

**“MAKING SENSE OF THE UGANDA-RWANDA ARMED  
CONFLICT IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF  
CONGO (DRC)”**

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## Introduction

At the time Rwanda and Uganda helped President Laurent Kabila come to power in the DRC (then Zaire) in May 1997, any critical observer would have anticipated that Uganda and Rwanda had become formidable allies. And no one, at that time doubted that a big regional force of these two allies had emerged, which force was strong enough to reckon with. It seems, it is the realisation of the existence of this force that prompted the Southern African allies, namely Zimbabwe, Namibia, Angola and others to join the war in the DRC on the side of Kabila. In the minds of the Southern Africa allies, the alliance between Uganda and Rwanda was poised to play a dominant role in the DRC – the third largest country on the African continent, rich in minerals and natural resources and geographically (and strategically) centred in the heart of the Africa.

Just slightly over a year of Kabila's stay in power, there was uneasiness between his government and his supporters (the Rwandese). In the month of August, 1998 Kabila expelled most of the Rwandese office holders in his government as well as their soldiers. According to the Rwandese government, Kabila was acting in a very "irresponsible" manner and was also ungrateful for the support they rendered to him, that enabled him to capture power in Kishasha. As a result of this perception, the Rwandese did not take Kabila's "irresponsible" actions too lightly. They organised around Kishasha with

of Kabila of the Southern Africa allies, the Kabila government would have fallen in a short time at the hands of the Rwandese. Fierce battles between Southern Africa allies on the side of Kabila on one hand, and Rwandese and Ugandans on the other, were fought around Kishasha. With the extensive involvement of Southern, Central and East African states in the Congo conflict, there was every reason to worry that a continental war had begun.

Since then, the Congo conflict has been one of Africa's worst wars in recent history.

According to the US Assistant Secretary of State Susan Rice speech to the US Congress.

“(The Congo) crisis which has internal as well as external antecedents, threatens not only to undermine any hope of early reconstruction and reconciliation in the Congo, but also to engulf Central Africa and the Great lakes Region in a bloody and protracted regional war – a war that could leave Congo divided and the neighbouring states openly hostile to one another for years to come”<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, the predictions of Susan Rice have been proved correct, over time. Congo is not on the path to democracy. While it may be said that Kabila has not had a chance to organise elections and to engineer reconciliation, many observers also see that Kibila is another “Mobutu”, in all but the name. The second prediction in Susan Rice's speech was that the Congo conflict would leave neighbouring states hostile to one another. Ironically, Rice's predictions have been proved by the most unexpected neighbours, namely, Uganda and Rwanda. This paper focuses on the conflict between Uganda and Rwanda in the Congo. The key questions to be answered are: why are Uganda and Rwanda in the Congo? What are the domestic as well as external factors influencing the

desire by Uganda and Rwanda to be in Congo? Why then should two foreign countries fight in the Congo? How "senseless" or "sensible" is the Congo saga?

## **2. Immediate Reasons Advanced for Uganda and Rwanda's Intervention in the Congo**

On 16 September 1998, President Museveni of Uganda addressed the parliament on the issue of Uganda's intervention in Congo. In his speech, he gave three basic reasons why Uganda should be in Congo. The reasons were: (i) that there was a possibility of genocide in the Congo if the situation was allowed to deteriorate. He stressed his opinion that the Kabila government lacked the ability to stop genocide if it started. Museveni added that Kabila's action seemed to encourage ethnic hatred hence this could lead to genocide.

(ii) that Uganda had serious security interests which necessitated the intervention.

According to Museveni, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) rebels who were terrorising much of Western Uganda were receiving assistance from the Sudan through Congo.

Museveni was particularly enraged in this regard by the fact that the ADF had in the month of July 1998 burnt to death seventy students of Kicwamba Technical College.

According to Museveni, therefore, the strategic approach to curtail rebel incursions into Uganda was to destroy their bases in Congo forests and cut off their supply lines.

(iii) that President Kabila had failed to keep his promise of ensuring that rebels fighting Uganda were not based in his territory. And that Kabila had become friendly to Sudan.

From the above reasons advanced by President Museveni, parliamentarians were convinced that Uganda had a serious and legitimate cause to be in the Congo. Museveni convinced parliament that the Uganda army was in the Congo to protect the people of Uganda and to pursue their interests. But the parliamentarians also queried Museveni about the devastating economic effect the war could have on Uganda. Museveni said that in fact, Ugandans should not fear because the war good for the economy. In this analogy, Museveni elaborated that if the Congo was well administered, it had a lot of market potential for trade and that Uganda would stand to benefit from stability in the Congo.

