

USAFRICOM and the Militarization of the African Continent: Combating China's Economic Encroachment

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As the Obama administration claims to welcome the peaceful rise of China on the world stage, recent policy shifts toward an increased US military presence in Central Africa threaten deepening Chinese commercial activity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, widely considered the world's most resource rich nation.

Since the time of the British Empire and the manifesto of Cecil Rhodes, the pursuit of treasures on the hopeless continent has demonstrated the expendability of human life. Despite decades of apathy among the primary resource consumers, the [increasing reach of social media propaganda](#) has ignited public interest in Africa's long overlooked social issues. In the wake of [celebrity endorsed pro-intervention publicity stunts](#), public opinion in the United States is now being mobilized in favor of a greater military presence on the African continent. Following the deployment of one hundred US military personnel to Uganda in 2011, a [new bill has been introduced to the Congress](#) calling for the further expansion of regional military forces in pursuit of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), an ailing rebel group allegedly responsible for recruiting child soldiers and conducting crimes against humanity.

As the Obama administration claims to welcome the peaceful rise of China on the world stage, recent policy shifts toward an American Pacific Century indicate a desire to maintain the capacity to project military force toward the emerging superpower. In addition to maintaining a permanent military presence in Northern Australia, the construction of an expansive military base on South Korea's Jeju Island has indicated growing antagonism towards Beijing. The base maintains the capacity to host up to [twenty American and South Korean warships, including submarines, aircraft carriers and destroyers](#) once completed in 2014 - in addition to the presence of [Aegis anti-ballistic systems](#). In response, Chinese leadership has referred to the increasing militarization in the region as an open provocation.

On the economic front, China has been excluded from the proposed [Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement \(TPPA\)](#), a trade agreement intended to administer US-designed international trading regulations throughout Asia, to the benefit of American corporations. As further fundamental policy divisions emerge subsequent to [China and Russia's UNSC veto mandating intervention in Syria](#), the Obama administration has begun utilizing alternative measures to exert new economic pressure towards Beijing. The United States, along with the EU and Japan have called on the World Trade Organization to block Chinese-funded mining projects in the US, in addition to a freeze on World Bank financing for China's extensive mining projects.

In a move to counteract Chinese economic ascendancy, Washington is crusading against China's export restrictions on minerals that are crucial components in the production of consumer electronics such as flat-screen televisions, smart phones, laptop batteries, and a host of other products. In a 2010 white paper entitled "[Critical Raw Materials for the EU](#)," the European Commission cites the immediate need for reserve supplies of tantalum, cobalt, niobium, and tungsten among others; the US Department of Energy 2010 white paper "[Critical Mineral Strategy](#)" also acknowledged the strategic importance of these key components. Coincidentally, the US military is now attempting to increase its presence in what [is widely considered the world's most resource rich nation](#), the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The DRC has suffered immensely during its history of foreign plunder and colonial occupation; it maintains the second lowest GDP per capita despite having an estimated [\\$24 trillion in untapped raw minerals deposits](#). During the Congo Wars of the 1996 to 2003, the United States provided training and arms to Rwandan and Ugandan militias who later invaded the eastern provinces of the DRC in proxy. In addition to benefiting various multinational corporations, the regimes of Paul Kagame in Rwanda and Yoweri Museveni in Uganda both [profited immensely from the plunder of Congolese conflict minerals](#) such as cassiterite, wolframite, coltan (from which niobium and tantalum are derived) and gold. The DRC holds more than [30% of the world's diamond reserves](#) and [80% of the world's coltan](#), the majority of which is [exported to China for processing](#) into electronic-grade tantalum powder and wiring.

China's unprecedented economic transformation has relied not only on consumer markets in the United States, Australia and the EU - but also on Africa, as a source for a vast array of raw materials. As Chinese economic and cultural influence in Africa expands exponentially with the symbolic construction of the new [\\$200 million African Union headquarters](#) funded solely by Beijing, the ailing United States and its leadership have expressed dissatisfaction toward its diminishing role in the region. During a diplomatic tour of Africa in 2011, [US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton herself has irresponsibly insinuated](#) China's guilt in perpetuating a creeping "new colonialism."

At a time when China holds an estimated [\\$1.5 trillion in American government debt](#), Clinton's comments remain dangerously provocative. As China, backed by the [world's largest foreign currency reserves](#), begins to [offer loans to its BRICS counterparts in RMB](#), the prospect of emerging nations resisting the New American Century appear to be increasingly assured. While the success of Anglo-American imperialism relies on its capacity to militarily drive target nations into submission, today's African leaders are not obliged to do business with China - although doing so may be to their benefit. China annually invests [an estimated \\$5.5 billion in Africa](#), with only 29 percent of direct investment in the mining sector in 2009 - while more than half was directed toward domestic manufacturing, finance, and construction industries, which largely benefit Africans themselves - despite reports of worker mistreatment.

