

ERASING THE BOARD REDUX

Part One

Warlords' Deadly Battle in Kinshasa

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The “four-day war” that rocked the capital city of the Democratic Republic of Congo from March 22-26, 2007 was called a “cleaning” by insiders—everyone knew it was going to happen, the United Nations Observers Mission in Congo (MONUC) did nothing to stop it, the death count was significantly under-reported, the realities behind the scenes remain cloaked by the international media and world institutions, and the big losers, yet again, are the Congolese people. This is the inside story.

The Democratic Republic of Congo is today both the richest and poorest country in the world. First robbed of its rubber and ivory (1890-1908) by Belgium's King Leopold—whose enterprise of slavery claimed ten million Congolese lives but was masked by a humanitarian “anti-slavery” propaganda campaign—the plunder of the Congo was advanced by Belgian colonial interests from 1908 to “independence” on June 30, 1960.

Following a *coup d'état* orchestrated in part by Israeli American Maurice Tempelsman and his corporate allies, the country emerged from the first Congo crises (1960-1967) with U.S.-backed Colonel Joseph Mobutu installed as President.¹ Mobutu and his corporate partners plundered Congo from 1965 to 1996, and many of the same “untouchables” of the Mobutu era—Maurice Tempelsman, Etienne Davignon, George Forrest, the Blattners—are plundering Congo today.²

Mobutu was overthrown in the 1996-1997 invasion led by Rwanda and Uganda, backed by the U.S., Canada, U.K., Belgium and Israel. Rebel warlords like Jean-Pierre Bemba, Azarias Ruberwa, Arthur Zahidi Ngoma, and Mbusa Nyamwisi fought against the seat of power in Kinshasa held by Laurent Kabila (1998-2001) and then Joseph Kabila, his purported son. Multinational corporations, criminal networks and regional governments backed “rebel” and “government” forces—often both—and all sides committed massive atrocities. Billions of dollars in plantation commodities, minerals and timber exited Congo during the war—shipped to Western markets.

¹ See Dr. David Gibbs, [The Political Economy of Third World Intervention: Mines, Money and U.S. Policy in the Congo Crises](#), University of Chicago Press, 1991.

² See: keith harmon snow and Rick Hines, “Blood Diamond: Doublethink and Deception Over Those Worthless Little Rocks of Desire,” [Z Magazine](#), June 1 and July 1, 2007.

As the Congo “peace process” unfolded, Jean-Pierre Bemba became one of four warlords rewarded with a vice-presidency in DRC’s transitional government (2003-2006); sworn in on July 17, 2003, he held the Finance and Economic portfolio. Bemba was one of five significant challengers to the transitional president, Joseph Kabila, in the 2006 elections, which fielded 33 presidential candidates. Bemba believes himself Congo’s savior and rightful leader, and he has provoked hostilities, riots and parliamentary chaos throughout the transition, elections and post-elections periods.

Behind the machinations of power in Congo lie hundreds of billions of dollars to be made in exploiting Congo’s riches in the next decade alone. From 1996-2007, despite multiple peace accords, some six to ten million people died in Congo’s wars.

THE BIG MAN’S WAR

On March 22, 2007 war broke out in Kinshasa, the capital city of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). For the next four days Congolese government troops—*Forces Armees Democratique Republic of Congo* (FARDC)—backing newly elected President Joseph Kabila fought with “rebel” soldiers fighting for former opposition leader and failed Presidential candidate Jean Pierre Bemba.

Eyewitnesses describe how the war erupted outside the residence of Jean-Pierre Bemba, but soldiers fought it out straight down the *Boulevard 30 Juin*—named for Congo’s “independence” day—from one end of the city to another, to the central train station, and down the tracks to the Ndolo airport, where a major battle occurred. There was also a battle in Maluku, 80 kilometers from the city center. The war raged from March 22 to 24 and simmered from March 25 to 27; sections of Kinshasa remained no-go insecurity zones into April.

Troops with the United Nations Observers Mission in Congo (MONUC) spent the day of March 22 evacuating MONUC civilians and other foreigners to safe sites. MONUC refused to evacuate any Congolese nationals, even those who were family members of Westerners. There are no reports of MONUC troops taking action to protect Congolese lives. Banks were robbed, the embassies of Spain, Italy, Nigeria and Zimbabwe were allegedly attacked, and bullets sprayed houses, shops and businesses. Civilians were shot all over the place. The Bemba faction armed children and sent them out to loot and pillage, a tactic used by Bemba’s Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC) throughout the rebellion (1998-2003), and by Rwandan and Ugandan invaders from the start (1996).

The Congolese people describe these events as the “Kinshasa War.” While some 1000 people are reportedly dying every day in eastern Congo, currently, due to war-related factors, the people of Kinshasa had come to believe the war in Congo was mostly over. They were wrong.

