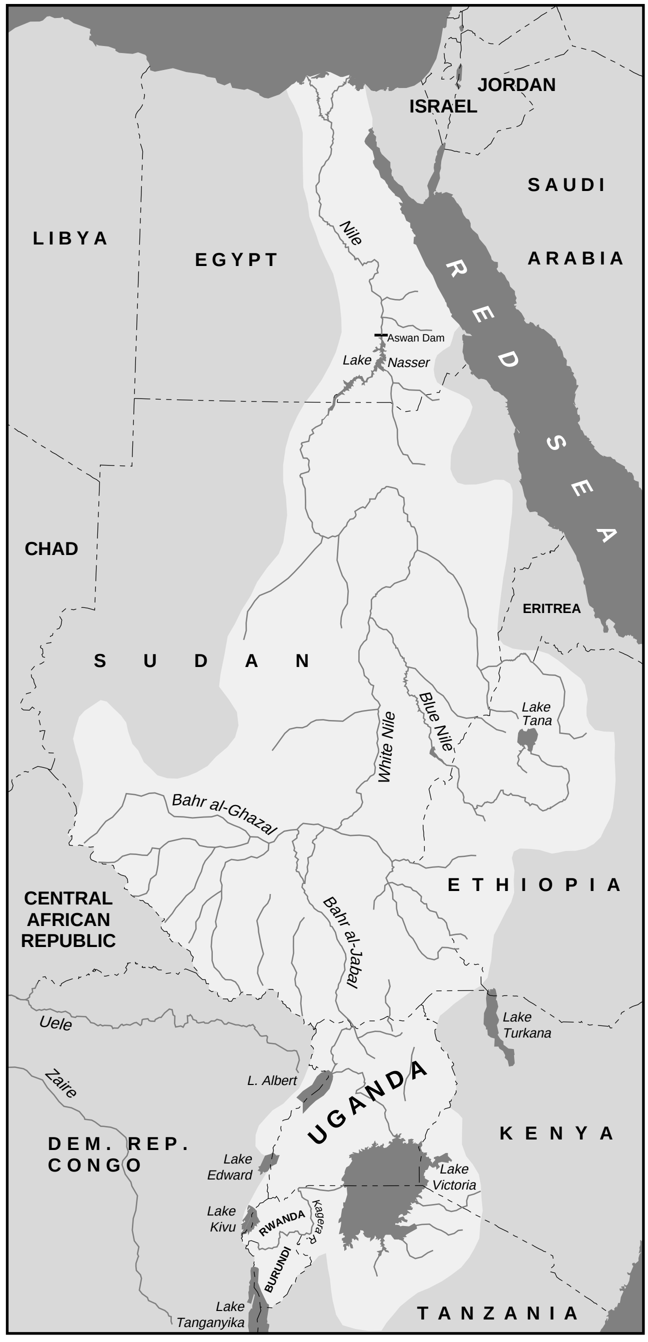
Raw Materials Looting Behind African 'Peace'

by Uwe Friesecke

MAP 1
The Nile River System



To many political observers, the deals that were signed in Africa to end two of the most devastating regional conflicts, came as a surprise. Breakthroughs were declared for negotiations on Sudan on July 20 in Kenya's town of Machakos, and one week later for the Democratic Republic of the Congo in South Africa's capital, Pretoria.

In Machakos, the Sudanese government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) signed a protocol in which Southern Sudan will be guaranteed six years of autonomy within a united Sudan, before a referendum will be held on whether the population wants to separate from the rest of the country or not. And the government agreed that the Islamic *Sharia* legal code will not be applied in the South. In the next few weeks, a definite cease-fire is supposed to be negotiated between the two delegations.

For the Congo, President Joseph Kabila and his counterpart from Rwanda, Paul Kagame, on July 30 signed a deal by which Kabila agreed to the disarmament and repatriation of the so-called Rwanda Interahamwe militias and former Rwanda Army soldiers within the next 90 days, and in return, Kagame promised to withdraw his troops from Eastern Congo.

On the surface, both deals were arranged by African mediators, and Western diplomats only attended the talks as observers. For Sudan, Kenya's President Daniel arap Moi and Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni played important roles. Moi was directly involved with the two delegations in Machakos, and Museveni later organized the first-ever meeting between Sudan's President Omar Hassan al-Bashir and the SPLM leader John Garang in Kampala, Uganda's capital. For the Congo agreement, the South African government played a critical role. President Thabo Mbeki was present at the signing, and his deputy, Jacob Zuma, chaired the meetings between the Rwandese and Congolese ministerial negotiating teams in Pretoria.

But looking behind the scenes, and taking into account how Western intelligence services kept these conflicts alive in the past, it is pretty clear that Anglo-American, and in particular U.S. pressure played the critical role in forcing the parties in the conflicts to come to an agreement now, where earlier negotiations had been fruitless for years. Reliable sources from the region report that John Garang was simply threatened with the loss of any U.S. and British support, if he would continue to refuse a deal with the Khartoum government, as he had done before, when Madeleine Albright was U.S. Secretary of State and demanded the toppling of the government in Khartoum. Now U.S. intelligence services have reportedly already begun to withdraw some of their personnel from Garang's rebel movement. The Bashir government in Khartoum, on the other side, was threatened to become a target of the U.S. war on terrorism. This set the stage for the Bush Administration to name former Republican Sen. John C. Danforth as special envoy to Sudan, and to start the process of U.S.-led mediation between the rebels and the government, which produced the Machakos Protocol of July 20.

