**Ducking a Congo Odyssey**

By Joseph Klein

April 16, 2010

Front Page Magazine

Original Source:

*http://frontpagemag.com/2010/04/16/ducking-a-congo-odyssey-2/*

Africa has been a heart-felt concern of U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice for years.

Rice joined the Clinton administration’s National Security Council in 1995 as a special assistant to the President and senior director for African Affairs. In 1997, Rice moved into the high-profile role of Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. During the years of the Bush administration, she joined the Brookings Institution and wrote about Africa.

Before taking up her present position at the UN, Rice advocated using American military power to directly intervene in African conflicts, including in the Darfur region of Sudan, as part of a large well-funded UN peacekeeping force.

Rice’s Afro-centric agenda may well stem in part from the horrors she saw in the aftermath of the Rwandan massacre. After her visit to Rwanda in 1994, she said:

“I saw hundreds, if not thousands, of decomposing corpses outside and inside a church. Corpses that had been hacked up. It was the most horrible thing I’ve ever seen. It makes you mad. It makes you determined. It makes you know that even if you’re the last lone voice and you believe you’re right, it is worth every bit of energy you can throw into it.”

Yet despite all of her concern with African issues, she has decided not to take part in an upcoming Security Council visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo. According to Mr. Gerard Araud, Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations who will be going on the trip, its purpose is to hold “discussions with the Congolese authorities and all the concerned actors in the Democratic Republic of Congo to prepare the reconfiguration of the mandate of the MONUC [United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo] and to discuss the future of the United Nations presence in Congo.”

Remarking on the fact that France and Great Britain were the only permanent members of the Security Council sending ambassador level representatives on the trip, Ambassador Araud said: “Of course we would have preferred to have more Permanent Representatives for this visit.”

Why is Susan Rice staying home rather than joining the Security Council contingent visiting an African country where, in Ambassador Araud’s words, there “is still sexual violence against women, there are still humanitarian problems, an outburst of violence between displaced persons coming back and the population.”

To put things into some perspective, the so-called Second Congo War, which began in 1998 and supposedly ended officially in 2003 (but has in reality continued), is the world’s deadliest conflict since World War II, killing 5.4 million people. Two hundred thousand Congolese girls and women have been raped, some by the UN’s own peacekeepers and civilians who had been sent to the Congo nation to help its people.

In her testimony before the Subcommittee on Africa, House International Relations Committee in 1998, Susan Rice (who was then the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs) said:

“The Congolese war–an unprecedented regionalized war that has drawn at least six armies onto Congolese soil–is potentially among the most dangerous conflicts on the globe. Credible reports of inter-ethnic violence, communal massacres, and attacks against non-combatants because of their ethnicity echo the tragedies of the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the subsequent alleged massacres inside Zaire in late 1996 and 1997…The United States, for our part, must continue to work with the Congo and other fragile African nations and governments, especially during the most volatile and vulnerable stages of their development. Africa’s progress will not be linear, nor is it assured. Yet, our own national security is tied too closely to the continent’s economic and political success for the United States to be a passive bystander at such a critical stage in Africa’s history.”

Conditions have improved somewhat since then, but the situation remains “fragile” according to French Ambassador Araud. The violence continues. The BBC and Human Rights Watch have uncovered evidence of a massacre in the Democratic Republic of Congo just last December in which more than 300 people were killed. It was carried out by rebels of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), a shadowy group that has committed numerous atrocities in Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda as well as the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Yet Ambassador Rice – who was so moved by what happened in Rwanda – is shirking her responsibility to help lead the UN’s effort to stabilize the Democratic Republic of Congo by failing to join the Security Council visit for a first-hand examination of present conditions and talks with the country’s leaders. Had she decided to go and raise the profile of the trip by her presence, more could perhaps be accomplished including a visit to the area of Congo outside of the capital city of Kinshasa, where the LRA’s most recent slaughter of 300 civilians took place.

I have contacted the press office of the U.S. Mission to the United Nations to inquire why Ambassador Rice is staying behind. No one has returned my calls.

One possible reason for Rice’s decision, according to Russell Lee Matthews of the Inner City Press who also was unsuccessful in getting a straight answer from the U.S. Mission, is that she wants to be present during the beginnings of negotiations on a resolution to impose additional sanctions on Iran. Given the fact that the trip will last just four days, it does not appear that she would miss any substantive negotiations. And the final decisions on the sanctions, which are weeks if not months away, will be made above her pay grade in any event.

Another possible reason is that Ambassador Rice was so personally affected by the suffering she observed on a prior trip to the East Congo, particularly the plight of women and children, that she did not want to experience such emotions again. However, it is precisely those women and children who continue to need her moral support and the spotlight that she can bring to their plight.

Ambassador Rice owes the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo an explanation for her no-show.