“We have been abandoned,” said Georges, a Congolese man who survived the fighting.³ Georges is afraid to give his name, seeing that people are being silenced. “They [foreigners] do not want to help Congolese people. Officials are saying 600 people killed, but this is not the truth. Bemba put

³ All names are fictitious, though the sources are real people: anyone identified in this story would be subject to persecution.

kidogo on the streets—children—and he put guns in their hands.⁴ Kabila’s soldiers killed them and they killed *too many people* who were not soldiers.”

Testimonies herein were taken in Kinshasa in late March and April 2007. All sources are unnamed either to protect them from military and intelligence networks sowing terror in Kinshasa today, or to respect their career security with the U.N. or humanitarian sector, or to protect this author from threatened retaliation.

“There’s been deaths everywhere,” said a surviving businessman working with DRC officials, on April 5. “Many neighborhoods are finding that relatives have disappeared or died. At least six trucks went by filled with bodies... and there was a MONUC truck assisting with logistics. Small children were killed and their parents don’t even know where they went. Hundreds and hundreds of innocent people who had nothing to do with it are dead. They say 550 people killed? It’s more than 2000. Everything has been blamed on Bemba but they forget that Kabila’s soldiers surrounded Bemba’s house. Both Kabila and Bemba are killers.”

“President Kabala has not made any speeches of mourning for all the Congolese people who have died,” said another eyewitness on April 5. “It’s nothing to them. Kabila and Prime Minister Gizenga have said nothing. They’re back to business as if nothing happened. And MONUC did nothing, they ran away, they are not peacekeepers. Families all over Kinshasa are realizing today that their sons or mothers or fathers or brothers are not coming home, ever. People are feeling very frightened, because no one can tell what they saw, no can say about the killing, or they will be killed too.”

“It’s safe to say that casualties exceed 100,” said MONUC spokesman Kemal Saiki on April 4. “We knew the situation was tense. We knew that there was a build-up of arms in the city. But to say that this was predicted... The issue is not the exact body count, but rather that violence was used by all sides. And the Congolese don’t need enticement from outside forces to take up arms and commit violence. And who would that benefit anyways?”⁵

Reports out of Kinshasa in July 2007 indicate that killings, assassinations, tortures and detention without charge under inhuman conditions are ongoing as Kabila consolidates power in Congo. Early July saw two young sex workers murdered in Kinshasa and 12 people (seven street kids under 18) locked for weeks in “Building B2” by police for unspecified purposes. Like the March events and the greater plunder of Congo—human rights atrocities are ignored, downplayed or whitewashed by the international press.

“Not impressed by your conspiracy theory that the international media are hiding anything related to March events in Kinshasa,” says one faithful MONUC official. “I know all the major international journo[s] [journalists] here, and I can vouch for their bravery and enormous efforts they made to tell the world what was going on during this time. They risked their lives to take trips around town whilst the fighting was going on and defied (very real) fear related to falling of mortars on their apartments to file incessantly during those days. They also trudged around morgues and hospitals for days after trying to piece together a realistic death toll. But in the end, if the public isn’t

⁴ *Kidogo* are children armed and sent into battle, in advance of the battle-hardened troops, to draw fire and take the brunt of immediate killing.

⁵ Private communication, MONUC spokesperson Kemal Saiki, Kinshasa, DRC, April 4, 2007.

interested in yet another story of ‘stupid Africans slaughtering one another,’ then those stories will not make the headlines. Journos write for an audience, and if there is no audience, then their voice will not be heard.”⁶

Reportage about Congo (Africa) amounts to a massive deception, pitifully irrelevant, but for its efficacy in inculcating racist beliefs and manipulative mythologies, and it is not because Westerners ‘are tired of yet another story about stupid Africans slaughtering each other’ or because ‘there is no audience’ who cares enough to listen. ‘Journos’ in Africa write for the perks of international travel, adventure, the prestige of appearing in print or broadcast, for career advancement, and for a paycheck. The ‘bravery’ and ‘sacrifice’ are self-perpetuating fictions of privilege and whiteness, and *reportage* is sanitized by the ‘journos’ internal censors and by their editors—gatekeepers of information—of media corporations that profit from predatory capitalism, its misery industries, and the permanent exploitation of people of color.

Civil servants working in Kinshasa believe that the death toll easily exceeded 2000 people, and quite likely many more than that. There are many eyewitnesses, but they can see the iron hand of repression at work around them in Kinshasa today, and they are terrified.

