



China and the Congo Wars: AFRICOM. America's New Military Command

by F. William Engdahl
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Just weeks after President George W. Bush signed the Order creating a new US military command dedicated to Africa, AFRICOM, events on the mineral-rich continent have erupted which suggest a major agenda of the incoming Obama Presidency will be for the son of a black Kenyan to focus US resources, military and other, on dealing with the Republic of Congo, the oil-rich Gulf of Guinea, the oil-rich Darfur region of southern Sudan and increasingly the Somali 'pirate threat' to sea lanes in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean. The legitimate question is whether it is mere coincidence that Africa appears just at this time to become a new geopolitical 'hot spot' or whether it has a direct link to the formal creation of AFRICOM.

What is striking is the timing. No sooner had AFRICOM become operational than major new crises broke out in both the Indian Ocean-Gulf of Aden regarding spectacular incidents of alleged Somali piracy, as well as eruption of bloody new wars in Kivu Province in the Republic of Congo. The common thread connecting both is their importance, as with Darfur in southern Sudan, for China's future strategic raw materials flow.

The latest fighting in the eastern part of the Congo (DRC) broke out in late August when Tutsi militiamen belonging to the *Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple* (CNDP, National Congress for the Defense of the People) of General Laurent Nkunda forced loyalist troops of the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC, Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo) to retreat from their positions near Lake Kivu, sending hundreds of thousands of displaced civilians fleeing in the process and prompting the French foreign minister, Dr. Bernard Kouchner, to warn of the imminent risk of 'huge massacres.'

Nkunda, like his mentor, Rwanda's Washington-backed dictator, Paul Kagame, is an ethnic Tutsi who alleges that he is protecting the minority Tutsi ethnic group against remnants of the Rwandan Hutu army that fled to Congo after the Rwandan genocide in 1994. MONUC UN peacekeepers reported no such atrocities against the minority Tutsi in northeast, mineral rich Kivu region. Congolese sources report that attacks against Congolese of all ethnic groups are a daily occurrence in the region. Laurent Nkunda's troops are responsible for most of these attacks, they claim.

Strange resignations

The stage for political chaos in Congo was further set in September when the Democratic Republic of Congo's 83 year old Prime Minister, Antoine Gizenga, resigned after two years. Then at end of October, with suspicious timing, the commander of the United Nations peacekeeping operation, the Mission de l'Organisation des Nations-Unies au Congo (MONUC, Mission of the United Nations Organization in the Congo), Spanish Lieutenant General Vicente Diaz de Villegas, resigned after less than two months on the job, citing, 'lack of confidence' in the leadership of DRC President Joseph Kabila. Kabila, the Congo's first democratically elected President, has also been involved in negotiating a major \$9 billion trade

agreement between the DRC and China, something which Washington is clearly not happy about.

Nkunda is a long-standing henchman of Rwandan President, US-trained Kagame. All signs point to a heavy, if covert, USA role in the latest Congo killings by Nkunda's men. Nkunda himself is a former Congolese Army officer, teacher and Seventh Day Adventist pastor. But killing seems to be what he is best at.

Much of Nkunda's well-equipped and relatively disciplined forces are from the bordering country of Rwanda and the rest have been recruited from the minority Tutsi population of the Congolese province of North Kivu. Supplies, finance and political support for this Congolese rebel army come from Rwanda. According to the *American Spectator* magazine, 'President Paul Kagame of Rwanda has long been a supporter of Nkunda, who originally was an intelligence officer in the Rwanda leader's overthrow of the Hutu despotic rule in his country.'

As the Congo News Agency reported on October 30, 'Some have bought into the pretext of an endangered Tutsi minority in Congo. They never fail to mention that Laurent Nkunda is supposedly fighting to protect "his people". They have failed to question his true motives which are to occupy the mineral-rich North-Kivu province, pillage its resources, and act as a proxy army in eastern Congo for the Tutsi-led Rwandan government in Kigali. Kagame wants a foothold in eastern Congo so his country can continue to benefit from the pillaging and exporting of minerals such as Columbite-Tantalite (Coltan). Many experts on the region agree today that resources are the true reason why Laurent Nkunda continues to create chaos in the region with the help of Paul Kagame.'