At the same time, Museveni's relations with Kabila had been deteriorating over time. This sparked off a series of unfriendly verbal exchanges between the two. For instance, according to the *East African Alternatives* (October 1998) Mr Victor Mpoyo, Kabila's Minister of Economy and Oil made a statement directed at Museveni and his role in the DRC, which worsened the already bad relations between Museveni and Kabila. The statement says, "We are not accusing anybody but there are some people who arrogate to themselves, mining concessions without informing us. Now if these people have noted that their interests are being adversely affected, they should pluck up their courage and come to Kinshasha to brief us instead of slandering our head of state who is good to them." This explicitly indicated that the official position in Kinshasha was no longer able to stand Museveni's directives and was also concerned about Uganda's illegal exploitation of their resources.

Apart from the above declarations of the Uganda president, there are other reasons in the official circles of the Ugandan government which have oriented them towards the war in

the Congo. One, is that President Kabila was not grateful to his allies (Uganda and Rwanda) who propelled him to power in 1997 by his decision to join Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) and not the East African Community (EAC) which Museveni had been keen to see revived. In effect, Museveni's implicit trade objectives were defeated by Kabila's decision in this regard. Secondly, Museveni and his official circles harbour the belief that Congo has suffered from lack of proper governance. This perception is reinforced by the belief in Uganda's official circles that Kabila has no capacity to effectively govern the whole of Congo.

On the part of Rwanda, three major reasons for intervention in Congo have always been advanced by Rwanda government authorities. The first one is that without direct involvement of Rwandese Patriotic Army (RPA) Kabila would still be in the jungles of Congo and Mobutists (even with the demise of Mobutu) would still be in power.

According to this version, the expulsion of Rwandese by Kabila from his government was the greatest insult slapped on their sacrifice for Kabila.

Secondly, the Rwandan authorities have serious concern for security probably far greater than Uganda. Following the genocide of 1994 in Rwanda, the perpetrators of genocide, mainly Hutu extremists (Interahamwe) have found sanctuary in the Congo. For a Tutsi led government, these dangerous elements could only be contained by having the RPA right inside the Congo. On this point, both Rwanda and Uganda share a similar view. In fact, the international community has not been keen to condemn the two countries for their invasion of a third country and violating its territorial sovereignty simply because

the issue of genocide will come up again. It will be recalled that the international community including the United Nations forces stood by as genocide engulfed the small state of Rwanda. To this extent the international community has been extra cautious on this matter. The third reason Rwanda authorities advance is that since Kabila's motives are unpredictable, their small ; country, neighbouring the larger Congo territory would be vulnerable if they did not take extra precautions in their security concerns.

Besides, Rwanda had other strong reasons that attracted it to intervene in Congo. The Rwandese authorities had entrenched themselves by proxy or by design into the first line up of Kabila's top government positions which ideally, had ensured Rwandese direct influence in Congo affairs. Just to mention a few Rwandese in Kabila's initial government:: James Kaberebe, Army chief, Bizima Karaha Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deo Burega Minister of State and Secretary General of Kabila's Alliance of Democratic Forces for Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL), Michael Rudatenguha – Director of Finance, office of the President and Moise Nyarugabo - Chief Executive Officer of the Ill-Acquired Goods Office. According to Kikaya Karubi,<sup>2</sup> the Rwandese were handsomely rewarded by Kabila after capturing power. According to this source, the problem between Kabila and Rwandese originated from the conspiracy by these officials of Rwandan decent mobilising to topple Kabila's government. But, one must not lose sight of the fact that Rwanda still feels strongly that there should be a regime in Kinshasha over which it has a reasonable leverage. And also, some of the officials named above played a critical role by mobilising the anti-Mobutu sentiments in Congo, and commanded Kabila's forces until Kishasha fell to him.

From the above perspective, one should derive sense of why Uganda and Rwanda intervened in the Congo. Thus a few observations are pertinent. First, it must be remembered that in the first place, Uganda and Rwanda entered Congo on the invitation of Kabila. In one sense, Kabila needed their critical support in order to get power in Kinshasha. Although the agreement between him and his former allies may not be written, it was expected that he would have the moral obligation to respect what they agreed, namely to guarantee their border security. On the other hand, Uganda and Rwandan armies and leaders seem to harbour expansionist tendencies, which means that Kabila could have sensed danger in keeping them around himself. This expansionist tendency gives these two countries an obsession towards dominance and egocentric approach towards other leaders. In a similar case while Tanzania helped in liberating Uganda from Idi Amin in 1979 at a huge financial cost as well as loss of its soldiers, it had no intentions of staying in Uganda. While one would argue that Uganda after Idi Amin posed no security threat to Tanzania, the fact of the matter is that if a liberation force stays in another country for longer than necessary, the ordinary folk will tend to perceive it as an occupation force. This seems to be the case with UPDF and RPA in Congo<sup>3</sup>.

### **3. Beyond Stated Reasons for Uganda and Rwanda's Intervention in the Congo**

It appears that the real motives for intervention and eventual stay in the DRC by the Uganda and Rwanda were beyond those often stated. The first encouragement to Rwanda



and Uganda was the swiftness with which their armies were able to push Kabila to power. Within a matter of seven months, Kabila (with Rwanda 's backing) organised from the scratch to take the seat of power in Kinshasha. This did well for him, but it had one unfortunate effect, i.e. to encourage the thinking in the minds of the Rwandese and Uganda authorities that there was a power vacuum in the DRC. And that they could easily manipulate events (militarily) by over throwing Kabila and installing a regime of their choice.

