

DO NOT REMOVE**Guerrillas in their Midst: Shifting Alliances in the DRC**

A reshuffling of alliances on both sides of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), has created confusion as to who's who in the ten-month imbroglio and has added to the complexity of finding a peaceful solution.

There has, in recent months, been a shift in the strategic alliances created on both sides of the DRC conflict. There have been reports of tension between the main rebel movement, the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD), and the newly formed Congolese Liberation Movement (CLM). RCD officials have disclosed a division within their movement. On the other side of the equation, DRC President Laurent-Desiré Kabila has reshuffled his cabinet and made some unexpected changes.

Shifting Alliances**The RCD divided**

The division within the RCD essentially pits the *renovateurs*, led by **Wamba dia Wamba**, against the ex-Mobutuists (former supporters of ex-President Mobutu Sese Seko), led by **Lunda Bululu**. The *renovateurs* were concerned about the continuing unpopularity of the ex-Mobutuists among the Congolese and the implications this had for the RCD. Wamba dia Wamba, in his New Year's address, attacked the RCD's Mobutuists, saying: 'We reaffirm our militant stand against these former wreckers of the nation, who want to take the RCD hostage.' The *renovateurs* argued that the RCD needed a wider base, with greater control of its steering committee. They wanted to legitimise the rebellion by organising local elections in the captured territories, transforming the rebellion into a liberation movement. In mid-March 1999, Wamba dia Wamba, the RCD President, moved his base from the Goma headquarters to Kisangani. He was joined by his adviser, **Jacques Depelchin**. The two men, who accused the RCD's Mobutuists of hijacking the rebel movement, fled Goma under the protection of the CLM and the Ugandans.

The other prominent *renovateurs* are **Michel Tshibuabua** — an adviser to the RCD's 'foreign minister' Bizima Karaha; **Willy Mishiki**, a Nandi chief who left the Mai-Mai to join the RCD; and **Jean-Francois David**, a businessman whose origins remain unclear. The split in the RCD was so deep that both its allies, Uganda and Rwanda, intervened to retain the unity of the rebellion. The two factions then agreed to set up two commissions to restructure the movement and bring the *renovateurs* into the fold. By late-January 1999, the RCD had been restructured.

Brief Chronology

- 27 July 1998:** President Kabila orders all foreign troops to leave the country.
- 2 August 1998:** An army rebellion against Kabila begins in eastern DRC with fighting reported in Goma and Bukavu (North and South Kivu), between loyal government troops (the Congolese Armed Forces - FAC) and a rebel coalition said to comprise former Mobutu soldiers - the ex-Zairean Armed Forces (FAZ), and in particular the so-called *Banyarwanda* troops (Tutsis that have settled in the DRC) who are backed by Rwandan Patriotic Forces (RPF).
- 3 August 1998:** Government troops succeed in controlling the rebellion in Kinshasa.
- 5 August 1998:** Foreign Minister Bizima Karaha announces in Goma that he has joined the rebels.
- 17 August 1998:** The rebels announce that their movement will be known as the *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Democratie* (RCD).
- 19 August 1998:** The defence ministers of Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola decide to send troops and military equipment to the DRC in response to Kabila's request for assistance from the Southern African Development Community (SADC).
- 21 August 1998:** Uganda admits that the presence of its troops in the DRC is limited to two battalions dispatched prior to the rebellion in order to combat Ugandan rebels based there.
- 28 August 1998:** Government troops backed by Angolan and Zimbabwean forces repulse the rebels' offensive on Kinshasa.
- 30 August 1998:** Government troops and their allies recapture Matadi and the Inga hydro-electric dam in the western DRC.
- 10 September 1998:** OAU talks in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, result in an agreement on 'draft modalities' for implementing a ceasefire. However, the rebels say that they will not recognise any agreement reached without their direct participation.
- 15 September 1998:** The annual SADC summit issues a communiqué recognising the legitimacy of the intervention by Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia in support of Kabila. The summit mandates Zambian President Frederick Chiluba to continue with the peace efforts initiated by President Mandela.
- 28 September 1998:** Chad announces that it has sent 1,000 troops to support Kabila.
- 6 November 1998:** Rwandan Vice-President Paul Kagame admits that his troops are supporting the Tutsi-led rebels in the DRC against Kabila.
- 20 February 1999:** Kabila dissolves his cabinet and unbans political parties.
- 14 March 1999:** Kabila announces a new government.
- 28 March 1999:** A Presidential decree sanctions the promised inter-Congolese national debate.

