

## Uganda and Rwanda: The Rocky Alliance

DO NOT REMOVE

Until recently, good relations between Uganda and its neighbour Rwanda were taken for granted. Both President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda and the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) strongman Major-General Paul Kagame are considered the 'new breed' of African leaders. These are the leaders who have openly challenged the old African order based on the sanctity of territorial boundaries and non-interference in the domestic political affairs of other states.

Museveni and Kagame openly intervened to overthrow the dictatorial regime of President Mobutu of Zaire. However, a clash between the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) and the Rwandese Patriotic Army (RPA) in the DRC town of Kisangani in mid-August 1999 exposed the strain in their relations. Both countries support the Congolese rebels fighting President Laurent Kabila of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the man they helped to power in May 1997.

The clash between Uganda and Rwanda illustrated a number of issues:

**First**, the tenuous nature of the relationship between the RPF and the National Resistance Movement (NRM) which is based on personal as opposed to institutional relations.

**Second**, the conflicting strategies on how to prosecute the war in the DRC.

**Third**, the struggle for hegemony between Uganda and Rwanda in the Great Lakes Region.

**Last**, but not least, business rivalry over the lucrative economic resources in the DRC.

Despite these conflicts, for the time being, Uganda and Rwanda will remain nominal allies since the price of a complete split is too costly. However, the rivalry between these two countries will further complicate efforts to resolve the political and military conflict in the DRC.

Uganda's close relations with Rwanda are a historical product of the role Tutsi refugees played in the NRM guerrilla struggle that brought Yoweri Museveni to power in Uganda; and the subsequent role played by Uganda, both military and diplomatic, in the capture of state power in Rwanda by the RPA in 1994. The RPA is thus, an offshoot of the Ugandan NRM. Relations between the two countries are largely based on informal links between people who served in the same army or government, who share common experiences, and who feel their destiny is linked by a perceived common threat: that of the Hutu

*Interahamwe* militia, and soldiers of ex-FAR who have linked up with rebels such the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), and the Allied Democratic Front (ADF), fighting President Museveni's regime in Uganda and their Sudanese backers.

In pursuit of their national security, Uganda and Rwanda supported rebellion against Mobutu in Zaire because he was perceived as supporting groups hostile to the regimes in the two states. Both countries are now supporting DRC rebels fighting to overthrow Kabila. They accuse Kabila of doing nothing to prevent the Hutu *Interahamwe* militia, ex-FAR, ADF, and the Sudanese from waging war against Uganda and Rwanda.

**"Rwanda favours direct involvement of its troops in conventional warfare and quick victory."**

However, a split has occurred between Uganda and Rwanda on which strategy to employ. Rwanda favours more direct involvement of its troops, in conventional warfare and a quick victory. Uganda, on the other hand, would like to see the Congolese doing the fighting, with foreign forces providing training, logistical and intelligence support. Uganda favours a more protracted guerrilla struggle, during which rebels can set up administrative structures, and politicise the population. During the struggle against Mobutu, the Rwandese army was directly involved in the fighting and the capture of Kinshasa. For this they suffered a nationalist backlash from the Congolese, since they were perceived as an occupation force.

This conflicting strategy has once again manifested itself in the current struggle by the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD) to overthrow Kabila's government. During the early days of the rebellion, Professor Ernest Wamba Dia Wamba was elected to head the RCD to give the organisation a Congolese face. However, the Rwandese were intent on keeping a strong hold on the RCD and the Tutsi element represented by Bizimaha Karaha remained largely in control. The RCD therefore operated as a Rwandese puppet, and failed to gain popular support

outside Goma. Under these circumstances, Uganda sponsored another rebel group under **Jean Pierre Bemba**, the son of a prominent Congolese businessman. Uganda's strategy is to build up a 'truly' Congolese organisation, that would take charge of the Congo without Ugandan troops necessarily being in Congo. Uganda has been involved in providing training for Bemba's rebel army, intelligence and logistical support. They have also encouraged Bemba to set up political and administrative structures in areas under his control. Where Ugandans are involved in fighting, they allow Bemba's rebel army to take the credit. This has not gone down well with Rwanda, which accuses Uganda of fragmenting the rebel movement. To make matters worse, when the RCD elected **Emille Ilunga** to replace Ernest Wamba Dia Wamba, the latter refused to acknowledge the change of leadership, and shifted camp to Kisangani under the protection of Ugandan troops. This led to a split into RCD-Goma, under Emille Ilunga and RCD-Kisangani under Ernest Wamba Dia Wamba. Consequently, relations between Uganda and Rwanda worsened to the point of open hostility and conflict in mid-August 1999.

Relations between Uganda and Rwanda have always been dogged by the struggle for hegemony in the Great Lakes Region. Uganda has been perceived as the regional hegemon, and it presents itself as the big brother. At the same time, the UPDF looks down upon the RPA and presents itself as a more disciplined and superior force; thus the threats by UPDF Chief of Staff, **Brigadier James Kazini**, who was until recently the Commander of the UPDF in the Congo, to arrest RCD-Goma Commander, **Jean Pierre Ondekane**. This attitude is resented by Rwanda which does not want to play second fiddle to Uganda. The Rwandese perceive themselves as having an efficient fighting force. Major-General Kagame for instance, was not amused when he was not given recognition for his role in the overthrow of Mobutu. He openly went to the international press about details of the war against Mobutu.