THE PAGE IS TURNED

It was expected that Joseph Kabila would win the presidential elections in the first round given election constraints imposed by the Kabila government and the massive funding from powerful foreign interests behind Kabila. The July 30, 2006 presidential vote reportedly recorded some 16.9 million votes, with Kabila winning 45 percent and Bemba 20 percent. What was not foreseen is that other presidential candidates would hold enough power to throw their votes to Bemba and shift the outcome in Bemba’s favor. The elections were severely manipulated in favor of money and power: many people were paid off; many positions effectively purchased.

On August 20, 2006 elections results were announced in DRC and the troops loyal to Bemba fought for several days with Kabila’s forces. DRC’s war-battered people denounced the fighting between the candidates and their supporters, saying they wanted an end to armed struggle, but the public was powerless in the face of the warlords.

Bemba won Kinshasa. When he didn’t win in other parts of the country he accused Kabila and his cronies of electoral fraud. The accusations were true, but Bemba was also involved in dirty electioneering. Other candidates seen as hopeful possibilities—like Oscar Kashala, a Congolese doctor with bright ideas and fresh energy who hailed from Harvard University—were blocked or sidelined. Kashala’s advance campaign team was arrested, some 32 foreigners, and charged with a coup plot in May 2006, and the Kashala campaign was crippled, and that was the end of that.⁷

“There’s no leadership in this country. It’s not Bemba, and it’s not Kabila,” Oscar Kashala said privately, ten days after the July 2006 elections. “I was prevented from campaigning. We came to

⁶ Private communication, MONUC official, May 8, 2007.

⁷ Oscar Kashala’s team was arrested in Kinshasa and charged with being mercenaries in an alleged coup plot; Kashala himself was apparently not arrested, an error in the earliest published versions of this story. See: “Congo Holding Three Americans in Alleged Coup Plot,” May 25 2006, <www.washingtonpost.com>.

this country with a logistical and strategic plan to run a campaign. On May 15 we were ready, we had our airplanes all lined up, but they arrested everyone. All our phones were being tapped. They even went to the U.S. to offer our financial backers options to get involved in the mining. Kabila's pressure worked: some supporters were worried. Then they started the mercenary stories in the press. They wanted to hurt me, and they did. But we are the only group who has not cheated in these elections. We are the only group who has no guns. We have not lied to the people.”⁸

Many of the other candidates hailed from the Mobutu regime, men like Vincent de Paul Lunda Bululu and Christophe Mbozo N'Kodia Puanga. Bululu is a Brussels educated former Special Adviser to President Mobutu, and a Bemba supporter. Puanga was a Minister of Energy and Mines under Mobutu. Both were tied throughout the war with the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD), backed and controlled by Rwanda. Candidate Pierre Pay-Pay was Minister of Economy and Trade under Mobutu and then Governor of the Central Bank—Bank du Zaire—from 1985-1991, a period of profound graft and corruption backed by western enterprises, amidst a climate of terror against the people of Congo.⁹

The involvement of Mobutu's cronies in privatizing the natural resources and enslaving the labor pool, to profit foreign capital involved then as now, was hidden by the Western press. International reporters who covered Zaire in the 1980's and 1990's perpetuated the invisibility of the Mobutu enterprise and its western capitalist partners.¹⁰

The Kabila government required presidential candidates in the 2006 elections to register with a \$50,000 fee. The United Nations and its partners spent more than \$500 million dollars on the elections, setting up 50,000 polling stations—and arming security forces with state-of-the-art Robocop equipment—all across the country.

A run-off ensued in late October 2006 after Kabila failed to get the required 50 percent of votes. Kabila had the support of Nzanga Mobutu, son of the late dictator, but former Mobutuists sided with both candidates based on the political alliances behind the scenes and the vast profits at stake.

In mid-November 2006 Bemba's forces again rampaged in Kinshasa. The actual death toll from the first two Kinshasa rampages of Bemba's troops will never be known. This remains true of the reign of state terror under Mobutu: the international criminal rackets plundering Congo never shine the spotlight on the atrocities of friendly, collaborating, dictators—a.k.a. their partners in business.

⁸ Private interview with Oscar Kashala, keith harmon snow, Kinshasa, DRC, August 10, 2006.

⁹ See Zaire: Repression as Policy, Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1990. In 1990 Mobutu's crack Israeli-trained troops of the Special Presidential Division (DSP) attacked the campus at the University of Lumumbashi, and thousands of students were killed, with countless more tortured and brutalized. The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency station in Lumumbashi supported the atrocities and cover-up.

¹⁰ These include John Darnton, Steven Greenhouse, Keith Richburg, Paul Lewis, Lynne Duke, James Ruppert, Kenneth Noble, Raymond Bonner, Joshua Hammer, James C. McKinley Jr. and Howard W. French. See: keith harmon snow, “Zaire Cracks, and the Media Fights Mobutu's War,” <http://www.allthingspass.com/uploads/html-84ZAIRE_CRACKS_3.htm>; also: Keith B. Richburg, Out of America: A Black Man Confronts Africa, Basic Books, 1997.

