

Winners, Losers, and Wild Cards in the Great Lakes Conflict

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Imagine Africa as a game board consisting of 50 brightly coloured political states. The pieces are influential people, cash, armies, and capital that the political players must move into the right places at the right time to facilitate outcomes favourable to their strategic or political interests. Like Park Lane in monopoly, one of the biggest prizes on this game board is Zaire, the second largest state and a geostrategic zone of great natural riches at the heart of Africa. The players who win influence there gain access to: vast quantities of minerals such as copper, zinc, gold, and industrial diamonds; strategic minerals such as uranium and cobalt [Zaire is the world's largest producer of this ingredient vital to jet engines]; unfelled forests, enough hydroelectric potential to meet all of Africa's needs, and enough fresh water to quench Southern Africa's thirst.

In this game of power one would be naive to assume that the actors who take an interest in this region have only the causes of peace, democracy and human rights in mind. Indeed in the real Zaire and in the Central African region most players are seeking to exploit the conditions of war and win (geopolitics). Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and the United States Government are clearly backing Kabila's rebel forces and all are winning in terms of economic opportunities, border security on the Zaïrian side, and alliances sympathetic to their geostrategic interests. South Africa would also appear to gain in the long term from a rebel victory but has suffered some losses in the short term. Mobutu's Zaire, Hutu militias from Burundi and Rwanda, certain Zaïrian ethnic groups, Sudan, Tanzania, Kenya, and France, appear to be losing the game.

The Winners

Tutsi Alliance: An alliance of ethnic Tutsis is the backbone of the Zaïrian rebel army, its financial basis, and the *raison d'être* for its movements. The alliance consists of Tutsis indigenous to Zaire [the Banyarawanda and Banyamulenge], the Tutsi-minority dominated regimes in Burundi and Rwanda, and President Museveni of Uganda, who also has a Tutsi background.

The genius behind the Tutsi alliance is not Laurent Kabila but President Museveni. Kabila constantly consults the old master whose own National

Resistance Movement [MNR] successfully defeated the corrupt Obote regime in 1986. The MNR included many Tutsis from neighbouring Rwanda and Zaire. For instance, Paul Kagame, now Rwanda's Vice-President and Defence Minister, was former head of Uganda's military intelligence. In turn, the RPF-ruled Rwandan regime assumed power in 1994 with Ugandan support. Thus, Museveni's Tutsi-led revolution has not ended but extended itself to Rwanda, Burundi and Zaire.

Museveni seeks two principal geostrategic advantages. One is in terms of security and the other in terms of trade. The security advantage was laid bare in October 1996 with the rapid creation of a pro-Tutsi controlled 300-kilometre-long strip of Eastern Zaire from Uvira in the South to Goma in the North. In the seven months since then pro-Tutsi militias moved northward and westward to neatly claim the mineral-rich eastern half of Zaire and to protect the borders of Uganda all the way to the Sudan border. This scattered all the rebel forces launching cross-border raids into Uganda [West Bank Nile Front, Lord's Resistance Army, Allied Democratic Army], Rwanda [ex-FAR forces], and Burundi [Forces for the Defence of Democracy, the FDD or CNDD rebels].

It also furnishes a geostrategy for trade and relief for the landlocked status of Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi. Tutsi dominance of these states and Eastern Zaire could see the fruition of Museveni's long-time ambition to fully develop a transport route across to Lake Tanganyika and hence south to the South African rail network.

These geostrategic designs could encounter two wild cards. First, this invites resistance on the part of Tanzania which is pro-Hutu rather than pro-Tutsi, controls much of the transport network, and is in competition with Uganda as a hegemon in the region. A Tanzanian invasion of Burundi could put Museveni's play in check. A second wild card is that many Hutu rebels returned to either Rwanda, Burundi or to their border zones to continue an armed struggle that could see the eventual collapse of the Tutsi alliance. Increased Sudanese support for Ugandan rebel militias could also furnish as strategy for destabilising the alliance.

Kabila's Zaire: Kabila is a Katangan of the Luba tribe and not a Tutsi but he is piggy-backing a Tutsi-inspired revolution all the way to Kinshasa. Before the start of the revolution in October 1996 numerous guerrilla armies plotting the overthrow of the Zaïrian government confronted the problem of Hutu refugee camps being used by Rwandan and Burundian rebel militias to launch cross-border raids on the Tutsi-held regimes. Kabila organised several large ethnic militias into an umbrella body called the Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Kinshasa [AFDL]. This included his own ethnically-mixed militia, Forces Armées Populaires [FAP] but the principal fighting force was the Alliance Démocratiques des Peuples or ADP composed of Zaïrian ethnic Tutsis.

It was this force backed by Rwanda and Uganda that made Kabila a winner in this game of geopolitical chess.

