

Washington Drives an “Imperial Wedge” Between Congo and China

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We in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have just commemorated the 15th anniversary of the assassination of President Laurent Kabila and the 54th anniversary of the assassination of our independence leader Patrice Lumumba on 16th of January and 17th of January respectively.

Shortly before these commemorations, the DRC was honored by the official visit of the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Wang Yi, China's top leader to visit the DRC since 2008 when his predecessor former Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Yang Jie Chi visited Kinshasa. Mr Wang Yi's visit sent a clear message to the world that Congo is back on its two feet again. There is therefore no excuse for Chinese investors NOT to go and invest in Congo.

As a reminder, China has established a tradition according to which every Chinese Foreign Minister would undertake his first official visit in the New Year to Africa. This is a good tradition. It is like coming home for the New Year. We should start looking at China-Africa relations in that way.

Taking a leaf from China's book, the United States appointed Mr. Russ Feingold as a special envoy to the Great Lakes Region (meaning the region in and around Lake Victoria, Lake Tanganyika, Lake Kivu, Lake Edward and Lake Albert; encompassing Burundi, the western part of Kenya, north western part of Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda and parts of Eastern Congo).

Mr Feingold started his job by interfering in Congo's internal affairs, a thing China would not do. For instance he told Radio France International on the sidelines of the France-Africa Security Summit held in Paris in December 2013, that the only solution for the Congo crisis to end is to change Congo's borders. China would never say such a thing! China would never condone the split of Congo. Congolese people appreciate China's support to their heroic resistance against foreign aggression, notably its opposition against the violation of Congo's sovereignty and territorial integrity at the UN Security Council and its quiet diplomacy.

The United States exerted pressure on Joseph Kabila NOT to seek a third term and abide by the constitution. US Secretary of State John Kerry even pledged to give the DRC \$30 million worth of aid for the next elections expected in 2016, but only “on condition that President Joseph Kabila does not seek a third term”. Western aid always come with conditionality and if it is elections and democracy we are talking about, why does Kerry not even refer to the point of view and will Congolese people? What kind of democracy is this?

Since Joseph Kabila, who still has two years to complete as part of his mandate since he won elections in 2011; and therefore wants to concentrate on his work, did not accept this money, we believe that it was used to finance opposition parties, the Catholic Church and members of civil societies to launch a “Congo Spring”, an “Orange Revolution” or “regime change”.

However, when Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni (one of America’s mercenaries in Africa) stood for a third term, the United States said nothing. Double standard is the main characteristic of Western powers’ policies in Africa.

During his recent visit to the DRC, Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Wang Yi, accompanied by the new Chinese Ambassador to the DRC, Mr. Wang Tongqing, re-affirmed China’s willingness to pursue its economic cooperation with the DRC. During the visit, he held talks with President Joseph Kabila.

Then, meeting his Congolese counterpart Raymond Tshibanda, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said:

“China will continue to develop mutually beneficial cooperation in the economic field in order to achieve win-win cooperation and contribute to the common prosperity of both countries.

“China remains very committed to its relationship with the DRC. And for us, the DRC is an important partner on the African continent. The DRC is the heart of Africa, and as a good friend of the DRC, we hope that this heart will continue to beat in a much more stable, stronger and more durable way.

“As a strategic partner of the DRC, we support Congolese efforts to defend the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of their country. And we want to see the pacification of the situation in the eastern DRC.

“Today, the DRC wants to achieve the modernization of its agriculture, the development of its mining industry as well as the development of its infrastructures, notably the construction hydroelectric plants. I think in these areas we can absolutely become the best partner of the DRC”.

It is this writer’s conviction that this is clearly a new road map for Congo-China relations. For us Africans who have gone through the worst kinds of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism, the only criteria for judging who is coming to Africa as a colonialist or not is the “win-win principle”.

Of course the China-Congo relations are not without problems, but should problems arise (such as the recent of powerful T-55 Missiles to Paul Kagame who can only target Eastern Congo) Congo and China have established a platform to talk about the issues arising. It is called Coordination Office and Monitoring of the Sino-Congolese Program”. We are brothers and brothers sometimes have candid exchange.

A few days after Minister Wang Yi’s visit, violent demonstrations broke out in the streets of Kinshasa the capital of the DRC, called for by a “group of opposition leaders, remnants of the Mobutu era”, including Jean-Claude Muyambo, José Makila, Vital Kamerhe, Martin Fayulu, and others. Their war cry: to protest against the adoption of the draft of the electoral law by the National Assembly. President Joseph Kabila’s Majority in Parliament says the move is necessary to update voter lists.