The general assembly was enlarged from 28 to 147 members, including 22 military personnel. The executive committee, acting as an RCD government, now comprises 23 departments instead of the previous eight. A 10-man political council to head the movement was created at the same time.

The restructuring, however, did not heal the divisions. On 17 May 1999, the RCD dissolved its leadership and ousted Wamba dia Wamba. Given Wamba's change of headquarters and his belief in the need to form a liberation movement, it was very likely that he would join the CLM.

The restructuring also failed to persuade RCD dissident **Arthur Z'Ahidi Ngoma** to accept the post of deputy chairman of the rebel movement. Ngoma a lawyer and opposition politician from Eastern Congo, was sentenced to one-year imprisonment by a Lubumbashi military court in May 1998 for 'plotting against state security'. Following his release he became the RCD's co-ordinator. In the second week of February 1999, Ngoma resigned from the RCD, condemning its failure to create a broader democratic movement that involved 'significant political organisations in the country that opposed the Mobutu regime' and said an RCD victory would merely lead to a third war since the movement's leaders 'are only puppets and will do nothing different from what the ADFL had done'. Ngoma has founded the *Union Congolaise pour la Paix*, from exile in Paris where he denounces the 'Goma mafia' but still predicts a rebel victory. However, he lacks significant support. He has been replaced as RCD vice-president by Commander **Jean-Pierre Ondekane**. External or 'foreign' relations was allocated to Alexis

Thambwe Mwamba, replacing **Bizima Karaha**, who has taken over security and information. General **Célestin Illunga Shamamba** has been charged with the defence portfolio. General Shamamba claimed on 8 May 1999 to have captured Manono, near the strategic town of Mbuji-Mayi.

The involvement of neighbouring states

Initially both Uganda and Rwanda supported the RCD. In December 1998, there were reports that fighting had broken out between the Ugandan and Rwandan troops in the DRC after they disagreed on which rebel group to support. According to a Ugandan military officer, the Ugandans are now backing the CLM of **Jean-Pierre Bemba** in the Equateur province, while the Rwandans maintain their support for the mainstream RCD rebels.

The RCD

The military leaders

Commandant James Kabarehe: Previously served in the armed forces of Uganda and Rwanda. Became chief of staff in the FAC after May 1997. Dismissed by Kabila on 13 July 1998. Responsible for mobilising internal military support for the August 2 rebellion when, in a tactical masterstroke, he hijacked a Boeing 737 belonging to Congo Airlines and dispatched 400 troops to Kitona airbase, in lower Congo, to open up a western front. He is believed to be in western Congo with about 3,000 troops, working closely with the Union for the Total Independence of Angola (Unita).

Commandant Jean-Pierre Ondekane: A career soldier from Equateur province and formerly a commander of Mobutu's forces (the FAZ). Joined the FAC after Kabila took power and led the Kivu-based 12th FAC infantry brigade during the August mutiny.

Deogratias Bugera (aka Rwamakuba), known as Douglas: A Banyamulenge from Masisi in Nord-Kivu and former leader of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (ADFL). Was appointed as Minister of State without Portfolio during Kabila's March 1 1998 cabinet reshuffle. Bugera joined the rebels soon after Kabila ordered the Rwandan and Ugandan armed forces to leave the country.

Commander Ilunga Kabambi: A career soldier from Kasai province and commander of the Bukavu-based 222nd FAC battalion that joined the rebellion within a week.

General Kpama Baramoto Kata and General Nzimbi Ngbale Kongo wa Bassa: Responsible for mobilising the 30,000 disillusioned FAC troops, garrisoned at Kitona, to join the rebellion. Together with Admiral **Mudima Mavua**, Mobutu's former defence minister, they formed Mobutu's military elite and were reported to have been plotting with South African mercenaries to overthrow Kabila after seeking refuge in South Africa in May 1997.

Commander Dieudonne Kabengele: Chief of the rebel forces in Western Congo.

Commander Sylvain Mbuchi: Commanded the Goma-based 10th battalion that initiated the rebellion.

The political leaders

Ernest Wamba dia Wamba: History professor born in Bas-Zaïre, lower Congo. Went into exile in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, during Mobutu's dictatorship. Stayed in Tanzania after Kabila took power and was appointed chairman of the political wing of the rebel movement. Ousted in May 1999.