The USA role and AFRICOM

Evidence which was presented in a French court in a ruling made public in 2006 claimed that Kagame was responsible for organizing the shooting down of the plane carrying Hutu President of Rwanda, Juvénal Habyarimana, in April 1994, the event that set off the indiscriminate killing of hundreds of thousands of people both Hutu and Tutsi.

The end result of the killings in which perhaps as many as a million Africans perished.

was that US and UK backed Paul Kagame—a ruthless military dictator trained at the US Army Command-General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth Kansas—was firmly in control as dictator of Rwanda. Since then he has covertly backed repeated military incursions by General Nkunda into the mineral-rich Kivu region on the pretext it was to defend a small Tutsi minority there. Kagame had repeatedly rejected attempts to repatriate those Tutsi refugees back to Rwanda, evidently fearing he might lose his pretext to occupy the mineral riches of Kivu.

Since at least 2001 according to reports from Congo sources, the US military has also had a base at Cyangugu in Rwanda, built of course by Dick Cheney's old firm, Halliburton, conveniently enough near the border to Congo's mineral-rich Kivu region.

The 1994 massacre of civilians between Tutsi and Hutu was, as Canadian researcher, Michel Chossudovsky described it, 'an undeclared war between France and America.'

By supporting the build up of Ugandan and Rwandan forces and by directly intervening in the Congolese civil war, Washington also bears a direct responsibility for the ethnic massacres committed in the Eastern Congo including several hundred thousand people who died in refugee camps.' He adds, 'Major General Paul Kagame was an instrument of Washington. The loss of African lives did not matter. The civil war in Rwanda and the ethnic massacres were an integral part of US foreign policy, carefully staged in accordance with precise strategic and economic objectives.'

Now Kagame's former intelligence officer, Nkunda, leads his well-equipped forces to take Goma in the eastern Congo as part of an apparent scheme to break the richest minerals region away from Kinshasha. With the US military beefing up its presence across Africa under AFRICOM since 2007, the stage was apparently set for the current resources grab by the US-backed Kagame and his former officer, Nkunda.

Today the target is China

If France was the covert target of US 'surrogate warfare' in 1994, today it is clearly China, which is the real threat to US control of Central Africa's vast mineral riches. The Democratic Republic of Congo was renamed from the Republic of Zaire in 1997 when the forces of Laurent Désiré Kabila brought Mobutu's 32 year reign to an end. Locals call the country Congo-Kinshasa.

The Kivu region of the Congo is the geological repository of some of the world's greatest strategic minerals. The eastern border straddling Rwanda and Uganda, runs on the eastern edge of the Great African Rift Valley, believed by geologists to be one of the richest repositories of minerals on the face of the earth.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo contains more than half the world's cobalt. It holds one-third of its diamonds, and, extremely significantly, fully three-quarters of the world resources of columbite-tantalite or "coltan" -- a primary component of computer microchips and printed circuit boards, essential for mobile telephones, laptops and other modern electronic devices.

America Minerals Fields, Inc., a company heavily involved in promoting the 1996 accession to power of Laurent Kabila, was, at the time of its involvement in the Congo's civil war, headquartered in Hope, Arkansas. Major stockholders included long-time associates of former President Clinton going back to his days as Governor of Arkansas. Several months before the downfall of Zaire's French-backed dictator, Mobutu, Laurent Desire Kabila based in Goma, Eastern Zaire had renegotiated the mining contracts with several US and British mining companies including American Mineral Fields. Mobutu's corrupt rule was brought to a bloody end with the help of the US-directed International Monetary Fund.

Washington was not entirely comfortable with Laurent Kabila, who was finally assassinated in 2001. In a study released in April 1997 barely a month before President Mobutu Sese Seko fled the country, the IMF had recommended "halting currency issue completely and abruptly" as part of an economic recovery programme. A few months later upon assuming power in Kinshasa, the new government of Laurent Kabila Desire was ordered by the IMF to freeze civil service wages with a view to "restoring macro-economic stability." Eroded by hyperinflation, the average public sector wage had fallen to 30,000 new Zaires (NZ) a month, the equivalent of one US dollar.

According to Chossudovsky, the IMF's demands were tantamount to maintaining the entire population in abysmal poverty. They precluded from the outset a meaningful post-war economic reconstruction, thereby contributing to fuelling the continuation of the Congolese civil war in which close to 2 million people have died.