On the contrary, for Jean-Claude Muyambo, José Makila, Vital Kamerhe, Martin Fayulu, and others, the government of President Joseph Kabila should not tie the organization of legislative and presidential elections scheduled for 2016 to a prior census of the Congolese population. They reckon this a delaying tactic by the government of President Joseph Kabila, a ploy to allow him to remain in office beyond the period of his final term, that is to say, beyond 2016; because, they say, in a vast country such as Congo, the census could take several years from completion. However, some UNDP [United Nations Development Programme] experts reckon that such a census can be successfully organized and completed in six months. All you need is good logistics.

During the vote on the electoral law at the National Assembly on 17 January 2015, Daniel Furaha, a member of Parliament of the Presidential Majority (MP), said that the opposition's rejection of the idea of a census is based on "bad faith".

"After consulting some UNDP experts and others who are used to this kind of exercise, they say that the identification of the population can take up to 6 months," Daniel Furaha MP said, indicating that before the 2006 and 2011 elections, the enrollment of the population in his constituency took only two months to complete.

According to Furaha, if the government makes funds available to the National Identification Population Office (ONIP), the census can go until July of this year and elections will be held without much difficulties. "Our friends in the opposition are agitated for nothing," said Daniel Furaha (Radio Okapi, January 18, 2015).

As Professor Yvon Ramazani wrote (in Congocitizen, a Congolese email to which I am subscribed), understanding and presenting things in that way to anybody who would bother to listen to and believe them, these opposition leaders called for protests the "Burkina Faso Way" to prevent the adoption of the draft electoral law. But the DRC is not Burkina Faso. The protest instead resulted in escalating unrest, assaults and vandalism by street children, demobilized soldiers and all the thugs that Kinshasa boasts, commonly known as "Nkuluna" who were recruited and paid "for the cause".

The scene was therefore set for the escalation of unrest and vandalism: outright looting of shops, stores and properties belonging to Chinese nationals in the Ngaba, Kalamu and Limeté communes in the capital Kinshasa and those of Lebanese in the Masina township, including Hasson and Brothers.

In addition, they set fire on 20 public buses operated by Transco, a public transport company (more than a hundred private and public vehicles were destroyed), ransacked and set fire on several communes' administrative offices and other State building as well as the Office of the Assistant Commissioner of Police in the Limete Commune. The same scenario was repeated at the University of Kinshasa. Police dispersed protesters in Goma and Bukavu near the Rwandan borders in eastern Congo and other Congolese cities. That is why the government cut off Internet and mobile phone short messages delivery to prevent coordination of opposition demonstrations. The signals of Radio France International were also interrupted by the government because of that radio's pro-opposition and sensational broadcasts. The toll increased to eleven dead, including two police officers and 300 injured, according to the authorities but according to human rights organisations sources, there were 28 deaths and other sources even cite the figure of 40 or 42 (Colette Breackman, Le Soir, January 22, 2015). So far, it has not been reported that 42 families have claimed their dead.

After the looting of their properties, the Chinese community in Kinshasa was reassured of their security by the government. On behalf of the government, Evariste Boshab Vice Prime Minister in charge of Internal Affairs promised to compensate or indemnify, to the extent possible, those members of the Chinese community whose properties were damaged. This was the decision of President Joseph Kabila Boshab confirmed (Digital.net, January 23, 2015).

So why do Congolese opposition leaders not wait until 19 December 2016 to see if there will be “a slippage” (a term they love to use) of the current Congolese Head State’s term in office instead of being agitated now, destroying newly built infrastructures (destroying is easy, rebuilding is difficult) and looting other people’s properties? We still have two years to go. Why don’t they wait? If Jean-Claude Muyambo, José Makila, Vital Kamerhe, Fayulu Martin, and others take power “the Burkina Faso way”, we doubt that they will logistically be able to organize the election the next day! Their behaviour lead many people to conclude that they are either jealous of Joseph Kabila’s achievements or they are manipulated by foreign predators. The fact that Martin Fayulu visited the United States immediately after three days of riots speaks volume.

After envoys from the United States, Britain, France and former colonial power Belgium met Kengo Wa Dondo, there times Mobutu’s prime minister and now President of the Senate (the Senate’s mandate expired three years ago but because no new legislative elections have been held since then, the Senate continues to sit and vote laws), a vote on changes to the electoral law which was supposed to take place on Thursday 22 January 2015 was delayed till Friday 23 January 2015. Even the UN Mission in Congo accused the police of firing on protesters, an accusation the government denied. The United States, France and U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon had all called for Kabila’s government to show restraint in handling the protests and urged presidential elections to be held on time (AP, January 24, 2015).

