This year, sub-Saharan Africa will face a series of key economic, political, and security challenges. After more than a decade of uninterrupted growth, several countries are struggling to weather the decline in global commodity prices. Oil producers, such as Angola and Nigeria, have watched their currencies plunge and foreign investors retreat. Zambia—Africa’s second largest copper producer—has been hit so hard by the economic downturn that its leadership last year called for divine intervention. Meanwhile, east and southern African countries are hurting from adverse weather conditions caused by El Niño, resulting in large-scale crop failures and the growing threat of famine. Africa also will hold national-level elections this year in more than a dozen countries. Observers already have been surprised by the first round results in war-torn Central African Republic, where former Prime Minister Faustin Touadera outperformed some higher-profile rivals.
Incumbents in Cabo Verde, Ghana, and Zambia similarly will face strong competition. While Beninese President Boni Yayi is expected to step down at the end of the constitutional term this year, President Denis Sassou-Nguesso of the Republic of the Congo, President Joseph Kabila of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and President Paul Kagame of Rwanda either have removed or seem intent to circumvent term limits. Judging by the escalating violence in Burundi over President Pierre Nkurunziza’s third term, some of his Central African neighbors may risk provoking street protests if they continue to pursue additional terms in office. Lastly, Africans will continue to grapple with mounting security problems from internal conflicts and terrorism threats. The African Union and United Nations currently have 10 peacekeeping missions deployed on the continent, with discussions underway to dispatch 5,000 soldiers to Burundi. Regional efforts to implement peace accords in Mali and South Sudan have made some progress, but probably will require sustained pressure and attention. The recent terrorist attacks on hotels in Burkina Faso and Mali, and continuing threats posed by al-Shabaab in East Africa and Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin region, underscore the region’s vulnerability to extremist violence.

The prospects for successfully managing these challenges and crises will depend in part on how the continent’s governments work together in regional and international settings. The African Union in recent years has shown a willingness to respond to conflicts in Central African Republic, Mali, and Somalia—often as a prelude to a UN deployment. Its authorization of a force to Burundi in December was especially noteworthy. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) also has demonstrated a commitment to reject unconstitutional changes in government, as it did in September in Burkina Faso. While the other regional bodies garner less public attention, many of these organizations have committed resources or appointed envoys to support peace talks or commissions of inquiry. Even smaller groupings such as the G-5 in the Sahel and the Mano River Union in West Africa have shown some potential. Looking ahead to 2016, these regional bodies almost certainly will serve both as important venues for resolving Africa’s problems and as key partners for the United States and other foreign governments.
Africa Research Initiative Report
By Dr. Kris Inman, Chief Africa Researcher, Center for Strategic Intelligence Research, National Intelligence University
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Overview. The Africa Research Initiative (ARI) began in April 2013. Housed in the Office of Research at the National Intelligence University, the ARI responds to Intelligence Community (IC) agencies’ strategic research needs pertaining to sub-Saharan Africa. The ARI’s primary intent is to address second and third-tier priorities that are important to the IC and national security interests, but that the IC is unable to address given its resource constraints. The ARI networks with analytic cadres and analytic leadership to develop collaborative and/or independent scholarly research projects using existing areas of knowledge and expertise. It does not conduct bench research, which may be misconstrued as collection operations. It does not conduct finished intelligence analysis.

Current Research Efforts. The ARI is currently conducting several research projects. The first project is an ongoing inquiry of political succession in Africa. The succession of the top political leader remains a source of potentially deadly conflict in many countries on the continent. Even in countries that at one time were consolidating democracies – such as Mali – struggles over legitimacy and power within the political system can destabilize the country and send it spinning into violence and chaos. In some cases, leadership change results in a regime change; in other cases, it causes the state to fail (e.g., Somalia after the ouster of Mohamed Siad Barre). In still other cases, successions have no effect on stability or legitimacy, and the country carries on with the status quo. With nearly half of the countries on the continent of Africa holding elections for the top political office in the coming years, it is important to understand how leadership change affects the political system and stability.

Finally, the ARI has two commissioned studies underway. The first is a report on Zimbabwean politics and civil society, with thoughts on a future post-Mugabe. The second is a study about generational differences in the Tanzanian military and how they may affect civil-military relations in the future. Both studies are due out in mid-2016.

