

## Museveni tries to justify Rice wars in Congo

by Linda de Hoyos

In a speech that lasted 194 minutes, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni attempted to justify to the Ugandan Parliament the deployment of the country's Armed Forces into the Democratic Republic of Congo. "We are in there primarily for our security," he said. "We have not yet taken part in this fighting which is going on. . . . We are just there watching. If we were to do so in future it would be because the region has failed to solve the problem, especially the problem of our security."

The government of the Democratic Republic of Congo has charged that on Aug. 2, Ugandan and Rwandan troops invaded Congo, and on that basis invited governments in the region to send their armed forces to defend the Congo from the aggression. Since Aug. 24, the militaries of Zimbabwe, Angola, and Namibia have driven the Ugandan and Rwandan troops out of western Congo, where they laid siege to the capital city of Kinshasa, and are now targetting the areas held by the Rwandan- and Ugandan-backed rebels in the east—the cities of Goma, Bukavu, and Uvira.

In meetings called to mediate the conflict by Zambian President Frederick Chiluba on Sept. 18-19, Museveni claimed that he had no troops at all in the Congo, and therefore there was nothing to negotiate. However, to his own Parliament, he was more forthcoming. He not only admitted the presence of Ugandan troops in Congo, but affirmed that "our army should stay in this area until there is an overall regionally approved *modus vivendi*."

The Ugandan military deployment into Congo, he said, "started initially with our involvement in Rwanda. Both involvements were involuntary." The warlord listed as the reasons for this involvement, aside from the "weakness" of the government of the Congo, as stemming from the requirements of the "security of neighbors. Uganda's security interest in the Congo has always been the problem of Sudan using the Congo to infiltrate terrorists into the country." He then charged that not only had Kabila failed to rein in Ugandan insurgents using Congo as a base from which to attack western Uganda, but that Kabila was directly aiding and abetting the insurgents.

He further declared Uganda to be the regional policemen with a mandate to intervene anywhere in the region to stop what he termed "genocide." "Internal affairs that should not

be interfered with cannot include genocide," he said. Uganda would intervene to stop any genocide against the Banyamulenge (Rwandan Tutsis living in Congo), "because it is nearby, we can stop it," he said.

Only the day before, the same thesis had been put forward by U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Susan Rice. A fellow of the Royal Institute for International Affairs in London, where she studied peacekeeping and conflict resolution, Rice has been the steadfast proponent and apologist for Museveni's militarism in the region, especially against Sudan.

Speaking before the House Subcommittee on Africa hearings on Sept. 15 on the "Congo in Crisis," Rice decried the inability of Kabila to "manage" the Congo, and faulted him for failing to enter into negotiations with the "rebels." She then enunciated the same line of arguments heard in the Kampala Parliament House:

"Externally, there will never be long-term regional stability until meaningful action is taken to address the threat that Congolese-based insurgents and genocidaires pose to regional states. A way must be found to bar the Democratic Republic of Congo from being used as a base for insurgent attacks into other countries, including movements that carry out genocide. Given the political and administrative vacuum that exists in the eastern Congo, any solution to the current crisis will depend upon creating new border security arrangements. The Congolese government has thus far failed to prevent UNITA [the Angolan movement of Jonas Savimbi] as well as Rwandan genocidaires and Sudanese-backed Ugandan rebels from operating out of Congolese territory. The Congolese government has failed to resolve the crucial issue of the Banyamulenge citizenship, to ensure that ethnic Tutsis who have lived in the Congo for generations enjoy national rights and privileges. These failures have undermined regional security and contributed to the current perilous situation. In addition, we are gravely concerned about reports of the Kinshasa government's close collaboration with pariah regimes that are known supporters of international terrorism, including Libya and Sudan."

Given the precise coincidence between Museveni's and Rice's views on the region, Faïda Mitifu, chargé d'affaires of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, stated in her own testimony to the subcommittee that the "lopsided view of the hostilities" coming from Washington "conveyed the strong impression that Rwanda and Uganda acted with the tacit complicity of the United States." Mitifu noted that the United States had ignored the fact that "the precipitating event" of the current crisis in Congo "was the reckless invasion of the Congo by Rwanda and Uganda."

On the issue of the necessity for Uganda and Rwanda to secure their borders, Mitifu emphasized that "to the extent my government had any ability to pacify the region, it resided in its national army, the FAC, which in the eastern provinces [bordering Uganda and Rwanda] was largely integrated by

Banyamulenge troops, and commanded by Rwanda Tutsi officers. The Chief of Staff of the FAC until July of this year was James Kaberehe, a Rwandan Tutsi. He had a free hand to deploy our forces to prevent the Interhamwe from attacking Rwanda. The civil administration of the region was also dominated by Congolese Tutsi, for instance, the governor of North Kivu, as well as his chief information officer, and the vice-governor of South Kivu. Thus, the full military might of the country, such as it was, was available to serve the security priorities of the Rwandan government. Indeed, subsequent events have confirmed that these officers and troops owed their primary allegiance to Rwanda and not to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.”

