

Strategic Natural Resources and Sustainable Development in DR Congo: Perspectives on Interests and Confrontation between Actors

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ABSTRACT: In order to support its economic growth, China has turned to Africa, particularly to the DR Congo, the pre-square of the Western powers. Its breakthrough in the DR Congo has, in recent years, made this country a terrain of geopolitical, geostrategic and even geo-economic confrontation or rivalry between China and the DR Congo's Western partners including USA.

This article examines the impact of these rivalries on the sustainable development of the DR Congo. At the end of the analysis, the author estimated that in order to avoid or reduce conflicts between actors and enable the DR Congo to benefit from its strategic resources, the Congolese state must use strategic diplomacy, which consists of encouraging the « concerted and balanced exploitation » of strategic natural resources by the various actors in confrontation. This will enable the Congolese state to adopt a centrist position and banish any idea of a bloc and to involve all actors in the development of the DR Congo.

KEYWORDS: strategic natural resources, DR Congo, confrontation, actors.

1 INTRODUCTION

The DR Congo is one of the richest countries on the planet in terms of natural resources. Its soil and subsoil are full of natural resources, the most sought after in the world, among which we can distinguish mining, oil and forestry resources which will be discussed in this study. It is in this sense that the DR Congo constitutes a geostrategic stake, an objective of control of the great powers because of its natural potentialities.

Despite the richness of the soil and subsoil of the DR Congo, which is seen throughout the world as a geological scandal, we note that after the country gained independence until the 1970s, the Congolese economy was marked by relative prosperity and appreciable economic performance for the well-being of its population. Unfortunately, after the 1970s, following the change of regime in terms of economic policies, the country plunged into an unprecedented crisis whose characteristics were, among others: a noticeable impoverishment of its population, excessive debt, a decline in the composite indicators of human development, an increase in the degree of nationalization of formerly private enterprises, etc.

On the other hand, the revenues from the sale of some strategic natural resources and the subsequent increase in the state budget have led to a considerable increase in revenue. Thus, since 2007, following the various mining contracts, giving China the opportunity to intervene in the field of exploitation of strategic resources, the state budget was relatively revised upwards but this increase in revenue is not felt on the socio-economic well-being of the Congolese population. Hence the poverty that characterizes most Congolese living on less than one US dollar a day. One could therefore say that the DR Congo is experiencing what some authors call the curse of natural resource¹s, caused not only by the poor governance of this sector by the Congolese state but also and above all because of armed

¹ The origins of the natural resource curse phenomenon can be traced back to the 1980s when studies revealed interesting results in which countries highly endowed with natural resources such as oil and minerals lagged behind in economic growth by countries with few or no resources. The term natural resource curse was first used by Auty (1993) to describe how resource-rich countries could not use this wealth to stimulate their economies and how these countries have lower economic growth than resource-rich countries. It is expected that resource-rich countries can exploit these resources for the benefit of higher economic growth, poverty reduction, and technology transfer. All else being equal, resource-rich countries should be able to increase their per capita welfare levels.

conflicts due to the presence of these strategic resources that plunge the country into chaos, making it ungovernable, because of the absence of a regulatory state.

However, despite the fact that these strategic natural resources do not contribute to the development of the country in a general way, they also constitute an essential economic asset for the country and an opportunity for sustainable development, making the DR Congo a center of diverging interests, an area of economic and geopolitical confrontation between US and Chinese. Thus, this research will consist in studying the fundamental reasons of this confrontation between these various state actors and in proposing solution tracks in front of this confrontation in order to make the strategic natural resources of the DR Congo real instruments for its sustainable development of this great African country.

1.1 STRATEGIC NATURAL RESOURCES IN RD CONGO

The DR Congo abounds in diverse natural resources, abundant and of exceptional quality, sought after throughout the world, particularly by Western and Asian powers. These natural resources endowed by nature are so spectacular that if ever they are exploited in a rational way, they can take this country, with continental dimensions, out of the poverty it has been facing for several decades.

Ranked among the most corrupt countries in the world, the DR Congo has today more than 80 million inhabitants and more than 73% of the population lives below the poverty line. Three of the strategic natural resources that the DR Congo abounds in are at the heart of conflicts or rivalries between actors. These are mainly coltan, Copper and cobalt. The map above allows us to locate these three resources in the DR Congo.

