

ISIS Attacks in DR Congo: Latest Phase of a Western Cover for Resource Plunder

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In October 2017, a video calling for an Islamic State jihad in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) appeared online and in a few news reports. It was purportedly made in Beni Territory, within Congo's North Kivu Province, where a phantom, so-called Islamist militia, the Allied Democratic Forces, has been blamed for massacres of the indigenous population that began in October 2014.

The footage featured a bearded, camo-clad North African or Middle Eastern man draped in ammunition belts and holding a Kalashnikov rifle, while calling on Islamic State jihadists to come to Congo – in Arabic. Black African militiamen stood behind him.

Nearly two and a half years later, on April 4, 2019, the [Atlantic Council](#), a Washington, D.C., think tank committed to U.S. hegemony, reported that Felix Tshisekedi, the new president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, had come to the U.S. and told them he feared ISIS attacks in DRC. He warned, they wrote, that ISIS might try to establish a caliphate there now that they'd been pushed out of their strongholds in Iraq and Syria.

Ten days after that, the [New York Times](#), Washington Post, Bloomberg and other major corporate media outlets began reporting ISIS attacks in DRC. Specifically in North Kivu Province's Beni Territory, a region with large reserves of rainforest timber, oil, gold, coltan, cassiterite (tin), rare earths, and other strategic and critical minerals essential to both industrial and military industrial manufacture.

Trouble with this ongoing story is that DRC's population is more than 90 percent Christian and only 2 percent Muslim, and the Roman Catholic Church is its most influential non-governmental institution. Arabic is neither the international language nor any of the national or indigenous languages.

So the idea of ISIS establishing a caliphate might seem comical if the indigenous people of Beni weren't being massacred by the illegal resource trafficking militias already operating there and the proposed caliphate weren't a new cover for that.

I asked Boniface Musavuli, author of "[Congo's Beni Massacres: Fake Islamists, Rwandan Unending Occupation](#)," whether any of the fundamentals have changed since he published his book in July 2017, and he said no, that there is still no credible documentary evidence of ISIS or other foreign Islamist groups in DRC. "Reports that they are there," he said,

"curiously reappeared in the last report of the New York University Group of Experts on Congo (GEC) on Beni. However, this report is based on unreliable

sources, including [Invisible Children](#) , producer of the laughable propaganda video [Kony 2012](#), and untraceable videos that could not have been made by GEC researchers themselves.”

Musavuli also said that none of the fundamentals in this October 2017 BAR conversation, [“ISIS of Central Africa: A New Cover for Plundering Congo,”](#) have changed:

Ann Garrison: Boniface, what’s your first response to this video? Do you think these ISIS jihadis have any real existence or any real interest in a holy war in your country?

Boniface Musavuli: This video appears mainly as an attempt to manipulate international opinion, to make people believe that eastern Congo is becoming a bastion of international Islamist terrorism. The reality is that only 2 percent of Congo’s population are Muslims, and there is no radical imam to lead a holy war.

Congolese Muslims have never fought against the government or even organized a political demonstration against the authorities. There is therefore no sociological basis for the establishment of a caliphate in Beni. A jihad in the Congo makes no sense whatsoever. Congo has never been claimed as a “land of Islam,” and the Congolese government does not send soldiers to Muslim countries.

AG: The Arab guerrilla fighter - or actor - in the video is not “white” according to the Western construction of that idea, but he is most certainly not a Black African, and the image of him at the head of a band of Black Africans has an unpleasant, racially supremacist implication. What do you think of that?

BM: I think that this image is making believe that the massacres that started in Beni in 2014 were from the very beginning sponsored by evil Arab Islamist organizations, and that the time has finally come for them to appear alongside their Black performers.



AG: “Islamic State” seems to have become a franchise business like McDonald’s, but it’s not clear that IS headquarters, wherever that may be, has granted a franchise to this highly unlikely “Islamic State of Central Africa.” According to [“ISIS calls for jihad in eastern Congo,”](#) someone posted the video to a few “pro-ISIS” websites, but I haven’t been able to find any of them. Have you?

BM: No, but that article with the video that was supposed to be on the “pro-ISIS websites” appeared on the online news outlet “politico.cd.” It did not appear on YouTube as we might have expected, and it did not appear on any other news websites either, so it seemed as if politico.cd was the only one that received it.

AG: Some of the video was included with a version of the politico.cd report in the [Daily Mail](#), a British tabloid that some call “The Daily Bigot.” The only other Western site that seems to have reproduced the story is [PJ Media](#), but last week the New York Times and AP both ran stories about the Ugandan Muslim Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) that this Arabic ISIS militia has allegedly been working with all along – even though the ADF story has been [proven fraudulent by U.N. investigators](#).

