

## E.U. ministers signal troop deployment to Congo

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There have been calls by the European Union for greater United Nations “peacekeeping” involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) since the collapse of government control in Goma, a strategic city located in the eastern region of the country.

On Oct. 30, the Congolese army command in Goma broke down, causing chaos within the city and prompting the evacuation of tens of thousands of civilians, who sought refuge in nearby towns and villages. After the abandonment of Goma by the Congolese army, the United Nations Mission to the Congo (MONUC) sent reinforcements to surround the city.

Some 800 U.N. troops attempted to block entry into the city by the rebel Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP), headed by renegade general Laurent Nkunda. On Oct. 31, the CNDP declared a unilateral ceasefire and offered to negotiate with the central government of President Joseph Kabila, based in the capital of Kinshasa.

These developments in and around Goma have drawn an immediate response from the European nations of Britain and France. Reports surfaced that both these imperialist states were willing to commit troops to eastern DRC under the auspices of the European Union, purportedly to stabilize the region.

There has been a flurry of diplomatic maneuvering from Britain, the European Union and the United States. French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner visited Goma on Nov. 1 to offer “assistance” in any negotiations aimed at ending the conflict.

Britain’s Minister for African Affairs, Mark Malloch-Brown, announced that his country was prepared to deploy military forces as part of an E.U. mission to the DRC. “We have certainly got to have it as an option,” Brown told the BBC on Nov. 2.

Not to be outdone, the U.S. State Department, through Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer, lent its voice to the chorus of imperialist nations calling for more military forces in the eastern DRC.

Louis Michel, the E.U. Humanitarian Aid Commissioner, has proposed a U.N.-organized summit involving the DRC, Rwanda and other neighboring states in the region. Michel advanced the notion that such a summit could create the conditions for a “permanent solution” to the ongoing conflict in the eastern DRC.

The escalation in fighting in eastern DRC has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in the area. Tens of thousands of people are currently on the move, fleeing the fighting.

### **Economic interests of imperialist states**

Despite their claims of humanitarian concern, the E.U., Britain and the United States all have considerable economic interests in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In previous articles, we have pointed out that the DRC contains vast reservoirs of strategic minerals that are vitally important to various transnational mining firms.

With its weak state and military forces, the DRC remains quite vulnerable to rebel incursions as well as intervention by neighboring states.

The U.S.-backed regime in Rwanda has intervened on numerous occasions in the DRC. There have been repeated reports that the CNDP rebels are acting on behalf of the Rwandan government. Nkunda fought with the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) when it seized power in Kigali in 1994.

A report on Oct. 29 indicated that the Rwandan military was heavily involved in attacks on the Congolese army. The South African Press Association (SAPA) and the Associated Press wrote that “Bombs, rockets and mortar shells exploded in eastern Congo on Wednesday, and the Congolese army claimed it came under attack by troops from neighboring Rwanda.”

### **Another Rwanda?**

European leaders have sought to draw parallels between the current situation in eastern DRC and the genocidal violence that swept Rwanda during 1994. British Prime Minister Gordon Brown told the British public that the country could not stand by and allow another “Rwanda” to take place inside the eastern DRC. Yet it has been reported that it is the Rwandan government that has supplied arms and logistical support to the CNDP rebels of Laurent Nkunda.

The nations of Rwanda and Burundi were colonized by Germany and later Belgium during the course of the late 19th and early to mid-20th centuries. The Hutu and Tutsi nationalities were divided and pitted against each other by the colonial powers.

At the time of independence in Rwanda, the colonial policy of divide-and-rule was reflected in the class divisions within society. The Tutsi were heavily represented in the civil service and other professional sectors of society. The Hutu, who made up the vast majority, were relegated to agricultural labor and military service.

The Belgians and French both had troops inside Rwanda during the genocide of 1994, under the banner of the United Nations. Yet there was no effort by either of these two military forces to intervene to stop the bloodletting that lasted for several months.

The United States and Britain financed the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), which took control of the country in August of 1994. The U.S. has continued to provide military assistance and encouraged the Rwandans, along with Uganda, to invade the DRC in 1998, a decision that led to a five-year regional war that resulted in the reported deaths of millions of Congolese between 1998 and 2003.

This war (1998-2003) brought in the progressive states of Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia on the side of the Congolese government of Laurent Kabila. Rwanda, Uganda and to a lesser degree Burundi, whose military is dominated by the Tutsi, were on the side of the rebel Congolese Democratic Rally (RCD), which was really a front for U.S.-backed interests.

### **What role for anti-imperialists?**

The legacy of colonialism and the continuing imperialist intervention have fueled the current divisions inside the eastern region of the DRC. Anti-imperialist forces throughout Africa and the world must closely examine the real motivations behind Western threats of military intervention in the DRC.

The African Union, the continental organization that embodies representation from all independent states, must be encouraged to take the lead in resolving the current crisis inside the eastern region of the DRC. Any British, French, U.S. and even United Nations involvement will only serve as a mechanism to maintain the strategic interests of the transnational mining firms that make billions every year extracting resources from the DRC.

In early October, the Pentagon formally launched its Africa Command (AFRICOM). It has been met with widespread skepticism and rejection on the continent. As a result of this negative perception of U.S. motivations in Africa, the European Union member states appear to be taking the lead in the proposed broader intervention in the eastern DRC.

However, any E.U. military deployment under the guise of boosting the effectiveness of MONUC will surely take into consideration the strategic interests of the U.S. ruling class. If the E.U. is not able to make a firm decision about the character of its diplomatic and military involvement inside the DRC, the U.S. imperialists may take a more direct role in maintaining their economic interests in this mineral-rich African nation.

***Abayomi Azikiwe** has been closely following the current situation inside the Democratic Republic of Congo.*

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