For the Congo, informed political observers from the region say that President Kabila had no choice but to sign the Pretoria deal. He clearly had in mind the way his predecessor had ended his life (his father, Laurent Kabila, was assassinated in January 2001). He accepted the fraudulent premise that the so-called Hutu rebels were all genocidalists and had to be delivered back to Rwanda, in exchange for an empty promise from the Rwandan dictator to withdraw his troops from Eastern Congo. Shortly before these negotiations, World Bank President James Wolfensohn visited Kinshasa, Congo, and praised the Kabila government for its economic policy. One week after Kabila signed the deal, the World Bank announced a $454 million loan to the Congo, and Wolfensohn announced a proposal to cancel 80% of the country's $12 billion debt, as if to prove once more how effective the crude carrot-and-stick method can be in diplomacy. In the process leading up to the Pretoria negotiations, the U.S. State Department was directly involved, through Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Mark Bellamy, who declared on July 14 in Kinshasa that he had come to the region "to accelerate the peace process."

High Stakes

Both deals fit well into a long-range plan to clear up the power structures in Africa, in favor of unchallenged Anglo-American interests. What is hailed as an African breakthrough for peace is, in reality, an attempt to cajole African leaders into accepting an arrangement by which the West continues to have unlimited access to Africa's raw materials, without providing in return the necessary means for Africa's own development. Exploitation of the vast oil reserves that were discovered in the Gulf of Guinea and in Sudan, is now the top priority for Anglo-American Africa policy, besides continuing the old arrangements to loot the diamonds, gold, coltan, and other strategic minerals.

For the Congo and the Great Lakes region, including Southern Sudan, this strategy rests on the role that the two dictators of Uganda and Rwanda, Museveni and Kagame, can play. Both came to power with British and American support, and in 1990 they started the series of wars that led to the carnage in Rwanda in 1994, the continuing fighting in Burundi, and the devastating conflict in Congo. Museveni's government has furthermore been the one used by Washington and London to channel military support to John Garang's SPLA, fighting the government of Sudan for the last 19 years.

Even though there are serious differences between Museveni and Kagame locally, they continue to fit very well into the larger geopolitical design of the Anglo-American powers for the African continent. In effect, the Congo deal forces Kabila to accept the Kagame/Museveni dominance in the region, and the Sudan agreement tends to bring the Khartoum government back into the orbit of Anglo-American influence. Next on the agenda is a deal to end the war in Burundi, which is right now being negotiated in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, where again South Africa plays the role of mediator.

That Presidents Museveni and Kagame are playing their role in this neocolonial game, is no surprise. But the fact that the South African government seems to look at its interests in the region in congruence with the interests of Washington and London, prompts questions. Though it is commendable for South Africa's Mbeki and Zuma to try to find peaceful ends to the conflicts plaguing the continent, they must confront the fact that, right now, Washington and London are ordering "peace without development" for Africa—which, in the long term, will not mean peace at all.

After the Bush Administration came into office, the Anglo-American powers accelerated their venture into African oilfields for purely geopolitical reasons. Having in mind a possible new Middle East war prompted by the Ariel Sharon government in Israel and a new war against Iraq, Anglo-American strategists are planning to lessen their dependence on Middle East oil, and replace it with increased supply from Africa. They also are trying to roll back the influence of China in Africa, which, in the absence of U.S. oil companies, since 1997 had built the pipeline to pump oil from the fields in Southern Sudan to Port Sudan on the Red Sea, and a refinery near Khartoum.

Shift in U.S. Africa Policy

The London *Times* of July 29 captures the current shift in U.S. Africa policy most clearly, with the headline: "U.S. Presses Africa To Turn on the Tap of Crude Oil." "The West has activated a plan," wrote the *Times*, "to reduce its dependence on politically risky Gulf oil by encouraging a huge increase in production in West Africa and by tempting Nigeria to leave OPEC." The paper quoted Walter Kansteiner, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs: "African oil is of national strategic interest to us, and it will increase and become more important as we go forward." Kansteiner, who had already served as a specialist for strategic raw materials in the administration of George Bush, Sr. in the 1980s, had just returned from a trip to some of Africa's most important oil producers—Angola, Gabon, and Nigeria. In a press briefing after his trip, Kansteiner explained that the United States is, right now, importing about 15% of its crude oil from West Africa, and that this could increase to 20% in the next three years.

In March 2000, the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Africa held hearings on "Africa's Energy Potential," at which testimony was given by representatives of think-tanks and oil companies about the vast potential for increased oil production in Africa, in particular West Africa. Paul M. Wihbey from the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies (IASPS), a Jerusalem-based think-tank linked to the most right-wing pro-Sharon circles in Israel, discussed the increased strategic importance of the Gulf of Guinea region of Africa for U.S. oil supplies. He already then proposed the formation of an extra U.S. military command for the South Atlantic, and increased U.S. military presence in West Africa, to safeguard the oil-supply lines.

