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The DRC lies in the heart of Africa. It is the size of western Europe with enormous wealth in natural resources including cobalt, diamonds, uranium (the source for our Manhattan Project in WWII), and incredible hydroelectric potential. In fact, the DRC is the largest world producer of cobalt (essential to emerging industries of information technology and electric automobiles), accounting for 51 percent of the global production of cobalt in 2015. The DRC was also the second largest global producer of industrial diamonds in 2015, contributing nearly 24 percent of global production of this strategic commodity behind only Russia (30 percent). Finally, the atomic bomb that helped the US and the free world win the Second World War was built with uranium from the DRC.

The Trump Administration has favored giving priority to alliances that can function as growth engines for American firms and create jobs for American citizens. Clearly, boundless opportunities await the development and deepening of economic relations between the DRC and the United States. Notwithstanding its enormous wealth, the DRC desperately needs to build infrastructure throughout its vast territory.

Cooperative efforts to foster trade and investment and build infrastructure will create jobs for Americans and Congolese that ensure growth and stability and maintain security. For example, the hydroelectric potential of Inga Falls is about 44,000 MW, more than 20 times the capacity of our Hoover Dam. When completed, that project could provide power for the DRC and its neighboring countries as well as South Africa and possibly even Egypt.

Significant economic development may also offer the best way to counter terrorism which is of concern to both the US and the DRC Governments. Special Envoy Tshibanda has repeatedly expressed his concern about growing terrorist activity in the region, emphasizing the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a terrorist organization believed to be affiliated with ISIS and a threat in the DRC and Great Lakes region. He has repeatedly highlighted the desire of the DRC to provide military and security cooperation with the United States and the international community through the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. AFRICOM Commander General Waldhauser was so advised of their desire when he visited the DRC with Ambassador Nikki Haley in October 2017.

The worst attack against UN peacekeepers in recent history occurred last December in North Kivu when the ADF attacked the MONUSCO Intervention Brigade and killed 15 UN peacekeepers and 5 DRC soldiers (FARDC) and wounded 53 peacekeepers. The Government of the DRC and the Special Envoy expressed deepest condolences to those who lost their loved ones and extended sympathy and speedy recovery to those wounded in this vicious attack. They condemned the perpetrators and requested the US Government to join hands with the DRC to help take more robust action against the ADF in the future.

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Today, the DRC remains the home to a number of nuclear rods that have been enriched to a level of 19 percent. They currently are of no use, but there are fears that the rods could either be enriched to bomb quality or, if they fell in the wrong hands, could be used in "dirty" bombs. Several years ago, the US presented an MOU to the DRC which would have resulted in the removal and disposal of these rods. The terms remain unresolved, however.

The DRC Government is committed to holding timely elections and to peace and stability in the region. Last November, the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) in the DRC announced the calendar for the presidential, legislative and provincial elections to be held on December 23, 2018. With the election calendar and benchmarks established, the DRC is attempting to advance discussions on issues of mutual interest and benefit to the DRC and the United States, inclusive of military, intelligence and commercial opportunities. Unfortunately, previous delays in the election calendar have been an inhibitor to productive dialogue on these aspects of a strong bilateral relationship.

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