Envoys from the United States, Britain, France and former colonial power Belgium met Kengo Wa Dondo, a diplomat told Reuters.

“They invited the president of the Senate to take into consideration the tension that was prevailing in Kinshasa and other towns of the country,” the diplomat told Reuters, asking not to be named.

“They urged him either to suspend the modifying law or to remove the incendiary provisions,” the diplomat added.

A meeting with Aubin Minaku, the head of the National Assembly was also planned (Aaron Ross, Reuters, Jan 22, 2015).

Senators voted unanimously to amend the bill, already passed by the lower house of parliament by dropping a provision tying the 2016 presidential and legislative elections to a census expected to be years from completion. Instead, the Senate’s amendment of the electoral law rather ties 2016 presidential and legislative elections to “demographic data already available”. A joint commission of the Senate and National Assembly must still meet in an effort to reach a consensus on the amended bill. If lawmakers cannot come to an agreement, the National Assembly where Kabila’s Presidential Majority MPs outnumber opposition MPs, would have the final word (AFP, January 24, 2015).

The Western model of democracy Congo has inherited is a waste of time, energies and financial resources which could be spent on development. No wonder why Africa remains at the bottom of the ladder. China is able to take decisions quickly without all these snags. China has found its own way and it is paying off. China is now the first economic power in the world.

Even in Burkina Faso, after all, France meddled in, like in all former French colonies, smuggled Blaise Compaoré out of the country to Ivory Coast and from there to Morocco. President Hollande admitted it.

As Professor Mugaruka argued (in Congocitizen, a Congolese email to which I am subscribed), those who wanted to plunge Kinshasa and by extension, the entire Republic into widespread insurrection, fear and chaos, have failed! Their foreign advisors and major donors of funds for the dirty work, have the wrong address in wanting to execute their macabre plan of the destabilization of the DRC, “the Burkina Faso way”. They have failed. As a reminder, former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Herman Cohen already predicted and warned in an interview given to Budapest Business Journal last year that “the uprising in Kinshasa will far exceed the one lived in Ouagadougou”.

Western powers’ strategy in Congo now is to use Kamerhe, Muyambo, Fayulu and others to agitate in Congo in order to erase the genocide of 8 million Congolese committed by the Anglo-american-ugandan-rwandanTutsi coalition from the memory of the Congolese people.

The Catholic Church which is very powerful in Congo firmly backed the protests and never condemned the looting. The BBC reported on 21 January 2015 that the Catholic Church in the Democratic Republic of Congo has thrown its weight behind protests against President Joseph Kabila extending his rule. It called on people to peacefully oppose his move to delay presidential elections until a census is held.

According to the BBC, Cardinal Laurent Mosengwo Pasinya personally expressed support for the protests and urged the government “not to kill its people”. The cardinal called on the public to challenge by all “legal and peaceful means any attempt to change laws that are essential to the electoral process”. Cardinal Monsengwo said “certain political actors, with the security forces” were in “desolation” and causing insecurity in DR Congo. “Stop killing your people,” he said in a statement.

The Catholic Church’s Elikya Radio TV broadcast messages of support to protesters and was transmitting images of the riots live.

Ironically, on 3 October 2013, the Council of Cardinals which advises the Pope on the reform of the Roman Curia, of which Cardinal Laurent Mosengwo Pasinya of the Democratic Republic of Congo is a member, unanimously voted for the elaboration of a new Apostolic Constitution. of the Catholic Church and not just merely to reform the previous constitution adopted in 1998. This is according to a report published on 4 October 2013 by “fait-religieux.com” , a popular Catholic website.

It this writer’s personal opinion that the Catholic Church could be made less relevant in the DRC if the state build better schools and better hospitals and become less corrupt than the Church.

Radio Okapi quoted Madeleine Andeka, vice president of the consultative framework of civil

society organizations in the DRC, as saying that “peace gained ‘with great endurance and much efforts’ must be preserved”. She backed a census of the whole Congolese population because according to her, “the identification of the population will be used for decision-makers to develop good policies as this will enable us to have the exact figures and will give us an idea about each category of our population”. She also condemned the deaths, injuries and looting which occurred during demonstrations

Given the fact that in 2011, the opposition accused the government of having fiddled with electoral lists, a census of the Congolese population prior to the elections becomes understandable, as long as such a census takes place in transparency. For instance, Rwandans should not be allowed to go to Congo to take part in the census and then return to Rwanda afterward. In addition, the smuggling of Congo’s strategic minerals to neighboring countries which continues unabated must be stopped.

