

## No support for rival warlords

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Last month the latest stage in the continuing battle for influence among the big western powers in Africa unfolded in Congo-Brazzaville.

The interests of French imperialism had been damaged by events in Rwanda and in the Democratic Republic of Congo. But in Congo-Brazzaville French imperialism saw its loyal agent, General Denis Sassou-Nguesso, sweep to power after a four-month civil war.

What was once the capital city, Brazzaville, is now a rubble-strewn ghost town. Its 800,000 inhabitants have fled to the countryside. The remaining forces of ex-President Pascal Lissouba have been driven out.

Unlike the scenes in neighbouring Congo, earlier this year, there were no jubilant crowds to greet the victorious rebels. Sassou-Nguesso had been dictator until 1992 when his regime was overthrown and Lissouba was elected as president. That ended years of one-party rule under which a vast and bloated state bureaucracy had grown up.

Even after these events, Sassou-Nguesso maintained his own militia and bodyguard of 45 men. No wonder the workers of Brazzaville didn't consider themselves 'liberated'.

It was the attempt by President Lissouba to disarm this bodyguard on 6 June which sparked the recent civil war. Sassou-Nguesso and his supporters took to the streets and fighting continued August.

In August, Lissouba extended his term in office which was due to expire and formed a government of national unity made up of 40 opposition parties with Bernard Kolelas as prime minister.

Sassou-Nguesso countered this move with a call for a transitional prime minister with extended powers and the support of all parties. When his proposal was rejected, his forces took up arms again.

Alongside the fighting, both sides set up their own mediation processes. Lissouba called in his ally, Laurent Kabila, the president of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Kabila and Lissouba called for an African 'Interposition Force' including Angola, Rwanda, Congo and Uganda - all countries now backed by the USA and Britain.

Meanwhile, Sassou-Nguesso rejected this and enlisted the support of Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, Chad, Central African Republic, Senegal Togo and Benin - all Francophone countries. In September, they issued a statement calling for a cease-fire and for a UN peacekeeping force.

By this time, however, Nguesso had decided his best chance was to press ahead for a military solution. He dismissed the UN solution, saying:

'There have to be two people to sign a cease-fire. The last time we signed an accord which we honoured it was Lissouba who broke it by sending in helicopter gunships.'

Laurent Kabila replied with border raids, ostensibly to clear troops who were shelling Kinshasa which lies just across the river Congo from Brazzaville. However, Sassou-Nguesso's troops were the only forces who were attacked. Lissouba was also backed by rebel troops of the Angolan enclave of Cabinda and possibly Unita forces as well.

But the involvement of Angolan rebels only served to broaden the conflict as the south of Congo-Brazzaville was quickly overrun in October by Sassou-Nguesso's forces in alliance with regular Angolan troops. By mid-October the civil war was over with General Sassou-Nguesso proclaimed President.

The very next day France officially recognised Nguesso's government. At the outset of the conflict France called for the sending of African troops from eight countries to Congo-Brazzaville, its own troops having been withdrawn from Africa this year. This proposal was vetoed by Britain and the United States.

However, France can now resume its relationship with one of its older allies. Furthermore, the French oil company Elf, which had its monopoly of extraction rights removed by Lissouba, will again be able to look forward to a more profitable relationship with Sassou-Nguesso.

Overall the victory of Sassou-Nguesso will have the effect of temporarily halting the progress of the Uganda-Rwanda pro-US axis in Africa. For France, it has proved a much-needed boost to its flagging interests in Africa.

For the people of Congo-Brazzaville, however, the future is more of the past: misery and poverty. Unlike the recent events in Mobutu's Zaire, this war was not a legitimate struggle for survival by part of the population as with the Banyamulenge in eastern Zaire. Nor did it become a popular uprising against a hated dictator.

It was two warlords, each with their own private militia, fighting it out for who would rule over the country and profit from the subordination of the people. The masses had no interest in who won. Defending the limited rights they have won since 1992 necessarily meant giving no support to either Sassou-Nguesso's Cobra militia or Lissouba's Zulus.

The people of Congo-Brazzaville have nothing to look forward to in either Sassou-Nguesso's one party state or Lissouba's presidential dictatorship. Their future lies in a workers' republic, as part of a socialist federation of African states.

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