The second important reason for RPA and UPDF to stay longer in the DRC is the economic motive. President Museveni has been ambivalent whenever this point is raised. When he was addressing parliament in May this year, the President said the only belongings he obtained from Congo are two walking sticks. But scholars have dug up evidence to suggest that Uganda has benefitted economically from the war in the Congo<sup>4</sup>. It now appears that the escalation of conflict in the Congo, particularly between Uganda and Rwandan troops has been aided by the obsession about economic gains in the Congo. Each side has concentrated on taking areas with more lucrative business potentials. This illuminates the fact that the clashes between Uganda and Rwandan troops are not so much of military strategic differences but motivation of economic gain, largely by their commanders and perhaps by those in positions of authority in the two respective countries.

## 5. The Historical Basis of Uganda-Rwanda Conflict in the DRC

It will be fool hardy for any one to look at the current events taking place in Kisangani town of the DRC as if they are not events of historical significance. In fact, failure to highlight the historical as well as the contemporary contexts of the so called clashes is to miss a big point. Historically, the Rwandese question has been part of Uganda's social milieu with varying degrees of interludes. Following the Rwanda crisis of 1959 when the Tutsi were forced to leave their country and many of them to live in Uganda, they have been a subject of political manipulation by Ugandan leaders. Idi Amin used them in the infamous State Research Bureau in the 1970s<sup>5</sup>. Obote on his part unleashed terror onto them in 1982. The latter attempts to expel them from Uganda partly forced them to join Museveni's rebel ranks in 1980s. Indeed this was strategy to survive the terror. No one doubts that the commitment of Rwandese to Museveni's rebellion played a big role in ensuring his success. Despite their key role in Museveni war, Ugandans continued to look at them with suspicion and sometimes with hatred. Thus, their determination to launch their home ward rebellion in October 1990 was greeted with double reaction within the Ugandan population. First, some Ugandans were happy that they were leaving Uganda altogether while others were skeptical; saying that "Rwandese can not leave Uganda which they love so much". Secondly, some felt that Museveni would not be militarily secure without the core of some of the loyal Rwandese Military Commanders, as Major General Fred Rwigyema<sup>6</sup> What does this history tell us about the relations between Rwandese and Ugandan? First, while the Rwandese lived in Uganda and appeared to be part of Ugandan society, they were consciously aware that they were not

Ugandans and Ugandans quietly regarded them as aliens. This silent suspicion lies at the back of what was to happen in Kisangani. This perspective is not limited to the general Ugandan population, it is also echoed amongst the ranks of the UPDF officers saying "we helped them to (Rwandese) fight their way back home, where would they be if we had not helped them?"

On the part of the RPA soldiers, the issue they raise is that they are indeed, grateful to Ugandans for their assistance in their war but, they have their own government and they are a sovereign state. These sentiments arise from the perspective that view the Ugandan authorities as well as senior UPDF try to patronise them. For example, Museveni is fond of saying "these boys, I personally trained them and they are now the ones shooting down my tanks". Such remarks irritate the authorities in Rwanda who regard them as a ridicule for leaders of a sovereign state. These sentiments or egos partly triggered the Kisangani clashes between the former friendly states, it has a lot to do with the historical background we have outlined above.

### **Differences in Strategy**

What seems to have sparked out the Kisangani 1 in August 1999 was partly a matter of strategic differences between the RPA and UPDF. According to the New Vision June 9, 1999, Uganda's Commander of the UPDF in Congo, Brigadier James Kazini blamed his counterparts thus,

“The RPF believes in quick victory but that would be tantamount to a coup de tat, that is why we say the people should be involved in the liberation struggle”.

The differences in strategy between Rwanda and Uganda have a problem in terms of explanation. There is no Ugandan official who has ever been frank to tell the truth about why Uganda went to fight in Congo. The President and the Command-in-Chief has generally emphasised the issue of the border security but the question that has remained unanswered is why the UPDF is more than five hundred kilometres inside Congo. The same question could still be asked about the RPA.

Whether the motive of either army is to remove Kabila or do other things such as business or mining has remained a mystery. Either way, the UPDF and RPA split in 1997, whereby either side had to support a different faction. Of the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD). Rwanda supported Dr. Illunga in Goma (known as the Goma faction) and Uganda supported Professor Wamba Dia Wamba (the Kisangani faction). Uganda also supports Pierre Bemba's Movement for Liberation of Congo (MLC). The origins of these factions however are not limited to differences in strategy, they are also a result of each side trying to occupy a more economically viable part of the Congo territory. As the Wamba group settled in Kisangani, the Illunga group in Goma felt uneasy that the Kisangani group had strategically occupied areas with more mineral deposits and other tradable goods which Goma was not endowed with. The Goma faction concerns were exacerbated by the fact that they failed to capture Mbujimayi, the gold rich area which eventually came under the control of the Zimbabweans. It may be

interesting to note that the "war of words" between Rwanda and Uganda failed their agenda in Congo until they went for real battles. It has been reported that Ugandan soldiers were unnecessarily uncooperative and arrogant, calling their Rwandan counterparts names, denegrating them as "boys". The war between Uganda and Rwanda in Congo began on the basis of such "silly things".