Rwanda accuses some elements of the UPDF of being nothing better than businessmen who are bent on plundering the economic resources of the DRC. To the RPA, the UPDF is engaged in business. It is an open secret that the respective military commanders grant mining concessions in zones under their control. **Major-General Salim Saleh**, the brother of President Museveni has been the foremost person involved in mining gold and diamonds. He is also involved in trade in timber. In September 1998, a plane carrying **Lieutenant-Colonel Jet Mwebaze**, the

younger brother of **Brigadier James Kazini**, and some business associates crashed while on a gold buying mission to the DRC. There have been complaints from the Uganda Civil Aviation Authority about unauthorised flights to and from the DRC by elements within the UPDF who use the old airport at Entebbe; and also from the Uganda Revenue Authority about smuggling by UPDF and unscrupulous businessmen. Rwanda for its part is engaged in a systematic state-organised economic exploitation of the Congo, the proceeds of which are used to sustain the Rwandese economy. There is thus an economic rivalry between the two allies.

It is under the circumstances discussed above that recent relations between erstwhile allies Uganda and Rwanda have been strained, resulting in serious clashes between troops of the UPDF and those of the RPA in the DRC town of Kisangani in August 1999. A face-to-face meeting between Museveni and Rwandese Vice-President Major-General Kagame was necessary before a ceasefire could be arranged.

After the clash, a Joint Commission of inquiry was set up between the UPDF and the RPA headed by **Major-General Odong Jeje** and **Brigadier Kayumba**, the respective heads of the two armies. The report was perceived by many in the UPDF as being critical of the UPDF, and thus a moral victory for the RPA, who had in any case inflicted a heavy casualty on the unsuspecting UPDF during the August clashes. Reaction to the report threatened to split the UPDF and led to criticism of Major-General Odong Jeje. There were also talks of setting up another commission under the leadership of Deputy Chief of Military Intelligence, **Major Noble Mayombo**. This incident also exposed the fragile cohesion within the UPDF.

### Implication for Relations Between Uganda and Rwanda

The clashes between the UPDF and the RPA have a number of implications for relations between the two former allies.

Senior officers in the UPDF such as **Colonel Kahinda Otafire**, who was nearly captured during the August clashes, accused the RPA of treachery and betrayal. The incident resulted in anti-Rwandese sentiments not just within the UPDF, but also among the civilian population. Ugandans accused the Rwandese of being ungrateful, not only for the hospitality and assistance accorded to them in their struggle, but also because the families of a great number of Rwandese officials still live in Uganda.

### Rwanda is engaged in a systematic state-organised economic exploitation of the Congo

Relations between Uganda and Rwanda are at an all-time low. When **Lieutenant-Colonel Reuben Ikondere**, the Commander of the Ugandan forces in Bunia was killed in Beni in mid-November 1999, the RPA did not send any condolences. Previously, this would have been unthinkable. However, few would be surprised now, since Lieutenant-Colonel Ikondere was the head of Ernest Dia Wamba's security. When the RPA overran Wamba's headquarters at Zatekxi Hotel in Kisangani during the August clashes, it was Lieutenant-Colonel Ikondere who saved him from being captured.

The image of the UPDF as an efficient fighting force was also tarnished after the heavy casualties during the August clashes, numbering hundreds. It was not only demoralizing for the UPDF; it also brought home the reality of Uganda's intervention in the DRC. Questions began to be raised more openly about the prudence of remaining in the DRC.

The manner in which the conflict between the two armies was 'resolved' also indicated clearly that relations between Uganda and Rwanda are built on personalities, that is Museveni and Kagame. This therefore raises the question of how long the close relations will continue; and whether the relations will outlive the two leaders. Even more disturbing is the prospect of an internal rebellion by elements within the UPDF who feel that Museveni is being too lenient with the Rwandese. Equally disturbing is the prospect of rebellion by sections of the RPA who think that Major-General Kagame is caving in too much to Yoweri Museveni. It is not an easy choice

for either country. The odds against Uganda and Rwanda are too great, and the dangers of an open split are clear for both to see. They have more than enough common enemies. For the immediate future, they will remain allies, as both regimes aim simply to survive.

Although both Rwanda and Uganda allege that they have intervened in the DRC to ensure their own security, the threats to the security of both countries emanate from internal sources. Intervention in the DRC will not eradicate the security threats; if anything, it will in the long run undermine the security of these states. Despite involvement in the DRC, ADF attacks and raids in the Western Uganda districts of Kasese, Bundibugyo and Kabarole have continued, resulting in death, destruction, and displacement of civilians. Involvement in the DRC will overstretch the military and economic resources of the two states. At the beginning of November, Rwanda announced the introduction of 'voluntary' taxes to sustain its involvement in the DRC.

Support for rival rebel groups has further complicated the situation in the DRC and it will make any peaceful attempts to resolve the DRC conflict more difficult. The existence of numerous rival rebel groups implies a multiplicity of negotiating partners and positions. In such a situation it is not easy to arrive at a common negotiating position and agreements are thus difficult to reach. Even if the parties to a conflict sign a peace agreement, the dangers of it being breached are greater. The numerous agreements to bring an end to the war in the DRC so far, illustrate this.