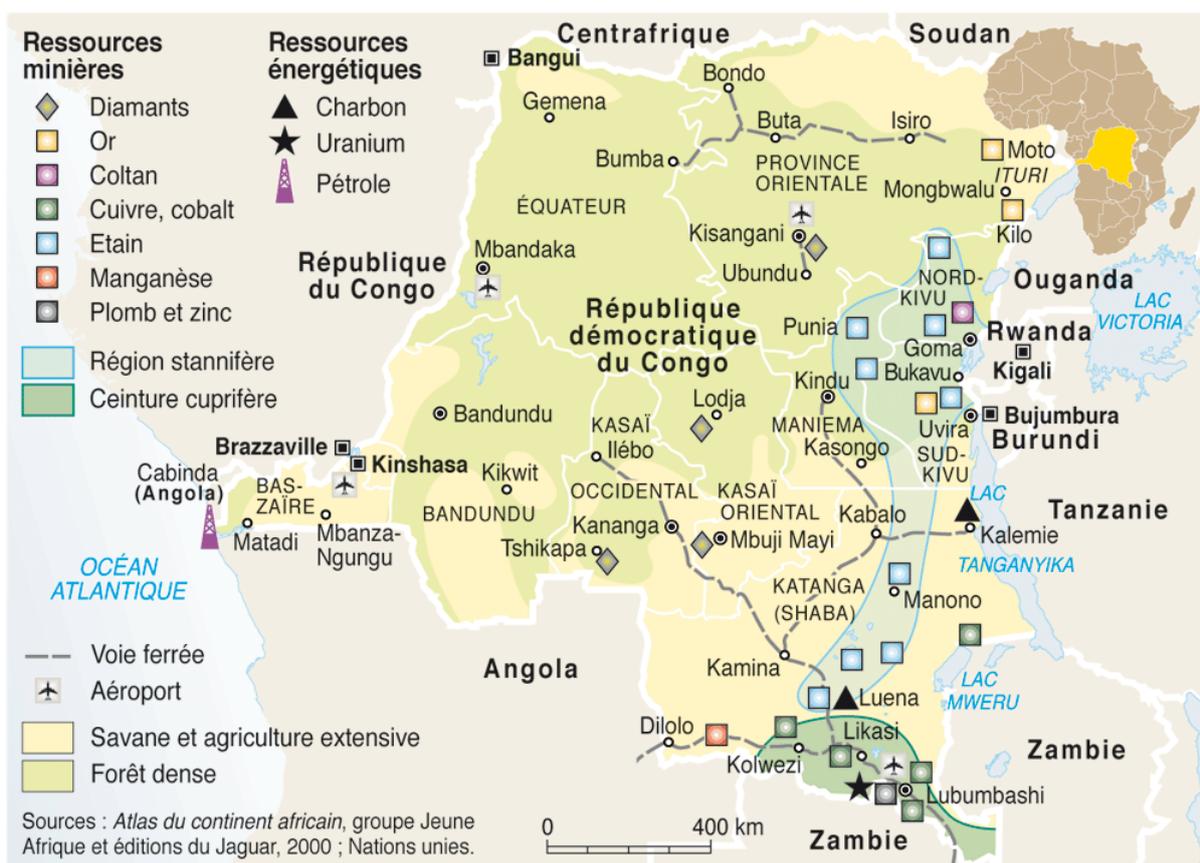


Fig. 1. Resources in the DR Congo

Source: The map of minerals in the DRC [online]. Available at: https://www.pagewebcongo.com/actions.php?a=dbo_articles&rid=45, consulted in China, Wuhan, February 1, 2021.

In fact, the word coltan is an abbreviation for columbite-tantalite. Two materials are extracted from this ore, columbarium and tantalum. It is tantalum that is most prized when coltan is mined. This metal has a very high corrosion resistance. It is used, among other

things, to make capacitors, components found in mobile phones. Some argue that coltan from the Kivu region has one of the highest levels of tantalum in the world².

It should be noted, however that both columbium and tantalum are considered by the U.S. government to be strategically essential for certain industrial activities, and critical to safety. Moreover, the American army has large reserves of tantalum (nearly 1,000 tons) and several tantalum-based products (powder, ingots, etc.) to support, it seems, a war effort, or even a structuring economic sector³.

Copper is a transition metal⁴, used in many sectors such as the construction industry (plumbing, roofing, shipbuilding and cladding), the energy sector (power plants and electrical infrastructure), industry, transport or finished products: in many countries it is the main component of coins, housing accessories, water heaters, etc.

Contrary to other rare metals, the strategic character of cobalt lies more in its unique characteristics than in its rarity. In rechargeable battery technology, cobalt is used in the composition of the cathodes of Nickel-Cadmium, Nickel-Metal Hybrid and Lithium-ion batteries used in portable electronic devices and in electric and hybrid cars. It therefore plays an important role, especially in the energy transition⁵.

These geographic locations of strategic resources, the geostrategic importance of which is no longer in doubt, is at the root of the increase in covetousness that often leads to illegal exploitation and killings. The actors who want to control them, sometimes proceed by non-credible means such as financing militias, to gain access to them and. In the absence of a regulatory state, these territories, rich in strategic natural resources, end up being a battleground for local and foreign interests.

The territories in which these strategic resources are located are also sources of illicit trade by the states neighbouring the DR Congo. The example of coltan demonstrates the strategies that have been put in place by these states and their implications in the trade of this resource. The following points will say more.

1.2 INTERNATIONAL POWERS AS THE ACTORS: FROM HISTORY TO THE PRESENT

Several international actors are competing and/or confronting each other in DR Congo. However, within the framework of this research, four actors have been identified whose confrontation would be based on strategic resources. These include the United States of America, France, Belgium and the People's Republic of China. It should also be noted that these actors act either directly or through their multinationals established in the DR Congo.

1.2.1 USA

The United States of America, abbreviated USA, is a Federal Republic composed of fifty states, each with a parliament and enjoying a large degree of autonomy. After the dissolution of the USSR, the United States remained the only nation in the world that has all the assets that made it an economic and military superpower: space, population, productive potential, an efficient economic system, an international currency, a vast internal market. At present, its main rival throughout the world is China, which is making exploits in all fields: economic, military, political, etc.

In the US strategic plan, the American view of the DR Congo is no longer based on Cold War concerns. Human rights, the stability of political regimes, efforts to achieve economic stability, seriousness in good governance and the integration of the vision of the great powers have become new parameters of the American choice⁶.

However, like Belgium, diplomatic relations between the DR Congo and the USA have experienced moments of tension on the eve of the elections that were to take place in 2016 but which were held in December 2018. The DR Congo accused the USA of interfering in its internal affairs while the USA denounced the way of repressing the demonstrations of the Congolese population who were seeking the departure of Kabila.

² Patrick Martineau, La route commerciale du coltan congolais, Groupe de recherche sur les activités minières en Afrique (Grama), Mai 2003 p. 10.

³ U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Geological Survey Mineral Yearbook. Columbium (niobium) and tantalum, 2001 available at www.minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/commodity/niobium/niobmyb01.pdf, consulted in China, Wuhan, on February 13.

⁴ INERIS, 2014. Données technico-économiques sur les substances chimiques en France : cuivre, composés et alliages, DRC-14-136881-02236A, 91 p. (<http://rsde.ineris.fr/> ou <http://www.ineris.fr/substances/fr/>), consulted in China, Wuhan, on February 6.

⁵ Aurélie Cotton et alii, Stratégies d'influences autour des ressources minières Cuivre, Cobalt, Coltan dans l'Est de la République Démocratique du Congo, de l'Association de l'École de Guerre Economique, Décembre 2014, p.37.

⁶ Mahatma Julien Tazi K., La politique étrangère des Etats Unis d'Amérique vis-à-vis de la République Démocratique du Congo: de 1990 à 2006, Université de Kinshasa, Diplôme d'Etudes Supérieures en Relations Internationales 2009, p.20.

According to Congolese people, the US no longer wanted Kabila at the head of the country not only because he was already at the end of his mandate but simply because he had turned much more towards China, his biggest competitor on the international scene. To this end, the United States had repatriated its citizens from Congolese territory before the December 2018 elections in order to secure them in case of possible unrest. In spite of this, it is worth noting that as the world's leading power, the USA is involved in several sectors in the DR Congo like other players. Since the arrival of Félix Antoine Tshisekedi in January 2019, relations between the two countries are in good shape, as the two states have established the Privileged Partnership for Peace and Prosperity.

1.2.2 THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Nowadays, China is a major player in African politics, a very remarkable power throughout the world and this will be demonstrated throughout this research. Since the time of Deng Xiaoping, the foreign policy of the Middle Kingdom has been based on the principle of peaceful development. And this orientation was confirmed after Hu Jintao came to power in 2002. Its foreign policy has gradually opened up with two clear objectives: the consolidation and expansion of Chinese interests across the planet is a believable deterrent to establish itself in the court of the greats (nuclear weapons), with the idea of mastering techniques and technologies which make China's position on the international scene irreversible.