China has further committed [\\$10 billion in concessional loans to Africa between 2009 and 2012](#) and made significant investments in manufacturing zones in non-resource-rich economies such as Zambia and Tanzania. As Africa's largest trading partner, [China imports](#)

[1.5 million barrels of oil from Africa per day](#), approximately accounting for 30 percent of its total imports. Over the past decade, [750,000 Chinese nationals have settled in Africa](#), while Chinese state-funded cultural centers in rural parts of the continent conduct language classes in Mandarin and Cantonese. As China is predicted to [formally emerge as the world's largest economy in 2016](#), the [recent materialization of plans for a BRICS Bank](#) have the potential to restructure the global financial climate and directly challenge the hegemonic conduct of the International Monetary Fund in Africa's strategic emerging economies.

China's deepening economic engagement in Africa and its crucial role in developing the mineral sector, telecommunications industry and much needed infrastructural projects is [creating "deep nervousness" in the West](#), according to David Shinn, the former US ambassador to Burkina Faso and Ethiopia. In a 2011 Department of Defense whitepaper entitled ["Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China"](#), the US acknowledges the maturity of China's modern hardware and military technology, and the likelihood of Beijing finding hostility with further military alliances between the United States and Taiwan. The document further indicates that "China's rise as a major international actor is likely to stand out as a defining feature of the strategic landscape of the early 21st century." Furthermore, the Department of Defense concedes to the uncertainty of how China's growing capabilities will be administered on the world stage.

Although a US military presence in Africa (under the guise of fighting terrorism and protecting human rights) specifically to counter Chinese regional economic authority may not incite tension in the same way that a US presence in North Korea or Taiwan would, the potential for brinkmanship exists and will persist. China maintains the largest standing army in the world with 2,285,000 personnel and is working to challenge the regional military hegemony of America's Pacific Century with its [expanding naval and conventional capabilities](#), including an effort to develop the world's [first anti-ship ballistic missile](#). Furthermore, China has moved to begin testing [advanced anti-satellite \(ASAT\) and Anti Ballistic Missile \(ABM\) weapons systems](#) in an effort to bring the US-China rivalry into Space warfare.

The concept of US intervention into the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, Central African Republic and Uganda under the pretext of disarming the Lord's Resistance Army is an ultimately fraudulent purpose. The LRA has been in operation for over two decades, and [presently remains at an extremely weakened state, with approximately 400 soldiers](#). According to the [LRA Crisis Tracker](#), a digital crisis mapping software launched by the Invisible Children group, not a single case of LRA activity has been reported in Uganda since 2006. The vast majority of reported attacks are presently taking place in the northeastern Bangadi region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, located on the foot of a tri-border expanse between the Central African Republic and South Sudan.

The existence of the Lord's Resistance Army should rightfully be disputed, as the cases of LRA activity reported by [US State Department-supported Invisible Children](#) rely on unconfirmed reports - cases where LRA activity is presumed and suspected. Given the extreme instability in the northern DRC after decades of foreign invasion and countless rebel insurgencies, the lack of adequate investigative infrastructure needed to sufficiently examine and confirm the LRA's presence is simply not in place. The villainous branding of

Joseph Kony may well be deserved, however it cannot be overstated that the LRA threat is wholly misrepresented in recent [pro-intervention US legislation](#). An increasing US presence in the region exists only to curtail the increasing economic presence of China in one of the world's most resource and mineral rich regions.

The Lord's Resistance Army was originally formed in 1987 in northwestern Uganda by members of the Acholi ethnic group, who were historically exploited for forced labor by the British colonialists and later marginalized by the nation's dominant Bantu ethnic groups following independence. The Lord's Resistance Army originally aimed to overthrow the government of current Ugandan President, Yoweri Museveni – due to a campaign of genocide waged against the Acholi people. The northern Ugandan Acholi and Langi ethnic groups have been historically targeted and ostracized by successive Anglo-American backed administrations. In 1971, Israeli and British intelligence agencies engineered a coup against Uganda's socialist President Milton Obote, which gave rise to the disastrous regime of Idi Amin.

