

Burundi: countdown to catastrophe

by Linda de Hoyos

The last week of March showed that British intelligence and its accomplice Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni are moving without restraint to repeat in Burundi the mass slaughters that occurred in Rwanda in the summer of 1994.

On March 27, Burundi President Sylvestre Ntibantunganya told Belgian television that "I really see a genocide," referring to the murder of 500 Hutus in the Bwiza district of the capital city of Bujumbura by Tutsi militiamen on the night of March 24. "Those things were well prepared and carried out fairly systematically. . . . The targets were Hutus and the authors were clearly an ethnic group, I say it was . . . deliberately started for a genocide." Government Secretary for Public Security Issa Ngendakumana concurred: "The district has been cleansed. There are no Hutus left here. I believe the attack was planned—two days of provocation, and then they move in."

Both the President and the Public Security official were prevented from visiting the district the day after the massacres by the Tutsi-dominated military. Reports further indicate that more than 50,000 Burundian Hutus from Bujumbura have fled to Zaire.

The massacre was prompted by agitation from the Tutsi side, led by former Presidents Pierre Buyoya and Jean Baptiste Bagaza, both of whom led Burundi as military dictators for the Tutsi minority. The Tutsi minority, with the military as its major instrument of power, ruled Burundi from the point of independence until June 1993, when the first-ever national elections brought Hutu Melchior Ndadaye to the presidency. Ndadaye was murdered in a coup attempt by the Tutsi military in October 1993, along with at least 100,000 more Burundi citizens.

More to the point, the Tutsi military forms a complex in east-central Africa, with the Ugandan National Resistance Army of Uganda dictator Museveni, and Rwandan Patriotic Front, which now rules Rwanda after it blitzkrieged through Rwanda last summer. The RPF invasion was sponsored by Museveni, who himself operates as the regional marcherlord for his close friend Lady Lynda Chalker, British minister of overseas development.

While the Ugandan Army has been deployed against Sudan and in support of the British-Lonrho-backed SPLA insurgency against Khartoum, the RPF has been given free rein in northern Burundi, according to multiple sources, to kill Hutu refugees who had fled Rwanda last year. In addition, the

Burundi military, the Tanzanian government announced March 20, is running incursions into Tanzania to kill Hutu refugees from Burundi who have fled there.

The immediate pretext for the massacre in Bwiza is agitation coming from Tutsi militia called Sans-Defaites (Invincibles), comprised mostly of students reportedly armed by Jean Baptiste Bagaza, with weapons coming from outside the country. On March 23, Tutsi students and militia took to the streets of Bujumbura to demand the expulsion from Burundi of United Nations special representative on the scene Ahmedou Ould Abdallah. The students charged that Abdallah, who has been working closely with President Ntibantunganya, is partisan.

In reality, Abdallah has been providing the cover for the gradual overthrow of the government that was elected in June 1993. Already, agitation, backed by student rampages in the streets of Bujumbura and targeted assassinations of public officials from those associated with Buyoya and Bagaza, forced 1) the September reorganization of government, giving the Tutsi-dominated Uprona Party a major, unelected share in the cabinet; 2) the ouster of the elected speaker of the assembly, Jean Minani, in December; and 3) the removal of Prime Minister Anatole Kanyenkiko, himself a member of the Uprona Party who had refused to back the ouster of Minani. During this entire period, Abdallah and other international observers on the scene, including Common Ground and the U.S.-based Burundi Forum, have orchestrated the charade that they are dealing with two equally culpable feuding groups.

Now, Bagaza, a dictator who fled to exile in Libya for six years before returning to Burundi in 1993, and his underlings are targeting the U.N. special representative himself. It is believed by Hutu representatives in Bujumbura, that if Bagaza et al. succeed in forcing the removal of Abdallah, then President Ntibantunganya will be next, and the Tutsi overthrow of the Hutu elected government will be completed.

To forestall this scenario, President Ntibantunganya has asked for outside military intervention. But despite statements of concern coming from the U.N. Security Council, foreign military protection for the government is not likely. French Cooperation Minister Bernard Debré, who arrived in Bujumbura on March 27, said that France would not take any unilateral military intervention into Burundi, and the Organization of African Unity has also ruled out any intervention. But an all-out military assault on the government is expected—U.S. embassy dependents were ordered out of the country on March 29, and other foreigners are also leaving.

For now, it appears that the Burundi military—which must be seen as a subsection of the Tutsi military clique under Uganda's Museveni and his British controllers—has been given a free hand to carry out the ethnic cleansing it already started in the southern provinces of the country, when after a 1972 Hutu uprising, the military murdered every Hutu male they could lay their hands on in two states.