

Surging violence and political crisis in Congo

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The political and social order of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is undergoing a further collapse under the pressure of imperialist-backed demonstrations against the government of President Joseph Kabila, and an ever-growing number of insurgencies and anti-government militia factions. Armed conflict between rebel factions in the south and east of the country, ongoing for decades, is growing markedly. The overall situation is moving rapidly toward a catastrophe not seen since the height of the Congo War of 1996-2003.

The number of Congolese people fleeing the violence caused by the conflict in Congo's southern, central and eastern provinces, including Kasai and Tanganyika, has surged in the past two years. Congo's refugee population, by some accounts, now surpasses those of the refugee crises caused by US wars in Iraq and Syria. Some 1.3 million Congolese people were externally and internally displaced in 2017, with 800,000 of them children. Since the start of the conflict in 2008, an estimated 4.5 million Congolese have been displaced.

In the past week alone, thousands of Congolese refugees have fled into Burundi and Tanzania. According to UNICEF, the DRC is now home to one of the largest displacement crises for children in the world. Refugees interviewed by the UN have testified to ongoing forced recruitment, including of minors, and atrocities by the militias.

The UN "peacekeeping" mission in the DRC, MONUSCO, is widely and correctly discredited in the eyes of the population with broad layers of the population viewing it with contempt and a lack of confidence.

"The humanitarian situation in the DRC is at a breaking point, as is our capacity to respond due to extremely limited funding. The stories that Congolese who have been forced from their homes are telling are bone-chilling," the chief of mission for the

International Organization for Migration (IOM) in the DRC, Jean-Philippe Chauzy, said in a statement last month.

The most recent outbreaks of fighting in the southeastern part of the country have already led to thousands of deaths and have further shaken the credibility of the imperialist-backed MONUSCO force, which sustained at least 15 casualties in a single ambush by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) against the UN base near Beni in late December.

The opposition forces are largely composed of fighters drawn from militia networks developed in Central Africa by the United States military-intelligence apparatus over decades. From the early 1990s, the Pentagon and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) backed the training of paramilitaries which launching a series of proxy wars in strategic areas of sub-Saharan Africa contributing to the neocolonial carve-up of large areas of Congo by the first years of the 21st century.

Forces assembled by the US and its Rwandan and Ugandan allies, roughly from 1993 to 1996, subsequently spearheaded the First and Second Congo Wars, also known as Africa's World War, across large areas of Congo and neighboring countries between 1996 to 2003.

In the period following the end of the war and the installation of Joseph Kabila in power in 2003, the imperialist-backed militias have continued to engage in near-constant fighting over control of resource-rich areas of Congo's borderlands, where the militias continue to serve as enforcers in the pay of US corporate interests and military agencies.

Hunger and famine in Congo are growing to levels of "alarming food insecurity," according to a recent World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization declaration. In the past six months, the number of people coping with extreme hunger has risen

to two million, adding to the overall number of 7.7 million experiencing hunger. This represents a shocking ten percent of Congo's overall population of 79 million, of which the majority subsist on approximately one dollar a day.

This year, a cholera outbreak has sent some 200 residents to Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) facilities in the capital city of Kinshasa while 1,190 have died and another 55,000 been infected with cholera across the DRC since last year. The effects of the outbreak are exacerbated in a city in which so many lack access to sanitary drinking facilities and health care. As a result, the MSF expects that cholera cases are certain to spread across the city like wildfire over the next period.

The intensification of the new round of wars in the Congo is accompanied by the deepening political crisis of the central administration led by President Kabila. His refusal, in December 2016, to step aside, was seized on by the imperialist powers to begin a mounting pressure campaign against Kinshasa.

Social struggle and conflict are surging, with deadly violence by government security forces and opposition elements in recent months. There have also been growing anti-Kabila demonstrations in major cities throughout the country, led by the Catholic Church and coalitions of other bourgeois opposition forces. More than 100 have been killed in protests since December 2016. Last month, DRC security forces attacked protesters in Kinshasa, killing 6 and injuring 68 others.

Since assuming power in 2003, Kabila and his corrupt ruling clique have fallen out of favor with American and European capitalism. Kabila's decade and a half in power has seen the DRC government forge much closer ties to the ruling class of China, while Congo's longstanding alliance with the United States, a relationship secured over decades by the dictatorship of Mobutu Sese Seko, has deteriorated. Like many regimes on the continent, the DRC is becoming an arena of global strategic competition, involving the rising Chinese power, and the United States and the imperialist powers of Europe, together with an array of other contenders, including Russia, India, and the Saudi-GCC bloc.

In Congo, the new scramble for Africa is centrally focused on the vast mineral and natural resources buried in its land, which are among the most strategically important resource concentrations

worldwide. Congolese rare metals play a central role in China's economic strategy and in the production of high-tech hardware generally. Washington correctly views US domination over large sections of Africa's economic resources as an immensely important lever in its global power struggle against China. This threat has increased steadily since the end of the USSR, with Chinese investment and economic influence throughout the continent expanding massively, to displace the United States as Congo's main commercial partner.

Forces in Washington have been signaling their backing for Moises Katumbi, an exiled businessman from Katanga province, as a leading candidate to replace Kabila as the bourgeois strongman in the DRC. The leadership of the anti-Kabila demonstrations, the Catholic Church, have also backed the wealthy tycoon, calling for the government to allow his return. The US government continues to support an array of opposition groups and NGOs, which it employs to maintain constant pressure against the government.

Despite the efforts of imperialist propaganda to portray the Kabila government as the root source of the social problems and violence in the DRC, their real origins lie in the accelerating breakdown of the capitalist system, and in the efforts of the various imperialist powers to overcome this crisis through military competition and war.

Not only the current government of Joseph Kabila, but the entire Congolese bourgeoisie, together with their backers in the Western financial centers, are engaged in the most ruthless efforts to exploit the Congo's working class and natural assets, as means to expanding their profit interests. The establishment of genuine peace and the resolution of the social problems facing the oppressed people of the Congo can be accomplished only via the independent struggle of the united African working class, led by Marxist leadership.



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