Other Activities. Beyond research endeavors, the ARI has been actively engaged in speaking engagements and conferences around the government and academic Africanist communities. Dr. Inman and the Office of Outreach at NIU have partnered with the National Intelligence Manager’s office and the Institute for Defense Analysis to plan The United States and Africa – Looking Toward the Next Decade, which will be held June 7, 2016, at the National Press Club. Dr. Inman partnered with faculty at Georgetown University to start a National Capital Region Africanist Research Workshop. The inaugural workshop was held at Georgetown University on October 27, 2015. The second workshop is scheduled for May 10, 2016, at the Newseum.

Get Involved. Have research questions about Africa and work in the IC? The ARI is here to assist. Contact Dr. Inman at kristie.inman2@dodiis.mil with your question. If the ARI is unable to conduct the research in-house, we can help facilitate a commissioned study through our vast academic network. Want to hold an event about Africa? We can connect you with the REC Team and NIU’s Office of Research to help facilitate your request.
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Conflict in Africa

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Politics in the Shadow of a Gun: The Political Legacies of Rebellion for Party Politics after Civil War in Burundi and Beyond

By Katrin Wittig, Ph.D. Student and Trudeau Scholar, University of Montreal

Policymakers, diplomats, and academics have long cited Burundi as a success story for international liberal peacebuilding. In 2005, the country organized its first post-accord elections following a brutal decade-long plus civil war and an inter-ethnic power-sharing agreement signed in 2000 in the Tanzanian capital of Arusha. These milestone elections brought one of the former Hutu-dominated rebel groups, the Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie – Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie (CNDD-FDD), to power.

Burundi’s political transition was accompanied by much hope and excitement for the country’s and the region’s eventual pacification and democratization. The Burundian population hoped that the new CNDD-FDD regime, which had taken up arms to fight against decades of authoritarianism and injustice, would finally bring genuine peace and democracy to a country torn apart by decades of ethno-political massacres, coups d’état, rebellions, and civil war. However, the enthusiasm for Burundi’s post-accord transition has long neglected the fact that the ruling party CNDD-FDD displays authoritarian tendencies and has increasingly turned to violence as a political tool to ensure its political hegemony since its accession to power in 2005. These inclinations came to a head during the 2015 electoral crisis, when the regime violently repressed popular demonstrations against a controversial third term for former rebel leader and current President Pierre Nkurunziza.
What does the case of Burundi reveal about internationally promoted attempts to transform former rebel groups into political parties? I have been investigating the integration of ex-combatants into “post-conflict” politics as well as the legacies of rebellion for party politics after civil war. Since the fall of the Iron Curtain, the integration of former rebel movements into the post-accord political system has become a recurrent peacebuilding remedy in liberal war-to-peace transitions stipulating a blueprint for democratization. According to the Uppsala Peace Agreement Dataset (UCDP) collected by Uppsala University in Sweden, between 1990 and 2011, 30 peace accords (or 16 percent) explicitly stipulated the transformation of rebel groups into political parties (as opposed to none before 1989). Scholars have estimated that there are currently approximately 45 cases of armed movements that have attempted to transform into political parties. In theory, the political integration of rebel movements into party politics is supposed to be the starting point for the groups’ steady transition from armed actors to peaceful political parties. The participation of rebel movements in the emerging democratic system is supposed to socialize these actors to the new rules of the game, rendering the recourse to violence obsolete in the process. However, examples from around the world, from Kosovo to Mozambique and from Nepal to Burundi, have underscored the lasting difficulties in transforming former militaristic, hierarchical organizations into peaceful, democratic political actors. Indeed, the resort to violence often continues to represent an important political strategy in the repertoire of political parties rooted in armed conflict.

Based on a review of literature and my own fieldwork in Burundi, I discuss in the subsequent sections three legacies of rebellion for party politics and democratization prospects after civil war. Even though rebel movements might become ruling or opposition parties, these legacies are most applicable to rebel movements that convert into ruling parties.

Legacy of Authoritarianism: How the Revolution Devours Its Children

Many rebel groups have emerged as armed resistance movements against authoritarian states. In Burundi, for example, several Hutu-dominated rebel groups took up arms to fight against decades of oppression and exclusion under the Tutsi-dominated authoritarian regimes. Two of these movements, including the current ruling party and one major opposition party, formally transformed into political parties during the country’s political transition. Various rebel groups have roots in social movements, student associations, workers’ unions, or political parties. After an initial period of peaceful resistance, many of these political organizations reckon that they have no other option than to take up arms, often described as the only language that authoritarian regimes understand. Armed movements need to display secrecy, discipline, and hierarchy if they want to be able to effectively challenge an authoritarian regime. These characteristics have long-lasting consequences for the organization and behavior of these groups, be it during or after the civil war. Despite their avowed goals to end oppression and injustice, they often develop authoritarian tendencies themselves if they manage to access executive or legislative power after civil conflict. This lesson underscores French journalist Jacques Mallet du Pan’s famous adage that the revolution devours its own children.

