

African nations defend Congo against Ugandan-backed rebellion

by Linda de Hoyos

The governments of Zimbabwe, Angola, Zambia, and Namibia have taken steps to defend the sovereignty of the Democratic Republic of the Congo against a rebellion which has been instigated and sponsored by London's marcher-lords in the region: Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni and Rwandan Defense Minister Paul Kagame. The action has been taken under the aegis of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), but without the approval of South African President Nelson Mandela, whose country supplies weaponry to Uganda and Rwanda.

On Aug. 19, after a meeting in Zimbabwe, the SADC countries sent a message to rebellion headquarters in Goma stating, according to Kenyan Foreign Minister Bonaya Godana, "If you continue fighting and move into Kinshasa, you can expect to engage units of our forces." The meeting "unanimously agreed," said Zimbabwean Defense Minister Moven Mohachi, "that we must with urgency make sure that practical assistance, both materiel and manpower, is given to the [Congo] in order to restore peace and stability."

Although Angola has a special interest in maintaining a regime in Kinshasa that will not aid Jonas Savimbi's Unita, the deployment on Aug. 24 of Zimbabwean, Angolan, and Namibian troops against the Rwandan-Ugandan rebellion, reflects a concern for the future not only of the Congo, but all of southern Africa. The aim of the deployment is to ensure that the government of the Congo is *not changed through foreign military intervention*. The fear is that a new regime—backed by Rwanda and Uganda, as Congo's Laurent Kabila was himself originally—will only bring more war to the Congo, and hence a heightening wave of instability across all central and southern Africa, in which the Congo is a geopolitical linchpin. Such instability will threaten the very existence of the SADC countries, many of them already under siege by the International Monetary Fund and by demands for British Commonwealth private ownership of their resources.

Zambian President Frederick Chiluba expressed his nation's concerns while in Harare, Zimbabwe on Aug. 27, where he met with Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe. "We have the same understanding with Zimbabwe and all SADC countries on the D.R.C. issue. We recognize and accept that there is a Congo with a government and whose President is Laurent Kabila, and as such we cannot accept anything that violates that understanding. . . . It's a conflict not particularly

against the Congo, it's a conflict that honestly questions the very essence of our unity on the continent, and we cannot tolerate it. We cannot allow it to carry on."

The day before, Zimbabwe President Mugabe had called for the Organization of African Unity to negotiate a peaceful settlement in Congo. "We want the solution to come from the OAU," he said. "It will have to work out an effective plan which will ensure the invading troops withdraw in the context of a cease-fire." He rejected a call by U.S. Special Envoy Howard Wolpe for all foreign troops to leave the Congo, saying that "the illegitimate ones purporting to be rebels are the ones that must go, because they have invaded the territory of the D.R.C." Kabila had invited SADC assistance.

As of Aug. 28, Zimbabwe has reportedly committed 4,000 troops to Congo, including 2,200 specialized airborne troops. Namibia has also supplied troops to defend Kinshasa. On Aug. 24, Angolan troops and tanks poured across the border from Cabinda to take back the Kitona airbase and nearby towns from the rebels.

A counteroffensive is expected from Rwanda and Uganda, and possibly other countries whose leaders line up with London's "new breed" of leadership. Both Rwanda and Uganda have threatened to officially send troops to the Congo, if the SADC forces are not withdrawn. Signaling military escalation from the Uganda-dominated east, Ugandan Maj. Gen. Salim Saleh announced on Aug. 28 that Uganda "is physically being attacked by Kabila, Zimbabwe, and Angola," in order to explain the fact that Ugandan soldiers have been taken prisoner or have been killed in the D.R.C. "We are not going to leave Congo," he said.

The possibility that the Congo conflict will become a regional conflagration is now mounting. But this is a risk that SADC governments evidently believed they had to take—an indication of the danger they perceive coming from the British marcher-lords of East Africa.

Ugandans protest troop deployment to Congo

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni's deployment of Ugandan troops into the Democratic Republic of Congo (D.R.C.)—either covertly or overtly—has created a major

political crisis within Ugandan itself.

According to the government, troops from the Second Division of the Ugandan Popular Defense Forces (UPDF), under the command of Museveni's nephew James Kazini, moved to establish a base in Congo, on the west side of the Rukenyi Mountains, allegedly to encircle the insurgent Allied Democratic Forces, fighting in western Uganda. The government has acknowledged this deployment. In the first week of August, according to multiple sources and as reported in the press, 3,000 more Ugandan troops moved to join Rwandan forces that had invaded the Congo farther south. This deployment is denied by the government.