Through its economic and commercial activism, China is in fact proposing a development formula based on the infrastructure sector with long-term commercial aims (especially mining) and inscribed in a regional perspective. This strategy of "development through trade and transport infrastructure" is at the antipodes of the philosophies of human development and human security currently in vogue in the United Nations Development Program and other donors, but it constitutes a very attractive partnership for the Congolese authorities, because this strategy responds to the urgent need for infrastructure to revive the economy of a country that is struggling to emerge from a long period of conflict⁷.

Nowadays, it is impossible to talk about the reconstruction of the DR Congo without mentioning the People's Republic of China, which has always shown its desire to play a leading role in the reconstruction of the country. China's way of doing things has always aroused major interest on the part of the Congolese. Of course, China's foreign policy is still to maintain world peace and create an international atmosphere of peace for the building of modernization.

2 RIVALRIES BETWEEN POWERS IN D. R. CONGO

This part analyses the conflicts of interest between international actors, the rise of China's power throughout the world that provokes jealousy from Western powers, especially from the USA. Finally, this part of that essay examines the negative impacts of the confrontation between powers in the DR Congo.

2.1 CONFLICT OF INTERESTS ON STRATEGIC NATURAL RESOURCES AMONG THE ACTORS

From the beginning of the colonial era to the present day, the DR Congo remains the country most coveted by all the great powers. The objective of each of these powers is to consolidate their respective positions in the country, which of course aims to control its strategic natural resources. This makes the DR Congo a potential conflict zone where the various players are competing either to maintain their influence or to counter adverse influence.

Competition between states can be understood as the search by one or more states for the same thing or title. Thus, compared to the diplomatic and economic policies pursued by the United States, France, Belgium and China in Africa, one might think that there is competition, even confrontation, between these two countries. But it is true that this confrontation exists much more in the area of the exploitation of the strategic resources of the DR Congo and the security cooperation but here, we will just be based on those related to the natural resources.

2.1.1 CONFLICTS RELATED TO THE EXPLOITATION OF STRATEGIC RESOURCES

For the United States, after the attacks of 11 September 2001, the entire American political class, including the Administration, Congress and interest groups such as public opinion, decided to redefine new areas of strategic interest for its energy supplies.

⁷ Lemoine Françoise, « La montée en puissance de la Chine et l'intégration économique en Asie », *Hérodote*, 2007/2 (n° 125), p. 62-76. DOI : 10.3917/her.125.0062. URL : <https://www.cairn.info/revue-herodote-2007-2-page-62.htm>, consulted in Wuhan, on March 3.

The US Administration believed that the Middle East, which was once designated as the first priority area because it accounts for 40%⁸ of the world's oil reserves, was becoming a high-risk area for America's oil supplies. And this is what prompted American geostrategists to say that the African continent could respond to America's new energy concern. This is why people can be seen that American oil import from Africa have increased and they should increase even more⁹.

Africa is now becoming a strategic zone for the USA, which has strengthened its presence in the continent with many countries such as Algeria, Angola, Chad, Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Libya, Nigeria and DR Congo. And this list has yet to be expanded in accordance with the wishes of American officials.

In the same way, China is making Africa its strategic priority area, as we can see today that Angola is its main supplier of oil, ahead of Saudi Arabia and Iran¹⁰. At the same time, Beijing has become the second largest economic power and the second largest consumer of oil after the United States. It increasingly needs raw materials to sustain its economic growth. It is now Africa's largest trading partner.

So, people can today that these two powers are making Africa their priority and strategic zone. In reality, there is no direct confrontation between these four great powers in Africa. But it is true that there are rivalries and conflicts between these powers and especially between China and the United States in DR Congo, what some African researchers call: "the new cold war between the United States and China in DR Congo"¹¹. But what justifies these rivalries between these great powers? What are the motivations or reasons for this confrontation? These reasons will be analyzed in the following lines.

2.1.1.1 THE MINING CONTRACTS CONCLUDED BY MOBUTU AND REVISED BY LAURENT DÉSIRÉ KABILA IN 1998: DISTANT CAUSES OF THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE ACTORS IN DR CONGO

With the end of the Cold War having accelerated the decline of the dictatorship of Mobutu, former President of the DR Congo, following the 1965 coup d'état, the DR Congo, then called Zaire, has been deprived of all international assistance since 1992.

The genocide in Rwanda, which took one million Tutsis in 1994 and made two million refugees, accelerated the destabilisation of its big neighbour, the DR Congo. In 1996, the Rwandan Patriotic Army, eager to dismantle the refugee camps, launched an assault on the Congolese province of Kivu, supported by Uganda and then by new actors: Angola and Zimbabwe. Laurent-Désiré Kabila, a former anti-Mobutist *maquisard*, took power¹².

By the blessing of the United States, Rwanda and Uganda wanted to rule the Congo from a distance, chase their respective opponents and make economic profit from their intervention. But President Laurent Désiré Kabila reneged on his commitments and revised the mining contracts concluded by Mobutu with certain multinationals, including America Mineral Fields, an American multinational.

Emancipating himself from his two African allies, he renewed his ties with Cuba, China and North Korea. In August 1998, his former allies (Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, etc.), approved by the West, tried to overthrow him. Military intervention by Angola and Zimbabwe defeated the putsch, which then turned into a regional war. Within a few months, three rebel groups, backed by Kigali and Kampala, took control of 40%¹³ of the territory, while the Congolese head of state, lacking an army, was forced to rely on troops from Zimbabwe and Angola.

In the light of the above, one can therefore understand the strategic role played by the United States in Central Africa through Rwanda and Uganda, which, after noting that the President they had supported would have reviewed the mining contracts that his predecessor (Mobutu) had concluded with the American multinationals for the benefit of China, decided, with the blessing of the United States, to overthrow Laurent Désiré Kabila but he was able to find reinforcements from its other allies, as demonstrated in the preceding lines.

This was already a rivalry between the United States and China and a direct confrontation with the DR Congo through its neighbours, because already at that time the United States was seeking exclusive control of all strategic resources in the DR Congo through its multinationals working with its allies, Rwanda and Uganda.

⁸ Mwayila Tshiyembe, *Géopolitique de paix en Afrique médiane*, Angola, Burundi, République Démocratique du Congo, Ouganda, Rwanda, Ed. L'Harmattan, Paris, 2003, p. 15.

⁹ *Le Quotidien d'Algérie*, Africom, les mains de Bush sur le pétrole, 2009.

¹⁰ Arnaud Leveau, «l'Afrique à l'heure chinoise», *Valeurs actuelles*, n° 3765 du février 2008.

¹¹ La Chine et le Congo : les amis dans le besoin, rapport de Global Witness sur la République démocratique du Congo, mars 2011, p.26.