Not only "silly things" were paramount in the outbreak of the first Kisangani war of August 5-17, First, there was a perceived notion on the part of the Ugandan authorities, to trust that the RPA could not start a war against UPDF. Secondly, Ugandan authorities felt that there was a "gentleman's agreement" between the two sides that each will control a particular territory which it had control over. Thirdly, the objectives of RCD-Goma and RCD-Kisangani were not contradictory to each other. Despite this sort of understanding the RPA continued to push ahead towards Kisangani. By 14 August the RPA had virtually surrounded Kisangani. Thus, Kisangani I appeared as a total surprise to the UPDF. If the UPDF knew that there was an imminent attack, they would have fortified their positions and increased their supplies and soldiers. Consequently, in Kisangani I, the RPA displayed a thorough and superior show of a mightier force over the UPDF. Again, this seems to have been a concealed plan by the RPA to teach the UPDF a lesson and to show that the so-called "boys" were better. Indeed the toll of UPDF soldiers on Kisangani streets was shocking, not to mention the countless Congolese civilian victims.

The RPA seemed to have planned the Kisangani I attack with their government. Ugandan military sources complain that Ugandan commanders in Kisangani requested for

reinforcement in face of the imminent attack by RPA, but concerned authorities refused, playing down the possibility of an attack. On the part of Rwandan authorities there were sufficient preparations, and blessing of the authorities for the RPA to attack UPDF in Kisangani. So, between 14 and 18 August 1999 fierce battles were fought between the former allies. To demonstrate the intransigence of the Rwandan authorities when President Museveni invited the then Vice President Paul Kagame to Mweya Lodge for talks on 16 August 1999; Kagame opted to move from Kigali to Mweya by road instead of a plane or helicopter, taking eight hours instead of less than one hour of travel by air. According to some sources this was intended to give the RPA more time to accomplish their task in Kisangani against UPDF and RCD- Kisangani. The effects of Kisangani I have had damaging effect on Uganda-Rwanda relations. The Chairman of RCD – Kisangani also seemed to have been the target of the RPA. His hotel residence was bombarded to ashes but he escaped, thanks to Major Lauben Ikondore (late) who virtually carried him on his back to safety. But the RPA not only defeated UPDF militarily it was able to establish itself more firmly in Kisangani. It was for example, able to control the main airport and starve the UPDF of critical supplies.

Thus, while the talks were held between Museveni and Kagame in Mweya, the RPA and Rwanda had already secured their strategic objective. Since August 17, 1999, several other talks have been held between the top ranking officials of the two states but no positive tangible outcomes have been registered in terms of restoring their mutual and supposedly friendly ties. The show of force especially by RPA has satisfied their ego,

demonstrating that they and not UPDF are the regional military power. But, it also boils to nothing.

In all senses, what would it help if Rwanda or Uganda claimed to be a military power in the region? It is a sign of absurdity typical of African leaders' agenda. African leaders have generally been incapable of accomplishing long term missions and it usually makes little sense to rely on them for long-term, or strategic projects. Essentially, there is no doubt that the bickering between the two states has dwelt on narrow considerations such as diamonds, gold, and timber. In strategic terms, they have both achieved nothing. The strategic objective of causing democratic governance in Congo, creating allies and removing Kabila have all come to nil.

### **The "Senselessness" of Kisangani Battles**

When Rwanda and Uganda began the war their military engagements in Congo they were hoping for a quick and decisive conclusive of their mission. This possibility waned with time. The apparent lack of success on the part of Uganda and Rwanda has had impact on their modes of operation and internal dynamics, leading to serious disagreements. For example, when RCD – Goma backed by Rwanda is opposed to the RCD – Kisangani and Pierre Bemba's MLC (both backed by Uganda). RCD-Kisangani of Wamba Dia Wamba is perceived as leftist, whose strategy is Maoist – ie a protracted struggle whose success does not seem to be visible from the Rwandan perspective. At the same time, Uganda supports Bemba's MLC whose ranks comprise mainly the Ex-FAR (former Mobutu's soldiers). On their part, the Rwandese, have stuck with the RCD-Goma faction which