Since Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Namibia pledged to come to the aid of the Congo, Museveni has stated that he "reserves" the right to militarily intervene on the side of the so-called rebellion, and has warned that Uganda will take "independent action."

Since 1990, Museveni has put the Ugandan Army at the disposal of the British Privy Council's financial and geopolitical interests in East and Central Africa. Ugandan troops have been deployed against Sudan, against the Habyarimana government of Rwanda, against democratic forces in Burundi, and it is acknowledged even in the Western press that Ugandan forces played a key role in the Zairean war of 1996-97. While many opposition leaders in Uganda have protested this use of Ugandan soldiers, the political crisis and insecurity *within* Uganda has caused the deployment of troops this time into the Congo to erupt into a serious challenge to the Museveni regime.

Paul Ssemogerere, chairman of the opposition Democratic Party, on Aug. 20 called for a national debate: "As Ugandans we demand that there be a national debate on Uganda's role in the Democratic Republic of Congo war, to establish the extent to which the accusations of aggression by Uganda are valid; and if so, under what authority, and to what end such aggression was carried out." Ssemogerere pointed to reports that Ugandan Mamba (special reserves) and Buffalos (special forces) had been sent to Congo from the West Nile region of northwestern Uganda. "There are also allegations that military equipment has been moved from Masaka army barracks at Kasijjagirwa all in the name of helping Banyamulenge rebels."

Ssemogerere said that many Ugandans had died inside Sudan, although war had never been officially declared; that many others had perished in Rwanda, and that Ugandans were also in Burundi. "As a concerned politician who hates these territorial ambitions, I must raise an alarm."

Deployment is unconstitutional

The next day, Ssemogerere was joined by Member of Parliament Cecilia Ogwal, chairman of the Interim Executive Council of the Ugandan Peoples Congress (UPC), who pointed out that the deployment of Ugandan troops to other countries is unconstitutional, unless approved by the Parliament.

Since her press conference on Aug. 21, Ogwal has received a number of death threats.

Ogwal, expressing the views of most Ugandans, took aim at Museveni's military ambitions in the region, stating: "UPC is concerned that Uganda has now earned the status of an exporter of violence. Uganda's hand was in the Rwanda holocaust. Uganda's hand is visible in Burundi, and now the latest victim, the former Zaire, is now accusing Uganda of aiding the rebellion against [Laurent] Kabila. In the case of the D.R.C., the chief witness to the conspiracy is none other than President Kabila himself. Providence has proved the UPC right, in that we identified President Museveni's agenda for the region and made it public. Our repeated appeals to the International Community landed on deaf ears. The present crisis in the D.R.C. is a rude reminder to Ugandans, the region, and Africa that Africa's tribulations, under the yoke of imperialism, are not yet over. Sadly, it is evident that imperialism has found an ally in Mr. Museveni's scheme of conspiracy and instability.

"Mr. Museveni's grand design of creating an empire in the region has clearly nothing to do with Uganda's interest and is exposing the people of Uganda to international scorn and hatred.

"The UPC therefore calls upon President Museveni to stop involving Ugandans in his military adventures.

"The UPC further calls upon the people of the Great Lakes region and the International Community to be aware of this design and to draw a clear distinction between the designs of Mr. Museveni, the person, and the aspirations of the people of Uganda."

Ogwal also called for the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity to stop the sale of arms to all parties in the regional conflict.

By Aug. 25, the pressure on the government was such that First Deputy Prime Minister Eriya Kategaya was forced to admit in Parliament the presence of Ugandan troops in the Congo, which he called "an appropriate military presence" carried out in order "to contain and eventually remove the bandits who were using the bases they had in the area to destabilize Uganda. The situation pertaining in the D.R.C. today where there is a breakdown of authority, warrants it even more that Uganda must maintain a military presence which is more than before crucial for the security of our country and her people."

The admission provoked a storm in Parliament, with the obvious questions being raised: Does the government have the funds to sustain troops in the Congo, when its people are without services and security at home? Why are troops sent outside the country, when the UPDF is unable to protect citizens from abductions, looting, and killings in the war in northern Uganda? Furthermore, opponents to Museveni have pointed out, in the last week, four terror bombs have gone off inside the country—with 28 people killed in one bus bomb. "There is no security, no safety, no peace anywhere inside the country," Ogwal said.