



## **BURUNDI, DR CONGO, RWANDA:**

### **THE DYNAMICS OF THE GATUMBA REFUGEE CAMP MASSACRE**

**1 SEPTEMBER 2004**

#### **A. BACKGROUND**

The political transition in the Democratic Republic of Congo, as brokered by South Africa in April 2003, has been in serious trouble for quite some time. There are a number of reasons for this.

Firstly, the various rebel groups, particularly Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie-Goma faction (RCD-G), have been unwilling to participate in a genuine merger into a unified government and administration. Instead they have retained their former administrative zones and also tried both to maintain their separate military forces and to keep control of those of their soldiers that have been integrated in the new “unified” Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC). This has all been aided by the fact that the central government is lacking in both the financial and the administrative capacities required to re-establish a centralized administration.

Secondly, the various parties to the transition agreement are all reluctant to move towards general political elections as planned in the peace package. No single group is assured of winning once they have to address the electorate on a truly national scale, because while all groups, including the former government, have their regional strongholds, they are also completely without support in other entire regions. In the case of the smaller components of the transitional administration, like RCD-N[ational] or some of the Mayi-Mayi groups, their electoral support base is likely to be practically nonexistent.

Finally, it cannot be stressed enough that the security situation in Eastern Congo (North and South Kivu, the Ituri region of Province Orientale and even northeastern Katanga) has continued to present very severe difficulties for a very long time, in fact since the time of Congo's first civil war of 1960-1965. There are a number of reasons for this, including the fact that the ethnic map of the region is highly complex, with many small groups living in close proximity or intertwined with each other. Given the high population density (lower than that of Rwanda but much higher than elsewhere in the Congo) this has generated very strong tensions around access to basic agricultural resources.

The long history of conflict has also left very painful local memories. The Banyamulenge for example, are hated not only for being "Rwandan", but because they sided with Mobutu in the last stages of the civil war of the 1960s. Likewise, the bitter opposition of Hutu and Tutsi Kinyarwanda speakers involved on different sides in the 1990-1994 Rwandan civil war has left a legacy of that "foreign" conflict, whose consequences they transported onto Congolese soil.

With this history, administration of the region would be difficult for any government. But there are additional, recent, problems which would make security in the East even more intractable even for a well-equipped, well-financed government, which the DRC government is not.

Firstly, it must be recognized that Rwanda has withdrawn from the Congolese East in name only. The Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) still has 4,000 to 5,000 troops in the region, a mixture of Banyamulenge, Rwandans (both Hutu and Tutsi) and Congolese (both Tutsi and Hutu). It also uses local militia forces to protect its very active mining interests. Many of these Rwandan proxies have developed interests of their own and cannot be easily controlled by their former masters. This is for example the case with Thomas Lubanga and his faction of the Union des patriotes congolais (UPC) in the Ituri.

It would also appear to be the case that some sections of the old Congolese government are still seeking revenge against Rwanda and are discreetly financing and arming some former *interahamwe* groups, distinct from Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR), over which their control is at times very uncertain. Some of these Rwandan *interahamwe* groups did indeed participate in the Gatumba massacre, which is the tenuous substance behind the Rwandan government's accusation that the DRC government was behind the attack.

Finally the region suffers from an explosive combination of almost complete lack of economic development and the presence of thousands of young men who are still in possession of their militia weaponry, and unlikely to respond to calls to lay down these weapons for the dubious benefits of demobilization, disarmament and reintegration programmes, which only too often are poorly implemented.

It is against this background that the rebellion in Bukavu of May-June 2004 by Brigadier Laurent Nkunda and General Jules Mutebutsi should be seen. Both men had personal reasons not to want to participate in the planned Army fusion, particularly Nkunda, who is under accusation of war crimes because of his massacre of civilians and prisoners of war in Kisangani in 2002, towards the end of the war. Nkunda's assertions that he "wouldn't go to Kinshasa to be killed", might be exaggerated but he would certainly be arrested. Given their personal problems both men were very open to approaches from the Rwandan government. Their mutiny was not designed to "take power", which they could not have done, but to set in motion just such a dangerous process as that which is unfolding at present.

## B. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

***1. Taking into account the recent fighting in Bukavu, the recent withdrawal of Vice President Ruberwa of RCD-Goma from the transitional government in Kinshasa and most recently the massacre in Gatumba refugee camp, what politico-military developments might be anticipated in the relations between Rwanda, Burundi and DRC?***

The common factor linking the events mentioned above is that they illustrate or accentuate the poor security situation in Eastern Congo.

The troubles in Bukavu that were started by a Tutsi (Brigadier Nkunda is a Tutsi from Rutshuru) and a Munyamulenge (General Mutebutsi) had the immediate effect of weakening government control and overall security in the region. The rebels were guilty of indiscriminate killing and raping, which in turn led to blind reprisals from local tribes against innocent Banyamulenge civilians. Once the reprisal attacks had started, even though they were limited in scale, thousands of Banyamulenge fled their home areas, heading mainly to Burundi.

