

Iran and the Congo's Vanishing Uranium Bars

By [Prof Michel Chossudovsky](#)

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Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

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A mysterious Congo vanishing uranium bars incident has emerged, coinciding with a decisive International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of governors meeting in Vienna on March 5-8, regarding Iran's nuclear program.

According to Kinshasa's Le Phare newspaper (March 7), "more than 100 bars of uranium as well as an unknown quantity of uranium contained in helmet-shaped cases, had disappeared from the nuclear centre in Kinshasa as part of a vast trafficking [operation]" ([Le Phare, 8 March 2007](#), [Le Phare, 7 March 2007](#))

The Democratic Republic of the Congo's Commissioner for atomic energy Professor Fortunat Lumu and his associate were arrested over allegations of uranium smuggling. The Congo's state prosecutor, Tshimanga Mukeba said that Lumu is being "questioned regarding the alleged disappearance of unspecified quantities of uranium in recent years." He is accused of "orchestrating illicit contracts to produce and sell uranium". (BBC, 8 March 2007)

The IAEA is also said to be "investigating the situation". While the names of the alleged buyers were not revealed, the evolving consensus within the Western media, based on an "authoritative" August 2006 Sunday Times report, which is quoted profusely in syndicated press reports, is that Tehran might be behind the uranium smuggling operation.

Iraq, Iran, Niger, The Congo, yellow cake, missing uranium 238 bars.

A feeling of déjà vu.

Remember the Niger uranium yellow cake, which was used as a pretext to wage war on Iraq.

Ironically, while Professor Lumu was arrested on March 6 for alleged smuggling of uranium 238 (natural uranium) in Kinshasa, back in the US, on the same day, former Cheney chief of staff I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby was convicted by a federal grand jury on multiple counts of perjury and obstruction of justice in relation to the Niger "yellow cake" operation.

According to US media reports, Bush's adviser Karl Rove and former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage were also involved.

As confirmed in the trial proceedings, the yellow cake story was a fabrication triggered by forged documents which described Saddam Hussein as buying "yellow cake" from Niger allegedly for the production of a nuclear bomb. Libby was acting on the orders of Vice President Dick Cheney, who is widely believed to have instigated the "yellow cake" psyop.

Déjà Vu?

Are we dealing with a similar fabricated Psyop in the case of the alleged missing Congo uranium bars, which could at some later date be used as a pretext directed against Iran?

Last August, at the height of Israel's criminal bombing of Lebanon during which radioactive bunker buster bombs were dropped on civilians, [Britain's Sunday Times](#), citing a UN source dated July 18, 2006, reported that uranium 238 had been smuggled out of the Lubumbashi mines in the Congo. According to Tanzanian customs officials quoted by the Sunday Times, the shipment was "destined for the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas". The radioactive shipment had apparently been intercepted in Dar Es Salaam in October of 2005 "during a routine check."

According to the Sunday Times report entitled "[Iran's plot to mine uranium in Africa](#)", "there is no doubt" that huge quantities of uranium 238 were smuggled out of the Congo. In the same article, the Sunday Times asserts, without evidence, that Iran supported terror cells in the UK which **"may be prepared to mount attacks against nuclear power plants in Britain.** Intelligence circulating in Whitehall suggests that sleeper cells linked to Tehran have been conducting reconnaissance at some nuclear sites in preparation for a possible attack." (emphasis added)

The [Tanzanian] customs officer, who spoke to The Sunday Times on condition he was not named, added: "The container [of smuggled uranium bars] was put in a secure part of the port and it was later taken away, by the Americans, I think, or at least with their help. We have all been told not to talk to anyone about this."

The report by the UN investigation team was submitted to the chairman of the UN sanctions committee, Oswaldo de Rivero, at the end of July and will be considered soon by the security council.

...

The mine has officially been closed since 1961, before the country's independence from Belgium, but the UN investigators have told the security council that they found evidence of illegal mining still going on at the site.

In 1999 there were reports that the Congolese authorities had tried to re-open the mine **with the help of North Korea.** In recent years miners are said to have broken open the lids and extracted ore from the shafts, while police and local authorities turned a blind eye.

In June a parliamentary committee warned that **Britain could be attacked by Iranian terrorists** if tensions increased.

A source with access to current MI5 assessments said: "There is great concern about Iranian sleeper cells inside this country. [DRC] The intelligence services are taking this threat very seriously." ([Sunday Times, 6 August 2006](#))

According to the Sunday Times: "The disclosure will heighten western fears about the extent of **Iran's presumed nuclear weapons program and the strategic implications of Iran's continuing support for Hezbollah during the war with Israel.**"

Within the same article, all the essential "connect the dots" ingredients of Iran's rogue plot were laid out: the script included smuggled 238 uranium destined to Iran, the involvement of Iran and North Korea in the Congo's uranium economy, Iranian terrorist sleeper cells in the Congo, Iranian terrorists inside Britain, the UN sanctions committee takes note of the

smuggled uranium, a British parliamentary committee warning the government of Tony Blair that an Iranian sponsored terrorist attack could take place in Britain...