Terrence Lyons argues that these authoritarian tendencies are often most prominent and visible in countries where former rebel movements manage to win the conflict militarily, as in the case of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in Rwanda or the National Resistance Army (NRA) in Uganda. However, recent examples, such as the CNDD-FDD in Burundi, illustrate authoritarian shifts of former rebel groups settling for a negotiated peace accord, albeit often through a slower process.
Göran Hydén has shown that African countries in which the anti-colonial liberation movements (especially those with roots in armed struggle) have remained politically dominant display strong authoritarian tendencies and little respect for human rights. Scholars analyzing the liberation movements against white minority rule in Southern Africa have underlined that once these organizations are in power, they display similar characteristics as the authoritarian regimes against which they took up arms in the first place.

**Legacy of Liberation Ethos: How Liberation Forges Entitlement and Supremacy Claims**

The authoritarian affinities are rooted in a firm liberation ethos. Many rebel movements frame and perceive themselves as the liberators of the population (or, at least, a part of the population) who had to use arms during the struggle to free the population from injustice and oppression. In their perspective, this shared struggle grants them legitimacy and supremacy over other political actors that did not sacrifice their lives for the liberation cause. This often leads to the attempt to marginalize established political parties or other potential opponents (framed and perceived as enemies of the nation) by legal and extra-legal means.

This liberation ethos stems from the solidarity bonds forged during years of armed struggle. According to research conducted by Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way on competitive authoritarianism, these intimate ties provide one of the most forceful bases for authoritarian rule in the post-Cold War era. The history of authoritarianism and armed struggle also brings with it the risk of violence and repression becoming a normal part of political life in those countries emerging from armed conflict. This is reinforced if impunity for past and present crimes prevails.

**Legacy of Militarization: How Civilian and Military Tensions Endure**

Many rebel movements that formally transform into political parties experience long-term struggles between their respective political and military branches. On the one hand, civilian party members feel that former combatant members regard them with a lot of suspicion. They believe that former high-ranking members of the rebel military establishment often continue to influence political decisions and occupy key positions inside the political party (despite the fact that they often lack the experience or education necessary to manage politics). In their perspective, these military leaders should have been integrated into the national army or demobilized if the demilitarization and conversion was to succeed. On the other hand, former military leaders want to keep their influence on the party. They feel that the civilians do not deserve to occupy key positions given that they did not sacrifice their lives for the armed rebellion.

**Conclusion**

Even though the formal transformation of rebel movements into political parties has become a recurrent feature of today’s liberal war-to-peace transitions, the enduring legacies of rebellion pose immense challenges for both this conversion process and the country’s democratization prospects. Despite the fact that former rebel movements might formally transform into political parties, they often continue to display many of the practices that characterized their history as armed groups. As one CNDD-FDD member told me during my research: “For the popular masses, the CNDD-FDD incarnates the liberator . . . We use the term ‘political party,’ but this is just a Western invention. In what we call demokarasi [referring to ethnic majority politics], the Hutus will always win. In fact, we prefer the dictatorship of the party to the dictatorship of the minority, which had oppressed the masses for too long. . . . Military orders prevail in our organization. You cannot say anything.
If you don’t follow the official party line, you risk being punished with 60 strokes, which were given during the rebellion to combatants who committed a mistake.”

These legacies of rebellion should prompt us to rethink the promotion of the conversion provision in peace accords and the possible international assistance to rebel group-cum-political parties. Two key questions emerge: First, there is the fundamental question of the risks and benefits of promoting the conversion of rebel groups into political parties in peace accords. If the risks outweigh the benefits, during peace accords, the international community should reconsider its promotion of the transformation of rebel groups into political parties. Second, if this conversion is promoted, there is the challenge of how local and international actors can help mitigate the authoritarian trap that many rebel group-cum-political parties seem to be drawn into. Even though national and international organizations have organized seminars for rebel parties to promote the principles of bona fide multi-party politics, this type of assistance has largely remained ad hoc and has been limited to technical workshops. In the long term, it would be important to find innovative ways to substantially monitor rebel groups’ conversion into political parties. Recent events in Burundi tragically illustrate this challenge, as international donors have frequently put relative stability first, thereby (at times inadvertently, at other times knowingly) allowing the increasing authoritarian shift and recurrence to political violence by the CNDD-FDD regime.