Two wild cards could affect Kabila's ability to restore order in Zaire. First, he will have to share power with some eleven regional leaders who have enjoyed a de facto autonomy because of the internal disorganisation of Zaire. If Kabila attempts to restore centralised control over the region, the state could collapse into civil war fuelling the ethnic animosities that are rife in the region and opening the doors for Kabila's enemies to destabilise his regime. Secondly, most of Kabila's local backers are unstable minority Tutsi dictatorships. Imagine a shift to democratic rule in Burundi or Rwanda whereby the Hutus come to power and break the Tutsi alliance apart. There would be a mutually deep hostility between these countries and the the Museveni-Kabila regimes that would manifest in covert military aid to warring ethnic militias throughout the region.

The United States: In both security matters and business interests, the United States is gaining enormously from its diplomatic and covert financial support for Kabila [The United States offers military training and funds to Rwanda and Uganda]. It has gained lucrative mining contracts for U.S.-based companies that negotiate directly with Kabila. American Mineral Fields scooped the one billion dollar open-pit copper-cobalt contract at Ruashi-Etoile from under the noses of the South African firms JCI and Anglo-American. American mineral was also rewarded with a new zinc plant in Shaba province. Immediately after taking Kisangani American Diamond Buyers was licensed as the only legal diamond-buying office.

Kabila's pro-American stance also comes at the expense of Francophone influence and establishes the U.S. as the hegemonic power in Central Africa. Millions of dollars in support to Uganda also aids the American effort to overthrow the regime in Sudan which is charged with training Islamic militants and 'terrorists'. Uganda backs the Sudan People's Liberation Army [SPLA] seeking to overthrow Sudan's ruling National Islamic Front which took power by a coup in 1989. Uganda's involvement in both Zaïre and Sudan has helped to precipitate Khartoum's increased support for the Zaïre/Hutu alliance and the anti-Museveni rebels operating along Uganda's borders.

South Africa: Although South Africa has lost some lucrative mining contracts to American companies bidding for Kabila's favours, it still stands to gain as much in transport agreements, shipping, and hydroelectric production as it loses in trade if a healthy and stable Central African Region is created. Spoornet, South Africa's rail company, already has a 51% share in the Zaïrian railway network Sizarail that bring raw goods and ore from Lumbumbashi in the mineral rich region southward into South Africa. Another area of potential transport development is in Bujumbura, Burundi, an ideal port on Lake Tanganyika capable of delivering from the eastern half of the Central African Region directly to the South African rail network in Zambia.

Discussion has already taken place in South Africa regarding Eskom's development of Zaire's hydroelectric potential. One section of the Zaire River--the Inga River Falls--could power all of sub-Saharan Africa with still some electricity left for export. Water from the Zaire River could also be tapped for thirsty Southern Africa. The contracts for that development could easily come to South Africa.

Arms Merchants: Those who sell arms are big winners in most conflicts and should be mentioned briefly. Surplus arms from Mozambique, Angola and some European countries, particularly Yugoslavia reached all sides at bargain prices. Illegal operators and security firms in Britain and South Africa have provided arms and mercenaries, some to Hutu Militias and Zaire and others to Rwanda. Some illegal arms have arrived in cargo planes chartered by charity organisations. Tutsi militias reportedly received South African arms shipments intended for Rwanda in 1996 and there are recent reports that Zimbabwe has maintained a steady supply of weapons to Kabila's forces.

The Losers

Mobutu's Zaïre: In many ways, Zaïre, a country of forty million people with an area the size of Western Europe, has little to lose from a revolution. It has been fragmenting along ethnic and provincial lines for more than three decades as dictator Mobutu Sese Seko siphoned off billions of rands from the national treasury to Swiss bank accounts. It is only "Mobutu's Zaire" that stands to lose.

Mobutu's Zaïre, now disgraced by its ineffective army that turned to looting Zaïrian citizens and sacking whole cities in its retreat, has also lost any economic benefit derived from the timber, gem and gold trade in Upper Zaïre [now financing the AFDL]. The geostrategic objective of the reclaiming territory seems nearly impossible. Zaïre lacks the military capacity [less than 10,000 combat-ready troops] to do this alone and modest assistance from France, Belgium, Serbia, Croatia, Sudan and Libya has been too little too late.

A wild card in the Mobutuist struggle is that many of Jonas Savimibi's rebel forces have headed to Zaire to help prop up the ailing regime. Mobutu offers access to Angola's diamond fields in exchange for protection. Unita's top troops offer the possibility of stern resistance to Kabila's advance and possibly a cross-border expansion of the fighting.

Hutu Militias: Following the April 1994 genocide of the Tutsi people in Rwanda, refugee camps along Zaïre's eastern borders with Burundi and Rwanda received more than one-million people fleeing reprisals from the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front [RPF]. The camps offered food, shelter, recruits, and human shields for 55,000 former Rwandese forces [ex-FAR] and the Interahamwe militia credited with the massacres. At the same time, Burundi's Forces for the Defence

of Democracy [FDD], the military wing of the National Council for the Defence of Democracy [CNDD], established themselves in the camps.