¹² https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/publications/l_atlas_du_monde_diplomatique/a53806 Consulted in China, Wuhan, on 7 Of March at 8: am.

¹³ Thierry Brésillon, «les grands du sud s'imposent sur la scène internationale» dans *l'état de la mondialisation*, Alternatives Internationales, Hors-série N° 6, Paris, décembre 2008, p. 18.

2.1.1.2 THE SINO-CONGOLESE CONTRACT

2.1.1.2.1 THE BACKGROUND TO THE SIGNING OF THE SINO-CONGOLESE CONTRACT

China and DR Congo have good relations that date back to the 1970s. During those years, relations were more ideological than economic in nature, even though China was already involved in the infrastructure construction sector in the Democratic Republic of Congo at that time. The most obvious example is the construction of the People's Palace and the Martyrs' Stadium in Kinshasa. This cooperation was even desired to the detriment of development aid from Western countries¹⁴.

Since China's economic rise, relations between the two countries have been characterized by intense trade. It is in this context that on 18 December 1997, the treaty on the encouragement and mutual protection of investments was signed between the Congolese and Chinese governments¹⁵.

After the overthrow of President Mobutu's regime, President Laurent Désiré Kabila engaged with China on cooperation in the field of telecommunications, which set up in 2000 the communication network "CCT", Congo-China Telecom with 51% of funds from ZTE and 49% from DR Congo¹⁶.

The relations between these two great countries took an important turn in 2007, after the presidential elections of 2006 in the DR Congo. After his victory in these elections, President Joseph Kabila, who emerged from the elections, is working to fulfil his electoral promise, formulated in « Five Construction Projects of the Republic », which are water and electricity, employment, health, education and infrastructure¹⁷.

For this, the President Kabila needed the substantial means to meet them. Avoiding the blockage and slowness of his traditional partners (World Bank, International Monetary Fund, etc.) who had even financed the said elections, the President of the Republic, who was caught in a vice between the these international financial institutions and the pressing appeals of the Congolese to see their daily problems resolved, chose China because of the availability of its financial reserves and its very high economic growth, and China responded promptly, in a manner that gave him total satisfaction.

With this in mind, on 17 September 2007, the Democratic Republic of Congo signed a collaboration agreement, also known as a "cooperation programme", with a Chinese business group. The collaboration agreement highlights the development of infrastructure and the development of the mining project. Initially, the Chinese are therefore committed to building 3,500 km of roads, as many km of railways, road infrastructure, especially in Kinshasa, 31 hospitals with 150 beds and 145 health centers. These works will be carried out by two Chinese companies, China Railway Engineering Corporation (CREC) and Sinohydro and financed by loans from Exim Bank¹⁸.

The repayment of these loans is guaranteed by the creation of a joint venture (Sino-congolaise des Mines, Somines in abbreviation) with a majority Chinese participation which will mine, produce and supply eight million tonnes of copper, 200,000 tonnes of cobalt, 2,000 tonnes of copper ore and 2,000 tonnes of cobalt ore. And 372 tons of gold. These agreements concerned a cumulative investment of 9 billion, 6 billion of which were dedicated to the development of infrastructure in the Democratic Republic of Congo and 3 billion to be invested in the mining project. The maximum amount planned for infrastructure was then reduced at the request of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which used the fear of a new cycle of over-indebtedness in the DR Congo as an argument¹⁹.

2.1.1.2.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SINO-CONGOLESE CONTRACT

The "contract of the century", which was surrounded by many secrets, is interesting from several points of view²⁰: The first characteristic of this contract is that it encompasses and regulates in a single text all the relations of one country with another. Trade, investment, cooperation aid and financing are linked in a way that demonstrates the uniqueness of the order.

¹⁴ Speech by Marshal Mobutu, delivered on 4 October 1973 before the United Nations General Assembly.

¹⁵ Rapport d'évaluation des impacts du projet Sicominex sur les droits des communautés locales dans la région de Kolwezi, 2014, p.14.

¹⁶ Idem, p.14.

¹⁷ Kirongozi S., Les malentendus de la Démocratie en Afrique Subsaharienne, le paradoxe congolais, Sirius, Kinshasa, 2010, p.88.

¹⁸ Sino-congolaise contrat

¹⁹ Rapport d'évaluation des impacts du projet Sicominex, op.cit. , 2014, p.14.

²⁰ Stefaan Marysse, « le bras de fer entre la Chine, la RDC et le FMI : la révision des contrats Chinois en RD Congo » (n° 125), p. 131-150., l'annuaire de l'Afrique des Grands Lacs, Juin 2010.

The second particularity of this contract is that it consists of a barter. The principle of barter, described by some Congolese authors as a new form of genuine cooperation, is nothing more than a substitute for the guarantee of repayment of the debt contracted during the execution of infrastructure works.

In principle, there is nothing negative in this construction of infrastructure as concluded in the contract provided that the repayment value is valued at the fair price, i.e. the price that the Congo could have received on the world market for these exports. However, barter has the disadvantage of opacity of exchange, it is really not clear who wins and who loses, because how can we compare the exchange of hospitals and roads for cobalt and copper if not through price? The principle of barter makes the comparison blurred.

A third feature related to this barter principle is the “win-win” principle, which is dear to the conception of Chinese foreign policy. At first glance, the Chinese get what they need, raw materials, and the Congolese in return see reconstruction efforts financed and executed by the Chinese. Nothing could be simpler or fairer. No condescending speeches about aid to poor countries receiving aid. Reciprocity is the order of the day here and, according to the figures in the contract, there is even generosity on the part of China, since the infrastructure built is estimated to be worth \$6.5 billion, while exports of raw materials are valued at \$3 billion²¹.

Obviously, it must not be forgotten, which is not estimated in the contract that the Chinese will still have to invest heavily in building mining production capacity. And this is where the third flow of economic relations and the fourth feature of this contract comes in: Chinese investment and the repayment of that investment.

Mining to repay loans for public infrastructure in the DR Congo is conceived in the same way as the Chinese have contracted foreign companies in China, through joint ventures in which the Chinese have majority control. The contract, for a total period of 30 years, stipulates that the Chinese will get 2/3 of the votes and the Congolese government 1/3. This is important because it regulates the terms of repayment of the loan²².

The fifth and final feature of this contract concerns the extremely liberal exemption conditions. Not only does the Congolese government in article 6 grant “the benefit of all the customs and tax advantages provided for in the investment code and the mining code” but also “total exemption from all taxes, duties, duties, customs, direct or indirect royalties, whether domestic or import and export, payable in the DR Congo”.

In view of all these relevant features of this contract, the Sino-Congolese partnership was seen by many Congolese as a historic opportunity for the DR Congo to loosen the bonds of dependence that still closely linked it to its former colonial power and to the International Financial Institutions. For most Congolese, this partnership should therefore enable the DRC to evolve and decide on the new direction of its relations with development partners.

