Twitter Thread by Albert Samaha



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This is some audacious spin. What actually happened: Pompeo endorsed the results of a rigged election in DRC after a private security company working for a Congolese autocrat back channelled with Giuliani and other Trump allies. Our investigation: https://t.co/WjO7hPmfZv

In negotiations, the US maintained it wouldn't allow then-DRC president Joseph Kabila to run for a third term. So the private security company, Mer, helped Kabila craft a new plan to control his country: a secret power-sharing deal with another candidate. https://t.co/WjO7hPmfZv

> Despite all the promises that Kabila's proxies made in Washington that year, Congo's election, ultimately held in December 2018, was neither free nor fair. Citing voting data that leaked after the election, international observers said that it was brazenly rigged in favor of a candidate with whom Kabila had struck a secret power-sharing deal. Kabila would officially step down, but he would still command Congo's security forces, his allies would still hold top Cabinet positions, and his party would still wield a legislative majority.

The deal might've stayed secret—except somebody leaked the real vote count, showing Kabila's candidate, Tshisekedi, lost in a landslide to Martin Fayulu, who vowed to end corrupt mining deals. @FinancialTimes did great work confirming the data was legit: https://t.co/gmXYAHVlJD

With the real results public, the US was left with the question of whether to endorse the official result or denounce it, as the African Union and the European Union did. US officials in charge of DRC foreign policy debated. Here's how it played out:

> At first, the case for "serious doubts" won out. At the root of the apparent consensus was a simple conclusion. "We know the outcome," the NSC official said, and it showed that Tshisekedi clearly had lost.
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> On Jan. 22, 2019, the group drafted a statement calling the election "deeply flawed and troubling" and concluding that Congo's election commission had "failed" in its responsibility, according to three US officials at the meeting and reporting by the news outlet Foreign Policy. All that was left was for the State Department to send out the statement.
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> But what came out hours later was a complete reversal: "The United States welcomes the Congolese Constitutional Court's certification of Felix Tshisekedi as the next President," the statement read.

US has a long history of undermining democracy in Congo. CIA backed the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, DRC's 1st prime minister. US presidents supported Mobutu's 34-yr dictatorship. Kabila won US support the way other modern-day autocrats have: with the facade of democracy.

The result: "We don't have the apparatus of control over security and armed forces," said a Tshisekedi administration official. Kabila "has people in charge in those places."

> With the international community now at bay, Kabila reestablished his hold on the government. His political party took two-thirds of the seats in Congo's legislature and then dominated Tshisekedi's Cabinet when it was named after months of negotiations. Of the 65 Cabinet ministers, 42 were members of Kabila's coalition. The former president's wealthy ally, Dan Gertler, remains in firm control of his mines and his land, even though he is under sanctions from the US and an investigation by the FBI.

US officials who favored endorsing the DRC election called it a pragmatic decision at a perilous moment. A Mer operative said: "Both sides have compromised on something. The United States compromised on the process; Kabila compromised on the end result." https://t.co/WjO7hP4EAV

Kabila paid Mer $9.5m to lobby for him in DC. The firm hired 27 Americans onto the project. But it had a secret: It supplied surveillance tech that helped Kabila crack down on protests. One consultant Mer hired said if he had known that, "I absolutely would not have said yes."

Kabila first turned to Mer in 2012, when Kinshasa hosted a conference drawing leaders from around the world. Mer's services constituted the biggest upgrade in surveillance capabilities that Congo had seen, cost $17.75m, & helped police stamp out demonstrations.

> Congo's intelligence agency, known as the ANR, sought help from private contractors and other governments. For some potential vendors, the nation's record of human rights abuses, including imprisoning dissidents and using violence against peaceful protesters, was a deal killer. "It was difficult to support ANR because they were participating in oppression," a Belgian official based in Kinshasa told BuzzFeed News.
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> Mer signed a $17.75 million contract to install surveillance cameras and build a command center in the capital city for intelligence and police agencies, according to the company's financial statements. Its work in Congo was part of

By 2015, with tech from Mer, Huawei, & other companies, the DRC's surveillance state was targeting dissidents more effectively. "Everything they knew in advance," said one activist. "Everywhere we are going, everything we are planning."

> In March 2015, after escaping a police raid at a meeting with other anti-Kabila activists, Sylvain Saluseke was spending a cold, damp night at a safe house in Kinshasa when his cellphone rang. The man on the line identified himself as an agent with the ANR, Saluseke said.
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> "We know where you are," Saluseke recalled the man saying.

This double act—promising a free election in Congo while selling the tools that could undermine the country's democracy—was unheard of. It all took place behind the curtain, in meetings & phone calls that left few witnesses & little trace of private influences involved.

> Though the vast majority of voters cast their ballots for a regime change, the fate of their country was decided by powerful interests negotiating behind closed doors. The US gave its blessing and millions in foreign aid, Kabila kept a large share of his power, and the company at the center of the arrangement walked away richer.

"When the history of the Trump administration is written, much will be made of the president undermining democracy at home. But as the Congo episode shows, he also did so abroad." How a private security company lobbied the US to accept a rigged election: https://t.co/WjO7hPmfZv