believes can remove Kabila from power. Besides, Rwandese authorities and the RPF argue that they were the ones who started the "project" of removing Kabila and Uganda came in later to "spoil the project". On the other hand, Uganda has sought to launch the struggle in Congo at double front, wishing that if one of the factions it supports was to fail, the other would probably succeed. This in itself has complicated the internal dynamics of the alliance, to the extent that Rwandese authorities view the Ugandan manoeuvres as aimed as aimed at upstaging them in the leadership of the rebellion against Kabila or at least aimed at making Kampala the command post for the rebellion, in effect marginalising Rwanda. But there is a snag associated with Uganda's manoeuvres in this regard, not only in the sense of making Rwanda restless, but also in sense that the very enemies Rwanda and Uganda fought i.e (the ExFAR) have their bases in Uganda which it also openly gives support and sanctuary. For example, one of Mobutu's commanders called Barimoto and others live freely in Uganda. It is said that Barimoto is one of the financiers of Bemba's MLC. To this end, the credibility of the rebel groups is at stake both at home and abroad. For Kabila, this is a valuable campaign ploy for him to mobilise the population against the rebels. The Rwanda – backed RCD in Goma too, is not spared by this intricate situation. Their faction is generally perceived in Congo as dominated by Rwandese and therefore lacking a nationalist perspective and identity in Congo. These points of divergence between Uganda and Rwanda failed their alliance and caused the subsequent conflict between them, with disastrous consequences. Thus, the power struggles within the alliance and the rebel ranks have been a total fiasco.



## **The Senseless Kisangani II and Kisangani III**

Until the most recent battles in May 2000 (code named Kisangani II) and the June 2000 (Kisangani III) the leaders of Uganda and Rwanda had not exposed their dirty linen in public. Both leaders had put on bold faces, concealing the dirt behind the ugly factional differences. In public, the Lusaka Accord was the point of reference, though it is known that they do not believe in it. The parliament in Uganda was demanding for a full explanation, which when given by the Ministers tended to be inadequate and lacking in detail. For a parliament like that of Uganda, whose majority are Movement supporters, a few voices trying to query why Uganda was in Congo and why Uganda and Rwanda were fighting; were easily branded "opposition" or "disgruntled elements" by the officials as well as their fellow members of parliament.

What is termed as Kisangani II is in reference to the battles fought between RPA and the UPDF in the city of Kisangani in Eastern Congo. This was on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2000. One version describing the cause of this battle says that the war was caused by Ugandan's war-mongering and stubbornness of Uganda commanders. Ugandan officials and commanders had all along harboured grievance against the RPA for the surprise attack on them on 5<sup>th</sup> August 1999 (or Kisangani I). According to this version, the Uganda side had been mobilising weaponry and men for a counter-attack on RPA since Kisangani I. They were therefore, ready for a showdown against RPA. Some of officials claimed that RPA had no business being in Kisangani rather than Goma. At the same time, the Rwandan side claimed that indeed the UPDF had behaved in a very unfriendly manner towards the

RPA. But official position given the President of Uganda in his speech to parliament on 28 May 2000 blamed the RPA for having shot the first bullet. Part of the President's speech goes as follows:

"I met with Major General Kagame at Mweya and, subsequently at Rwakitura and signed a ceasefire agreement including the demarcation of Kisangani into two zones. The North and East of the city was agreed to be put under the control of the UPDF and the South and West of the RPA. Each force was to keep company at each airport in either zone. On May 5<sup>th</sup>, 200, however, the RPA once again attacked the UPDF. This time around they apparently wanted to seize the high ground at Kaparata and the Lubutu-Batasende Road....contrary to the rumours the Rwandese spread prior to this attack, there was not UPDF amassing of troops beyond a mutually agreed position" *President Museveni's speech on 28 May 2000 to parliament p. 24*

In the context of the above speech, the President of Uganda was trying to shift the blame from his soldiers to the Rwandese. And he was also quick in that same speech, to give details of several agreements reached between him, his government and UPDF chief and their counterparts in Rwanda, which the latter allegedly broke. He also asserted that during the Kisangani battle "the UPDF exercised maximum restraint even in self-defence bearing in mind that these were acts which were not in the legitimate interests of our peoples and, further bearing in mind the overwhelming desire by the Ugandan leadership not to act in a way that would jeopardise the relationship that has long existed between the peoples of Uganda and Rwanda" (p.25). It seems from the fore-going that the President of Uganda was indicating that there were still some avenues for amending the relations that were developing between the two countries. But it should be recalled that when Museveni was addressing people in Nakasongola on the Heroes day on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2000, he said "I think they are drunk (referring to Rwandese leadership). When somebody gets drunk you don't kill him" while responding to the calls by the Chairman

of Luwero Veterans Association who had said, "Kagame should remember we helped them to go back after many years in exile here", (New Vision 10, June 2000). This contradicts with the tone of his formal speech to parliament which appeared to be reconciliatory. In concluding his speech to parliament he called the Kisangani battles "stupid clashes". This appears to be a serious euphemism, given that the recent Kisangani wars are reported by the Red Cross to have left about 700 civilians dead and about 1200 people wounded. In a comprehensive interview with the Monitor 12, June 2000 Kagame called the war "silly". Since then we have a scenario of "stupid and silly wars". One member of parliament, John Kazoora (Kashari) later on remarked that if the war is "silly and stupid" why should wise Presidents fight such wars?