And Radio Okapi, a U.N. Peacekeeping Mission outlet, seemed to take it seriously when they [interviewed Nicaise Kibel’bel](#), a Congolese journalist who published a book, “The Advent of Jihad in Eastern Congo, the Islamic Terrorism of the ADF.”

BM: Nicaise Kibel’bel won a CNN African Press Freedom Award in 2009 before starting to write his book on Beni. He published this book in December 2016. He is very close to Gen. Mbangi Mashita, who directs the military operations in Beni, which are, in reality, operations to traffic resources and kill the local people. It is therefore possible that he has an interest in conveying a story that serves as Islamist cover for the crimes of the army and the regime of Kabila.

I don’t believe this ISIS jihadi terror story, but I’m very worried that the gangsters in power may bring real jihadi killers to Beni to terrorize the people more and make the international community believe their cover story.

AG: Do the people of Beni believe that Islamists are killing them?

BM: The people of Beni knew from the beginning that the Congolese soldiers who are part of the resource-trafficking networks are killing them. The people lived for a long time with the ADF Muslims in the forest – almost 20 years – and the ADF trafficked timber but it never massacred them.

The killers are the units commanded by Gen. Mundos, a close friend and collaborator of [then president] Kabila; they have been killing the people since October 2014. This video will not change what they know to be true.

AG: Politico.cd links to its source for the ISIS video, the [SITE Intelligence Group, breaking news, articles and analysis on the jihadist threat](#), which is led by private Israeli intelligence professional [Rita Katz](#) in Bethesda, Maryland. [SITE Intelligence Group released the video of ISIS beheading American journalist Steven Sotloff before ISIS itself released it](#) in 2014, after which President Obama said the U.S. would “degrade and destroy ISIS,” which the U.S. is still bombing – or funding – in Syria today. Which depends on whom you ask, of course, and there are also people who say the U.S. is doing both.

I can’t imagine President Trump using this “ISIS of Central Africa” as an excuse to drop Cruise missiles on eastern Congo, but this certainly makes it look as though U.S. and Israeli intelligence agencies are for some reason investing in the idea that this group exists. ISIS always seems like a serviceable cause for militarization or military intervention of one sort or another.

And regardless of who’s actually producing politico.cd, they obviously favor U.S. policymakers’ viewpoints. On Monday, Oct. 23, one of its three most recent posts was about U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley’s trip to Congo’s capital Kinshasa to meet with President Kabila. The other two were about [New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker](#), whom they identified as a

“rising star of the Democratic Party, the first Black senator from New Jersey.”

The Booker reports varied only slightly, and both included a letter that he and six other senators had written to President Trump and U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley asking them to compel Kabila to hold an election in 2017 by imposing harsher sanctions and threatening the murky international financial networks that Kabila and his circle use to stash all the wealth they’ve stolen from their own people. I can’t help asking why they’re willing to let the loot sit in its overseas vaults, election or no, instead of returning it to the people, since they claim to know where it is and how to seize it as they did Gaddafi’s.

BM: That wouldn’t be in their interest. They say they’re concerned that we have an election and that we be able to freely express ourselves, but they’ve never said that the Congolese people should benefit from Congo’s resource wealth. Their big mining corporations are here too, most of all in Katanga, where they take as much ore as they can for as little as they can and exploit Congolese labor miserably.

AG: Another piece prominently featured in politico.cd summarizes [“A Worsening Crisis in Congo,”](#) an essay by Enough Project founder and executive director John Prendergast and Sasha Lezhnev in Foreign Affairs, the journal of the Council on Foreign Relations. Both are leading ideologues of the humanitarian war crusades led by former U.N. ambassador now Harvard professor Samantha Power, but writing for the CFR audience, they’re frank about how essential Congolese minerals, most of all copper and cobalt, are to U.S. national security.

Both are absolutely key to both weapons and consumer commodity manufacture. Congo contains 60 percent of the world’s known cobalt reserves, and the U.S. has no cobalt ore worth mining. Congo also has the world’s second largest copper reserves.

Prendergast and Lezhnev warn that if instability keeps escalating as Kabila clings to power, it could endanger the security of roads leading out of the Kolwezi and Kasumbalesa copper and cobalt mines. Like Cory Booker, they want Trump to manipulate Kabila and his criminal cronies by threatening their overseas assets if they don’t behave.