While these facts are deliberately obfuscated by the British Foreign Office, the U.S. State Department, and the Western press, this reality is well understood by the national leaders of the African continent.

### **One, two, three, many fronts**

Nevertheless, the propulsions coming from London and Washington are for war, and more war.

As Museveni was speaking to his Parliament, Ugandan troops were amassing at Kidepo Park in northern Uganda for an assault against Sudan, according to Uganda military officials who claimed that the build-up was required to stave off an impending re-entry into Uganda by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA).

There have been no signs of the LRA in the northern war districts of Kitgum and Gulu, according to local residents, but on Sept. 22, Sudan Armed Forces spokesman Lt. Gen. Abdel Rahman Sir al-Khatim told the press that Ugandan forces backed by Eritrea and Rwanda had launched a new attack into southern Sudan. In the fighting in Sudan’s Eastern Equatoria state, he said, the Sudanese Armed Forces had destroyed 11 tanks, and killed more than 70 Ugandan troops. Al-Khatim said that Uganda et al. had attacked on three different fronts, including artillery shellings of villages in eastern Sudan, and had targetted the southern towns of Torit, Liria, and Juba. However, he said, all fronts were in control of Sudanese forces.

The Ugandan and Rwandan forces have met far worse difficulties in the Congo. An attempt to lay siege to Kinshasa was blocked in the first week of September by the combined forces of Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Angola, with up to 1,000 Rwandan and Ugandan troops captured.

In the east, despite Museveni’s blandishments to his Parliament that “we are only watching,” Ugandan troops had been involved in taking Beni and Kisangani, and attempted to take the northeastern town of Isiro. However, on Sept. 22, as the U.S. State Department issued statements of its “grave concern” and demanded the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Congo, including those invited by the Congo government, sources report that the militaries of Zimbabwe, Angola, Namibia, and Congo had managed to oust the Ugandans and

Rwandans from Goma, and were converging on Bukavu. “Kisangani has already been taken back,” said one military source. “It is not being reported, but that is the case.”

It is not to be expected that Uganda and Rwanda, even if augmented by mercenaries as reported by the Ugandan press, or by battalions of the Sudanese People’s Liberation Army, would be able to take on Congo’s regional allies. Zimbabwe has one of the best-trained militaries on the continent, and both Angola and Zimbabwe have air power, which Uganda and Rwanda lack.

But the military adventures pursued by Museveni et al. to “secure” their borders have had profound and deleterious effects on the Congolese people. In the battle for Kinshasa, before they were defeated, the Ugandan and Rwandan forces shut down the Inga Dam, which supplies Kinshasa with electricity, cut the power lines, and destroyed the rail lines which bring food from the port of Matadi to Kinshasa. The result was food shortages in Kinshasa, forcing a food airlift until the port and rail lines were restored.

In both Kinshasa and in eastern Congo, the Rwandan-Ugandan invasion has intensified ethnic divisions. In eastern Congo, the Rome news agency MISNA reported on Aug. 24 that Roman Catholic missionaries had discovered 600 bodies of people massacred at a Catholic mission by the invading forces in Kasika, 50 miles from the city of Bukavu. On Sept. 7, spokesman for the Congolese Democratic Coalition Lunda Bululu said that 264 people, mostly ethnic Tutsis, had been murdered by retreating Congolese troops in three eastern cities. There have also been reports of reprisals taken against Tutsis living in Kinshasa.

The conclusion that can be drawn is that further militarism of the region will spark the very “genocide” that Museveni, Kagame, and Rice claim they seek to prevent.

The myopia coming from Washington is induced by the demand coming from the British Commonwealth companies—Banro Resources, America Mineral Fields, Barrick Gold, and Anglo-American, among others—that the Congo “be made safe for investment.” But in Africa, where such demands mean death for thousands, there is a resolve to draw the line at the Ugandan-Rwandan border. In a televised national address on Sept. 14, Namibia President Sam Nujoma explained his reasoning for sending troops in defense of Congo. Deriding the Congo “rebels” as “puppets” of Uganda and Rwanda, he said: “The same kind of actors are back in the Congo and they are once again using the Congolese and other Africans from neighboring countries to destabilize the country and assassinate President Kabila. He, too, is seen as an obstacle in the way of the plunder and pillage of Congo’s wealth by foreigners. . . . Today it is the Congo, tomorrow it may very well be Namibia. When that unthinkable should happen, we would be able to expect help from our fellow Africans. . . . By helping our Congolese brothers and sisters today, we are guaranteeing our own survival, security, and prosperity.”