But there are a number of issues which President Kagame raised in his interview with Kevin Aliro of the Monitor newspaper. These are:

- (i) "Take it or leave it Ugandans have been told a lot of lies. I am not sure whether that is because they are willing to take a lot of lies about the rebellion, the Congo and all sorts of things....."
- (ii) "I want to ask a simple question; why does the leadership in Uganda occupy itself with the affairs of Rwanda to the extent that they give the impression that they are the ones to solve the problems of Rwanda?"
- (iii) "Rwanda has no obligation to listen to Museveni or anybody..but for Museveni to assume he knows everything about Rwanda is unacceptable.."
- (iv) "You can't imagine what it means for a leader of another country to address a parliament insulting leaders of another country".

(v) "How can he (Museveni) be a problem to Uganda and Rwanda when there are people from whom he takes command?"

(vi) "We have never understood the logic from the time UPDF arrived they started causing problems and creating a bad image about Rwanda".

We have decided to reproduce these excerpts from Kagame's interview with the Monitor newspaper verbatim because they are of significance to our analysis of the clashes in Kisangani between Uganda and Rwanda. First of all, as we noted earlier the core of Kagame's ruling elite loathe Museveni's perceived dominance of affairs in Rwanda and

Congo. Secondly, Kagame even complained in that interview that RPA occupied Kisangani first and UPDF "arrived three weeks later with a message from the top that our forces should leave the city". Thirdly, Kagame seems to have been making efforts to disengage Rwanda from Uganda by amending relations with Kabila. In the same vein, Kagame seems to have rebuilt his relations with Rwanda's former colonial power, Belgium which has increasingly taken diplomatic moves to come back in the Rwandan equation, henceforth alienate the British-American backed Uganda. By implication, Kagame seems to be saying that Museveni receives directives and perhaps support from the Americans, and Kagame can do without them.

Indeed, the recent moves by Kagame to meet Kabila in Eldoret, Kenya on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2000, was a clear indication that Kagame was moving fast to steer himself and his country out of Museveni's perceived or actual dominance. And it also shows that Kagame is taking independent moves to play a role in regional affairs, unhindered by anybody, including Museveni. Uganda and Rwanda are ashamed that they fought in Kisangani between

themselves. However, each of them is struggling to come out there with as little diplomatic debacle as possible. It appears that at the moment, Kagame is moving well on that course. It is reported (New Vision 4<sup>th</sup> June 2000) that Kabila promised some concessions in Mbuyi Mayi, and release of prisoners of war and to deal with the Interahamwe. Kabila has already delivered on some of his promises eg the Zimbabwean forces in Congo released two hundred Rwandese prisoners of war to Rwandan authorities. In a recent commentary in (The New Vision 21. June 2000) by Onapito Okomolit, he asserted that Uganda stands to be the biggest loser in the Congo, arguing that Uganda has earned itself the place of a pariah state in the diplomatic circles; and should therefore do one wise thing – withdrawing. But in his analysis also, he argued that Rwanda stands to lose if Uganda was to leave it in Congo. According to his analysis, Rwanda can not stay alone in Rwanda, it risks being crushed by Kabila's forces. Perhaps, this is the card Kabila is presently playing – isolate Uganda and later defeat Rwanda. It remains to be seen where this trend will take Rwanda. In the meantime, both Uganda and Rwanda have complied with the UN resolution demanding that they unconditionally withdraw their troops for more than one hundred kilometres from Kisangani. In this scenario, the UN has been successful. Kabila too, has proved he is not a fool. His moves seem to be on the right track, only for Uganda and Rwanda to look "silly".

### **Analysis of Issues Pertaining to Uganda-Rwanda Conflict in Congo**

Yusuf Bangura in his article "Comments on Regional Security and the War in Congo"<sup>7</sup> asserts that one important question that needs to be asked is: why did Museveni and

Kagame squander, in the space of a year, the good will and leverage they enjoyed in Congo, following the positive role they had played in overthrow of Mobutu regime?"

According to Bangura, Museveni and Kagame's blunder in sponsoring rebels stands out "as one of the most extraordinary blunders in foreign and security policies in modern times"<sup>8</sup>. He dismisses the heightened accusations Uganda and Rwanda levy against Kabila. First that Kabila's one year in power could not have allowed him to patrol the borders of Congo to tame the rebels. The demand by Uganda and Rwanda seems to have been overzealous. Secondly, that Kabila could not have supported the Interahamwe and ADF rebels, when he was at that time dependent on Rwanda and Uganda for his own security. It may be added that long-term, the land locked Rwanda heightened tension and insecurity in Eastern Congo, whether the government of Congo wins or not. Kabila is also likely to act like a "wounded lion" if the Ugandan and Rwandese backed manoeuvres fail in the Eastern Congo. And indicators point to the fact this is most likely to happen.

