By LYDIA POLGREEN

BISIE, Congo — Deep in the forest, high on a ridge stripped bare of trees and vines, the colonel sat atop his mountain of ore. In track pants and a T-shirt, he needed no uniform to prove he was a soldier, no epaulettes to reveal his rank. Everyone here knows that Col. Samy Matumbo, commander of a renegade brigade of army troops that controls this mineral-rich territory, is the master of every hilltop as far as the eye can see.

Columns of men, bent double under 110-pound sacks of tin ore, emerged from the colonel’s mine shaft. It had been carved hundreds of feet into the mountain with Iron Age tools powered by human sweat, muscle and bone. Porters carry the ore nearly 30 miles on their backs, a two-day trek through a mud-slicked maze to the nearest road and a world hungry for the laptops and other electronics that tin helps create, each man a link in a long global chain.

On paper, the exploration rights to this mine belong to a consortium of British and South African investors who say they will turn this perilous and exploitative operation into a safe, modern beacon of prosperity for Congo. But in practice, the consortium’s workers cannot even set foot on the mountain. Like a mafia, Colonel Matumo and his men extort, tax and appropriate at will, draining this vast operation, worth as much as $80 million a year.

The exploitation of this mountain is emblematic of the failure to right this sprawling African nation after many years of tyranny and war, and of the deadly role the country’s immense natural wealth has played in its misery.

Despite a costly effort to unite the nation’s many militias into a single national army, plus billions of dollars spent on international peacekeepers and an election in 2006 that brought democracy to Congo for the first time in four decades, the government is unable or unwilling...
ing to force these fighters — who wear government army uniforms and collect government paychecks — to leave the mountain.

The ore these fighters control is central to the chaos that plagues Congo, helping to perpetuate a conflict in which as many as five million people have died since the mid-1990s, mostly from hunger and disease. In the latest chapter, fighting between government troops and a renegade general named Laurent Nkunda has forced hundreds of thousands of civilians here in eastern Congo to flee and push the nation to the brink of a new regional war.

The proceeds of mines like this one, along with the illegal tributes collected on roads and border crossings controlled by rebel groups, militias and government soldiers, help bankroll virtually every armed group in the region.

No roads lead to Bisie. This hidden town of 10,000 lies about 30 miles down a winding, muddy path through dense, equatorial forest. Built entirely for the mine, it is a cloistered world of expropriation and violence that mirrors the broad crisis in Congo.

This is Africa's resource curse: The wealth is unearthed by the poor, controlled by the strong, then sold to a world largely oblivious of its origins.

Under Colonel Mutumbo, Bisie is a Darwinian place where those with weapons and money leech off a desperate horde.

The chokehold begins far from the mine. At the trailhead, a burly soldier demands 50 cents from each person entering the narrow trail to the mine. A clamoring crowd hands wrinkled bills to the soldier, who opens the wooden gate a crack to let in those with cash.

At the other end of the trail, at the base of the mountain, another crowd forms at the gate into Bisie. Porters exhausted from the two-day trek sprawl on felled trees, waiting for soldiers to inspect their loads and extract another tribute. The price is usually 10 percent of entering merchandise and cash.

The men at the checkpoints describe these payments as taxes. But the people of Bisie do not get much in return. The village is a filthy Warren of mud huts. Hundreds of haphazard latrines flood narrow, trash-filled alleyways. Disease courses through the town, carried by water from a river that is used for everything from washing clothes to cleaning orts. Jawbones of slaughtered cows and goats stud the riverbed. When it rains, the river overflows, spreading cholera and dysentery.

In some ways, Bisie is a thriving commercial town. It has makeshift theaters showing bootleg kung fu movies on televisions powered by sputtering generators. Its bars are stocked with Johnny Walker whiskey and Primus beer, each bottle carried through the jungle. There is no telephone service, but a ham radio system passes messages between the mine and the outside world. It has hotels that double as brothels. There is even a clapboard church.

