

Burundi inches toward war

by Linda de Hoyos

Burundi President Sylvestre Ntibantunganya has made visits to both Washington and Paris in the last month, urgently calling for foreign intervention to avert either full-scale war in the country, or the complete overthrow of his civilian government by a military coup. Since the October 1993 murder of Burundi's first elected President, Melchior Ndadaye, the country has been slipping into chaos, as the military and police forces—comprised 99% by the Tutsi elite caste—has sought to overturn the result of the elections, which gave a 65% victory to the Frodebu Party, a party comprised of Hutus (the word originally meant “serf”) and those Tutsis who have repudiated the supremacist ideology of their own caste.

The Burundian President is specifically asking the United States to intervene as a mediating force. In Paris, he also called for the convening of a “conference on peace, stability, and development in the region of the Great African Lakes,” which would tackle the question of up to 4 million displaced people since the October 1993 bloodletting in Burundi that preceded the summer 1994 horrors in neighboring Rwanda.

The President is also calling upon the western countries to help reorganize the Burundi military. “We do not want the defense the security forces of Burundi to be the monopoly of any ethnic group,” Ntibantunganya told reporters in Paris. This demand, which would end the military domination of Hutus by the Tutsi military, has been brushed aside, particularly by United Nations bureaucrats involved in Burundi, and by those attached to the policy orbit of British Minister of Overseas Development Baroness Lynda Chalker. The Burundi military is now working closely with the Rwandan Patriotic Front, another Tutsi organization, which ran the blitzkrieg invasion of Rwanda in 1994 from Uganda—all under the approving eye of Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni and his own mentor, Lady Chalker.

Chalker is reportedly to arrive in the capital city of Bujumbura, to aid in United Nations Commission on Inquiry into the Burundi crisis. In the Burundi Forum held by the Search for Common Ground think tank in Washington, D.C., Ould Abdullah, who recently left his post as U.N. special envoy to Burundi, squelched any idea of integrating the Burundi military, because, he said, Tutsis would not accept it. Abdullah spent his tenure in Burundi targeting

any Hutu armed resistance to the “ethnic cleansing” that has proceeded in the country. According to the Belgian paper *Le Standaard*, for instance, Bujumbura has now largely been “cleansed” of Hutus. The families of those Hutu politicians still in the National Assembly or the government administration have been sent out of the country for safety reasons.

Abdullah's stance does not bode well for the U.N.-Chalker inquiry or mediation bid.

In addition, Jimmy Carter was also in East Africa in September, in an effort to organize a conference on the region among leaders from Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire, and Uganda.

Reportedly, an effort is also being made for mediation from Italy.

None of these initiatives into the Burundi situation is coordinated, and none begins to address the underlying economic crisis which has exacerbated caste tensions.

The only public challenge to the perception of the Burundi crisis as put forward by such stooges as Abdullah, has come from American Ambassador Robert Krueger. In September, Krueger precipitated a government crisis when he called for a full investigation into the report that the Burundian military had murdered up to 140 Hutu civilians in a Bujumbura suburb, after he had gone to examine the massacre site himself. Krueger's call drew strong fire from Tutsi Interior Minister Gabrielle Sinarinzi, who demanded that Krueger be declared *persona non grata*. When Hutu Foreign Minister Paul Munyembari intervened to say that Sinarinzi did not speak for the government, the military demanded a cabinet reorganization. On Oct. 12, President Ntibantunganya obliged. The new cabinet, composed of 25 members, now has only 10 members of the Frodebu Party, the party which won 65% in the elections!

Mass murders continue

While negotiations and inquiries proceed in Bujumbura, massacres continue. The government reported Nov. 1, that up to 250 Hutu civilians had been murdered in a village near Ngozi in northern Burundi by the Tutsi military. The mass murder was reportedly retaliation for attacks on soldiers from Hutu guerrillas. The Hutu guerrilla force is reportedly now in control of a “war zone” covering the northwestern eighth of the country.

President Ntibantunganya has understandably informed officials in both Paris and Washington, that if there is no action to integrate the Army, then more and more Hutus will take up arms against the Tutsi military, and a military coup will likely ensue. This terrible alternative, however, matches the aim of British intelligence: the crushing of eastern Africa under a military machine that will clear the land and open this mineral-rich region up to full-scale foreign exploitation. The political chief of the Tutsi military, former dictator Pierre Buyoya, has already been appointed a “special adviser” to the World Bank.