However, it has attracted much criticism from other Congolese and above all from traditional partners such as the USA, France, Belgium and the Bretoon Woods Institutions, including the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which have triggered a kind of rivalry between them, against China and the DRC up to the present day. This rivalry is lived much more between the two giants: the USA and China and this for the following reasons that we will illustrate through this question:

2.1.1.2.3 WHY IS THE SINO-CONGOLESE CONTRACT A CAUSE OF CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE POWERS?

Reading the writings of Colette Braeckman, I shall say that it is because the DR Congo had decided to “revisit”, that is to say to review the terms of the 60 mining contracts, among which were those signed with Belgian, French and American multinationals. Faced with this situation, the French and Belgians, who were strongly committed to ending the war that ravaged the DR Congo in the 2000s (but which continues to tear the country apart to this day) and who had convinced the “international community” to organise and finance the 2006 elections, had a strong and bitter feeling that the DR Congo's strategic natural resources would change hands to serve Chinese economic development.

Yet the revision of their contracts was by no means for the DR Congo to find a place for China as the Western bloc thought, but simply because the Congolese state was disappointed by the poor performance of their multinationals in the natural resources sector.

Moreover, the signing of the Sino-Congolese contract was at the origin of Laurent Nkounda's military offensive in the east of the DR Congo. This offensive would be supported by the Rwandan state, which was in turn supported by the lobbies controlled by the former Bush administration in its policy of containing the Chinese advance in Africa and in particular in the DR Congo. And it is noted that on the international market, Rwanda was already at that time a major coltan exporting country.

²¹ Sino-congolese contrat, op.cit.

²² Sino-congolese contrat, op.cit.

It is even in this perspective that the International Forum for Truth and Justice in the Great Lakes Region of Africa denounced in 2008: “the rebels in the east of the DR Congo as being the gendarmes of much more powerful groups; they act on behalf of those who oppose China's penetration anywhere in the Congo”²³. Those who did not want China to enter the DR Congo were France, Belgium and above all the USA, its main competitor, who saw their interests threatened by the presence of China.

Faced with this situation, there sounds to be an indirect confrontation between the DR Congo, China's ally against the American, French and Belgian lobbies. Contrary to the situation in 1998 when the Americans tried to overthrow President Laurent Désiré Kabila, this time they organized atrocities in the east of the country in order to scare the government into not signing the contract, but the Congolese government signed it because of the importance that China held in its eyes.

In response to the conflicts linked to the exploitation of strategic natural resources, and to the facts noted above, it can therefore be noted that it is the revisions of mining contracts that are at the root of the confrontations between the actors. These revisions are made in favour of China and to the disadvantage of the DR Congo's western partners. This therefore worries these traditional partners of the DR Congo.

2.1.2 THE SOAR OF CHINA'S INFLUENCE AND THE JEALOUSY OF THE WEST

China's strong presence in Africa and around the world has wider implications for the international system. It challenges Western pre-eminence in a region that has long been Europe's « preserve » and an increasingly vital source of energy for the United States²⁴. Confronted with this new challenge to their well-established international position, the major industrialized countries have tried to respond with a strategy of increased public criticism and a reluctance to collaborate with China. China's ability to raise enormous financial resources from the revenues generated by its status as the world's largest manufacturer and a major trading nation to serve its foreign policy interests gives it a comforting position that Western states can only envy.

Just as historians have called America's transition from a debtor nation to a “trading nation” a defining moment in the distribution of forces in the international system, so too have historians called America's transition from a debtor nation to a “trading nation” a defining moment in the distribution of forces in the international system. As a credit nation after 1919, China's status as one of the world's major international creditors also means that these forces are shifting eastward. One can understand the annoyance and surprise caused by the declining interest of African states in borrowing from the World Bank and the European Investment Bank. The reconfiguration of the balance of power has led the two institutions to decry Chinese lending practices and to question their own relevance as an indicator of Western marginalization²⁵.

China's rise in power in the world in recent decades has created frustration in the camp of Westerners, especially the Americans. In fact, talking about the rise in power of a state means examining and then comparing a certain number of parameters that illustrate a difference between the different states in comparison. For example, if one were to examine aspects relating to the economy, diplomacy, armaments, scientific publication, electronics and the control of strategic resources, one would realize that China is making enormous progress in comparison with the West, which then creates what I call “Western jealousy”.

China's influence in the international system is therefore increasingly seen as a threat to Westerners and Europeans who have long been at the forefront of global geopolitics. This threat has much more to do with economic sovereignty, which means that Westerners and Europeans are unable to support Chinese projects on an international scale. But it also refers to resistance of several kinds. The most illustrative example is the trade war that is rapidly developing between China and the United States, who believe that the trade war is indispensable to diminish China's influence in the economic arena. Forgetting that this trade war, will also have repercussions on their own economy. On the other hand, France and Belgium also see China as a real economic challenge and are afraid of being dominated by China.

In relation to the control of strategic materials in the DR Congo, which I am talking about in the context of this work, several documents that I consulted throughout this research inform us that China alone controls more than 80% of Congolese cobalt, whose technological usefulness has been demonstrated in the previous lines, ahead of the USA knowing that the DR Congo alone has a 60%²⁶

²³ <http://lepangolin.afrikblog.com/archives/2008/12/08/11669762.html> Consulted in China, Wuhan, on 12 Of March at 10: pm.

²⁴ Alden Chris, Large Dan, Soares de Oliveira Ricardo, « Chine-Afrique : facteur et résultante de la dynamique mondiale », *Afrique contemporaine*, 2008/4 (n° 228), p. 119-133.

²⁵ China treads on Western toes in Africa”, *Financial Times*, 12 janvier 2007.

²⁶ Gazano, A., *Les Relations Internationales : les données, les acteurs et les règles, les enjeux et les défis*, Gualino Editeur, Paris, 2001, pp : 22-23. Also read Braillard P., Djilili R., *Les Relations Internationales*, Puf, Paris, 1988, p. 51.

share of the world cobalt market. This situation is of great concern to Westerners and in particular to the USA, which is already in a trade war with China.

Thus, several informed observers believe that this fight between these two world giants might not spare the DR Congo if the latter were unable to respond intelligently and wisely to this situation. This situation raises several questions, including: what position will the new president of the DR Congo, Félix Tshisekedi Tshilombo, take?

As a reminder, Félix Tshisekedi Tshilombo was elected 5th President of the DR Congo following the elections organized and financed in December 2018 with the Congolese State's own funds, i.e. without the support of external partners as was the case in 2006 and 2011.