But these meager comforts do not come cheap. A bowl of rice and beans costs $3 here, six times the price along the main road. Mud huts rent for $50 a month or more, in part because opportunism is the town ethos.

A History of Plunder

The saga of Bisie is merely another chapter in Congo's epic tragedy. Though blessed with an incomparable endowment of minerals and water and abundant fertile land, this vast nation in the heart of Africa has known little but domination and war since its founding as a colony under King Leopold II of Belgium in the 19th century.

The bloodshed and terror have always been driven in part by the endless global thirst for Congo's resources, "the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience," as the novelist Joseph Conrad put it.

Just as the pneumatic tire was invented, King Leopold began sucking every last drop of rubber from Congo's jungles, his militia killing or maiming anyone who stood in his way. Generations later, the country's vast reserves of cobalt, a mineral essential for building fighter jets, helped the longtime ruler of the nation then known as Zaire, Mobutu Sese Soko, keep the United States firmly behind him during the cold war despite his obstinately kleptocratic and repressive ways.

Congo's riches have played a starring role in the conflict that has unfolded in the past decade. The war began in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide, when the perpetrators of that slaughter fled into neighboring Congo. Rwanda backed an effort to flush out the killers in 1998, but it soon led to a huge regional conflict that descended into a war of plunder by half a dozen nations and countless homogrown rebel groups.

A peace deal officially ended the war in 2003, and elections in 2006 brought Congo its first democratically chosen leaders in more than four decades. And in many parts of the nation, which covers an area the size of Western Europe, life is slowly returning to normal. International investors, especially China, have begun pouring billions into Congo's economy.

But here on Congo's eastern edge, the war never really ended. The unfinished battles over the Rwandan genocide play out on Congolese soil among armed groups fueled by lucrative mines like the one in Bisie and by other mines controlled by the Hutu militias that carried out the genocide.

Those fighters have been hiding in the jungles of eastern Congo for more than a decade, sowing terror and reaping profits from the nation's minerals. Other rebel groups, including Mr. Nkunda's largely Tutsi militia, have gleaned profits from illegal taxes levied when valuable minerals and other resources pass through territory they control, ac-
According to analysts and government officials in the region.

The Discovery of Tin Ore

In 2002, a hunter discovered chunks of tin ore, known as cassiterite, lying on the slopes of a mountain deep in the jungle in eastern Congo. Almost overnight, hordes of miners arrived, driven by fevered reports of piles of ore lying around waiting to be carted away. But civilians were not the only ones interested. Armed groups fought pitched battles over who would control the area. In 2004, a group of Mai Mai fighters allied with the government took control.

Under the terms of the peace agreement that ended the war, the militia was absorbed into the national army and became the 85th Brigade. The fighters were supposed to be sent for military training and then deployed around the country to dilute the influence of regional militias.

But the 85th refused to disband. Its commander, Colonel Matumo, is known as a ruthless warrior with a keen eye for business who believes, as most Mai Mai do, that he has special powers connected to water that make him all but invincible. During the war these fighters would wear drain plugs dangling from their bulging biceps as amulets of their potency. These days the brigade’s members have mostly abandoned this practice in favor of the more practical army greens.

They violently enforce a system of illegal taxation of every worker, merchant and mineral trader who comes to the mine.

That system has ensured that they and their allies have skimmed millions of dollars in the years the militia has controlled the mine — a costly, lost opportunity for a nation desperately in need of development.

Tin has replaced lead content in the solder used to make many electronic devices. And as the price shot up in recent years, to a high of $25,000 a ton in May, Colonel Matumo and his men staked out a whole ridge of the mine complex as their personal property. Senior commanders of the brigade have built large houses and opened businesses, like hotels and bars, with the proceeds of the mine.