The attack on the Banyamulenge refugee camp at Gatumba, on the DRC-Burundi border, was carried out by *interahamwe* and Mayi-Mayi militias, apparently with the aid of a diversionary attack on the neighbouring Burundi army post by elements of the Burundi rebel FNL militia. All came across the border from the DRC, further emphasizing the failure of the DRC government to control its eastern regions.

Although both the Burundi and the Rwandan governments issued statements soon after the Gatumba massacre, threatening direct military intervention in Eastern DRC to improve security there, all the regional powers, as well as the African Union and the UN, have subsequently emphasized the need for a peaceful approach to the crisis.

However, at the same time, a disturbing hypothesis is being suggested by usually reliable local sources. According to this analysis elements within the Rwandan secret service and armed forces have long been eager to precipitate the kind of crisis in Eastern DRC which would enable Rwanda to either re-enter the Congo or, better, to formalize its militia arrangements in order to create a kind of protectorate over the Kivus. In this reading the Bukavu mutiny was a preliminary and the Gatumba massacre the culmination of attempts to orchestrate such a crisis. Gatumba, however, was orchestrated at long remove from the Rwandan interests that hope to benefit from it, instead playing on the blind hatred of the Rwandan Tutsi government felt by the cruder elements of the *interahamwe*, on the apocalyptic vision of the Burundian FNL, and on the fanatical enmity of the Congolese Mayi-Mayi to the Tutsi occupation forces in Eastern DRC and their local collaborators, such as the Banyamulenge. All three groups crossed the border from the DRC, thus providing the final proof that the DRC government has no control over these “negative forces” and might even support them. Arguing then from the failure of the international community to step in, Rwanda would use the same rationale as that used for attacking Zaire in 1996 and the DRC in 1998. On such a reading of events, DRC Vice-President Azarias Ruberwa’s decision to withdraw the RCD-G contingent from the transitional government was forced on him by Rwandan pressure on other RCD-G leaders, such as Bizima Karaha. The DRC transition is in danger of collapse, and war, very likely limited to the East this time, and mostly fought by proxies, could restart at any moment.

***2. What is the source of funding for the armed Burundi FNL rebel and Rwandan interahamwe groups?***

None of these groups appear to be receiving any significant amounts of external funding. Most of the limited resources they need come from their own communities in the shape of

“taxes” and from their trade in illegally mined minerals. However, they do get some outside subsidies from elements within both the DRC and the Rwandan governments, who in return try to influence them in ways that are favourable to their policies. So far the Rwandan government has been the more successful in this.

***3. Are the FNL and other Burundi rebel groups linked to interahamwe? If so what is their strategy.***

These groupings clearly have more than simple “links”; they are closely allied and often operate as one, especially inside the DRC or on forays from the DRC, of which the attack on Gatumba is the latest example. Their strategy, if such a word can be used for often appallingly simplistic plans and world views, is to give first priority to the destabilization of Burundi, which they perceive, perhaps rightly, as the weakest of the states in the region. This view is supported by the less sophisticated of the Rwandan groups, who are hoping to use a future Hutu-dominated Burundi as a rear base for a war of revenge against Rwanda. The Burundian fighters tend to be by far the crudest and their views do not go very far beyond aiming to kill large numbers of Tutsis, and then look forward to a Christian-redemptionist return of the suffering Hutu masses to power. To those who hold these views Pierre Nkurunziza, the Hutu leader of Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie-Force pour la Défense de la Démocratie (CNDD-FDD), is a traitor because of his participation in the Burundian coalition government of President Domitien Ndayizeye.

However, the FDLR belongs to another category. Led by former Forces Armées Rwandaises (FAR) officers, with a fair degree of professionalism, they aim at regime change in Rwanda and are not interested in Burundi. But they are conscious of their military weakness compared with the RPA and do not want to repeat the unsuccessful efforts at infiltration and direct attack organized by their predecessors in 1997-1998. They are biding their time in the hope that the DRC transition process will collapse, and that full-scale war will start up again.

One might therefore say that the forces actively or passively behind the Gatumba massacre constitute a coalition of the extremes: both Tutsi extremists in Kigali and their opposite Hutu numbers based in the DRC are now looking to the collapse of the DRC transition process, and a general conflict, at least in the East. For them this would appear to be a way out of the present deadlock, i.e. the extremists among the Rwandan officers are hoping for a “protectorate” over the Kivus, which would leave them in control over the mining rights, while the FDLR are hoping that the Rwandan government will overreach itself and finally give them the tactical opportunity they have been looking for during the last six years.

