

Great Lakes crisis: a view from Belgium

by Dean Andromidas

The British-orchestrated war and genocide that have engulfed the Great Lakes region of Africa raises the question of the role of Belgium in this crisis. After all, Rwanda, Burundi, and Zaire are former colonies of the Kingdom of Belgium. Why has it remained so conspicuously silent, at a time when the last remnants of its influence in the region are being wiped out by this invasion of Zaire by the Ugandan Army, deployed by the British stooge, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni? Why has Belgium been unable to put forward any independent initiative to stop the genocide now being perpetrated against Hutu refugees?

In an effort to find answers to these questions, this writer travelled to Belgium, as part of an effort by an *EIR* team of journalists and investigators. We were surprised to find, on the one hand, that the Belgian government has officially put the Great Lakes crisis close to the bottom of its agenda, while, on the other hand, among well-informed political, economic, and church-related circles, there is a surprisingly serious awareness of the role of Uganda, the British, and allied American interests, in fueling the crisis.

One Africa expert based at the University of Antwerp told *EIR*, that if the so-called Zairean rebel leader Laurent Kabila were left without his Ugandan and Rwandan Tutsi troops, his rebellion "would immediately collapse." A former Belgian functionary with several decades of experience in the region, was asked for his assessment of Kabila's army. He replied, "He has 15,000 Ugandan troops" and no Zaireans to speak of. When asked who supplies Kabila's weapons, he said, "The British." And the role of the United States? His reply, "We at first saw the Americans and British as being completely in one boat, but now we are not so sure." But when asked what the Belgian government's policy is, he answered, "The government has no policy. Africa is at the bottom of the list."

One obvious reason for this disinterest, is the fact that the country is embroiled in several major domestic crises, such as, the Dutroux pedophile murder ring, in which a high-level political coverup is almost universally condemned by the general population. Also, the related, ongoing investigation of the 1991 murder of former Belgian Socialist Party leader André Cools, and other corruption scandals, could very well bring

down the fragile coalition government of Prime Minister Jean-Luc Dehaene. Furthermore, the closing down of a steel mill and one of the largest automobile factories in the country, has sparked a mass strike process whose intensity has not been seen in the country since World War II. Given these problems, coupled with the peculiarities of Belgian national politics, which is split down the middle between French-speaking Wallonia and Flemish-speaking Flanders, national governments in the last ten years have walked a political tight-rope. Prime Minister Dehaene presides over a four-party coalition, including two socialist parties, one representing Flanders and the other Wallonia, and, similarly, two Christian Democratic parties.

In better days, Zairean President Mobutu Sese Seko often chided the Belgians, saying, "We in Zaire do not have the tribal problems you Belgians seem to have."

Wiping out Belgian influence

The wiping out of Belgium's influence in Central Africa was instrumental to the success of redrawing the political map of the Great Lakes region of Africa. Zaire, the former Belgian Congo, had been a crown colony of Belgium since the 19th century, until it was granted its independence in the 1960s. Neighboring Rwanda and Burundi, formerly part of imperial Germany's East African colony, became Belgian colonies after World War I. Under Belgium's colonial system, the colonial economy was dominated by Société Générale, the country's largest holding company, which had tremendous holdings in industry, mining, trading, and banking. Civil society was dominated by the Belgian Catholic Church, religious orders, and charitable organizations. Société Générale's interest in these countries' economies gradually lost its dominant position. It is important to note that Société Générale has very little mining activity in the region, which is dominated by British, South African, and Canadian companies.

By contrast, the role of the Catholic Church, particularly its missionary activities, continued to play an important role in education, health care, and charitable work, particularly in Rwanda. In the post-colonial period, the missionary movement and allied groupings in the Belgian Christian democratic party, known as the Christian People's Party, continued to play an important role and exerted considerable influence with the government's Secretariat for International Development Cooperation.

In 1990, at the same time that the United Nations began the so-called democratization process in Rwanda, the country was invaded by Ugandan troops and the rebels of Paul Kagame and his Rwandan Patriotic Front. The above-named Belgian grouping gave strong support to President Juvenal Habyarimana. As a Catholic, he also enjoyed a close friendship with former Belgian King Badouin. Habyarimana also enjoyed considerable support among his people, Hutus and Tutsis alike. It took his assassination, in 1994, when the plane carrying him and the President of neighboring Burundi was

shot down outside Kigali Airport, to ignite the preplanned catastrophe that has thrown this region into the current genocidal war that threatens all of Africa.

