



This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers [here](#) or use the "Reprints" tool that appears next to any article. Visit www.nytimes.com for samples and additional information. Order a reprint of this article now.

November 25, 2009

Congo Army Helps Rebels Get Arms, U.N. Finds

By [JEFFREY GETTLEMAN](#)

KHARTOUM, Sudan — A new [United Nations](#) report says that the Congolese Army continues to funnel weapons to rebel groups that are smuggling millions of dollars in gold and other minerals out of Congo, helping sustain one of Africa's bloodiest and most complicated wars.

The lengthy report, which has not been made public but was provided to The New York Times, details a vast, rebel-driven criminal network in eastern [Congo](#) with tentacles touching Spanish charities, Ukrainian arms dealers, corrupt African officials and even secretive North Korean weapons shipments.

None of this is especially shocking. For years, eastern Congo has been a steaming cauldron of ethnic tensions, competing commercial interests, land disputes and regional politics playing out at gunpoint.

Most of the fighting is not soldier versus soldier but soldier versus civilian, and millions of people are thought to have died from gunshot wounds or easily preventable diseases since the war broke out in the mid-1990s.

Women especially have borne the brunt of the conflict, with hundreds of thousands raped and mutilated, a sexual violence epidemic that has caught the eye of global figures, including Secretary of State [Hillary Rodham Clinton](#).

The United Nations report lays bare exactly how various rebel groups finance their brutality, tracing the flow of illegal minerals from the lush green mountainsides of Congo, formerly Zaire, to Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda, and eventually to markets in Europe or smelters in the Far East.

The report charges that government officials in several African countries are working hand in hand with the rebels to help smuggle out minerals and bring in guns.

According to the report, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, one of the most notorious rebel armies, "has a far-reaching international diaspora network involved in the day-to-day running of the movement; the coordination of military and arms-trafficking activities and the management of financial activities."

This document is likely to add momentum in the United States and elsewhere to efforts to crack down on Congo's illicit mineral trade. Congolese officials estimate that 80,000 pounds of gold are smuggled out of the country each year, which at today's high gold prices is worth more than \$1 billion, much of it going straight into rebel hands.

Already the [Enough Project](#), an antigencide group based in Washington, and [Eve Ensler](#), an American playwright who has been supporting Congolese women's projects for years through the organization [V-Day](#), among others, have been urging Congress to pass legislation that would bar American companies from buying Congo's "conflict minerals," which include gold, tin and coltan, a metallic ore used in many cellphones and laptop computers. Several bills have been proposed.

This effort is akin to a successful movement in the early years of this decade to crack down on blood diamonds, the term given to the gems unearthed in the rebel-held areas of West Africa that fueled gruesome civil wars in Liberia, Angola and Sierra Leone.

It is a bleak picture of Congo that the report paints. Despite the billions of dollars the United Nations has spent on [peacekeeping](#), countless so-called peace treaties and pledges of regional cooperation, the eastern part of the country remains in the grip of incredibly violent criminals, some of them high-ranking officers in the national army.

Nothing seems to be working. Recent military operations to sweep out the rebels have mostly failed and instead led to widespread massacres and human rights abuses. The rebels, meanwhile, continue to seize mines and use their networks in Europe and the United States to raise cash.

Timothy Raeymaekers, a professor at the University of Ghent in Belgium, who specializes in studying Congo, said the report contained "some substantial new information."

"It's high time the U.N. gets serious about this criminal connection," he said.

The [United Nations Security Council](#) is expected to discuss the Congo report this week. But the United Nations is in a difficult position. It recently cut ties to Congolese Army units accused of widespread human rights abuses. But at the United Nations headquarters in New York, diplomats are trying to delay the release of the new report because "there is a lot in there that makes us look complicit," admitted one United Nations official, who asked for anonymity because he said he could be punished for speaking candidly.

The official called the conflict in Congo "messy and ragged."

There is little doubt about that. Take the recently integrated rebel forces, which agreed earlier this year to join the Congolese Army. Many still have dubious loyalties. In one documented case, a commander ordered his troops to fire in the air to let rebels in the bush know the army was coming. In other cases, army commanders gave or sold weapons to the very armed groups they were supposed to be wiping out.

There is also creeping warlordism. Local army commanders are taxing timber, charcoal, tomatoes, anything that passes through their roadblocks, making \$250,000 a month, the report said. Commanders are even conscripting civilians to haul wood through the forest, reminiscent of the Belgian colonial days when pith-helmeted officers whipped Congolese porters with hippopotamus hide.

Some Congo experts describe a "shadow army" within the national army, with rebels keeping their weapons to themselves and maintaining a separate chain of command, many of them still loyal to neighboring Rwanda.

Jason Stearns, a researcher who has spent extensive time in eastern Congo, said the recent integration effort "has led to a deep ethnicization of the army."

"While I don't see full-fledged war breaking out again," he said, "the situation will remain extremely volatile."

Copyright 2009 The New York Times Company

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)