***4. What would be the fallout of a conflict both in short term and long term in the region?***

A general conflict in Eastern Congo would have extremely serious consequences. While the Rwandan armed forces would be unlikely to intervene overtly, they would operate through the militias they support. Human rights abuses would again reach their 1998-2001 levels. The DRC government would have to send more troops, but their training and preparedness are poor, their tactical capacities low, their communications and logistics highly deficient. It is unlikely that they would be able to stop the militias running havoc throughout the region. In fact the likely development would be that the DRC army would itself disintegrate into a multitude of quasi militia units.

Uganda would be unlikely to involve its armed forces directly in a DRC conflict again, unless threatened by destabilization efforts from Rwanda during next year’s election period, which is already looking to prove rather difficult. If Rwanda did use some of the Ituri militias to try to influence politics in Uganda, the reaction of the Ugandan government might be violent, even including a direct confrontation on the Rwanda-Uganda border. Given the disparity of military capacities, the Ugandan People’s Defence Force (UPDF) would be defeated once

more, leaving the field open for Rwanda. What Rwanda would do with such a “victory” is impossible to predict, though much would depend on the attitude of the international community, whose financial support for the country remains vital.

***5. To what extent have the recent events affected the prospects for the peace process in Burundi?***

The “Burundi peace process” has to be seen as basically a process for “sharing out the assets”. In this miserably poor country without any natural resources and with a shrinking agricultural base, the main question is always “who gets what”. Thus the Tutsi, who controlled the majority of the country’s resources between independence in 1962 and the *ikiza* (“catastrophe”) of 1972, and then almost all of them between 1972 and 1993, are understandably wary of change. This is why ten of the small Tutsi parties (probably representing around one per cent of the population but influential beyond their size) refused to sign the 6 August 2004 compromise on powersharing in the transitional government and claimed that “a national consensus had not been reached”. These elements are now trying to get maximum political capital out of Gatumba. Since their own weight is so negligible they can only re-enter the political scene from a position of some strength if they are in tune with a powerful popular feeling. Revulsion at the Gatumba massacre is strong in the Burundi population, which has seen quite a few massacres of this size on its own territory and which is both scared and tired. The Tutsi minority operators are trying to use this, and the increasingly extremist statements of the FNL play right into their hands. The mental state of the FNL leader, Agathon Rwasa, seems distinctly disturbed: apparently he reads nothing but the Bible and presents himself as a new prophet, the Hutu being the modern reincarnation of the Jews. FNL’s other spokesman, Pasteur Habimana, is not much more rational. Their eagerness to claim responsibility for the Gatumba massacre, which led to the break-up of their dialogue with the UN, illustrates their state of mind.

The question is whether these two forces at the two extremes of the political spectrum, Agathon Rwasa’s FNL at one end, and the small Tutsi parties at the other, are actually able to destabilize the peace process. On balance it seems unlikely, particularly if the momentum of the peace process remains strong in its own right. Regardless of how they feel on the ethnic question, Burundians are aware that what happened in Gatumba on 13 August 2004 is linked with regional and particularly Congolese politics and not with Burundi politics. It would be a mistake to assume that the militant statements coming out of the Forces Armées Burundaises (FAB) represent the feelings of the majority of Burundi Tutsi. Many top officers of the old school are still close to the views of the Tutsi extremist parties. But they cannot count on a unified military force to follow them in a foreign adventure which would not be motivated by national security.

Most Burundians, on both sides of the ethnic divide, want peace. The question at issue is really the fears of the political class, whose members can see that power-sharing might mean that they might lose some privilege, or fail to gain one. They then try to mobilize support from within their own group by suggesting that such a loss to the politicians will mean a whole series of cascading losses for all their followers.

***6. What is the likely effect on the UNHCR repatriation from Tanzania of Burundians in the event of an outbreak of hostilities between Burundi, Rwanda and DRC?***

Hostilities, if they do break out, are not likely to take the form of a regional war. In other words, there will not be a scaled-down version of the events of 1998-2001. Rather, any conflict between countries in the region would be much more complicated and much more covert. Nobody will openly admit, as all the actors did last time, to having troops in the neighbouring country. All actors will use militia proxies, which are in plentiful supply and come very cheap, though rather lacking in reliability and with a tendency to change sides to

follow the highest bidder. The Ituri militias during the 2000-2002 fighting were notorious for this type of behaviour.

However, even if such a situation develops it is unlikely to seriously disturb the Burundian repatriation process, which is solely dependent on the situation in Burundi itself, i.e. the evolution of the Burundi peace process. If there are indeed elections by 31 October 2004 (or soon after) and if they go reasonably well, there will be a strong leaning towards compromise among the population as a whole. The only question would then be whether those elements of the political class who are frustrated by the election results will end up spoiling the outcome.