A company called Mining and Processing Congo bought the rights to search for tin ore at the mine in 2006. But the militia has effectively barred the company, which is owned by a consortium of South African and British investors, shooting at its helicopter and chasing its representatives from the premises.

When the company started working on a road to link the mine to the main road, local officials blocked the route. When it began working on a campsite for its geologists to begin prospecting, soldiers opened fire on the workers, injuring several, company officials said.

“We have all our documents and permits in order,” said Brian Christophers, the weary managing director of the company. “We have written to the head of the military, the minister of mines and even the president. But there are no rules in Congo, just the rule of the gun.”

Mr. Christophers said that his company was prepared to help pay not just for a road to the mine but also for schools, clinics and a hydroelectric power station. It also promised to invite government agencies to enforce labor standards. But none of them have had the chance.

Indeed, some workers are suspicious of the company’s plans, fearing that a road would put thousands of porters out of work and that mechanized mining would drastically reduce employment here. The militia has tapped this unease to convince some workers and local officials that the company will simply abscond with the minerals and leave the local people empty-handed.

The militia levies a tax on every enterprise here. For the small-time peddlers who sell tiny packets of laundry soap, cooking oil and powdered milk, the tax is usually $20 a week, a hefty slice of profits. From prosperous brothels, bar owners and mineral traders, the soldiers usually take a percentage, businesspeople here say.

One Congolese intelligence official estimated that the militia took in $300,000 to $600,000 a month in illegal taxation alone, not including the money it made from mining tin.

The workers preyed on by the militia toil in hand-dug tunnels as deep as 600 feet that are held up precariously by

ENVIRONMENTAL SCARS

When ore is cleaned or clothes are washed, the dirty runoff goes into the fetid river coursing through Bisie.
wood pillars. Some of the workers are children, especially in the summer, when desperate parents send boys here to earn cash for the next year's school fees.

The tunnels are pitch-black and suffocatingly narrow. They often fill with dangerous fumes. Miners sometimes spend 48 hours straight working in the tunnels. The open pits are dangerous, too: heavy rains cause mudslides and collapses. Cave-ins, mudslides and gas explosions kill and maim an unknown number of workers every year.

On a late summer afternoon at the mine, a tunnel collapsed and crushed a miner's leg. Another worker carried the man on his back as the injured miner cried in agony, his eyes darting wildly. Blood carved tracks down his forehead and cheeks.

"My wife is pregnant," the miner moaned. "Jesus, mama, please."

The man had broken his leg, and his left shoulder was sliced open. He gritted his teeth and screamed, his eyes darting wildly. Blood carved tracks down his forehead and cheeks.

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Musamaria Luseke, 22, is what passes for a doctor here. He is one of a handful of health workers who have basic first aid training and earn cash by selling medicine to sick and injured miners.

These kinds of injuries happen all the time, he said.

Mr. Luseke had painkillers in his metal box, but he was charging 25 cents a tablet.

"I have to eat, too," he said.

Solidarity is in short supply here. An argument broke out over who would pay a porter $20 to carry the injured miner down the mountain.

"I don't tell him to go work," shouted the owner of the tunnel, who nevertheless ponied up the $20.

Hard-rock miners who work deep in the tunnels say the money they can earn on a productive day makes up for the risk. A young man who gave his name as Pypina said he made $200 on a good shift.

"I told my friend Serge that such days were rare.

"We have some days where we find nothing, where we die and dig for nothing," he said.

Both of the young men are high school dropouts who came to the mine to work for the summer but quickly found themselves trapped in a web of debt. Serge said he hoped to go back to school, but already he had been at the mine for a year and had saved nothing.

Pypina had given up on college.

"I'll buy a car," Pypina said, flexing his biceps to admire the dollar sign tattooed there.

But he is a long way from buying that car. When he makes a bit of money he has to pay his debts first. With anything left, he tries to save the loneliness of life.

"First, you need a woman," he said.