Moïse Nyirugabo: A Banyamulenge who previously served as Kabila's adviser and headed the Office for Ill-Gotten Goods. Appointed as RCD deputy chairman and said to be number two to Wamba dia Wamba.

Bizima Karaha: His real name is Bizimana Karahetu. A Banyamulenge from South Kivu. Studied medicine in South Africa before joining the ADFL. Joined the RCD as a member of its executive committee in charge of foreign relations.

Vincent de Paul Lunda Bululu: A Luba from Katanga. Prime Minister of Mobutu's first transitional government (1990-1991). Thereafter he joined the moderate opposition. He is now the co-ordinator of the executive committee of the RCD.

A New Rebel Movement is Formed

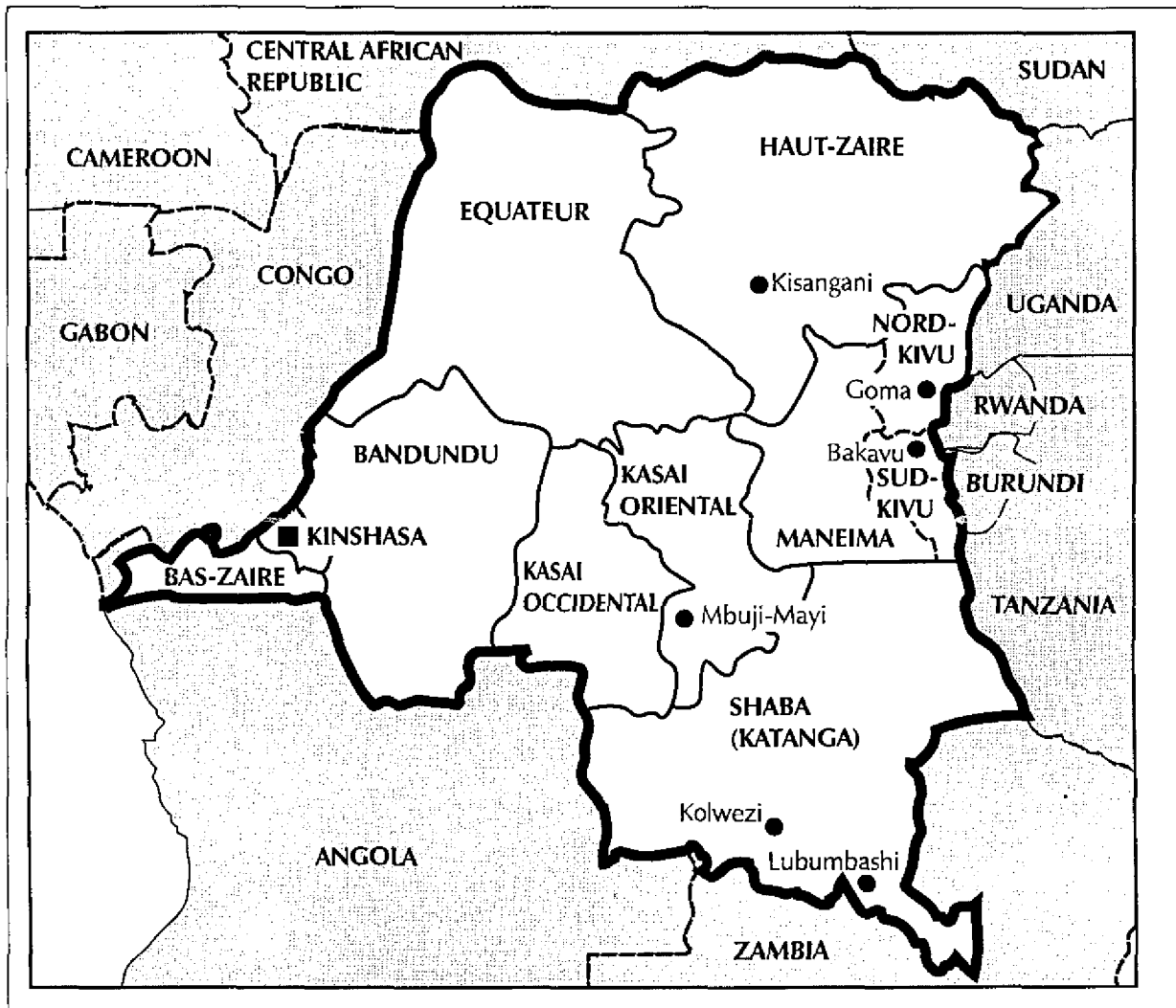
In early November 1998, newspapers in Kinshasa reported the launch of a new rebel group in the Equateur province. A businessman, **Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo**, was said to have formed the *Mouvement de Liberation du Congo* or the Congolese Liberation Movement (CLM), with the intention of joining forces with the RCD rebels in the east. Bemba Gombo is the son of Congolese tycoon, **Bemba Saolona**, who was a key figure in Mobutu's client-based network. Bemba promptly claimed that his rebel force had captured the north-eastern towns of Aketi and Dulia, killing at least 200 Chadian soldiers, sent by their government and financed by Libya, to bolster Kabila's troops. In late-April 1999, Bemba claimed that his troops had captured two towns in the north-west of the country — Kateke, 200km east of Gbadolite; and Bondu, 65km from the border with the Central African Republic (CAR). It has been reported that the CLM is receiving considerable military and logistic support from Uganda.