Prior to declaring himself head of state after deposing Obote, Amin was a member of the British colonial regiment, charged with managing [concentration camps in Kenya during the Mau Mau rebellion](#) beginning in 1952. Amin conducted genocide against the Acholi people on the suspicion of loyalty toward the former Obote leadership, who later reclaimed power in 1979 after Amin attempted to annex the neighboring Kagera province of Tanzania. Museveni founded the Front for National Salvation, which helped topple Obote with US support in 1986, despite the fact that [his army exploited the use of child soldiers](#). Museveni formally took power and was subsequently accused of genocide for driving the [Acholi people into detainment camps in an attempt to usurp fertile land in northern Uganda](#).

The Museveni regime has displaced approximately 1.5 million Acholi and killed at least [three hundred thousand people when taking power in 1986 according to the Red Cross](#). In addition to accusations of using rape as weapon and overseeing the deaths of thousands in squalid detainment camps, Museveni has been accused of exerting a campaign of state-sponsored terror onto the Acholi people in a [1992 Amnesty International report](#). During [an interview with Joseph Kony in 2006](#), the LRA commander denies allegations of mutilation and torture and further accuses Museveni's forces of committing such actions as propaganda against the Lord's Resistance Army.

In a detailed report of Museveni's atrocities, [Ugandan writer Herrn Edward Mulindwa offers](#), "During the 22-year war, Museveni's army killed, maimed and mutilated thousands of civilians, while blaming it on rebels. In northern Uganda, instead of defending and protecting civilians against rebel attacks, Museveni's army would masquerade as rebels and commit gross atrocities, including maiming and mutilation, only to return and pretend to be saviors of the affected people." Despite such compelling evidence of brutality, Museveni has been a staunch US ally since the Reagan administration and [received \\$45 million dollars in military aid](#) from the Obama administration for Ugandan participation in the fight against Somalia's al Shabaab militia. Since the abhorrent failure of the 1993 US intervention in Somalia, the US has relied on the militaries of Rwanda, Uganda and Ethiopia to carry out US interests in proxy.

Since colonial times, the West has historically exploited ethnic differences in Africa for political gain. In Rwanda, the Belgian colonial administration exacerbated tension between the Hutu, who were subjugated as a workforce – and the Tutsi, seen as extenders of Belgian rule. From the start of the Rwandan civil war in 1990, the US sought to overthrow the 20-year reign of Hutu President Juvénal Habyarimana by installing a Tutsi proxy government in Rwanda, a region historically under the influence of France and Belgium. At that time prior to the outbreak of the Rwandan civil war, the Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) led by current Rwandan President Paul Kagame, was part of Museveni's United People's Defense Forces (UPDF).

Ugandan forces invaded Rwanda in 1990 under the pretext of Tutsi liberation, despite the fact that Museveni refused to grant citizenship to Tutsi-Rwandan refugees living in Uganda at the time, a move that further offset the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Kagame himself was trained at the U.S. Army Command and Staff College (CGSC) in Leavenworth, Kansas prior to returning to the region to oversee the 1990 invasion of Rwanda as commander of the RPA, which received supplies from US-funded UPDF military bases inside Uganda. The invasion of Rwanda had the [full support of the US and Britain, who provided training](#) by US Special Forces in collaboration with US mercenary outfit, Military Professional Resources Incorporated (MPRI).

[A report issued in 2000](#) by Canadian Professor Michel Chossudovsky and Belgian economist Senator Pierre Galand concluded that western financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank financed both sides of the Rwandan civil war, through a process of financing military expenditure from the external debt of both the regimes of Habyarimana and Museveni. In Uganda, the World Bank imposed austerity measures solely on civilian expenditures while overseeing the diversion of State revenue go toward funding the UPDF, on behalf of Washington. In Rwanda, the influx of development loans from the World Bank's affiliates such as the International Development Association (IDA), the African Development Fund (AFD), and the European Development Fund (EDF) were diverted into funding the Hutu extremist Interhamwe militia, the main protagonists of the Rwandan genocide.

Perhaps most disturbingly, the World Bank oversaw huge arms purchases that were recorded as bona fide government expenditures, a stark violation of agreements signed between the Rwandan government and donor institutions. Under the watch of the World Bank, the Habyarimana regime imported approximately one million machetes through various Interhamwe linked organizations, under the pretext of importing civilian commodities. To ensure their reimbursement, a multilateral trust fund of \$55.2 million dollars was designated toward postwar reconstruction efforts, although the money was not allocated to Rwanda – but to the World Bank, to service the debts used to finance the massacres.