Pypina said he paid $100 to have a woman with him for 34 hours. They go on dates to the clapboard bars in the market, and he shells out $100 or more for whiskey, beer and gin. She cooks for him.

"She is like a wife for a day," he explained.

"I am a man," he said, describing why he spent so much on pleasure-seeking. "I cannot live without a woman. And only God knows what tomorrow will bring."

One of Many Problems

Colonel Matumo declined to be interviewed for this article. But he made no effort to conceal his control over the mine, openly supervising the production and the sale of dozens of sacks of ore. A hotel he owns doubles as an ore depot, and each morning porters arrive to carry his latest load to the main road for sale.

A major who said he had been sent by Congo's top military brass to assess the situation said the government wanted the militia to leave but had too many other security problems to contend with. Mr. Nkunda, the renegade Tutsi general, has had a fierce insurgency in another part of eastern Congo, and the army has so far been unable to defeat him.

"Samy is just one of many problems," the major, who refused to give his name, said of Colonel Matumo. "If we can't deal with Nkunda, how can we force Samy to go when he does not want to leave?"

Bisie may be the middle of nowhere, but the ore it produces is tightly linked to the global market. After porters bear the loads, often heavier than the men themselves, the ore reaches middlemen along the main road. One such middleman, Bakwe Selomba, said he did not mind paying the militiamen because the payment guaranteed his investment.

"To be honest, it is better for us that they are there," he said. "I can send my buyers walking through the jungle with lots of money, but nobody will touch them as long as we pay the tax. It protects us."

The ore is then trucked a few miles down a stretch of pavement to the village of Kilambo. There, on a slightly curved stretch of road, Soviet-era cargo planes take off and land, as many as two dozen times a day. The carcasses of two planes that presumably botched this tricky maneuver lay strewn to one side of the makeshift runway, covered in black and green mold.

The flights land in Goma, the provincial capital, where other middlemen buy and process the ore for export. Alexis Makabuza's Global Mining Company is one of these buyers. Amid the sorting and cleaning equipment of its rudimentary processing plant sit dozens of barrels, each stenciled with the address of Malaysian Smelting Company Berhad, a major tin smelter.

Mr. Makabuza said he sold to the company via a minerals broker.

In a handwritten contract between a local government official and a representative of Mr. Makabuza's company signed in 2005, they agree to pay a large percentage of its earnings from the mine in exchange for a guarantee of security. Colonel Matumo's militia is the only force operating in the area, and most of this money ended up in his hands, according to security officials in the region.

Mr. Makabuza shrugged off questions about his business dealings with the militia.

"We follow all the rules," he said. "I am just a buyer like anybody else."

Debating a Solution

Congo's tin ore represents a relatively small slice of the world market, but in recent years supplies have been so tight that efforts to stop mining at Bisie have caused price spikes. This year, the government tried to shut down the mine, but it was quickly reopened by local authorities who were concerned about the economic and political costs of putting thousands of miners out of work and cutting off the cash flow to a volatile renegade military commander.

Indeed, many fear banning exports of tin ore from Congo would cause more problems than it would solve.

"A blanket ban on tin from Congo is nonsense because it penalizes the millions dependent on the sector the most," said Nicholas Garrett, a mining expert who has written reports on Congo for the World Bank and other institutions.

Putting those people out of work would simply invite another rebellion, Mr. Garrett said.

The government has repeatedly asked Colonel Matumo's men to leave the mine. In a written order issued in August 2007, Col. Delphin Kalimbi, deputy commander of the army in North Kivu, the province where, according to sources, that elements of the armed forces were profiting from the mine and laid out a plan to replace the renegade brigade with loyal soldiers. But the orders were never followed up, and the militia's grip on the mine seems tighter than ever.

Julien Paluku, the governor of North Kivu, said the government must move cautiously. Already faced with a renegade Tutsi general, who has large swaths of the region under siege, the government can scarcely afford to pick a fight with another armed group, he said.