Laurent Kabila was succeeded by his son, Joseph Kabila who went on to become the Congo's first democratically elected President, and appears to have held a closer eye to the welfare of his countrymen than did his father.

Now, in comes the new US AFRICOM. Speaking to the International Peace Operations Association in Washington, D.C. on Oct. 27, General Kip Ward, Commander of AFRICOM defined the command's mission as, 'in concert with other US government agencies and international partners, [to conduct] sustained security engagements through military-to-military programs, military-sponsored activities, and other military operations as directed to promote a stable and secure African environment in support of US foreign policy.'

The 'military operations as directed to promote a stable and secure African environment in support of US foreign policy,' today, are clearly aimed squarely at blocking China's growing economic presence in the region.

In fact, as various Washington sources state openly, AFRICOM was created to counter the growing presence of China in Africa, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, to secure long-term economic agreements for raw materials from Africa in exchange for Chinese aid and production sharing agreements and royalties. By informed accounts, the Chinese have been far shrewder. Instead of offering only savage IMF-dictated austerity and economic chaos, **China is offering large credits, soft loans to build roads and schools in order to create good will.**

Dr. J. Peter Pham, a leading Washington insider who is an advisor of the US State and Defense Departments, states openly that among the aims of the new AFRICOM, is the objective of 'protecting access to hydrocarbons and other strategic resources which Africa has in abundance ... a task which includes *ensuring against the vulnerability of those natural riches and ensuring that no other interested third parties, such as China, India, Japan, or Russia, obtain monopolies or preferential treatment.*'

In testimony before the US Congress supporting creation of AFRICOM in 2007, Pham, who is closely associated with the neo-conservative Foundation for Defense of Democracies, stated:

'This natural wealth makes Africa an inviting target for the attentions of the People's Republic of China, whose dynamic economy, averaging 9 percent growth per annum over the last two decades, has an almost insatiable thirst for oil as well as a need for other natural resources to sustain it. China is currently importing approximately 2.6 million barrels of crude per day, about half of its consumption; more than 765,000 of those barrels—roughly a third of its imports—come from African sources, especially Sudan, Angola, and Congo (Brazzaville). Is it any wonder, then, that...perhaps no other foreign region rivals Africa as the object of Beijing's sustained strategic interest in recent years. Last year the Chinese regime published the first ever official white paper elaborating the bases of its policy toward Africa.

This year, ahead of his twelve-day, eight-nation tour of Africa—the third such journey since he took office in 2003—Chinese President Hu Jintao announced a three-year, \$3 billion program in preferential loans and expanded aid for Africa.

These funds come on top of the \$3 billion in loans and \$2 billion in export credits that Hu announced in October 2006 at the opening of the historic Beijing summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) which brought nearly fifty African heads of state and ministers to the Chinese capital.

Intentionally or not, many analysts expect that Africa—especially the states along its oil-rich western coastline—will increasingly becoming a theatre for strategic competition between the United States and its only real near-peer competitor on the global stage, China, as both countries seek to expand their influence and secure access to resources.'

Notably, in late October Nkunda's well-armed troops surrounded Goma in North Kivu and demanded that Congo President Joseph Kabila negotiate with him. Among Nkunda's demands was that Kabila cancel a \$9 billion joint Congo-China venture in which China gets rights to the vast copper and cobalt resources of the region in exchange for providing \$6 billion worth of road construction, two hydroelectric dams, hospitals, schools and railway links to southern Africa, to Katanga and to the Congo Atlantic port at Matadi. The other \$3 billion is to be invested by China in development of new mining areas.

Curiously, US and most European media neglect to report that small detail. It seems AFRICOM is off to a strong start as the opposition to China in Africa. The litmus will be who President Obama selects as his Africa person and whether he tries to weaken Congo President Joseph Kabila in favor of backing Nkunda's death squads, naturally in the name of 'restoring democracy.'

F. William Engdahl is a Research Associate and the Center for Globalization and author of 'A Century of War: Anglo-American Oil Politics and the New World Order (Pluto Press) and Seeds of Destruction: The Hidden Agenda of Genetic Manipulation (www.globalresearch.ca).