How Burundi reached this point of crisis

This interview with a member of the Politburo of the Frodebu Party of Burundi was conducted by Dennis Speed in September.

EIR: Many people in the United States know something about the situation in Rwanda, but the situation in Burundi is virtually unknown. Could you tell us when the most recent situation erupted and something about the history there?

A: The current problem in Burundi was brought to the fore only recently, in October 1993, when the first democratically elected President, Melchior Ndadaye, was assassinated. It is true to say that the roots of the problem go back to maybe 30 years earlier than that.

EIR: Could you tell us something about the circumstances of the assassination of President Ndadaye?

A: The ruling group that had been in power since the early 1960s was operating behind the military. Previously this group had murdered most of the members of the National Assembly. In 1972, there were other mass killings, actually a genocide that occurred, carried out by this group. But in 1993, the first democratic elections were held, and the situation was reversed. For the first time in Burundi history, a candidate emerging from another group was elected by a very comfortable majority, by 65% of the votes. Obviously, those who had been in power until that time, felt they could not possibly accept that.

EIR: Who was the new leadership?

A: That ruling group that had been in power for over 30 years was the Uprona Party, which the people identified with Tutsi ethnicity, because the most powerful people among this group were among the Tutsi leadership. The new leadership, by the name of Frodebu, which came to power after the first multiparty elections and the single-party system was brought to an end, was popularly identified with Hutu ethnicity. The new leader was elected by 65% of the total votes, across ethnic lines. But in the minds of the people, the leadership was basically identified with Hutu ethnicity, simply because the new President was Hutu. But in October 1993, the President was killed, along with the speaker of the National Assembly, the deputy speaker of the National Assembly, and other key officials. The reason was doublefold. First, to frus-

trate the electors who had clearly put their confidence in this new leadership, and secondly, to show that they were concerned that they would no longer be enjoying the privileges they had enjoyed for the last three decades. They had acquired wealth; they were afraid that this time around, there would be some kind of reversal of fortune, and they fantasized that this would happen.

EIR: How long did the new President serve before he was killed?

A: He served exactly 102 days.

EIR: Did a military conflict begin after the assassination of the President?

A: Shortly after the murder of President Ndadaye, there was a fairly violent resistance on the part of the population. That was spontaneous. Mostly people were fear-ridden, fearing that what happened to the President might happen to them. This had previously occurred to them, in the mid-1960s and mid-1970s. The military soon got the better of the population and ended up imposing its own order, with the help of the civilian politicians. They reached a point where the victors of the democratic elections had to accept to negotiate with those who had just killed the beginnings of democracy, on the grounds that they had no alternative. A Convention of Government was drafted, whereby those who had won the elections had to accept to relinquish some of their privileges and to accept to share power.

So instead of keeping on the line of the 65% for the Presidential elections and 80% for the legislative elections, the convention ruled that the victors of the June 1993 elections would get 60% of designated positions and the opposition would get 40%, that the ministerial posts would be shared by 45% for the opposition.

In addition, over 99% of the military are Tutsis. Over 99% of the intelligence and law enforcement agencies are Tutsi. Not to speak of the actual representation in the foreign service, because the power-sharing agreement says that 50% should go to the opposition. And so, it turned out very clearly that the winners ultimately were those who had lost the elections.

EIR: What people are seeing now is not the first time that major violence has occurred against the Hutus?

A: In 1961, Burundi had the first general elections, in preparation for the end of colonial days. There were still many parties, not one single party. The man who became prime minister as a result of those elections was Prince Louis Rwagasore, the son of King Mwambutsa IV. He was very popular, and the colonial masters were not very happy with that, because his stance was that Burundi should achieve independence as soon as possible. Shortly after his election, he was killed. In order to resolve that crisis, King Mwambutsa IV appointed a prime minister, Pierre Ngendandumwe, who was

not from the majority party that had won the elections, and who was a Hutu. That was in 1961. He appointed a prime minister who was Hutu.