"Solving this problem will take time," Governor Paluku said.

Some analysts say the situation in Bisie is so blatant that its very persistence is evidence of collusion between the militia and powerful politicians.

"Unless immediate action is taken to transfer these soldiers out of Bisie mine and to prosecute those responsible for the large-scale looting of minerals, we
can only conclude that these activities are sanctioned at the highest levels," Patrick Alley of the anticorruption organization Global Witness, based in London, said in a statement.

In May, Senators Sam Brownback of Kansas and Richard J. Durbin of Illinois introduced a bill to require certifying minerals from Congo. "Without knowing it, tens of millions of people in the United States may be putting money in the pockets of some of the worst human rights violators in the world, simply by using a cellphone or laptop computer," Senator Durbin, a Democrat, said at the time.

Here in Biste, daily life offers few clues that such information age technology exists. Isolated and indebted, almost none of the town's workers have any clue what tin is actually used for.

"It is for weapons," suggested Djuma Assualani, 21. "Kalashnikov, bombs. They make war with it."

"It's gold," shouted Makami Kimima, 18, who came to the mine to earn money to go back to school but ended up in debt instead. His fellow miners jeered at his ignorance.

"It is something like gold," he said, chastened. "It goes to America. And China. It makes people rich."
Like many children in Congo, Imani Mulumeo Derwa, 15, looks younger than he is.

By LYDIA POLGREEN  
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BISIE, Congo — The people who toil in the tin ore mine here are links in a long, global chain that reaches all the way to the cellphones and digital music players so ubiquitous in modern life.

At the very bottom of that chain, hunched beneath the blasting sun in a deep red gash near the base of a mountain, a 15-year-old named Imani Mulumeo Derwa sifted through ochre-colored earth this summer with his slender fingers.

In a small plastic bag, he stowed tiny rocks he hoped were tin ore. If the day went well, he might find enough ore to buy a plate of rice and beans. If not, he would fall asleep hungry on a dirt floor.

Every Thursday, he must hand over a day’s wages to Col. Samy Matumo’s men, who control the mountain and illegally extract taxes from every enterprise here. Imani arrived in July, hoping to save enough money
to return to school at the end of September. But by early August, he found himself trapped in a web of debt and despair.

“I am stuck here,” he said, his weary, almond-shaped eyes betraying traces of a war-tossed childhood otherwise invisible on his smooth, boyish face. “I want to go home but I can’t.”

On July 6, Imani arrived at the head of the winding 30-mile jungle trail leading to the mine at Bisie. He said he had joined a river of people streaming into the forest, men and women laden with crates of beer, sacks of rice and cartons of powdered milk, all destined for Bisie, a town in the middle of the jungle where, Imani had heard, a hardworking boy could earn a few hundred dollars by picking up bits of a certain heavy rock from the ground.

Like many children in this war-ravaged country, Imani looks younger than he is. He said he had spent much of his childhood in flight from the latest armed group swarming into his hometown, Walungu. The gnawing hunger of life on the run has left him stunted, a little more than four feet tall. His voice has not yet broken.

All that running meant he was far behind in school, having completed only the fourth grade. But he was determined to finish high school and go on to college. At the end of the school year, his mother, a widow, told him he would need to get a job and contribute something to the household, he said. So he left Walungu with friends on the back of a pickup truck, headed for the tin ore mine at Bisie.

Imani did not carry much with him on the journey. Everything fit in a small blue plastic bag: an extra pair of trousers, a notebook with the Unicef logo across its cover, a ballpoint pen and an empty wallet emblazoned with a fake Nike swoosh. At the entrance of the trail, he said, he took his last 200 francs, less than 50 cents, out of the wallet and handed them to the soldier watching the gate.