#### **Possibility of Spillover:**

That the war could still spill-over to Uganda and Rwanda in the event that the Congolese government was able to control the Eastern part of Congo. This is an argument that both countries have presented for their stay in Congo. The two countries have not been good strategists in diplomatic terms. They have been keen to pursue a militarist strategy rather than a diplomatic one. This is why Kabila was smart enough to take his case to the International Court of Justice and not the other parties. Uganda and Rwanda would have

done better to portray themselves as harbingers of regional stability rather than instability. The Congo conflict at large and the in-fighting between Rwanda and Uganda risks the Great Lakes region to enter a spiral of conflicts and humanitarian disasters.

#### **Uganda-Rwanda failure at organising rebellion at the war front.**

Focus seems to have been placed on a militaristic strategy before a political strategy. Military manoeuvres preceded political strategy in the sense that it was after the RPF and UPDF fought endless wars to capture some territory that a political strategy to organise Congolese rebels started. But even when the rebellions were organised the military commanders from the two countries went ahead to dominate their actual operations. The Congolese rebels were not allowed to chart their independent strategies and to be seen to be fighting for a national cause. In RCD-Kisangani, Wamba Dia Wamba is a protégé of Kazini (Uganda's overall military Commander in Eastern Congo). In RCD-Goma Rwandese authorities hold the instruments of command. And for Bemba's MCL, their lifeline is in Uganda and amongst Ex-FAR based in Uganda. In terms of protracted struggles, no where has a rebel group fighting for a national cause ever succeeded on the basis of foreign command. It usually takes personal sacrifice, determination and ability to mobilise nationalist elements to fight for a cause. At the moment, the Congo rebels may not stand on their own to sustain a war against Kabilia's government.

**Economic repercussions:**

According to Austrain report entitled the Congo Crisis, Rwanda is spending more than 50% of its national budget on its defence and alleges that the Rwanda government may be using development aid funds to supplement its expenditures on the war.

Both Rwanda and Uganda are poor countries dependent on aid. Uganda's development budget is supported by donors by more than 50%. The prospect of such countries bearing the burden of an external war is inconceivable. Therefore, the prospect that the governments of these countries may be diverting development aid to finance the war seems real, but absurd; in view of the fact that this means depriving the poor people in these countries of water, health services, education and social welfare. No wonder therefore that they are ranked together as some of the countries with the poorest development indicators by the United Nations <sup>9</sup> in the world. In the case of Uganda, war expenditures have been rising. It is noted for example, that Uganda's defence budget increased by shs. 91 billion or 89% for the fiscal year ending June 1999 over the previous year.<sup>10</sup> It is further noted this figure does not reflect off budget expenditures. But further to note is the fact that some of the money is not used for actual war expenditures but instead it is diverted by high ranking military officials.



### **The Congo war and the Democratic Deficit in Rwanda and Uganda**

The deployment of UPDF in Congo was done by the President but in contravention of Article 124 of the Constitution. This article requires the President to declare war with approval of parliament. This was not done. But 124(2) which allows the President to declare war without approval of parliament, requires that he seeks approval of the parliament within seventy two hours after the declaration of the state of war. This too, was not done.

To political observers of Uganda and Rwanda's political landscape, it is not surprising that the President of Uganda did not stick to the constitution. In both countries the executive is very powerful vis-as-vis the parliament. While the Ugandan parliament has been proactive in demanding full explanation as to why the war was declared without approval of parliament, the Rwandan parliament has not even raised a finger.

In comparative terms, Uganda's leadership has some legitimacy owing to the fact that the President is directly elected by universal suffrage. The parliament is also directly elected.

But the Rwandan leadership is largely an RPF affair. The issue here is not whether Uganda is more or less democratic than Rwanda, the issue is that the two countries have no moral right to preach democracy to Kabila, when they have not put their houses in order. In the particular case of Rwanda, the situation remains rather lugubrious given the delicate terrain of balancing social and ethnic forces. Evidence however, tends to indicate that a Tutsi oligarchy is emerging very fast in that country, rather than the broad-based scenario that the RPF tried to put up in 1994<sup>11</sup> The delicate situation created by the

consolidation of Tutsi hegemony makes the Rwanda leadership more arrogant and aggressive because without externalising the problems at home and mobilising the nationalist sentiments, the disgruntled elements in Rwanda may raise a number of questions regarding their exclusion from government. In this particular regard, Rwanda authorities also harbour ill-feelings against Uganda for one reason, that some of the deserting Hutu officials find their passage to foreign capitals through Uganda. There are also elements within the official circles of Rwanda who have a strong desire that the hitherto good relations with Uganda should continue to be cherished. These elements have also been victims of their conviction at the hands of the emerging Tutsi oligarchy (the core around President Paul Kagame)\*.