So, why were Chinese traders’ shops and stores were targeted by the looters? As we know well, America and its Nato allies’ aggression against Libya was not part of Arab Spring. Their objectives among others, was to target China’s massive investments in that country. China lost a lot of money in Libya and Chinese workers had to leave.

After coming to power, President Joseph Kabila made his ambition very clear: “to rebuild a strong, united, stable and prosperous country, where it will be possible to travel by road from Goma in the North to Lubumbashi in the south and Gbadolite in the north-west. The life expectancy from birth which is 49 now will be 55 even more. Congo will be the “China of Africa” tomorrow. With all the resources that we have, our under-development is scandalous” (Interview given to Jeune Afrique, April 2006).

President Joseph Kabila tried to escape the control exercised by Western powers (the financial empire of the City of London and Wall Street,) on raw materials of his country, through the launch of a partnership with China (Sébastien Périmony, 2014).

The \$9 billion Congo-China infrastructures for minerals deal was opposed by the United States and other Western powers through the IMF, the World Bank, the African Development Bank and the Paris Club of Lenders until it was reduced to \$6 billion. The Nigeria-China oil infrastructures for oil also failed due to the United States and other Western powers’ pressure piled on the Nigerian government through Western multinational oil companies. All the proxy wars waged by Africom in Congo, Sudan, Central African Republic, Mali also target China’s presence in Africa and to create a difficult environment for China-Africa relations to thrive. All these strategies will backfire!

So we are not surprised that Chinese shops, stores and properties belonging to Chinese nationals were looted in Kinshasa. In fact, Chinese traders are often accused by Western media of engaging in unfair competition in Africa, not just in Congo, and of killing local industries.

Colette Braeckman, journalist at Belgian daily, *Le Soir* and expert on Congolese affairs raised the following question: Why such discontent, such a profound desire for change in Congo, while the current government is probably the one which since independence, has deployed most efforts to rebuild and modernize the country? According to Braeckman, certainly, there was lack of communication on the part of the government and she criticizes President Joseph Kabila’s “lack of charisma and eloquence” (according to her). However, she adds that glorious digit growth, macroeconomic references so often invoked by the

government could not mask rising inequalities and the arrogance of the regime's "nouveaux riches" who more than emulated the predators of yesterday (the Mobutu regime's).

Braeckman further argues that in some respects the Congo today reflects Queen Marie Antoinette's France: Louis XVI was not the worst of kings and the people lived rather better during his reign... The peasants simply discovered that those who governed them lived in an insolent luxury and enriched themselves beyond the reasonable. In Congo, too, progress has been real but very slow and it has increased inequalities instead of narrowing them; feelings of poverty, exclusion have sharpened, especially among the youth who made many sacrifices to finish their university studies but without finding any real job opportunities afterwards.

Braeckman concludes that with its ten million souls subjected to taxes and new laws, but without having managed to escape poverty, insecurity and a precarious life, Kinshasa is a city in transition, it represents a potential time ticking bomb. To meet the population's impatience, the regime asked to be given yet a little more time, but the street has now given its answer (Colette Braeckman, *Le Soir*, January 21, 2015).

With Western powers and the influential Catholic Church calling for the reform to be scrapped, legislators bowed to pressure and abandoned the census requirement in a dramatic climbdown. A contentious provision making elections contingent on a new electoral roll to be drawn up after a census across the vast country was removed. Opposition cried victory.

"This is a victory... because there won't be (a delay) of the presidential election," Vital Kamerhe, head of the opposition Union for the Congolese Nation, had told AFP on 24 January 2015.

Ironically, after this declaration of victory, *La Republique*, a Congolese daily newspaper revealed that some Western embassies funded the Congolese opposition to get the population to rise up against the Kabila regime: \$ 500,000 in total to sow unrest and riots in the capital Kinshasa and throughout Congo.

So, where are we now? To paraphrase Tony Busselen, another Belgian analyst who commented on Braeckman's article, the French Revolution was victorious. Now it is very unlikely that the current trend may lead to the overthrow of the Kabila government. Things can change, but for now we are still very far from reporting the victory of adverse forces over the government.

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