Furthermore, Paul Kagame was pressured by Washington upon coming to power to recognize the legitimacy of the debt incurred by the previous genocidal Habyarimana regime. The swap of old loans for new debts (under the banner of post-war reconstruction) was conditional upon the acceptance of a new wave of IMF-World Bank reforms, which similarly diverted outside funds into military expenditure prior to the Kagame-led invasion of the Congo, then referred to as Zaire. As present day Washington legislators attempt to increase US military presence in the DRC under the pretext of humanitarian concern, the

highly documented conduct of lawless western intelligence agencies and defense contractors in the Congo since its independence sheds further light on the exploitative nature of western intervention.

In 1961, the Congo's first legally elected Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba was assassinated with support from Belgian intelligence and the CIA, paving the way for the thirty-two year reign of Mobutu Sese Seko. As part of an attempt to purge the Congo of all colonial cultural influence, Mobutu renamed the country Zaire and led an authoritarian regime closely allied to France, Belgium and the US. Mobutu was regarded as a staunch US ally during the Cold War due to his strong stance against communism; the regime received billions in international aid, most from the United States. His administration allowed national infrastructure to deteriorate while the Zairian kleptocracy embezzled international aid and loans; Mobutu himself [reportedly held \\$4 billion USD](#) in a personal Swiss bank account.

Relations between the US and Zaire thawed at the end of the Cold War, when Mobutu was no longer needed as an ally; Washington would later use Rwandan and Ugandan troops to invade the Congo to topple Mobutu and install a new proxy regime. Following the conflict in Rwanda, 1.2 million Hutu civilians (many of whom who took part in the genocide) crossed into the Kivu province of eastern Zaire fearing prosecution from Paul Kagame's Tutsi RPA. [US Special Forces trained Rwandan and Ugandan troops at Fort Bragg](#) in the United States and supported Congolese rebels under future President, Laurent Kabila. Under the pretext of safeguarding Rwandan national security against the threat of displaced Hutu militias, troops from Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi invaded the Congo and ripped through Hutu refugee camps, slaughtering thousands of Rwandan and Congolese Hutu civilians, many of who were women and children.

Reports of brutality and mass killing in the Congo were rarely addressed in the West, as the International Community was sympathetic to Kagame and the Rwandan Tutsi victims of genocide. Both Halliburton and Bechtel (military contractors that profited immensely from the Iraq war) were [involved in military training and reconnaissance operations](#) in an attempt to overthrow Mobutu and bring Kabila to power. After deposing Mobutu and seizing control in Kinshasa, Laurent Kabila was quickly regarded as an equally despotic leader after eradicating all opposition to his rule; he turned away from his Rwandan backers and called on Congolese civilians to violently purge the nation of Rwandans, prompting Rwandan forces to regroup in Goma, in an attempt to capture resource rich territory in eastern Congo.

Prior to becoming President in 1997, Kabila sent representatives to Toronto to discuss mining opportunities with American Mineral Fields (AMF) and Canada's Barrick Gold Corporation; AMF had direct ties to US President Bill Clinton and was given exclusive exploration rights to zinc, copper, and cobalt mines in the area. The [Congolese Wars perpetrated by Rwanda and Uganda killed at least six million people](#), making it the largest case of genocide since the Jewish holocaust. The successful perpetration of the conflict relied on western military and financial support, and was fought primarily to usurp the extensive mining resources of eastern and southern Congo; the US defense industry relies on high quality metallic alloys indigenous to the region, used primarily in the construction of high-performance jet engines.

In 1980, [Pentagon documents acknowledged shortages of cobalt](#), titanium, chromium, tantalum, beryllium, and nickel; US participation in the Congolese conflict was largely an effort to obtain these needed resources. The sole piece of legislation authored by President Obama during his time as a Senator was S.B. 2125, the [Democratic Republic of the Congo Relief, Security, and Democracy Promotion Act of 2006](#). In the legislation, Obama acknowledges the Congo as a long-term interest to the United States and further alludes to the threat of Hutu militias as an apparent pretext for continued interference in the region; Section 201(6) of the bill specifically calls for the protection of natural resources in the eastern DRC.

The Congressional Budget Office's 1982 report "[Cobalt: Policy Options for a Strategic Mineral](#)" notes that cobalt alloys are critical to the aerospace and weapons industries and that 64% of the world's cobalt reserves lay in the Katanga Copper Belt, running from southeastern Congo into northern Zambia. For this reason, the future perpetration of the military industrial complex largely depends on the control of strategic resources in the eastern DRC. In 2001, Laurent Kabila was assassinated by a member of his security staff, paving the way for his son Joseph Kabila to dynastically usurp the presidency. The younger Kabila derives his legitimacy solely from the support of foreign heads of state and the international business community, due to his ability to comply with foreign plunder.