Notes

4 In April 2015, the CNDD-FDD’s Party Congress announced another presidential candidacy for President Pierre Nkurunziza. The ruling party’s decision to re-nominate Nkurunziza for a third term was contested by a variety of national and international stakeholders. Members from Burundi’s civil society, political opposition parties, and the ruling party mobilized to advocate for democratic alternation. The opponents to the third mandate argue that Nkurunziza was not allowed to run again given a presidential term limit included in the Arusha Peace Agreement and Burundi’s Constitution. Article 7, Paragraph 3, of the Arusha Accord states: the President “shall be elected for a term of five years, renewable only once. No one may serve more than two presidential terms.” The presidential camp points to an ambiguity in the Constitution. Article 96 states: “the President of the Republic is elected by universal direct suffrage for a mandate of five years renewable one time.” Given that Nkurunziza was elected during the first post-Arusha elections in 2005 by Parliament, the presidential camp argues that he was allowed to legally stand again one more time. Nkurunziza was reelected President on July 21, 2015, though international organizations, such as the African Union and United Nations, asserted that the political climate was not conducive for free and fair elections. The announcement of Nkurunziza’s candidacy culminated in months of popular demonstrations, state repression, a failed coup d’état, escalating political violence and renewed armed rebellion. As of mid-March, the official death toll counts at least 400 people killed (with local sources putting the number much higher), as well as more than 250,000 refugees who have fled Burundi to neighboring countries.
5 The terms “post-war” or “post-conflict” are highly ambiguous. If employed, they refer to stipulations in the peace agreements regarding the integration of former rebel groups into the society following the end of formal hostilities. However, peace accords do not necessarily coincide with the end of armed conflict or political violence. In light of these challenges, I prefer to employ the terms “peace accord” or “post-accord,” which reflect a more factual representation.
12 Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
13 Jeroen De Zeeuw (ed.), From Soldiers to Politicians: Transforming Rebel Movements After Civil War (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008).
Rwanda and Burundi: Considering False Twins

By Gerard Prunier, Ph.D., Senior Fellow, Atlantic Council

The 1994 Rwandese genocide has had a considerable impact on the way foreigners look at the Great Lakes region, and particularly at the ethnopolitical make-up. Yes, both Rwanda and Burundi are old nation-states, something which is not a frequent trait of African polities. But no, they are not an exception, particularly in that region. Buhweju, Igara, Nkore Mpororo, and Bushi were in the near neighborhood, while Buganda, Tooro, and Bunyoro were not very far. Some had full-fledged, bi-casted social systems paralleling the Tutsi-Hutu duality of Rwanda and Burundi, others had partial equivalents, and none were equalitarian societies. But non-equalitarian does not mean violently conflictual, and there were many modalities applied in the constellation of micro-states studding the northern and western reaches of the Great Lakes. Rwanda and Burundi were the largest (the case of Buganda is to be separated: its size and importance made it an actor reaching eastward to the Kenya Rift and northward into the Nilotic world) on the Nile-Congo divide, and if they looked similar from a distance, a closer examination revealed many differences.

Their first point of difference was rooted at the very heart of the countries’ socio-economic relationships. In Rwanda, the *Ubuhake* patron/client contract was extremely stiff and turned the Hutu peasant mass nearly into indentured labour. The Tutsi aristocracy, more authoritarian and more demanding than its Burundi cousin, was also much more militarily inclined. Military service was recurrent and exacting, Wars of conquest, either northward against the “Ankole” kingdoms, westward against the Kivu kingdoms, or even southward against Burundi, were frequent. Conversely, the corresponding *Ubugabire* contract in Burundi was not easy, but it was tolerable, and did not result in the quasi serfdom of the Hutu peasants. Military service, which did also exist in Burundi, was much less demanding. These differences had far-reaching consequences in terms of the mutual feelings between the two social groups, whose degree of tension and antagonism was incomparable.

At the political level, the hold the monarchy had on its population was not exactly similar. In Rwanda, the kingly institutions were clearly Tutsi in both ethnic and cultural terms. The Burundi monarchy was “softer” in that its “special royal clan,” the *Abaganwa*, was neither Tutsi nor Hutu, but was supra-ethnic and seen as embedding an essential national identity which went beyond the Hutu-Tutsi divide. The institution of the *Abashingantahe* (local judges), unique to Burundi, was another “smoothing agent” for social relations. These judges operated hill by hill and had very precise, narrow, and intimate knowledge of their area’s social relations. Their membership was both Tutsi and Hutu, and they tended to render judgments that were not dependent on the ethnicity of their plaintiffs. Thus, the nuances of ethnic relations were different between the two countries.