The so-called “independent” Election Commission announced in the third week of November that Kabila won 58 percent of the votes, and Bemba 42 percent.

Jean-Pierre Bemba offered the international criminal business community the perfect guise. Bemba served as a staunch opponent to Joseph Kabila—the perfect “face” of opposition—as long as he would cooperate and accept “defeat” as dictated by the rigged elections. With Bemba behind the Kabila machine, the powerful mining cartels and money houses—Merrill Lynch, J.P. Morgan Chase, Rothschilds, IMF, World Bank, EXIM Bank—and their pliable governments in Europe, Australia, Japan and North America, could easily uphold the fiction of democracy in Congo. Bemba as warlord—atrocities and all—would be forgotten and, as they say in Congo, “the page is turned.”

Bemba did not cooperate. The stakes were too high, the promise of profit and power, the influence behind him, and the indignity of seeing Congo run by a foreigner when Bemba himself is “one hundred percent Congolese,” all drove the arrogant Bemba to miscalculate his position.

On November 13, 2006, Joseph Kabila decreed that the holdout forces of Jean-Pierre Bemba and Azerias Ruberwa—another tycoon and warlord—must immediately integrate their soldiers into the FARDC command. Kabila allowed for fifteen policemen as personal guards. Bemba and Ruberwa refused. On March 5, 2007, the FARDC's chief of staff General Kisempia Sungilanga issued an ultimatum to integrate their militia into the national army or face unspecified action.

In early March 2007, Jean-Pierre Bemba returned from Portugal on his private Boeing 727. What happened next went unreported. Arriving at N'djili airport, Bemba's heavily armed bodyguards tried to enter the Presidential Lounge, controlled by Kabila's elite Presidential Guard, for the President only. Bemba arrived with some 20 jeeps of soldiers with rockets and machine guns and demanded access to the VIP compound. The Presidential Guard refused, and a war nearly erupted on the tarmac. Six-hundred white foreigners on two jumbo jets fresh from Europe were unloading some 20 meters away from the tense military standoff. Kabila ordered the Presidential Guard to stand down and Bemba's gang entered the compound and had a party.

The airport incident humiliated Kabila and his elite Presidential Guard, promising a future showdown. Then on March 15 Bemba insulted Kabila in public interviews on his private radio and TV stations, accusing Kabila of “dictatorship” and “corruption” and “other foolishnesses.” Insiders close to Kabila knew on March 16 that Kinshasa was doomed to a “small but brutal war between Bemba and Kabila.” This journalist was informed on March 15th.

MONUC intelligence was also informed of the imminent war.

“For me, trouble was imminent,” says one MONUC civilian. “Every day I saw it and felt it coming. A memo from MONUC security was sent to us reminding us to respect the curfew two days before [March 20]. Meanwhile, I was very well informed, some Congolese friends called me.”

Deputy Special Representative to the Secretary General, Ross Mountain, from Australia, is coordinator of MONUC security and all U.N. systems in Congo. United States diplomat William Lacey Swing, Special Representative to the Secretary General (SRSG), runs the MONUC show.

In October 2006, as the second round of elections concluded, some MONUC civilians were advised by MONUC security to transfer to more secure lodgings. The situation was tense and volatile, and MONUC took precautions to insure the safety of personnel. In March 2007, security plans were apparently absent even as it became clear that Kinshasa was spiraling out of control.

According to MONUC insiders, internal security memos and alerts warned that Kinshasa was going to explode. These memos reportedly began circulating as early as March 15th, after Bemba ignored the ultimatum to disarm. Days prior to March 22 apparently saw numerous “confidential” memos going from Security to chief directors of MONUC’s Divisions and Sections.

“At 9:00 AM on March 22nd people knew that things were going to happen,” says another MONUC source. This source alleges that President Joseph Kabila communicated by phone with MONUC chief William Swing to request withdrawal of the MONUC soldiers and U.N. Armored Personnel Carriers from outside of Bemba’s residence in Kinshasa. “Around March 15th, Kabila called Swing and told him to move the Uruguayan troops stationed outside Bemba’s residence.”

The passive MONUC response—attempts to relocate civilians at the last minute, but no efforts to stop or mitigate the killing—seemed to clear the way for the imminent war. The apparent failure by MONUC security to take proper precautions to protect MONUC civilians—never mind the general public—suggests some internal conflict or ambiguity about security protocol. Why?