During the Congo's general elections in November 2011, the international community and the UN remained predictably silent regarding [the mass irregularities observed by the electoral committee](#). The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has faced frequent allegations of corruption, prompting opposition leader Étienne Tshisikedi to call for the UN mission to end its deliberate efforts to maintain the system of international plundering and to [appoint someone "less corrupt and more credible"](#) to head UN operations. MONUSCO has been plagued with frequent cases of peacekeeping troops caught [smuggling minerals such as cassiterite and dealing weapons to militia groups](#).

Under the younger Joseph Kabila, Chinese commercial activities in the DRC have significantly increased not only in the mining sector, but also considerably in the telecommunications field. In 2000, the Chinese ZTE Corporation finalized a [\\$12.6 million deal with the Congolese government](#) to establish the first Sino-Congolese telecommunications company; furthermore, the DRC [exported \\$1.4 billion worth of cobalt between 2007 and 2008](#). The majority of Congolese raw materials like cobalt, copper ore and a variety of hard woods [are exported to China for further processing](#) and [90% of the processing plants in resource rich southeastern Katanga province](#) are owned by Chinese nationals. In 2008, a consortium of Chinese companies were granted [the rights to mining operations in Katanga in exchange for US\\$6 billion in infrastructure investments](#), including the construction of two hospitals, four universities and a hydroelectric power project.

The framework of the deal allocated an additional \$3 million to develop cobalt and copper mining operations in Katanga. In 2009, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) demanded renegotiation of the deal, arguing that the agreement between China and the DRC violated the foreign debt relief program for so-called HIPC (Highly Indebted Poor Countries) nations. The vast majority of the DRC's \$11 billion foreign debt owed to the Paris

Club was [embezzled by the previous regime of Mobuto Sesi Seko](#). The [IMF successfully blocked the deal in May 2009](#), calling for a more feasibility study of the DRCs mineral concessions.

The United States is currently mobilizing public opinion in favor of a greater US presence in Africa, under the pretext of capturing Joseph Kony, quelling Islamist terrorism and putting an end to long-standing humanitarian issues. As well-meaning Americans are successively coerced by highly emotional social media campaigns promoting an American response to atrocities, few realize the role of the United States and western financial institutions in fomenting the very tragedies they are now poised to resolve. While many genuinely concerned individuals naively support forms of pro-war brand activism, the mobilization of ground forces in Central Africa will likely employ the use of predator drones and targeted missile strikes that have been notoriously responsible for civilian casualties en masse.

The further consolidation of US presence in the region is part of a larger program to expand AFRICOM, the United States Africa Command through a proposed archipelago of military bases in the region. In 2007, [US State Department advisor Dr. J. Peter Pham offered the following on AFRICOM](#) and its strategic objectives 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.” Additionally, during an AFRICOM Conference held at Fort McNair on February 18, 2008, Vice Admiral [Robert T. Moeller openly declared AFRICOM’s guiding principle](#) of protecting “the free flow of natural resources from Africa to the global market,” before citing the increasing presence of China as a major challenge to US interests in the region.

The increased US presence in Central Africa is not simply a measure to secure monopolies on [Uganda’s recently discovered oil reserves](#); Museveni’s legitimacy depends solely on foreign backers and their extensive military aid contributions – US ground forces are not required to obtain valuable oil contracts from Kampala. The push into Africa has more to do with destabilizing the deeply troubled Democratic Republic of the Congo and capturing its strategic reserves of cobalt, tantalum, gold and diamonds. More accurately, the US is poised to employ a scorched-earth policy by creating dangerous war-like conditions in the Congo, prompting the mass exodus of Chinese investors. Similarly to the Libyan conflict, the Chinese returned after the fall of Gaddafi to find a proxy government only willing to do business with the western nations who helped it into power.

As the US uses its influence to [nurture the emergence of breakaway states like South Sudan](#), the activities of Somalia’s al Shabaab, Nigeria’s Boko Haram and larger factions of AQIM in North Africa offer a concrete pretext for further US involvement in regional affairs.

The ostensible role of the first African-American US President is to export the theatresque War on Terror directly to the African continent, in a campaign to exploit established tensions along tribal, ethnic and religious lines. As US policy theoreticians such as [Dr. Henry Kissinger, willingly proclaim](#), “Depopulation should be the highest priority of US foreign policy towards the Third World,” the vast expanse of desert and jungles in northern and central Africa will undoubtedly serve as the venue for the next decade of resource wars.

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