The Sunday Times alleged “Iran connection” relied on a [July 18, 2006 UN Letter from the Chairman of the Security Council Committee](#), which it selectively misquoted and distorted. The quoted UN document and report of the Group of Experts on the DRC, while analysing the smuggling of uranium, does not even mention Iran. ([United Nations Security Council, See section C of the Report of the Group of Experts, 18 July 2006, pdf](#))

With regard to the report quoting Tanzanian customs officials, the shipment pertained to a relatively small amount of uranium ore (100 kg which contains about 70 grams of fissile U-235) bound for land-locked Kazakhstan via the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas: “The shipment was destined for smelting in the former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan, delivered via Bandar Abbas, Iran’s biggest port.” (Sunday Times, op cit)

The UN Letter dated 18 July 2006 from the Chairman of the Security Council Committee, acknowledges incidents of smuggling over a six year period in and around Kinshasa as well as in relation to seized consignments by the Tanzanian authorities. But the UN document states that no information was provided by the Tanzanian authorities regarding the quantities involved. ([United Nations Security Council, 18 July 2006, op cit](#). See also [armscontrolwonk.com](#))

With regard to the alleged North Korean connection, there was a delegation of North Korean engineers in 1999. But there was no follow-up due to pressure exerted on Kinshasa by Washington as confirmed in an earlier [London Times report. \(27 March 2004\)](#).

Brinkley Mining

Uranium mining and exploration in the DRC (which contains significant untapped resources) is, in practice, under the control of Western corporate capital. The underlying relationship is not with Iran but with a UK registered Anglo-South African mining company: [Brinkley Mining PLC](#) with a subsidiary in the Seychelles. ([Uranium Reserves in Africa](#)) The Anglo-South African conglomerate Lonrho Africa owns ten percent of Brinkley. While the principal shareholder of Brinkley is Australia’s Atomaer, Brinkley is headed by [Gerard Holden who is Joint Executive Chairman of Lonrho Africa PLC](#).

In 2006, the nuclear energy center headed by Professor Fortunat Lumu entered into a far-reaching agreement with Brinkley Mining. Under this agreement, Brinkley is “to develop and advise on all uranium assets in the DRC.” ([brinkley-mining.com](#))

The agreement established with the country’s atomic energy authority, Le Commissariat General a l’Energie Atomique (CGEA). involved the creation of Brinkley Africa Ltd, which oversees the “domestic management of nuclear resources” in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The exclusive rights of future uranium exploration and production were handed over to Brinkley Africa, which is a 70% owned subsidiary of Brinkley Mining, which in turn is an affiliate of Lonrho Africa.

Brinkley Mining PLC acknowledged in a report released on the 7th of March that it “it made a loss for the year to Dec 31, 2006 of 2.747 mln stg,” Brinkley stocks initially dipped momentarily on March 7th by approximately 20 percent. However, despite the financial report coupled with the announcement of the arrest of Fortunat Lumu, the price of Brinkley

shares on the London Stock Exchange skyrocketed (March 8th, 50% increase in relation to its low value on 7 March, 2007). (see graph below).



Source : LSE

Meanwhile, another prominent member of the Neocon inner team, World Bank president Paul Wolfowitz arrived in Kinshasa on the 8th of March. Following a meeting with DRC President Joseph Kabila, Wolfowitz announced a 1.4 billion dollar financial support to the DRC's post-war reconstruction. While formally tagged to poverty alleviation programs, part of this World Bank money will be used to support Anglo-American and South African mining interests in the Congo.



World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz and DRC President Joseph Kabila

Undercover Network

On Friday the 9th of March, coinciding with Paul Wolfowitz' official visit, the DRC government, without explicitly referring to Brinkley Mining PLC, announced that it had "dismantled an undercover network that was trying to **illegally sell uranium to companies registered in Britain, South Africa and the Seychelles.**" (Associated Press, 9 March, emphasis added).

Congo's Minister of Scientific Research, Sylvanus Mushi Bonane, accused Professor Fortunat Lumu and his associate of creating "fictitious companies to sell uranium" and that they had been arrested yellow-handed:

"Bonane said, adding they were in the process of selling off the radioactive materials when they were detained...Officials declined to say if there was any connection between the arrest and the alleged 2005 shipment" which according to the Sunday Times was destined to Iran.

<http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/ap/fn/4616249.html>

There was no mention of Iran in the official communiqué. In fact quite the opposite: the government was pointing its finger at an Anglo-South African conglomerate. According to Le Phare, the arrest of Fortunat Lumu bears a relationship to the dealings of Brinkley Mining, which had been granted exclusive rights over DRC uranium exploration and extraction.