Officially, MONUC was supporting the Kabila government. However, allegations have surfaced that high-level officials inside MONUC were paid off by Jean-Pierre Bemba. According to MONUC sources, there were numerous recipients, it has gone on for a long time and is still going on, and decisions were made—actions taken, or not taken—that benefited the Bemba machine.

“I know people were receiving money from Bemba,” says one MONUC insider. “These are high-level MONUC people, people who are making important decisions. And it is big money. BIG money.”¹¹ The source confirmed that payoffs have been regular and that numerous people are aware of the payoffs (the names of key witnesses have been provided).

Pay-offs from Jean Pierre Bemba to pivotal MONUC officials would explain MONUC’s apparent paralysis during the Kinshasa crises. This raises questions about MONUC officials receiving pay-offs from Joseph Kabila or others. There is evidence that kickbacks and payoffs of MONUC insiders have and are occurring in Kisangani, and bribery and corruption of the MONUC mission is likely occurring in other cities.

Just days after the March 22-26 war, SRSG William Swing held a “town-meeting” for all MONUC personnel in Kinshasa. Attending staff expressed frustrations about the mission and about the MONUC ‘position’ during the March events. There were reportedly many questions about security: people knew that MONUC security expected violence and that MONUC was not prepared, *or not interested in being prepared*. Some complained that MONUC did nothing to prevent the war.

“It was a cleaning,” confirmed another deeply connected insider who for years has worked with top-level ‘players’ in mining, military and politics in Central Africa. “It is evident that MONUC knew

¹¹ The source alleges that pay-offs have occurred regularly.

what would happen. They knew that Bemba's forces were in Kinshasa. They knew about the weapons buildup. Previously the EUFOR [European Union Forces] were here—these are professional killers, Special Forces, they are trained to kill, they are not MONUC—but the elections were over and the EUFOR were already gone. Nobody wants to be a witness to the killings. If we say, 'I saw FARDC troops killing all these Bemba men and all these civilians'—I will not be safe."

GUNS, ROCKETS, TANKS FOR DEMOCRACY

Early reports in the international media counted 150 people dead and described the warfare in general terms, absent all revealing details or background. A few days after heavy fighting the German Embassy broke ranks and declared, "up to 600 people killed." The German ambassador told reporters "The military forces that faced Mr. Bemba's militias were too heavy." The German Embassy remains silent about their direct involvement in illegal mining and bloodshed in the eastern Congo however.

War broke out on March 22 but the New York Times went completely silent about events in Congo. Then on March 28, they ran a sizeable front-page feature, "After Congo Vote, Neglect and Scandal Still Reign," focused on "a recent 1200-mile trip across the country" by NYT reporter Jeffrey Gettlemen. "The unruly capital" in Kinshasa, Gettlemen commented in passing, "looks as if a war has been fought in its streets. There has been some violence there, like the periodic clashes between the presidential guard and a militia loyal to Jean-Pierre Bemba, a tycoon, former warlord and unsuccessful candidate for president." The on-going Kinshasa war was relegated to "periodic clashes." As usual there was nothing about political alliances, dirty diamond deals, mercenary ties or the machinations behind the scenes.

Most remarkable were Gettlemen's misrepresentations of violence in Kinshasa. "But it is not tanks and bombs that have turned the streets into bone-jarring rubble and many elegant buildings into teetering shells," he wrote. "It is neglect and corruption, which persist despite the election."

Reuters had already reported (March 23) that "heavy gun and mortar fire shook the Congolese capital at first light on Friday in a second day of fighting between government troops and forces of a former rebel leader."¹² This was not reflected in the Gettlemen piece. On March 24, 2007, the Associated Press published a photo of FARDC troops in a tank in front of Bemba's residence in Kinshasa—refuting the Gentlemen dismissal of heavy weapons.

Gettlemen's long feature in the NYT filled about 45 column inches, on several pages, with numerous photos of poor people in the bush, and it deflected attention from the conflict in Kinshasa.

Weapons deliveries regularly rolled into Kinshasa from Matadi port between August and October 2006 and the four-day war involved mortars, bombs, tanks and RPG-7 rockets. Some twenty T-55 battle tanks arrived in Congo's Matadi port in July 2006, shipped from Europe, along with armored vehicles and tons of ammunition. There were some twenty newly arrived T-72 tanks at Matadi port. On August 24-25 FARDC moved seven truckloads of ammunition from Matadi to Kinshasa. Nine T-55 battle tanks were delivered during the night of 12 September. The FARDC logistics base in

¹² "Mortars shake Congo capital, Govt. seeks Bemba arrest," Reuters, 23 Mar 2007

Kinshasa stored at least twelve T-55 tanks and 20 infantry combat vehicles.¹³

The Kabila government and FARDC command did not cooperate with MONUC in verifications or inspections and weapons deliveries to FARDC violated U. N. Security Council resolutions.¹⁴

In mid-March, Bemba's fighting force in Kinshasa was estimated at 600-1000 soldiers, not counting *kidogo*—child soldiers tasked with looting shops and businesses—and they were decisively outnumbered. Some two thousand tons of weapons were captured at Bemba's compounds in the northern cities of Gbadolite and Gemena, along with a big ammunition depot near Bemba's house in Kinshasa. Bemba abused and neglected his troops, creating a force of desperate and angry men authorized to rape and plunder.