However, although criticized by the international community because of its irregularities, these elections have nevertheless, for the first time in its history, given the Congolese people a chance to witness a peaceful transition of power between an outgoing president (Joseph Kabila) and another elected and incoming president (Félix Tshisekedi). This is a kind of interpellation and an example of democracy that must be followed by some African heads of state who want to stay in power even at the end of their constitutional term. Joseph Kabila was thus an eloquent example.

Reading the political situation in the DR Congo after the December 2019 elections, one cannot help but say out loud the ambitions and/or intentions of the Americans to influence the new Congolese President in order to put an end to the Sino-Congolese contract, a strategic partnership for China and the DR Congo.

The Americans are proposing to the new president and in return to ensure his security, that of his country and the Great Lakes region. Thus, once in power, President Félix Tshisekedi had made several trips to the Great Lakes region of Africa in order to become aware of the stakes of this part of the African continent but also in order to find ways and means, for a peace in the eastern part of the country, which has been torn apart by war for decades.

However, it was an opportunity for the allies of the Americans, Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi, to take advantage of the opportunity to pass on to the Congolese President the intentions of the Americans on the Sino-Congolese contract, before the Congolese President's trip to the United States.

It is here that the double game of DR Congo's neighbours is being played: on the one hand, they support the rise of China but also its primacy over DR Congo's strategic resources because they know that thanks to this influence from China, they will be able to obtain more eloquent funding than they receive from the West, in order to rebuild their countries, and on the other hand, they are playing the games of the West to influence the Congolese president to put an end to the Sino-Congolese contract. It is therefore understandable why, in international relations, it is said that there is no friendship between states, but it is the interests that matter most.

This proposal would not pass as easily in the ears of some Congolese who, for more than 10 years have seen their country being built by China, which has now become unavoidable for most African states, including the DR Congo itself. This is why, since he came to power, President Félix Tshisekedi has not yet visited China, although he has already been to Belgium, France, the USA and even Russia.

The president Tshisekedi is thus faced with a dilemma: on the one hand, he cannot put an end to the Sino-congolese contract because it could have repercussions on the diplomatic level but also and above all because he knows the very strategic role China plays in the construction of the country but also its other investments in other sectors of national life. On the other hand, he sees security guaranteed by the USA once the Sino-Congolese contract is cancelled in favour of the USA, especially as this contract is the result of a process highly decried by the Western world.

As the Chinese military power is growing, especially as it is already proven and ready to fight any army in the world, the majority of the states in the world, including the African states, including the DR Congo, will turn to China for protection, hence, such a proposal from the Americans cannot scare the Congolese President, especially if he has good advisers. He could perhaps accept such a proposal if the US promised him far greater investment in the DR Congo than China, which is not at all obvious.

Thus, one think that it would be best for the new President of the DR Congo to give priority to the state actor who contributes efficiently to the development of the Congolese state and this state actor is none other than China which, until now, has proved its worth in the DR Congo, especially in terms of construction, while not neglecting the other Western powers, especially the USA, especially since the liberal context obliges us to do so, because, as Graham Allison says in his book *Towards War, America and China in Thucydides' Trap*, world peace depends on the ability of Americans to agree to negotiate with China for a world balance.

All means were good to achieve this, including wars. This was the era of unipolar hegemony. Consequently, for almost 20 years, politicians, economists, journalists, people, bankers, and especially researchers have seen the rise of a new pole of power with contradictory logics for global governance.

At first, these were predictions, but over the last decade, some of them have clearly come true, with China leading the way. It has the capacity and the strength to participate in the construction of a more humanistic world. China's ambitious One Belt and one Road Initiative is the most striking example of this.

Today's DR Congo must understand the new global issues and challenges and integrate them into its diplomacy in order to contribute to the definition of the new world order as an active and independent player.

To do this, a stable internal dynamic combined with a global national strategy is strongly recommended in order not to put an end to the Sino-Congolese contract as desired by the Americans, but also to thwart the bad campaign plan that the Europeans are waging against Chinese power in the DR Congo.

Indeed, the Europeans for their part, shocked by the revision of their mining contracts in favour of China, are using their media to sell China badly in the international arena by brandishing the non-respect of environmental rules in its operations in the DR Congo. However, China is one of the actors who respect the laws of the DR Congo, especially in terms of resource exploitation. This way of acting of the Europeans, especially France and Belgium, is simply a sign of jealousy, of seeing a player evolving in power in practically all sectors. These European powers were simply trying to draw the attention of the Congolese state to put an end to the Sino-Congolese contract as well, because it gives much more power to China.

3 THE IMPACTS ON CONGO'S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

As it has been repeatedly stated in this research, natural resources have strategic importance because of their economic value and also because of the power they confer on the countries that possess them. The DR Congo's possession of strategic natural resources does not play a major role in terms of power and development, but rather a crucial role in the cycle of violence and armed conflict.

These strategic resources are, by virtue of the interest and envy they arouse in the international arena, at the root of the instability that has been tearing the country apart until these days, making its eastern part a conflict zone of prime concern in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

Natural resources are a source of financing and even motivation for the conflict. The minerals present in the war-torn territories in eastern DR Congo, where countless armed groups are swarming, are referred to as conflict minerals, because the armed groups use them to finance the rebellions. In addition, the chaos that reigned in the DR Congo in the early 1990s allowed the proliferation of rebel groups that have no other economic alternative and use violence to obtain money, political power and, above all, control of resources, and this continues to the present day²⁷.

It is in this context that Roland Marchal and Christine Messiant point out that the end of the Cold War has considerably modified the configuration of international relations, with consequences for wars²⁸. These wars enabled many major powers that were in search of strategic natural resources to sign defence agreements with countries that possessed them but whose countries were in a situation of armed conflict, in order to come to their aid militarily. This is the case of France which, by signing defence accords with Niger in 1961, sought to guarantee its access to precious raw materials.

Areva, the world's leading civil nuclear company, has been mining Nigerian uranium for forty years after the state. Areva, the second largest employer, bought a kilogram of uranium from Niger at 27,300 CFA francs (41 Euros), well below the market price of 122,000 CFA francs per kilogram (186 Euros)²⁹.

This fool's bargain dates back to the 1961 defence agreements. On the one hand, the former colonial power guarantees the security and stability of Niger. In exchange, this country reserves to it the primacy over mining resources³¹. The policy of the United States regarding access to oil reserves is another example on the issue of strategic natural resources. Aware of its increased dependence on politically unstable countries in the Middle East, the United States is seeking new strategic partners on the African continent³⁰.

As can be seen, there is a correlation between the availability of natural resources on the one hand; and civil war or internal conflict on the other. Violence, whether perpetrated by repressive regimes or by non-state actors in the context of civil war, remains a conflictual expression of tensions within a society, as is currently the case in the DR Congo.