Moreover, the alleged uranium smuggling took place prior to the employment of the two officials with the country's atomic energy authority. How could these arrested officials have been involved when they were not, at the time, even working for the Commissariat Général

à l'Energie Atomique? ([Le Phare, 8 March 2007](#))

While the Western media have underscored an alleged "Iranian connection", the undercover network described by the DRC authorities refers to illegal sales to "companies registered in Britain, South Africa and the Seychelles"(emphasis added). Brinkley Mining is registered in the UK with subsidiaries in South Africa and the Seychelles:

"We're happy with our contract," Gerard Holden, chairman of Brinkley, told Bloomberg News. "We're confident due process will prevail in the Congo," he said.

Bloomberg News said Fortunat Lumu, head of the DRC's Atomic Energy Commission, **could not leave the DRC's capital Kinshasa until he had answered questions regarding the award to Brinkley Mining."**

(<http://www.miningmx.com/wts/672268.htm> emphasis added)



Gerard Holden, chairman of Brinkley Mining
and Joint Chairman of Lonrho Africa

Media Disinformation

The Daily Telegraph's coverage of the evolving DRC uranium scandal, takes on a familiar line: while it has "not been proven" that Iran is behind it, there have been "a series of allegations" implicating both Iran and the Sicilian Mafia:

It has long been feared that radioactive materials stored there could prove useful to countries seeking to develop fuel for a covert nuclear programme. **But none of a series of allegations, including claims that uranium has been sold to Iran and to the Mafia, have ever been proved** and the Congolese government has denied that any illegal shipments have been made.

But it is now understood that a long-running government investigation into two missing rods of the highly radioactive uranium produced sufficient evidence to detain the two suspects." {Daily Telegraph, 8 August 2007, emphasis added)

While the July 2006 UN report refers to the Italian mafia, Iran is not mentioned. (See [United Nations Security Council op cit](#))

USA Today in an article entitled "*U.N. cuts Iran nuke aid amid uranium-smuggling claims*" goes one step further. It states emphatically that uranium was smuggled to Iran, and that the suspension of IAEA technical aid to Iran by the Board of governors meeting in Vienna (5-8 March 2007) was the direct result of Iran's alleged involvement in the Congo uranium scandal:

U.N. cuts Iran nuke aid amid uranium-smuggling claim The U.N. nuclear watchdog has voted to cut aid to Iran [Board of governors meeting in Vienna], suspending nearly two dozen programs as part of U.N. sanctions. None, however, applied directly to Tehran's uranium-enrichment activities.

The action by the International Atomic Energy Agency comes amid reports that uranium **was smuggled to Iran from the Democratic Republic of Congo** and that the country's top nuclear scientist and an aide have been arrested. The IAEA said today it is investigating the claims, reported by a Kinshasa newspaper, the BBC says. ([USA Today, 9 March 2007](#))

The BBC in a report entitled "*DR Congo 'uranium ring smashed'*" quotes the Minister of Scientific Research Mr Mushi Bonane,

"a vast network aimed at the fraudulent exploitation of DR Congo's uranium has been dismantled".

"It was a criminal network," he said, **without giving any more details.** (emphasis added)

Referring to earlier reports that the two officials had been arrested on suspicion of uranium smuggling, Mr Mushi said that the prospection and exploitation of DR Congo's uranium had not yet started. ([BBC, March 2007](#))

In a bitter irony, this report by the BBC is refuted by the BBC's African correspondent Arnaud Zajtman, (BBC Afrique in French), which provides the "missing details". Reporting from Kinshasa, Zajtman quotes the same statement of the Minister of Scientific Research Mr Mushi Bonane.

[The two officials] **"were arrested for having negotiated an agreement with a foreign company pertaining to exploration and production."** ([BBC Afrique, 9 March 2007](#), emphasis added)

They are also accused of corruption:

"The DRC authorities accuse the officials of the nuclear centre for having reached a partnership agreement with a British company, without obtaining the approval of the government." ("Les autorités congolaises accusent les responsables du centre nucléaire d'avoir passé un partenariat avec une entreprise britannique sans obtenir l'aval du gouvernement." (BBC Afrique, 9 March 2007, emphasis added).

Where is the Iran connection? Or is it a UK Connection?

What is at stake in the Congo uranium scandal is the granting to a British Mining company (without DRC government approval) of the "first right of refusal for the exploration and development of any uranium projects in the DRC ".(AP, 9 March 2007).



[Michel Chossudovsky](#) is the author of the international best [America's "War on Terrorism"](#) Second Edition, Global Research, 2005. He is Professor of Economics at the University of Ottawa and Director of the Center for Research on Globalization.

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About the author:

Michel Chossudovsky is an award-winning author, Professor of Economics (emeritus) at the University of Ottawa, Founder and Director of the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG), Montreal, Editor of Global Research. He has taught as visiting professor in Western Europe, Southeast Asia, the Pacific and Latin America. He has served as economic adviser to governments of developing countries and has acted as a consultant for several international organizations. He is the author of 13 books. He is a contributor to the Encyclopaedia Britannica. His writings have been published in more than twenty languages. In 2014, he was awarded the Gold Medal for Merit of the Republic of Serbia for his writings on NATO's war of aggression against Yugoslavia. He can be reached at crgeditor@yahoo.com

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