Kabila's 'Government of National Salvation'

In February 1999, President Laurent Kabila dissolved his cabinet and unbanned political parties. A month

later, Kabila announced a new government of 'national salvation'. Kabila remained in charge of the Defence Ministry. Notwithstanding the reshuffling, Kabila's government of 'national salvation' has failed to co-opt prominent opposition figures such as **André Bo-Boloko**, the chairman of the Democratic and Social Christian Party, or Mobutuists such as the former foreign minister, **Gerard Kamanda wa Kamanda**.

The only major change to the cabinet, was the appointment of **Jean Bemba Saolona**, the former chairman of the National Association of Zairean Enterprises, as the Economy and Industry Minister. However, the appointment of Saolona has not restored business confidence in the Kinshasa regime. Some observers have referred to Kabila's reshuffle as 'a game of musical chairs'. **Pierre-Victor M'Poyo**, the former manager of Kabila's financial interests and former minister of state to the presidency, was reappointed oil minister. **Abdoulaye Yerodia Ndombassi**, Kabila's diplomatic adviser, who publicly incited hatred against Tutsis, was promoted to Foreign Minister. **Gaetan Kakudji**, Kabila's cousin who was reported by Uganda's 'New Vision' newspaper on 30 October 1998 to have fled Kinshasa fearing that



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Kabila was plotting to kill him, remains as Minister of Internal Affairs in the new cabinet. **Didier Mumengi** also retained his post as Information Minister.

Kabila's cabinet reshuffle did not stop an attempted army mutiny within the FAC when recruits refused to be sent to the war front. DRC state television said that security services arrested 76 soldiers after the incident. By the end of March 1999, about 2,000 FAC soldiers fled into neighbouring Zambia. Most of the fleeing soldiers were disarmed and returned to the DRC by Zambian police. However, there were reports that some armed troops remained disguised among the Congolese refugees that fled the Katanga province around the same time.

Faced with internal dissent and an increasing need by his allies to make a face-saving exit from the nine-month conflict, Kabila set ground rules for a national debate. A presidential decree in March 1999 sanctioned the promised inter-Congolese national debate but made it clear that the organisation of the forum remained in the hands of Kabila and his administration. 'The president of the republic will convoke the national debate by decree and fix the venue and its duration. Kabila can end it if circumstances require,' the decree said. A meeting was scheduled for Rome under the mediation of the Catholic Sant' Egidio Community to

find a solution to the crisis. A few days before the meeting, the DRC authorities announced that it had been postponed and would instead take place in Nairobi, Kenya, from 8 to 15 May 1999. On 7 May 1999, the Kinshasa officials announced that the Nairobi meeting was further postponed to the first week in June 1999, in order to give Kenya adequate time to make the necessary preparations.

These changes have indicated that a political solution could be forthcoming. President Kabila has, nevertheless, warned that the national debate should not be confused with peace talks. Meanwhile, the leader of the main opposition party not involved in the conflict, the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS), **Etienne Tshisekedi**, said that his party would not attend the national debate. Tshisekedi's decision has resulted in scepticism about Kabila's intentions for peace in the country.

Possible Lessons

Strategic alliances formed against a common enemy in the heat of a rebellion with one's former opponents, can run the risk of disintegrating on the verge of victory. In the DRC, a country which is not short of political chameleons, shifts in strategic alliances have not only crippled the effectiveness of the rebel movement, but have moreover complicated finding any political solution to the conflict.

On 19 May 1999, The RCD named Emile Ilunga as their/new leader. Jean-Pierre Ondekane was appointed as First Vice-President and Moise Nyarugabo, an ethnic Tutsi as second Vice-President.