The walk to the mine was hard. Hills followed hills. Imani’s green plastic sandals struggled to grip the iridescent, mineral-rich mud. The mossy roots of soaring trees criss-crossed the path, creating a ropy web that battered his narrow ankles. He had brought no food and had to beg for leftovers from hungry porters, he said. To cool his parched throat he slurped water directly from the streams that bisect the trail. Many times he thought of turning back, of going home. But the lure of quick cash was strong.

“I didn’t want to give up,” he said. He could not face going home empty-handed.

Finally, after two days of walking, he arrived in Bisie, half-starved and exhausted.

The mine operates in a rigid hierarchy, and Imani struggled to find his place in it.
The highly skilled miners who work in tunnels sometimes 600 feet deep can make good money here, dividing the minerals they find 30-70 with the owner of the tunnel, usually a businessman or a soldier, with the owner getting the lion’s share.

These workers sometimes toil in 48-hour shifts in narrow, airless tunnels, with no safety gear beyond their dim headlamps. Because there is no industrial equipment or electricity here, the tunnels are built by hand and lined with wood. Cave-ins are common, and toxic gases fill the tunnels at times, sickening workers. It is impossible to say how many workers have been injured or killed because there are no authorities here to keep track.

A worker on a productive mine can make $200 on a good shift, but those days are few and far between. Moreover, those kinds of jobs are out of reach for boys like Imani, too young and weak to wield a steel mallet or clear heavy stones.

So Imani joined the other boys who sift earth discarded by bigger, stronger diggers, looking for bits of ore. He recorded the date of his arrival in his notebook and drew a makeshift calendar.

He recorded in his diary that he worked 2.1 hours the day he arrived and made 240 francs, less than 50 cents. That was the last entry.

"I wanted to keep track of what I earn," Imani said. "But so far I really haven’t earned anything."

Because he arrived penniless, he had to borrow money to buy food and rent a room. He happened upon Daniel Mubwirano, a friend of the family, who said he had space he could rent Imani. Imani joined three other boys sleeping on the floor of his room, scarcely six feet square.

Mr. Mubwirano, a stocky man with dark, deep-set eyes, was a new arrival, too. He had borrowed $200 from relatives to buy merchandise to sell here. Despite having a leg that is lame from an accident, he carried a sackload of salt, gin, cigarettes, powdered milk and soap through the forest into Bisie, determined to triple his money in a month and return home to his wife and three children.

But nothing had gone according to plan. He did not anticipate the inordinate expense of life here. Flooding in the tunnels meant fewer people had the cash to seek oblivion in his small plastic bottles of gin. Workers asked for credit, which he granted. He waited in vain to be paid.

"What choice do I have but to hope that someday they will pay?" he said.
And Mr. Mubwirano had not expected to have to fork over a good portion of his earnings to militiamen, who collect $20 in illegal taxes from him each week. That is in addition to the taxes he paid along the trail getting here: 10 percent of his merchandise and cash.

So when Imani showed up, he felt no compunction about asking the boy for $10 a month to sleep on a corner of the crowded $20-a-month room he already shared with two other boys. They also paid $10 each.

“We are all just trying to survive,” he said. “Everyone must look after himself.”

Imani said he had not known that Mr. Mubwirano was turning a profit on renting the floor of his squalid room, but he was not surprised. He has nowhere else to live.

Imani borrowed $10 worth of cassava flour from a merchant who also came from Walungu, imploring the man to take pity on him. But more than a month later the man was starting to harass him for payment. Imani keeps making excuses and promises.

“I am full of debt,” he said.

Back in Walungu, Imani and his friends would play soccer after school, slipping off rubber sandals to kick around a ball made of wadded-up plastic bags.

But in Bisie there is no flat surface on which to play soccer, just hills upon hills. To pass the evenings Imani and his friends prowl Bisie’s fetid alleyways. There is no room here for the pleasures of childhood. So the boys amuse themselves spying on prostitutes and sneaking pulls of rot-gut gin.

The worst is Thursday, when the soldiers come. For boys like Imani, the tax is 500 francs, about a dollar. But that is a whole day’s wages. When he does not have the money, he runs into the forest to hide.