The Tutsis had always been groomed to be leaders by the colonial masters; they could not understand that a Hutu should be placed in such a position at such a high level. A few years later, there were other elections, and the party that came with the majority of votes was the Uprona Party, which at that time was not a Tutsi-dominated party. Uprona had the right to have the most parliamentarians in the national assembly. These were, of course, Hutus, since the demographics of Burundi is 85% Hutus and 14% Tutsis, and 1% Twa. These demographics help explain why, in the history of elections in Burundi, there has always been this phenomenon. It is similar to South Africa in that aspect. It has been observed in Burundi and South Africa—whenever a minority attempts to rule at will, more often than not, conflict grows which is never-ending. That is exactly what has happened in Burundi.

In 1965, the military executed a majority of the National Assembly, on the pretext of a fake charge that the Assembly was plotting an overthrow. They killed everyone—80% of the Assembly was murdered. This was the second major crisis in Burundi. In 1966, the chief of staff of the military, Michel Bicombero, carried out a coup, and Burundi proceeded to be ruled by the Tutsi military until June 1993, when Melchior Ndadaye, a Hutu, was elected President.

EIR: Is there coordination between the Rwandan Patriotic Front and the Tutsi military in Burundi?

A: At the time of the assassination of Melchior Ndadaye, it was disclosed by some media in Uganda that there was a plan that was about to be put into operation in the whole of the central African region, whereby a Hima empire—Hima being a subgroup of the Tutsi ethnic group and which is the boldest and most supremacist group—would be created across the borders. It is a cross-border ethnic phenomena, which is present in Uganda, and is very vibrant in Rwanda and in Burundi. In this plan, all the Himas would unite and create a huge territory where they would be the leaders and would rule over the majority groups in the three countries. Uganda would be the chief implementor of that plan, with [Ugandan President Yoweri] Museveni one of the chief agents, along with the vice president and defense minister of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, and either [former military Presidents Jean-Baptiste] Bagaza or [Pierre] Buyoya being the Burundi part.

Even today, the military of Burundi can go to Rwanda without any procedures whatsoever. The military of Rwanda can do the same. You can no longer really talk of any border existing between Rwanda and Burundi. The same holds for the border of Rwanda and Uganda. The training of the military and paramilitary in Burundi do take place in Rwanda. This collaboration takes place on a daily basis.

EIR: This idea of the Hima empire goes back considerably.

A: In the history of this central African region, from perhaps the 15th century up through the mid-20th century, this region was ruled by kings, and the chief rulers were identified as Tutsis and Himas.

EIR: Did the colonialists use the Tutsi as an overseer force for them?

A: It had always been a pattern during colonial days that the colonial administration would make use of the minority groups—groom them—to maintain themselves in power as long as they could. This divide-and-rule strategy has always been there, and it can only work where you offset one group against another—where you give power to a minority over the majority. This was very much cultivated and encouraged by the colonialists. The minority would have a leading role and means in education, in the military, in the civil service, in the economy, and you can see that in Burundi today. It was a very powerful channel for the colonial masters to pursue the exploitation of the country.

Imperialism goes through alliance, through a complex geopolitical game, that not only involves countries that are neighbors to one another, but with nations that may not be close but which have similar patterns, thanks to the same game of divide and rule.

EIR: What would you wish the United States to do in this crisis?

A: We are very much willing to have people encourage the idea of negotiation and have the different warring factions in Burundi sit together and talk. There are life and death matters that the Burundi people alone cannot possibly tackle, since they have failed to do so in the last few years. It has reached a point where the civilian-military relations have completely deteriorated, and the people cannot digest the military or see eye-to-eye with them at all. It looks as though a third party, which has to be powerful enough to impose a certain order and operates on principles, is required.

The most crucial question is the creation of an integrated army, which integrates members of both ethnic groups, so that we have a balanced military and police force. That can only happen if there is successful mediation, and that can only happen if powerful nations, such as the United States, force the belligerents to sit around the table and agree on a political agenda. Other nations have proved to be incapable of achieving that. The OAU [Organization of African Unity] has tried time and time again and has achieved nothing at all. We believe that the United States would qualify in this, because they have no historical colonial record, and could play a vital role, a neutral role. But I have learned that the process of political decision-making here is very strange indeed. The United States may say that it is a democratic country, but it is more a media-influenced country, than influenced by the people. The media is quite a power.