Both sides were heavily armed but the proliferation of arms, weaponry and landmines has rarely been explored by the international media, and the Gettlemen feature continued the tradition of misrepresenting reality. The media generally spotlights cannibalism and tribalism in Congo, and T-55 battle tanks, helicopter gunships or C-130 transport planes brokered through international criminal arms syndicates don't fit the tribal mold.

THE MONUC PARALYSIS

The fighting began March 22 outside Jean-Pierre Bemba's compound. Sources loyal to Kabila claim that Bemba's soldiers attacked a jeep carrying government troops. Bemba's troops allegedly fired an RPG-7 rocket, completely destroyed the jeep, and killed seven FARDC troops and officers.

According to several sources, Bemba's forces captured two MONUC armored personnel carriers after "frightened" Uruguayan soldiers stationed outside the Bemba residence abandoned the combat vehicles. It may be that MONUC troops were ordered to abandon their position, if fighting occurred, due to Kabila's request to Swing. But Bemba troops didn't get far because troop carriers were low on fuel.

According to Kabila supporters, Kabila reportedly sent some 2000 forces of his elite Republican Guard to encircle, attack and "clean up" positions held by Bemba's troops.

One Congolese human rights worker was outside Bemba's residence at 9:47 AM on March 22 when some Bemba's soldiers who knew him told him "Guns have no friends: leave now." The eyewitness went to the *Boulevard 24 Novembre* where he saw FARDC troops carrying fully armed RPG-7 rocket launchers. He claims Bemba's troops at the time had AK-47's but no RPG-7's, which contradicts Western press reports indicating that Bemba's troops attacked first, and with RPG-7's.

¹³ Twenty-second report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, S2006/759, 21 September 2006.

¹⁴ According to a U.N. Security Council report of September 21, 2006, "Pursuant to Security Council resolution 1596 (2005) of 18 April, MONUC inspected a shipment of military equipment and related materials, including tanks, armored personnel vehicles and ammunition, at the Matadi port on 29 July. The Government had neither informed the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) prior to the arrival of the cargo, nor invited the Mission to verify the type and quantity of military material, in violation of the resolution."

When he saw Bemba's troops doing a "war dance" he knew that there was going to be fighting. On the *Avenue de la Justice* he saw more Bemba troops "obviously preparing to fight." He heard the shooting begin about 11:00 AM.

At 11:30 AM, MONUC security advised all personnel at MONUC Headquarters to stay inside and all other MONUC personnel to stay where they were. For the rest of Thursday March 22, MONUC rounded up and evacuated civilians to safer locations; personnel whose lodgings were in high-risk areas were moved during the night.

Some MONUC civilians who took security seriously and moved to hotels in October 2006 incurred exorbitant unrecovered expenses in addition to rents paid for private, long-term lodgings. Thus, in the middle of the night on March 22nd, some MONUC staff refused to comply with last minute and haphazard evacuations, knowing that both personal security *and* personal finances might suffer in the deal.

On Friday, March 23, it was total war in Kinshasa. Eyewitnesses report that Kabila's crack Presidential Guard was killing innocent civilians who were on the streets because they wanted to eliminate all Bemba supporters. After March 24th some of Bemba's soldiers, fearing capture or death, gave up their clothes and weapons to civilians to protect themselves. Civilians grabbed these out of pride for the Bemba cause, but it transformed them into sitting ducks, as the Bemba soldiers expected, and these armed civilians were reportedly massacred.

Many of Bemba's soldiers had rejected the internationally brokered demobilization ordered by the government and supported by "humanitarian" organizations, fearing—with good reason—they would be selectively killed. According to one Kinshasa witness, on March 24 and 25 many of Bemba's surviving civilian supporters were arrested: more than 30 women were rounded up and jailed because they were "the women of Bemba's soldiers." As of July 27 some 168 Bemba soldiers were being held by MONUC troops at Kingabua (Kinshasa), along with 97 women and 57 children.

