

Key moments in the U.S.'s relationship with the Democratic Republic of the Congo

1940 During World War II, the Belgian government in Congo ordered mining companies there to assist the Allies in the hunt for resources to help the war effort. As part of that initiative, uranium was mined and delivered to the United States. Congolese uranium was the Manhattan Project's main ingredient in the race to build an atomic weapon.

1960 Congo obtains independence from Belgium, and rebel leader Patrice Lumumba becomes prime minister. The U.S. government is suspicious of the new leader, who is said to have strong communist leanings.

1961 The Cold War intensifies. Lumumba is assassinated after two months in power. Belgium and the U.S. were suspected of playing a role in his death, which some reports maintain was authorized by President Dwight Eisenhower. (In 2002, the Belgian government apologized for its role in the death.)

1963 Congolese army chief of staff Joseph Mobutu visits the White House as a guest of President John Kennedy, marking the beginning of a long relationship between the American government and the man who would rule with sticky fingers and an iron fist for 30 years.

1964 The United States sends four transport planes to provide airlift for Congolese troops during a rebellion.

1965 Mobutu overthrows Congolese government in coup with tacit support from U.S., which supports Mobutu for the next 30 years. While Mobutu plunders his country's natural resources for personal gain and human rights abuses are widespread, the U.S. aligns itself with Mobutu. Resource-rich Congo is surrounded by several nations oriented toward the Soviet Union.

1967 The United States sends three military transport aircraft with crews to support Mobutu during a revolt. A U.S. corporation helps build a regional nuclear research center in Kinshasa.

1971 Mobutu renames the country Zaire.

1978 American and other foreign support arrives to help Mobutu maintain control during another coup attempt. U.S. aid comes in the form of U.S. military transport aircraft support for Belgian and French rescue operations in Zaire.

1991-2001 After rampant rioting by unpaid soldiers in Kinshasa, U.S. Air Force C-141s transport Belgian troops and equipment into Kinshasa. Through much of the 1990s, U.S. political and military engagement recedes. A 1993 mission in Somalia, which left 18 soldiers dead, leaves policy makers more reluctant about getting sucked into messy crises around the continent. During much of the decade anti-Mobutu forces, many supported by neighboring governments of Rwanda and Uganda, gather in size and strength. Mobutu's control loosens and eventually crumbles. Instability spreads. Between 1998 and 2001, more than 2 million Congolese die as a result of conflicts, many connected to capturing valuable minerals, gold and diamonds.

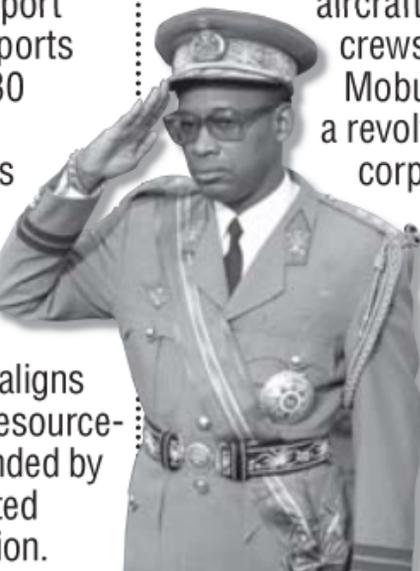
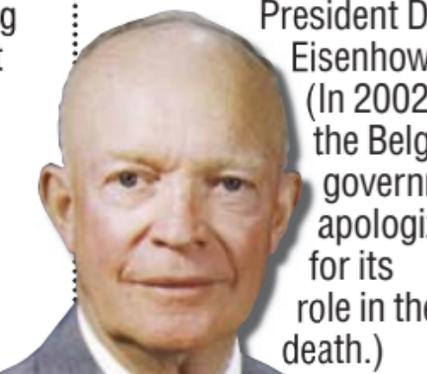
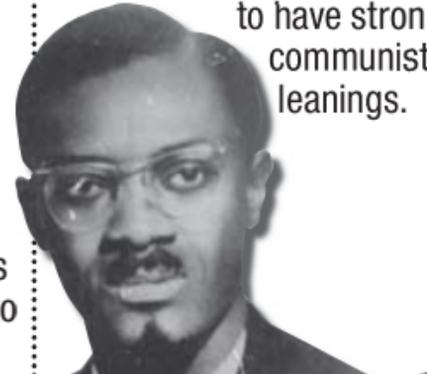
2003 President George W. Bush meets with new Congo President Joseph Kabila, the son of previous president Laurent Kabila, who was assassinated in 2001. The U.S. commits \$77 million toward humanitarian aid projects.

2006 Bush orders assets of top rebel leaders in the DRC frozen amid concerns they could foment more unrest.

2008 Uganda, southern Sudan and Congo launch an offensive — dubbed Operation Lightning Thunder — against Lord's Resistance Army forces in eastern Congo. Newly formed U.S. Africa Command plays a small support role at the behest of the White House, providing equipment and logistical support. The mission failed to capture LRA leadership and resulted in civilian casualties. AFRICOM takes criticism from several activist groups.

2009 U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visits Congo to apply pressure on the Congolese government to end the widespread problem of rape, which is frequently used as a weapon of war. Clinton announces a \$17 million plan to fight sexual violence.

2010 U.S. Africa Command begins training a 750-member Light Infantry Battalion, expected to provide security and stabilize borders in volatile regions in the north and eastern parts of the country.



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