But, getting back to ISIS, whatever interest the U.S. may have in promoting the ISIS of Central Africa story, it also benefits Kabila and his circle by enhancing their cover for the army’s crimes in Beni, doesn’t it?

BM: Absolutely. I’m sure he’s hoping this Islamic State video and Nicaise Kibel’bel’s delirious new book about Congo jihad will create an even thicker smokescreen to hide behind.

AG: OK, let’s talk about the indigenous people of Beni, the ones suffering because of all this. If I understand correctly, the majority are indigenous in that their families are rooted there – Beni is their homeland – and they survive by farming and/or artisanal, pre-industrial mining. Is that more or less accurate?

BM: The majority of Beni’s population live by subsistence agriculture. The mining sector remains small and artisanal. Beni is mainly a transit zone for eastern Congo’s minerals and other resources to be exported to the markets of East Africa and Asia.

AG: Not to the West?

BM: Yes, but indirectly. First the minerals go to the East, to China, Malaysia, Korea, Japan,

India, but we are in a globalized economy. The factories in these Asian countries, such as China, process Congolese minerals more cheaply than they could be processed in the West, but they operate with capital from Western investors.

AG: And if Beni is a transit zone, where are the minerals and other resources coming from?

BM: Some of course come from Beni, most of all timber, but others come from Ituri District and other territories of eastern Congo. Beni is the border territory where the resources are transported into Uganda.

AG: The Ituri District borders Uganda too, but the smuggling routes have been developed from points in Beni to points in Uganda?

BM: Yes.

AG: And what else can you say about the timber trade? I know that most of Beni is rainforest, the earth's lungs, and cutting it down is hastening climate catastrophe, but who's doing it and where do they trade it, to what markets?

BM: Beni's precious rainforest timber is illegally logged and smuggled out by the Congolese army, then sold on the world timber market, as U.N. reports have shown. It's first stored in Uganda, then shipped to overseas markets.

Beni's timber exploitation zones were occupied by the ADF until 2013, but they've broken up and dispersed. Since then, the forests have been occupied by traffickers pretending to be ADF, most of all by the Congolese army. U.N. experts revealed that Gen. Mundos, Joseph Kabila's henchman, was logging Beni's rainforest timber and exporting it, but we don't know what part of it is controlled by Mundos and Kabila behind him.

AG: What about the Ugandans and Rwandans that you've said are among the aggressors and traffickers?

BM: Regarding the role of Rwanda and Uganda, it should be noted that at the time when the ADF occupied the forest and controlled the timber sector, they were working for the benefit of Uganda, even though, officially, they presented themselves as "Ugandan rebels hostile to the government of Museveni." That lie masked their mafia trafficking.

When the ADF were driven out of the Beni forest, thousands of Rwandans arrived in areas they'd formerly occupied, where timber is exploited, but the timber still continues to transit through Uganda. The only victims of this illegal economy are, of course, the indigenous people, who are driven off their land and replaced by hordes of Congolese soldiers and Rwandans.

AG: So they kill indigenous people and terrorize them till they flee just to get them out of the way?

BM: Yes.

AG: And what about foreign, industrial mining corporations. Has AngloGold Ashanti set up operations in Beni yet?

BM: There are gold-buying comptoirs - middlemen - in Beni and Butembo who buy from

artisanal miners, but there are no big industrial mining companies. The firm AngloGold Ashanti, which merged with Sokimo to form Kibali Gold, has operations more than 300 km from Beni, near Watsa in the province of Haut-Uele.

AG: Is there anything else you'd like to say about this?

BM: Yes. I don't believe this ISIS jihadi terror story, but I'm very worried that the gangsters in power may bring real jihadi killers to Beni to terrorize the people more and make the international community believe their cover story. I believe they are quite capable of bringing killers from Arab countries to eastern Congo, and this could make things even worse, even though that's hard to imagine.

Today [Oct. 23, 2017], the [United Nations activated its Level 3 humanitarian emergency designation for the entire Democratic Republic of the Congo](#). That puts it on par with the three other crises currently recognized as L3 emergencies: Iraq, Syria and Yemen.

They said that North Kivu Province, which includes Beni, hosts the largest number of internally displaced people in the country – close to a million. And it's not even one of the most urgently targeted areas yet, though they say it's very fragile and its conflicts could suddenly intensify again at any time.

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This article was originally published on [San Francisco Bay View](#).

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Featured image: Young people in the city of Beni protest the massive resource theft from DRC Congo. They know the resources belong to them, who's stealing them and that their government is complicit. They need allies, but only very rarely does the media tell their story and even more rarely is it told truthfully. (Source: San Francisco Bay View)

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