Will President Obama Finally Bury King Leopold’s Ghost? Common Dreams

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By Peter Erlinder

November 2008 was the 100-year anniversary of the Congo's conversion from the personal property of Belgian King Leopold II to a colonial possession of Belgium, itself. The King's brutal rule, documented in Leopold's Ghost, embarrassed the Belgians into switching "landlords" in 1908, but did little to ease the colonial burden on the Congolese people.

Between the European powers Berlin meeting that divided up Africa in 1885 and 1908, Belgium's Leopold II accumulated spectacular wealth for himself while an estimated 10-million Congolese died. Even more died before Congo finally got its independence on June 30, 1960. But, real independence has never arrived in the Congo, and foreign military and economic powers still control its destiny today! In 2008, Leopold's "Ghost" has been replaced by the United States and the United Kingdom, and surrogate-armies led by Rwanda's Paul Kagame and Uganda's Yoweri Musveni, as documented by reports commissioned by the UN Security Council more than 5 years ago....that the U.S. press has studiously ignored.

U.S. neo-colonial influence in Congo can be traced to the years just after nominal "independence," when Patrice Lumumba, its first democratically-elected prime minister, was assassinated by a western-backed "anti-communist" coup on January 17, 1961. Belgium apologized for its role in 2002 , but despite exposés like A Legacy of Ashes, the CIA history published last year that documents CIA crimes in the Congo, and elsewhere, the U.S. still downplays its role in assassinating Lumumba, and backing the "anti-communist" dictator-criminal Mobutu Sese Seko for more than 3 decades...until he was overthrown in 1997 by a U.S./U.K. sponsored invasion from Rwanda and Uganda, after the Soviet Union's collapse made him expendable.

During a lull in the fighting in the Congo, the UN Security Council commissioned detailed reports in 2001, 2002 and 2003 that document how the 1996 Ugandan/Rwandan military-invasion overthrew of Mobutu, put Laurent Kabila in power in 1997 and unleashed an ongoing resource war, when Kabila tried to reclaim the resource-rich eastern Congo from his erstwhile "allies." That war eventually brought Angola, Zimbabwe and other nations to the defense of the Congo's territory in what became known the First "World War of Africa." Since the 1996 invasion, the Congo has lost an estimated 6 million men, women and children, and the Rwanda/Uganda sponsored war continues today.

As central Africa teeters on the edge of another conflagration that threatens to touch off a Second "World War of Africa" even the New York Times is reporting that the increasing violence is based in a grab for resources. But, what has not been reported is that, more than 5 years ago, at least 3 UN Security Council-commissioned reports submitted over 3 separate years, identified the resource-grab by Rwandan and Ugandan elites as the main source of violence and death in the Congo. Each nation's capital has become the largest trading centers for riches that don't exist in either country, but exist in great plenty in the eastern Congo.

The UN reports describe how elites, related to government and military leaders in Rwanda and Uganda, are gorging themselves on the riches stolen from the areas under the control or their armies or their surrogates. For example, according to the UN reports Rwanda controls an area of the Congo more than 15-times its national territory.

The map of central Africa shows Rwanda and Uganda as smallish "bumps" on the backside of the Congo, a country the size of Western Europe. Uganda's population is only about 35 million and Rwanda's no more than about 8 million...but they have both managed to sustain a 12-year war of occupation in vast areas of the eastern Congo, and have threatened to take control of the entire country.
The Iraq and Afghanistan wars have taught the American people just how expensive wars of aggression and occupation really are. The occupation of the Congo has lasted nearly twice as long as George Bush's wars, which means that either the wars are very, very profitable, or the Ugandan and Rwandan militaries are getting support from outside central Africa...or both.

The 2001-03 UN-commissioned reports document just how lucrative the Congo invasion and occupation has been for its Rwandan and Ugandan sponsors....but it also helps to know, as reported by the U.K. Telegraph, that Uganda is one of the largest recipients of U.K military and economic aid on the African continent. And, Rwandan President Kagame was trained by the U.S. Army at Ft. Leavenworth and that Rwanda has been Africa's largest per capita recipient of U.S. military and economic aid. The Rwandan army has grown from 7,000 troops when Kagame invaded Rwanda from Uganda in 1990 to between 70,000 to 100,000 troops today. Rwandan and Ugandan troops and private military contractors are in Darfur, Somalia and part of the 180,000 "civilians" assisting the U.S. military in Iraq.

Only the United States and United Kingdom (not the UN or the "international community") have the power to stop the killing in the Congo by removing support for the military and economic crimes of their allies. But, in addition to direct governmental support, as we know from the movie "Blood Diamonds," cutting off the private capital that also fuels Africa's wars is also necessary. But, if the well-documented governmental and private Anglo-American interests in central Africa stop turning a blind-eye to the crimes being committed by their surrogates....that supply "blood"-coltan for cellphones, "blood"-gold, diamonds, tin and bauxite to North American and European markets, and proxy-troops in Africa and Iraq, the "puppet-combatants" would be unable to continue a large-scale war for very long.

Europe had its own 100-year war, and the Congo has already experienced an African variation with a century of European assistance. But, at the dawn of the 21st Century, the British and Americans can prevent what promises to be a 200-year genocide in the Congo and central Africa....but only if they choose to admit their complicity, and end it!

President Obama has many difficult challenges indeed....but his capacity for deeper understanding of neo-colonial manipulations in Africa than any U.S. president before him presents the possibility that he could emerge as a peacemaker in Africa on a scale that could even exceed the contributions of Nelson Mandela, and ensure Obama's place in world history. The question is whether he will have the wisdom, strength and courage to finally put Leopold's neo-colonial "Ghost" in its well-deserved grave....and, whether the Pentagon and U.S. economic interests will permit him to bury U.S. neo-colonialism in Africa, once and for all.

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