After President George W. Bush assumed office in January 2001, discussions in the Pentagon and State Department on the issue of African oil, along the lines of the IASPS proposals, intensified. Following the events of Sept. 11, 2001, the war in Afghanistan, the escalation of the Israel-Palestine conflict, and the early planning of a U.S. war against Iraq, the question of alternative sources for oil supply for the United States became highest priority for strategic planners.

Mideast Clash of Civilizations Angle

On Jan. 25, 2002, the IASPS organized a symposium in Washington entitled "African Oil: A Priority for U.S. National Security and African Development," which reflected the increased attention the Bush Administration was giving to the issue of African oil, following the events of Sept. 11, 2001. The seminar was addressed by Kansteiner and other officials of the State and Defense Departments. U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Karen Kwiatkowski, a political/military officer assigned to the Secretary of Defense's Office of African Affairs, pointed out that "Africa is important to U.S. national security" because by 2015, fully 25% of U.S. oil imports will come from sub-Saharan Africa, especially West Africa, Sudan, and Central Africa. Robert Murphy, an economist with the State Department's Office of African Analysis, added that it would be important to diversify the sources of imported oil away from the troubled areas of the Middle East. Murphy puts the proven reserves in the Gulf of Guinea at more than 30 billion barrels. According to data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration, oil output in Nigeria will rise from 2.185 million barrels per day in 2001, to 4.422 million in 2020; in Angola from 722,000 in 2001 to 3.288 million in 2020; in Equatorial Guinea from 145,000 in 2001 to 724,000 in 2020; and in Sudan from 199,000 in 2001 to 526,000 in 2020.

At the Washington seminar, a working group was formed, called the African Oil Policy Initiative Group (AOPIG), comprising Bush Administration officials, representatives from Congress, from the big oil companies, investment firms, and international consultants. On June 12, 2002, they delivered a report to the Africa Subcommittee chairman, Rep. Ed Royce (R-Calif.), who declared on the occasion that "African oil should be treated as a priority for U.S. national security post-9/11."

The AOPIG report projects that U.S. imports of oil from Africa will go up from 1.5 million barrels a day, currently, to 2.5 million barrels a day by 2015. The Gulf of Guinea emerges as the new energy center of gravity and a vital U.S. interest. The total oil and gas reserves along the African coastline from Senegal in the north to Namibia in the south, may be more than those of the Middle East. Most of the deposits are offshore, and are therefore isolated from potential political and social turbulence on the mainland; and transport lines to the U.S. are just across the Atlantic, shorter and more direct, than from the Middle East. Therefore, West Africa offers the quickest, most secure, and least complicated potential for an increase in U.S. oil supply to replace part of the flow of Middle East oil. Reflecting discussions in the U.S. Administration, the report proposes that the U.S. Congress formally declare the Gulf of Guinea an area of "Vital Interest" to the United States; and further, that the U.S. government should plan a much more aggressive military forward presence, and create a regional sub-command for the Gulf, with a new home port on the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe, just north of the Equator.

Regional Maneuvers—and Warnings

In early July, a delegation of AOPIG, led by Paul Wihbey, presented their findings and a U.S. proposal for the establishment of a "Gulf of Guinea Commission," involving oil-producing West African states, to President Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice President Atiku Abubakar of Nigeria in Abuja, Nigeria's capital. The Nigerian leaders were reportedly very much in agreement with these U.S. proposals.

The Nigerian President has become notorious for his subservient alliance with the U.S. government of President Bush. Other African Presidents, such as Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal and Eduardo Dos Santos of Angola, are emulating the Nigerian leader in this. Only days after the rebel leader Jonas Savimbi from Angola's UNITA was killed in January of this year, the Angolan President met President Bush in Washington, and offered a significant increase in Angolan oil for the United States.

The astonishing number of personal meetings this U.S. President has had with African leaders, since assuming office more than a year ago, can only be explained by the fact that the Bush Administration is committed to advancing the political and military structures in Africa which will guarantee unhindered access to Africa's raw materials, crude oil in particular.

These are the strategic realities behind the current changes in Africa. But, because these "peace deals," ordered by the United States and greatly supported by Britain, in Angola, Sudan, Congo, and soon Burundi, lack any element of real economic development, and fail to address the complicated historical injustices of the conflicts in question, they will not bring lasting peace to the troubled African people of the conflict regions. Therefore, some wiser statesmen are sounding their warnings. In the case of Sudan, Egypt President Hosni Mubarak's political adviser Osama al-Baz warned that the Sudan deal could lead to the splitting of Sudan into two parts. This could be the precedent for dividing other African countries along tribal, linguistic, or religious lines, and could lead to even greater chaos throughout the continent. One hopes that at least some who are responsible for Africa policy in Western governments, will look beyond their obsession with the continent's raw materials, and listen to those well-founded concerns.