From October 1996 these Hutu militias were successfully routed by Kabila's AFDL. Some accompanied 650,000 refugees that returned to Rwanda. Many of the Hutu militias crossed Lake Tanganyika to take up positions in Tanzania and thence into Burundi and Rwanda where civil war has intensified. Others moved further east into the rainforest to take up arms with the Zairian army.

Thus, in the short term, the Hutu militias are losers but not a spent force. In fact, they are a wild card that could destabilise the entire region. Despite the force of the Tutsi alliance which includes minority regimes in Rwanda and Burundi, one must remember that there are six Hutus for every Tutsi in a collective population of 13 million. Between 750,000 and one million Hutus are located on the Tanzanian boundary with Rwanda and Burundi and exercise influence within Tanzania where rebel militias receive training and their leaders are headquartered. Tanzania could be the stage of departure for a second revolutionary movement.

Another wildcard are the ethnic militias inside Zaire that are allied with the Hutus and opposed to the AFDL. This complex ethnic rivalry could be exploited in a conflict situation. The Bufalero, Warega, Tembo, Hunde and Babembe have shown support for Hutu militias in the past.

Sudan: To some degree fighting in Sudan is interlinked with the war in Zaire. Part of Uganda's motives in supporting Kabila was to secure its borders against militias funded by Sudan and launching cross-border raids into Uganda from Zaire [Lord's Resistance Army, West Nile Liberation Army]. Part of Uganda's war effort is to support militias aimed at overthrowing Sudan's present regime [the Southern People's Liberation Army]. If the two wars become even more interlinked France and the United States could find themselves on opposite sides of a conflagration ranging from Sudan on the North to Angola in the South. At one point in late January French-influenced Morocco, Chad, and Togo nearly sent troops to help Mobutu. France might try to prop up Sudan in retaliation for its loss in Zaire and to hold the line on the deterioration of Francophone Africa short of neighboring Central African Republic and Chad.

Tanzania: Tanzania is allied with Hutu militias from Burundi [the FDD, Palipehutu, and Frolina]. In fact many Hutus serve and have influence in Tanzania's army. In November 1996 Tanzania warned that it would use its army to counter-attack should Burundian troops attack rebels on its side of the border. Certain Hutu leaders would like to see Tanzania annex Burundi. The total economic blockade of Burundi that limits the resources available for protecting its boundaries was also engineered from Dar-Es-Salaam last July.

This geopolitical circumstance produces another wildcard: imagine a Tanzanian invasion of Burundi just as Zaire collapses into regional warfare and Uganda's civil war heightens with increased Sudanese support for anti-Ugandan forces. Such a scenario would increase the involvement of extra-regional actors such as the United States with all the potential of developing into a major conflagration that will serve few long-term interests in the region. War and huge refugee movements could involve a score of states and affect more than 100 million African people.

Kenya: It is unlikely that Kenya would be drawn directly into war except in the foregoing scenario. However, Kenya is losing diplomatic influence under the present situation because President Daniel Arap Moi has housed extremist Rwandan Hutu leaders in Nairobi, supported anti-Museveni rebels in the past, approved the sanctions against the Tutsi regime in Burundi, and has openly supported the Mobutu regime. This makes Kenya a loser in diplomatic circles and certainly in terms of economic gains under a Kabila regime. Diplomatic relations have already deteriorated between Kenya and Uganda and in July 1996 Kenya closed the Rwandan embassy. Kenya's principle geostrategy has been to influence the West to bring in peacekeeping forces that might neutralise the Tutsi alliance.

France: France is a big loser in the region simply for supporting the losing side. The French have intervened more than once to prop up the Mobutu regime and to prevent secession by Shaba province. France has also been aligned with Zaïre and ex-FAR forces of the former Rwandan regime. From 1990 to 1993 elite French forces along with the Zaïrian army and the Hutu-dominated FAR repelled RPF advances in Rwanda. They also intervened in 1994 to prevent further RPF attacks on the Hutu. As with many outside players, the French motive was access to the vast natural wealth of Zaïre and to maintain its sphere of influence within former Francophone Africa. Now with Kabila vehemently rejecting French influence in the region, France has little to gain either economically or strategically from a winning AFDL-Tutsi alliance. In fact, France's best strategy is to prop up Mobutu to the bitter end hoping for some concessions in the endgame of geopolitical chess.

Conclusion

In many ways what we are dealing with in Central Africa is less about peace, democracy, and humanitarianism and more about a geopolitical game fueled by greed and a hunger for power. The game is called "Scramble for Africa" in which each player has a stake and some win and some lose. The biggest loser is the ordinary citizen who believes that the players caught up in the game are acting in their best interests. Another loser is the one who believes in the predictability of revolutions--they seldom turn out as intended. Killing as a means of conflict resolution leads to all kinds of repercussions. In this case, there are enough wild

cards to see this dangerous game spread from the Red Sea to Angola as to finish in Zaire.