### **Regional and International Considerations**

Whatever the differences exist between Uganda and Rwanda, the critical point is that these two countries risk being isolated in the regional and international agenda. The perception that they can not be trusted or that they are empire builders is not easy to rub from these useful circles. It is undoubtable fact that United States and Britain saw the leaders of Rwanda and Uganda as part of the "new breed" of African leaders. From this perspective, what is known is that Uganda enjoys favourable American support especially for its role in dealing with the threat of islamic fundamentalism in the region, sponsored by Sudan; and its support to the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA). The US treats Uganda's security concerns in the North and West with seriousness. But this notwithstanding, the failure on Uganda's part to execute a plausible mission in the Congo

puts her at an adverse disadvantage in these international connections. The US and Britain are in search of reliable allies, with a record of making things happen. On the contrary the events in Kisangani do not prove Rwanda and Uganda as reliable allies.

Closer home in East Africa, the rejuvenated energy to renew the East African Cooperation (EAC) has slackened ever since all the eyes focused on Congo. In addition, the prospects of Rwanda joining the EAC are getting dim in the view of the fact that the good working relationship between Uganda and Rwanda were catalysing the latter's motivation to join the EAC. In effect, Museveni's dream of greater East Africa is on the brink collapse, altogether. Some of the regional leaders, such as President Moi of Kenya, whose relations with Museveni had gradually improved seem to have gone on the ice-rock once again, though not pronounced. This is demonstrated by Moi's recent tottering with Paul Kagame, which appears to be a stab in the back of Museveni. At this level, the vision of a greater East Africa may once again collapse in the hands of our leaders, as it did in 1975.

## **Conclusion**

It is not easy to conclude this paper simply because the of issues being discussed, cannot be prematurely concluded is not yet any solution to the problems of Congo and the problematique of the alliance between Uganda and Rwanda and their conflicts. Congo remains occupied and the Uganda-Rwanda alliance seems to be at the brink of collapse. The world is watching these developments which threaten stability in the Great Lakes region and prospects for peace on the continent remain elusive. The prospects for

African peoples to live a reasonably decent life are still shattered by the endless, senseless and silly wars.

## Notes

1. See the speech by Susan Rice, the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs to the US House of Representatives' International Relations subcommittee on Africa on September 15, 1998 reproduced appendix II in Mwesiga Baregu (ed) *Crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo* SAPES Books Harare, 1999 pp. 186-194.
2. Speech by the Acting DRC Ambassador to Zimbabwe, Kikaya bin Karubi gives the list of some of the officials (of Rwandese decent) in the initial line up of Kabila's government, See his presentation in Mwesiga Baregu (ed) *Crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo* pp. 102-6.
3. The Congolese people generally view Ugandan and Rwandese military presence in their country as occupation forces. The press in Uganda has covered these sentiments generally.
4. For a detailed treatment of this issue see William Reno "Stealing like a Bandit, stealing like a state" paper presented to the Department of Political Science Seminar at Makerere University. According to Reno Uganda's exports of gold rose from US \$12.4 million, in 1994-5 to US \$ 110 million in 1996-97. And that in 1999 gold was the second largest export for Uganda after coffee.
5. See Ogenga Otunu, "Rwandese Refugees and Immigrants in Uganda" in **Howard Adelman and Astri Suhrke (eds). The Rwanda Crisis from Uganda to Zaire; The Path of a Genocide**, Transaction Publishers, New Jersey, 1999. According to Otunu, Rwandese joined Idi Amin to survive. They were facing discrimination from several quarters of the Uganda population even when some were born in Uganda.
6. Major General Fred Rwigyema, the first commander of the RPA was formerly the Deputy Army Commander of the National Resistance Army (NRA) as the UPDF was known then. Rwigyema died on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1990. President Paul Kagame himself was the Chief of Military Intelligence in the NRA by the time the RPA/RPF launched the offensive against Habyalimana government in Rwanda, he was undertaking a course in the US as an NRA officer. On the death of Maj. Gen. Rwigyema, Kagame was called in by Museveni to lead RPA's war efforts.
7. See Bangura Yusuf, in Mwesiga Baregu (ed) *Crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo* pp. 10-21.
8. *ibid* Bangura, p. 12.  
Report entitled *The Congo Crisis* authored by the Department of Political Science, Helsinki University for Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finland Government p. 101.

The report argues that the costs of the war have over-burdened Rwanda and Uganda because they had initially hoped for quick and deceive victory when the war broke

9. Paper presented to the Department of Political Science, Makerere University 26 May 2000. See pp. 17-20. Among other arguments presented by Clark are that the war is being used by senior military officials to make private gains. Not only are they active in plundering Congo resources, they also divert official funds intended for the soldiers and suppliers in Congo.
10. Several of the Hutu top politicians who had been included in the broad-based RPF government have been sidelined. These included Former Prime Minister Faustin Twagiramungu, former Interior Minister Seth Sendashonga for RPF Secretary General Alexis Kanyanwengwe, for Minister of Planning Finance, J.B. Birara and finally, former President Pasteur Bizimungu.



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