Shooting continued throughout the nights of March 22 through 26. Eyewitnesses report trucks and soldiers hauling off dead bodies—soldiers and civilians—and dumping them in mass graves at the Mikonga Cemetery near the N'djili airport. People living near Mikonga Cemetery saw trucks go by loaded with bodies and return empty. Eyewitness also saw bodies being dumped in the Congo River. At least 121 of Bemba's soldiers fled the lost war by crossing the Congo River to Congo-Brazzaville, but many of Bemba's troops were reportedly shot trying to escape by boat and their bodies thrown in the river.¹⁵

Many innocent civilians were killed and people in Kinshasa know their names. Dead bodies were moved and dumped elsewhere so that bodies would be seen, identified and counted. One wealthy moneychanger was killed in the Gombe section of Kinshasa and the body was dumped in front of MONUC. The man was loved and respected and there was a huge street celebration in his honor in early April. The dead bodies of others, like 39 year-old Charlotte Yaribu, another moneychanger shot going to a store, were identified but quickly taken and dumped in mass graves. Hundreds of people simply disappeared.

¹⁵ "CONGO-DRC: Refugees from Kinshasa to be repatriated," [IRIN](#), 7 May 2007.

The battle in the city center was reported somewhat, but the big FARDC battle with a sizeable Bemba contingent in Maluku, some 80 kilometers from Kinshasa, was not. MONUC and the media ignored it: officially, it never happened.

“There were armored vehicles, cannon, machine guns—the fighting in Maluku was very bad,” reported one Congolese human rights researcher who was unable to get there due to insecurity. He claimed that fighting was ongoing as late as April 5. “No one has talked about this at all. It was not in the center of town. Bemba was constructing a house there. Many, many people were killed there. No one has reported on it.”

There were also uncountable cases of arbitrary arrest, and these were ongoing until at least April 5. People described random detentions on the street followed by quick searches for money. “It was the same under Mobutu,” said one traumatized victim who was robbed of the little money he had.

On March 27 Reuters repeated European Union ambassadors’ claims of “more than 200 people killed” in clashes that “continued for two days,” and it cited the German Ambassador offering “clear indications from hospitals and morgues” of 200 to 600 deaths. On March 30 Reuters reported that Bemba would fly to Portugal as a “tourist” seeking medical treatment, the accusation of treason against Bemba by the DRC government, and that Bemba was hiding in the South African embassy in Kinshasa.¹⁶

But by April 1 news sources were universally downplaying the scale and nature of atrocities, and none addressed the international scandal behind the conflict. Agence France Press reported “at least 163 people killed.”¹⁷ Voice of America offered a total whitewash with no accountings of dead.¹⁸ The South African Press Agency reported that Bemba “sought refuge in the South African embassy 17 days ago,” meaning *prior* to March 15, turning “old news” into older news.¹⁹ Kenya’s The Nation, a western intelligence monitored state newspaper, reported (April 6) some 250 to 500 killed and 500 injured.²⁰ On April 13, Africa Confidential, the British intelligence newsletter, vetted U.N. reports of “several hundred” dead. Notably, AC confirmed that Angolan troops were in Kinshasa during the March war.²¹

THE SAVIMBI SOLUTION

Among the dead bodies that turned up in the morgue after the “short but brutal war” in March 2007 were battle-hardened soldiers who once fought alongside Jonas Savimbi. Hundreds of bodies filled the morgue but many were not claimed, indicating that the dead were outsiders whose families would not be coming. Some 20 troops who surrendered were also reported to be former UNITA.

¹⁶ “Portugal accepts Bemba but not for exile,” Reuters, 30 March 2007.

¹⁷ “DRC’s Bemba set for Portugal,” Agence France Presse, 1 April 2007.

¹⁸ Kari Barber, “DRC Opposition Leader Awaits Approval for Medical Evacuation,” Voice of America, Dakar April 1, 2007.

¹⁹ “Kabila 'okays' Bemba's visit to Portugal,” Sapa/Ap, 1 April 2007.

²⁰ Juacali Kambale, Congo DRC: Kabila Wins Round Three, but Bemba Not Finished Yet,” The Nation, Nairobi, 6 April 2007.

²¹ “The Bashing of Bemba,” Africa Confidential, Vol. 48, No. 8, 13 April 2007.

South African special forces were operating in Kinshasa at the time, and South Africa negotiated with DRC for Bemba's safe departure from Congo; Bemba's ties to South Africa run deep and silent.

To understand why MONUC and the "international community" did not take action to prevent the March war in Kinshasa—even after the history of belligerence and atrocities by both Bemba and Kabila's forces—we can find some clues in the example of Jonas Savimbi in Angola.