This can be seen in a much more sophisticated form these days as the same foreigners are plundering by covering themselves in armed branches or rebellions. It should be remembered, however, that although the Great Lakes sub-region suffers from the conflict situations in which the DR Congo is involved, it is not always a stranger or an innocent victim³¹.

²⁷ Fiel Bafilemba and Timo Mueller, "The Networks of Eastern Congo's Two Most Powerful Armed Actors" The Enough Project, 2013, p.43.

²⁸ Marchal R. et Christine Messiant, *Une lecture symptomatique de quelques théorisations récentes des guerres civiles*, Cerl/Cnrs-Cea/Ehess, Paris, 2001, p.2

²⁹ Dikema, C., *Strategic natural, fossil and mining resources*, Ellipses, Paris, 2011, p.2.

³⁰ *Courrier international*, Niger - l'affaire Areva ou la fin du monopole français sur l'uranium nigérian, in *courrier international*, 9 août 2007.

³¹ Bailoni, M., (dir), *Conflits non armés autour des ressources stratégiques naturelles*, Ellipses, Paris, 2011, p.139.

In the light of the above, it should be noted that these rivalries between actors are likely to have several negative impacts on the sustainable development of the DR Congo in the coming days, including: the continuation of armed conflicts and the plundering of strategic resources, the risk of the outbreak of the Third World War and the balkanization of the country long desired by the West with the aim of illegally exploiting the country's resources. Finally, the regression of the DR Congo's economy. The following lines explain in detail all these consequences of the confrontation between the actors.

3.1 THE CONTINUATION OF ARMED CONFLICTS, ILLEGAL EXPLOITATION, LOOTING OF STRATEGIC NATURAL RESOURCES AND RISK OF THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE CONGOLESE STATE

The DR Congo has for several decades been torn apart by political crises, followed by civil wars before, during and after its independence in 1960. It faces recurrent insecurity. The eastern part remains the most fragile in terms of security. Both North and South Kivu are still replete with a multitude of armed groups, both foreign and national. These groups report their existence in this part of the country through cases of abuses, killings and massacres against the peaceful population. In addition, there is the looting and illegal exploitation of the country's natural resources by these armed men still active in the region³².

It is currently very hard in the DR Congo to go even for one day without reports of acts of insecurity by occult elements, militias or negative forces operating in the eastern part of the DR Congo, which is very rich in natural resources. Just after the regular armies of the neighbouring states of the DRC, the relay of acts of predation has passed into the hands of small groups that are difficult to identify, nebulae that allow the string-pullers to extract not only financial dividends through the illicit exploitation of precious raw materials, but also to assure the effective control of this part of the national territory.

Moreover, the international community, which has not been able to find a lasting solution to all these facts despite the multiplication of intervention missions in the DR Congo, will one day be faced with a *fait accompli*, and one even wonders whether this international community is not complicit in all the misfortunes that the Congo is experiencing today. It will therefore not hesitate to support a solution that appears to be humanly and politically acceptable. It will be the culmination of a plan that has been simmered for a long time but which will never be agreed to by the Congolese people.

Moreover, the illicit exploitation of the DR Congo's strategic resources has made it possible to build up real "war economies". This criminal practice has fostered and maintained arms trafficking mafia networks while implying violence in the DR Congo. The illegal marketing of these minerals makes it possible to finance warlords and criminal armed groups instead of contributing to the development of the Congolese people, who are the legitimate holders of these minerals.

This trafficking in strategic resources includes both national and international exchanges of fraudulent origin or related to the commission of a crime. In fact, for more than a decade, the African continent has been affected by the violent network of mafia criminals as a result of access to natural and strategic resources found in the DR Congo, all means are possible to see that these resources are accessed allowing the rapid enriching of some while others die as if they were flies, and this is experienced almost daily in the eastern part of the DR Congo, a part that abounds in large part, the strategic resources of the country.

The Congolese people of North and South Kivu can no longer stand the daily killings, forced displacement of populations, mass rapes, kidnappings, looting, trafficking of all kinds, corruption, social imbalances, ecological losses, impunity of the armed forces and other authorities. In this situation, the Congolese of Greater Kivu now feel that the DR Congo is no longer ruled. Violence has reached an unacceptable level. And with a direct confrontation of actors in a country already torn apart by recurrent wars, the DR Congo, which has become a field of strategic competition between the powers, is in danger of disappearing as a state, hence;

3.2 RISK OF THE OUTBREAK OF WARS AND THE BALKANIZATION OF THE DR CONGO

The political and administrative history of the DR Congo tells that Congo-Kinshasa experienced between 1996-1997, the first Congo war, which has been described as a war of liberation, and between 1998-2003, the « Second Congo War », otherwise known as « the Great African War », « the First African World War » or « the Second National War of Liberation ». This conflict, which marked the history of mankind after the Second World War, was at the root of several unfortunate incidents, among others, numerous massacres, rapes, looting of natural resources, killings, etc., leaving the DR Congo in a catastrophic situation that continues to this day.

This war, which has its origins in the Rwandan genocide of 1994, but also in the events linked to Burundi, which had caused the flight in these two countries (Burundi and Rwanda) of the Hutus towards the east of the DR Congo, had involved 9 African countries and several armed groups supported on the one hand by powers and on the other hand by multinational companies operating in the natural resources sector. This war led to the destruction of the economy of the DR Congo; several investors had moved away from this country

³² Honoré Ngbanda, *crime organisé en Afrique centrale : révélation sur les réseaux Rwandais et occidentaux*, éd. du bois, Paris, 2004, p.7.

whose security situation left much to be desired, the communication infrastructures were also destroyed, etc. It should also be mentioned that “strategic” natural resources were used to fuel the war and not to develop the country.

These few historical facts that I have mentioned in the lines above, sufficiently show the risk of a direct confrontation between the powers under review on Congolese territory and the potential damage that this can cause in the DR Congo in that, if already 9 African countries and 30 armed groups supported by certain powers have been able to bring down the Congolese state, how much more so from direct confrontations between powers themselves.

Nowadays, China, which is being fought by France, Belgium and the USA in the quest for strategic natural resources, is proving its worth in this country in practically all areas, but more particularly in the field of infrastructure, without neglecting the contribution of other partners including France, Belgium and the USA. China has a special place in the DR Congo because of the package it has at its disposal in its investments in this country, unlike the other powers mentioned above.

However, if ever a solution is not found between the Congolese state and its partners in the face of this cold war over the strategic resources to which these powers are devoting themselves, people will see in the coming days the formation of two blocs as was the case during the Second World War where, on the one hand, there will be China in alliance with most of the African states, including the DR Congo, which believes in it and considers it to be its model of development.