“If you don’t pay they will kill you,” he said.

Although Imani wants to leave, he has no money to pay the taxes along the road. And his creditors would send soldiers to arrest him if he tried to escape.

“I can’t go home,” he said.
Battle Unfolds in a Poor Land
For the Riches Beneath the Soil

By LYDIA POLGREN

AIR MOUNTAINS, Niger —

Until last year, the only trigger Amoumoun Halil had pulled was the one on his livestock-vaccination gun. This spring, a battered Kalashnikov rifle rested uneasily on his shoulder. When he donned his stiff fatigues, his lopsided gait and smiling eyes stood out among his hard-faced guerrilla brethren.

Mr. Halil, a 40-year-old veterinary engineer, was a reluctant soldier in a rebellion that had broken out over an improbable — and as yet unrealized — bonanza in one of the world’s poorest countries.

A battle is unfolding on the stark mountains and scalloped dunes of northern Niger between a band of Tuareg nomads, who claim the riches beneath their homeland are being taken by a government that gives them little in return, and an army that calls the fighters drug traffickers and bandits.

It is a new front of an old war to control the vast wealth locked beneath African soil. Niger’s northern desert caps one of the world’s largest deposits of uranium, and demand for it has surged as global warming has increased interest in nuclear power. Growing economies like China and India are scouring the globe for the crumbly ore known as yellowcake. A French mining company is building the world’s largest uranium mine in northern Niger, and a Chinese state company is building another mine nearby.

Uranium could infuse Niger with enough cash to catapult it out of the kind of poverty that causes one in five Niger children to die before turning 5.

Or it could end in a calamitous war that leaves Niger more destitute than ever. Mineral wealth has fueled conflict across Africa for decades, a series of bloody, smash-and-grab rebellions that shattered nations. The misery wrought has left many Africans to conclude that mineral wealth is a curse.

Here in the Sahara, the uranium boom has given new life to longstanding grievances over land and power. For years, the Tuareg have struggled against a

Continued on Page A12
pale Tuareg tea, a potent brew poured into small glasses.

At such moments, Mr. Halil Aached for home. He thought of his newborn son, whom he had never seen. He wondered if he had made the right choice, leaving his family and taking up the way of the gun.

"Sometimes I have doubts," he said, stoking the embers of a campfire.

In late June, Mr. Halil was on a mission when the thwacking sound of helicopter rotors suddenly broke the desert silence, he said. There had long been rumors that the government had acquired attack helicopters, a power that would fundamentally change the conflict.

In the firefight, 17 rebels were killed. Mr. Halil managed to get away and fled to Algeria, leaving the rebellion and taking up his studies once again. He hoped, at last, to become a real veterinarian.

"I won't abandon the struggle, but I will continue by other means," he said.

The fighters left behind, in bases deep in the mountains, vow that they are there to stay.
Congo's Riches Plundered by Renegade Troops