Savimbi was the leader of the *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA), a Reagan-era rebel front that fought against "communist" Angola with U.S., U.K. and Israeli backing. By the late 1990's UNITA was out of favor: new oil and diamond deals, increasing U.S. investments in Angola, mercenary friends of Bill Clinton, all played a role.²²

After Savimbi refused the vice-presidency in President Dos Santos' government in Angola the order went out to assassinate him. Israeli Special Forces, with Pentagon support, flew to Angola to track and kill Savimbi. They reportedly pinpointed Savimbi's position with satellite technology, and he was reportedly assassinated soon after the Clinton Administration and its partners gave the orders.²³

"They got tired of Savimbi, and they find him and kill him," said one Kabila insider. "When the international powers want Savimbi killed—it's easy. This is what finally happened with Bemba. They were tired of him interfering in their plans. Mining in this country is an international scandal, and Bemba was disturbing the new *democracy* and getting in the way of exploitation and profits."

"I would never believe that Kabila would take such action if he did not have the green light from important people outside," said one insider close to Kabila and the secrets of the Kabila Government. "It is clear that this was a "cleaning" of Bemba's men by Kabila's forces and that some powerful people from the U.S. and U.K. and Israel and Belgium and Australia—the supporters of Kabila—wanted it to happen." One government parliamentarian close to Bemba agreed.

MONUC allowed surrendering Bemba troops to take refuge at MONUC camps. MONUC also transferred Bemba from the South African Embassy to the N'djili airport under heavy guard in a convoy of fifteen U.N. Armed Personnel Carriers under cover of night. On April 13, 2007 Bemba flew out of Kinshasa on his private Boeing 727 with his wife and five children. His plane arrived at the airport of Portugal's southern tourist city of Faro and police escorted him to a luxury villa in the southern Algarve resort of Quinta do Lago. People interpret MONUC's assistance in evacuating Bemba as evidence of MONUC's support for Bemba.

Tensions between Kabila and MONUC have flared since the March events. Kabila and Rwanda's President Paul Kagame recently took high moral stances after allegations that MONUC troops traded gun for gold, but the bloodshed in Central Africa has their names all over it.

²² Wayne Madsen, Genocide and Covert Operations in Africa, 1993-1999, Edwin Mellen Press, 1999: p. 64.

²³ Ibid.

According to MONUC spokesman Kemal Saiki, weapons captured from the Bemba camp were turned over to the Congolese government forces. Saiki also confirmed that many of Bemba's soldiers surrendered to MONUC for their own protection. "We are assisting them to get legal protection and assistance," Saiki said. "There were too many arms that were held by Bemba."²⁴

"Bemba will not be arrested," said one Bemba supporter and parliamentarian who worked for Bemba's MLC rebellion during the war. "There are soldiers behind Bemba—Nkunda and Ruberwa. Did Kabila have authorization to move soldiers for this small war? No. When the leadership drops the opposition then you have dictatorship." Asked about Bemba's exile in Portugal, he said: "As Jean-Pierre Bemba is the opposition he must come back. It's not finished yet. Now is not the time to use guns. It's time for *reason* and *spirit*."¹

To gain perspective on the MONUC position, we can compare the MONUC reaction to the March violence in Kinshasa with other recent violence in Congo. On the night of May 26, 2007, some ten to twelve "militiamen" allegedly massacred 18 villagers in South Kivu. Only two days later MONUC issued a communiqué that used very strong language of condemnation.

"The U.N. Peacekeeping Mission in the DRC, MONUC, strongly and unequivocally condemns this horrible massacre of innocent civilians." MONUC "calls on the Congolese authorities to use all necessary means so that those responsible for these heinous crimes are pursued, and brought to justice."²⁵

Although the European Union officials expressed "indignation" on March 27—"indignation" tempered by their involvement in plunder and profit hidden behind the scenes—MONUC did not at any time, it appears, issue any communiqué like the one issued about massacres in South Kivu. MONUC's actions and inactions during the conflict, including logistical support—trucks dumping bodies in mass graves—raises important questions. MONUC's role in the death of civilians in Matadi earlier in 2007 raises similar questions. MONUC spokesman Kemal Saiki said that MONUC troops "shot over the heads" of a mob, when in fact troops shot directly into the crowd.

"MONUC is not honest, they don't care about people," said one disillusioned MONUC civilian employee in Kinshasa. "They are talking about human rights and they are the first organization to violate the rights of the Congolese people."

Events of March 22-27 in DRC demand that an independent International Commission of Inquiry be established to investigate the charges of high-level bribery, corruption and possible extortion within the United Nations Observers Mission for the Democratic Republic of Congo. Alleged violations of international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions demand an investigation of all parties, MONUC included, their actions and inactions related to the March 22-27 warfare.

Next:
ERASING THE BOARD REDUX

²⁴ Private interview, Kemal Saiki, MONUC Headquarters, Kinshasa, 4 April 2007.

²⁵ Private interview, Kinshasa, April 6, 2007.

Part Two:
The Warlords and Their Foreign Backers