This was of course what happened in October 1993 and it has cost Burundi ten years of civil war and 180,000 dead. Nobody wants to repeat that process, unless it would be those members of the political class who most of the time can escape the consequences and let ordinary people do the dying for them. The unknown quantity is their capacity to scare the masses into action. But assuming this does not happen, then the repatriation process can be expected to go well. Burundian Hutu in Tanzania have enough problems of their own without wanting to get involved in a regional war by proxy.

***7. What may be the impact on outflow of refugees from the DRC to neighbouring countries, and how much are agencies other than UNHCR, and governments, likely to be prepared for such an influx.***

If widespread warfare, even by proxy, should break out, it does at present seem likely that the result would unfortunately be a repeat of what happened in 1998. There would be drastically increased displacement and cross border refugee movements, but no preparations for such events and none of the belligerents wanting to take such factors into account. UNHCR would most likely stand alone, with such assistance from other aid agencies as is normally forthcoming. There does not appear to be any contingency planning for new population displacement on the part of any of the governments of the region, who are likely to look to foreign aid organizations and other international agencies to play the major part in such relief work.

***8. It is alleged that Brigadier Nkunda has left his hiding place in the Kivus and has crossed over into Rwanda. Given that General Mutebutsi and his 300 men have sought refuge in Rwanda as well, is there a likelihood of some coalition been formed between these two military officers. What impact would this have on political and security developments in DRC?***

Contrary to what has been alleged Brigadier Laurent Nkunda is not in Rwanda, nor is he in hiding. Instead he is quite openly in Goma, and issuing threatening statements, in full confidence of Rwandan support. General Jules Mutebutsi, on the other hand, was effectively forced to cross into Rwanda when his rebellion failed in June. Unlike Nkunda, who has a strong power base in North Kivu and his own military corps of over 4,000 men with good equipment, Mutebutsi, who as a Munyamulenge is experiencing the reluctance of the Banyamulenge to countenance a repeat of the 1998-2001 adventure, was only able to muster 300 men. Commander Patrick Masunzu, a Munyamulenge opposed to the Rwandan government, who has a much bigger following, would have defeated Mutebutsi in Uvira if he had not put the safety of the border between him and his enemy. Masunzu's motivation was that he who had been fighting Rwandan government forces since 2000, and by doing so had regained a place for the Banyamulenge on the Congolese political map, did not want to sacrifice years of struggle to the late-coming Mutebutsi rebellion. This, in turn, means that it is unlikely that Nkunda could ever have held on to Bukavu. Bukavu is in South Kivu, Banyamulenge heartland, and the Banyamulenge force would prevail, but probably not on the side of the rebellion. The Nkunda/Mutebutsi alliance, which is already a reality and has been for some time, is therefore not a balanced one. Nkunda holds a position of real strength in his

own province, North Kivu; Mutebutsi does not have similar backing in the South. The Rwandan government will help both, but with predictably different results.

***9. What do we know of the existence of the “Front pour la liberation du l’Est du Congo” (FLEC) which has allegedly been formed by the former governor of South Kivu, Xavier Ciribanya, with the purpose of working towards the secession of East Congo (from Ituri to Kalemie)?***

The FLEC is yet another shadowy organization with a name and no followers. It’s originators are said to include not only Xavier Ciribanya, the former South Kivu governor, but also Eugène Serufuli, the pro-Kigali governor of North Kivu and national MP. Serufuli is much the stronger and has what Ciribanya lacks: a strong power base in terms of local Kinyarwanda speakers, a good militia, financial resources, and the ability to bargain with the DRC government. For Ciribanya the creation of FLEC is a means of attempting to show his backers in Kigali that he, too, can do something, and thus advance his claims to their favours, cash and weapons. However, among the local population men like Ciribanya are regarded with disdain as the tools of foreign intervention. The position of Serufuli is somewhat different. He has a certain amount of crude charisma, which he uses to convince his people that, like it or not, at present the Rwandans can give them something that the DRC government cannot, and he has gained a modicum of loyalty even from people who do not like him.

However, what is certainly true is that Rwanda would be extremely pleased to see a secessionist movement in the Kivus. Such a project, however, will find absolutely no supporters (apart from paid ones) once it is seen to be sponsored by the Rwandan government. For the FLEC to announce that it will fight for the secession of Eastern Congo is bound to be counterproductive, an illustration of Ciribanya’s poor tactical sense. Serufuli might also be planning to please his masters by organizing a secession, but if so this would be done quietly, and without stressing the Rwandan connection, but rather building on the local dislike of Kinshasa (which has always been strong).

**Caveat:** Writenet papers are prepared mainly on the basis of publicly available information, analysis and comment. The papers are not, and do not purport to be, either exhaustive with regard to conditions in the country surveyed, or conclusive as to the merits of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. The views expressed in the paper are those of the author and are not necessarily those of Writenet or Practical Management.