In the town of 10,000 lies about 30 miles down a narrow, trash-filled alleyway. In the latest chapter, fighting between government troops and a hordes of miners arrived, driven by feverish hopes of an easy fortune. In 2002, a hunter discovered chunks of tin ore in a forest near Bisie. The militia levies a tax on every entrance to the mine. Its profits from illegal taxes levied at the gate into Bisie have been a primary source of strength for this small but powerful group. The proceeds of mines like this one, as many as five million people have died since the war began in 1998, mostly from starvation, disease. In the latest chapter, fighting between government troops and a hordes of miners arrived, driven by feverish hopes of an easy fortune. In 2002, a hunter discovered chunks of tin ore in a forest near Bisie. The militia levies a tax on every entrance to the mine. Its profits from illegal taxes levied at the gate into Bisie have been a primary source of strength for this small but powerful group. The proceeds of mines like this one, as many as five million people have died since the war began in 1998, mostly from starvation, disease. In the latest chapter, fighting between government troops and a hordes of miners arrived, driven by feverish hopes of an easy fortune. In 2002, a hunter discovered chunks of tin ore in a forest near Bisie. The militia levies a tax on every entrance to the mine. Its profits from illegal taxes levied at the gate into Bisie have been a primary source of strength for this small but powerful group. The proceeds of mines like this one, as many as five million people have died since the war began in 1998, mostly from starvation, disease. In the latest chapter, fighting between government troops and a hordes of miners arrived, driven by feverish hopes of an easy fortune. In 2002, a hunter discovered chunks of tin ore in a forest near Bisie. The militia levies a tax on every entrance to the mine. Its profits from illegal taxes levied at the gate into Bisie have been a primary source of strength for this small but powerful group. The proceeds of mines like this one, as many as five million people have died since the war began in 1998, mostly from starvation, disease. In the latest chapter, fighting between government troops and a hordes of miners arrived, driven by feverish hopes of an easy fortune. In 2002, a hunter discovered chunks of tin ore in a forest near Bisie. The militia levies a tax on every entrance to the mine. Its profits from illegal taxes levied at the gate into Bisie have been a primary source of strength for this small but powerful group. The proceeds of mines like this one, as many as five million people have died since the war began in 1998, mostly from starvation, disease. In the latest chapter, fighting between government troops and a hordes of miners arrived, driven by feverish hopes of an easy fortune. In 2002, a hunter discovered chunks of tin ore in a forest near Bisie. The militia levies a tax on every entrance to the mine. Its profits from illegal taxes levied at the gate into Bisie have been a primary source of strength for this small but powerful group. The proceeds of mines like this one, as many as five million people have died since the war began in 1998, mostly from starvation, disease. In the latest chapter, fighting between government troops and a hordes of miners arrived, driven by feverish hopes of an easy fortune. In 2002, a hunter discovered chunks of tin ore in a forest near Bisie. The militia levies a tax on every entrance to the mine. Its profits from illegal taxes levied at the gate into Bisie have been a primary source of strength for this small but powerful group. The proceeds of mines like this one, as many as five million people have died since the war began in 1998, mostly from starvation, disease.
"I am a man," he said, describing why he had to work for the summer but quickly found himself trapped in a web of violence. "I'll buy a car," Pypina said, flexing his biceps to admire the dollar sign tatooed there. "I don't think I'll go far today," he said, dodging a question about his business dealings with the militia. Mr. Luseke had painkillers in his medicine chest. "I have to eat, too," he said. "I can't live without a woman. And he spent so much on pleasure-seeking. I'll follow all the rules," he said, just as a buyer might do.

There are few who do not work for the summer but quickly find themselves trapped in a web of violence. "I'll buy a car," Pypina said, flexing his biceps to admire the dollar sign tattooed there. "I don't think I'll go far today," he said, dodging a question about his business dealings with the militia. Mr. Luseke had painkillers in his medicine chest. "I have to eat, too," he said. "I can't live without a woman. And he spent so much on pleasure-seeking."

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A Battle Unfolds in Northern Niger for the Riches That Lie Beneath the Soil

A12

Niger Movement for Justice fighters near Tsarayi. The group has demanded, among other things, that wealth generated by each region benefit its people.

Resource-Rich Desert

Niger is the fifth-largest producer of uranium in the world. The uranium mining area, in the north of the country, is home to the nomadic Tuareg people.

Somalia’s President Fires Prime Minister but May Not Have the Power to Do So

THE NEW YORK TIMES
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2008

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The government argues that democracy depends on the importance of a peaceful transfer of power.

Prime Minister Nur Hassan Hussein was fired yesterday, but it is unclear whether the president has the authority to do so.

On Sunday, the president issued a decree ending the prime minister’s term and calling for a new one to be appointed.

A showdown could be next in a nation that is already in crisis.

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