Following the UN's lead

From 1990 on, a campaign was undertaken in Belgium to isolate this grouping, especially by a group within the Belgian Socialist Party. So divisive was this struggle, that it threatened to create a government crisis, which merely served to prevent the Belgian government from putting forward any independent initiative. The result was that Belgium simply followed the lead of the United Nations, with disastrous results.

At the time of the assassination of Habyarimana, Belgium had 600 elite paratroopers in Kigali, Rwanda when the rioting and ethnic clashes began. Under United Nations orders, the troops were forbidden to intervene militarily, not even to fire their guns in the air to stop the bloodbath, and suffered serious casualties. This is currently the subject of a parliamentary inquiry, and could lead to yet another government crisis. Some observers suggest that if Belgian troops had had a mandate to intervene militarily, they could have reestablished order and thus averted the catastrophe that followed.

Similarly, Belgium lost credibility in Zaire, as Brussels fell behind a policy of supporting a strictly anti-Mobutu line, at the expense of being able to deal with the unfolding genocidal disaster of both the refugee crisis and the expanding war. This is best reflected in the failure of the so-called "Tindermans plan," named after the former Belgian foreign and prime minister, Leo Tindermans. According to a report in the Belgian daily *La Libre Belgique* on April 4, the plan had the support of French President Jacques Chirac, and within the cabinet of European Union President Jacques Santer. Its purpose was to prevent a widening of the war in the region. The idea was to remove the tens of thousands of Rwandan refugees away from the Rwanda-Zaire border as a means of preventing their becoming a source of provocation that might lead to an attack by the Rwandan and Ugandan armies. Chirac requested Tindermans, as a senior European political figure, to negotiate an agreement with the Zairean government to allow these refugees to resettle much deeper within Zaire. Once away from the border, the International War Crimes Tribunal would be able to separate out any suspected perpetrators of war crimes.

Once again, the Belgian government refused to endorse such an initiative, on the grounds that it would give support to Mobutu. As was feared, it was precisely allegations that the Hutu militias were using the refugee camps, which served as the pretext for an invasion into Zaire of up to 15,000 Ugandan and Rwandan troops.

As of this writing, Belgian political circles have told *EIR* that their government would be ready to support a strong U.S. initiative, especially to save the refugees. Such an initiative would enable the government to overcome partisan resistance.

All Sudanese choose peace, except Garang

by Muriel Mirak Weissbach

In the second half of April, a momentous event is scheduled to take place in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum. No one should expect that CNN or any major Western media outlet will cover it, because it flies in the face of the slanders which have been spread by those media against Sudan. Nonetheless, the event will have vast consequences on the future not only of Sudan, but of many neighboring African nations.

On April 21, a definitive Peace Treaty is to be signed, between the government of Gen. Omar al Bashir, and leaders of the rebel forces who had been waging war against the central authorities since 1983. The signing ceremony is to take place just over one year after the two sides signed a Political Charter, outlining the principles on the basis of which a final treaty could be negotiated. At the time of the April 10, 1996 Charter, two leaders of major factions of the rebel forces had signed, Commander Dr. Riek Machar Teny Dhurgon, chairman of the South Sudan Independence Movement (SSIM) and commander in chief of the South Sudan Independence Army (SSIA), and Commander Kerbino Kuanynin, chairman of the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM/A), Bahr el Ghazal group. Witnesses to the signing included the founder of the SPLAS, Arok Thon Arok. By now, leaders of five factions are part of the peace process, including James Othow Along, SPLM/A-United, Fashoda; Theophilus Ochang, of the Equatoria Defense Force (EDF); Mohamed Haruka Kafi, of the SPLA/M, Nuba Mountains; the Independent Group led by Kuanj Makoi, Arok Thon Arok, Shal Deng, and others; and Lawrence Lual, minister of education of the SPLM. Yet others are expected to join, as well.

The 'ultimate challenge' to Garang

This means, that the only rebel force which is holding out, refusing to join the peace process, is that of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army faction of John Garang. It lays bare the fact, that the continued military and political opposition identified with Garang, has nothing to do with the internal dynamics of the 14-year civil war, but is the expression solely of the commitment, on the part of the British Privy Council and its allies in the United States, to manipulate local forces, like those of Garang, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Eritrea, to fuel a war, in hopes of breaking up the nation.

As President al Bashir said, in announcing plans to sign the agreement after the Adhha Eid holiday, this peace treaty represents the "ultimate challenge" to Garang and his backers.