Besides China and African countries, there will also be powers such as Russia and other Western and even Asian powers that will align themselves behind China. On the other hand, there will be the USA, France and Belgium in alliance with their African satellites such as Rwanda and Uganda, but also with Western and Asian powers that will confront each other on Congolese territory. Each of these powers will seek to show its strength on the international level and this will have repercussions on all humanity, especially when people know that the 3rd World War will be a war of resources and there is a strong probability that it will be unleashed in Congo-Kinshasa. This is not desirable the DR Congo has experienced several wars that have caused more than 6, 000,000 deaths³³, which is abnormal for a state like Congo.

Moreover, if ever there is a direct confrontation between these actors, this confrontation could be at the root of the implementation of the balkanization of the DR Congo. In fact, each of these actors will seek to control entities bursting with natural resources that are strategic for their economies. However, it is known that the DR Congo has strategic resources in practically the whole of the national territory, so there is a risk that the DR Congo will be completely dismembered to the benefit of the actors in confrontation and their allies.

The project of balkanization of the DR Congo has always been on the menu of powers such as Belgium, Germany and the USA. These powers are no longer waiting for the DR Congo to go through a disastrous situation in order to influence the concert of nations to see their plan for balkanization executed.

In the case of Belgium, for example, history tells that around the 1960s, just after independence, Belgium, a former colony of the DR Congo, sought to maintain the jewels of its crown in the former great province of Katanga, the richest in mineral resources. In order to do so, it provoked the secession of this province. This situation created a civil war but unfortunately for it and fortunately for the DR Congo, this war was brought under control around 1965 with the arrival of Mobutu in power, thus defeating this Machiavellian project.

Concerning the USA, Patrick Mbeko⁵⁶ reveals that already in June 1996, shortly before the first Congo war, Stephen Metz³⁴, had submitted a working paper to the Pentagon on the possible dismantling of the DR Congo. According to Metz, given the state of decay in Mobutu's Zaire at the time, the United States had to accompany the disintegration of the country, while opening “channels of communication with the new states” that would emerge. A few months later, in October 1996, Walter Kansteiner agreed³⁵.

Not leaving their project to balkanize the DR Congo, the United States had in 2013, through Johnnie Carson⁵⁹ in front of the Brookings Institutions, to say that it was important to apply to the Congolese crisis that the country was going through at that time, the crisis exit scheme that had been applied to the former Yugoslavia and Sudan. And like any informed analyst, the results of this « crisis exit » plan for these two countries were: the balkanization of these two great countries.

Moreover, around 1997, politicians and members of several German Non-Governmental Organizations had to propose to the members of the civil society of the Kivu³⁶ to convince the inhabitants of this part of the DR Congo to accept to detach from the DR Congo and to annex Rwanda in order to benefit from a project of the “Marshall Plan” that Germany and the European Union had at their

³³ Report of the Ministry of Defence of the DR Congo, 2016, p.33.

³⁴ Stephen Metz, professor at the US Army War College

³⁵ Walter Kansteiner, is the son of a Chicago coltan dealer and former member of the Department of Defense Task Force on Strategic Minerals.

³⁶ Kivu is one of the provinces of DR Congo, rich in natural resources such as gold, coltan, cassiterite and tin

disposal. This proposal was rejected by members of civil society in the Kivu, who swear by the total unity of the Congo. Curiously, this same Marshall Plan was also proposed in 2013 by Belgium at the United Nations General Assembly.

It is therefore understandable that these powers, which are campaigning for the balkanization of the DR Congo, would simply like the country to be split up so that they have the opportunity to impose on the new states that will be created following a potential balkanization new leader who will let them exploit natural resources without much conditionality. For, with the new mining code of March 2018, these powers no longer have any room for manoeuvre. This is where China is gaining ground in the DR Congo because its partnership signed with the DR Congo creates trust between the two partners and everyone has an interest in it. In the light of all these facts, the DR Congo must avoid living through events that could lead to its balkanization.

3.3 RECESSION OF THE CONGOLESE ECONOMY

The DR Congo's economy is mainly based on its natural resources and is largely dependent on the outside world. The rivalry between international actors exploiting strategic resources will have an impact on the taxes and royalties that these actors pay to the DR Congo, allowing it to adjust its budget, which depends largely on its resources.

This is why a diversification of the Congolese economy is necessary in order to avoid falling into such a situation. Also, the confrontation between these powers is a risk of blocking the various aid and donations that the DR Congo receives from all these powers. In these days, for example, within the framework of the corona virus disease, China has just brought sanitary assistance to the DR Congo in order to face this situation which has hit the world economy. Avoiding this confrontation would help the DR Congo not to suffer all these negative consequences as listed above.

4 CONCLUSION

Throughout this paper, it has been demonstrated that the role of the international actors (powers) and the states neighbouring the DR Congo is to exploit the strategic resources in this country, not only in order to meet the needs of their respective industries but also because these resources, due to their importance, constitute one of the challenges of international relations.

However, it was noted that rivalries or conflicts between these actors are due in particular to the revisions of mining contracts in favour of China and to the detriment of Western actors like USA and also to the China's rise in power on the international scene. All these elements create jealousy in the camp of Western actors, particularly in the camp of its main competitor, the USA. Having lost the primacy of the exploitation of the DR Congo's strategic resources, the USA is working to compete with China to put an end to the Sino-Congolese contract, which gives China that primacy. They are using all means to seduce the Congolese state to accept their proposal.

Furthermore, conflicts between the actors, poor governance in the natural resources sector and the lack of strong political leadership in the DR Congo are major obstacles to sustainable development in the DR Congo. In our opinion, we believe that the Congolese State and, above all, the new President of the DR Congo must not give in to the proposals made to them by the United States, because history shows that the American multinationals lost interest in the DR Congo when the prices of raw materials fell sharply, while, at the same time, China signed a contract with the DR Congo because it had a vision of the future. And nowadays, it is almost impossible to talk about the reconstruction of the DR Congo without mentioning China, thanks to the Sino-Congolese contract. China plays a strategic role. Its strategic partnership with the DR Congo should rather be strengthened with the DR Congo without neglecting the Western bloc, in particular the USA, because, in a liberal context, the plurality of partners is a great advantage for the development of the DR Congo.

In addition, the promotion of good governance of the natural resources sector by the Congolese state will help the DR Congo to undertake a large-scale diplomatic action that will enable it to negotiate with the powers that be with a view to the establishment of a "concerted exploitation" of resources by the various actors. This strategy appears to be difficult to materialize but remains, in our opinion, the best way to avoid a confrontation between actors, which has many negative effects on the sustainable development of the DR Congo. This concerted exploitation will enable the Congolese state to achieve a real balance between the powers.

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