At the time of independence, the decolonization process was also quite distinct. Prince Louis Rwagasore, legitimate heir to the throne, became the leader of the Union for National Progress (UPRONA), the main independence party in Burundi. He was a remarkably enlightened young man whose close associates and political advisors were Hutu and who had married a Hutu wife. His very personality looked

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1. This was a traditional form of contract by which Tutsi herders let Hutu peasants have the use of some of their cattle in exchange for agricultural labour and shepherding.

2. We use here the later British colonial terminology. But “Ankole” is just a convenient name for a group of pre-colonial kingdoms in South-western Uganda.

3. Which the Belgians tended to consider in similar fashion, given the fact that, contrary to their Congo colony, “Le Ruanda-Urundi” had a distinct administrative status, being a former German colony given as a Mandate to Belgium by the Society of Nations after World War I.
like an embodiment of the national identity, pure Ganwa style, beyond the Tutsi-Hutu divide. His murder in 1961 had nothing to do with Tutsi-Hutu rivalries (his killer was a Greek settler acting out of a mixture of personal resentment and business problems), and in spite of this tragedy, independence was peaceful, with none of the large-scale violence that took place in Rwanda. But the death of Rwagasore had long-term consequences, partly because of the Rwandese explosion. Rwagasore was a man of superior intelligence and political acumen who could have steered Burundi through the tempests of the time, something many of the rising Tutsi political elite were neither desirous nor capable of doing. Tutsi radicals, persuaded that unless they tightened the domination over the Hutu, they were likely to fall victims to the same violence that was tearing Rwanda apart from 1959 to 1964, began to rise in the political landscape, surfing on the back of a scared Tutsi public opinion.

To make things worse, the kings who ascended to the throne after Rwagasore’s murder were mediocre and incompetent, and the monarchic institution began to be criticized both by Tutsi and Hutu alike, at a time when it would have been more necessary than ever. In 1966, the king was deposed and replaced by Colonel Michel Micombero, a Tutsi extremist. His extreme policies led to a twin revolutionary attempt in 1972, during which the Tutsi monarchists tried to retake power while the Hutu peasantry rebelled. Micombero responded by having the king shot and massacring about 200,000 Hutu peasants, an event of genocidal nature that triggered the exile of hundreds of thousands of Hutu peasants toward the safety of Tanzania. These events are still remembered today in Burundi as Ikiza, the catastrophe. And a catastrophe it was, since it injected into Burundian life what one could call “the Rwandese virus,” or rather, the theory and practice of violent racist political extremism. In Rwanda the monarchy had been abolished by a Hutu peasant populist movement, while in Burundi it had been destroyed by a quasi-Fascist Tutsi military dictator.

Even though the result was bloody in both cases, the two processes were radically different, in fact almost opposite, even if they perversely fed into one other.

Micombero was overthrown in 1976, interestingly by another Tutsi military strongman who was to be followed by a dynasty of military dictators, all coming from the same hill in Bururi Province. It is nevertheless interesting to note that Micombero died in his bed and that his two successors, Jean-Baptiste Bagaza and Pierre Buyoya, are both still alive and politically active today, something hardly thinkable in Rwanda.

As a consequence of this milder political climate, when President Buyoya was challenged by a Hutu uprising in 1988, his reaction was not to commit another massacre. Instead, he tried to try control his Army (which could only be contained with the greatest difficulty) and open his regime, tolerating the creation of a Hutu party in 1990 (the Front pour la Démocratie au Burundi or FRODEBU). He also organized elections in June 1993. The elections proceeded flawlessly; Buyoya received 32.5 percent of the vote, and his FRODEBU civilian rival, Melchior Ndadaye (a survivor of the 1972 Ikiza) received 65 percent. Power was peacefully transferred. The new—and first Hutu—president acted with great care and prudence. But the Army was still completely Tutsi, and Ndadaye could not control it. The Army overthrew and murdered him in October, four months after his election. This murder triggered the civil war that lasted until 2005, causing anywhere between 150,000 and 300,000 deaths and forcing new waves of refugees to flee again to Tanzania, where they joined those who had escaped from the country after the 1972 Ikiza.

However, even during the war, contact was never broken between the warring parties and “peace conversations” went on in Arusha. At times, one could despair; this author attended some of the meetings in Arusha, and it seemed they could never arrive at anything. Eventually, a workable peace settlement was
brokered in 2005. Strangely enough, one of the episodes that led to the successful conclusion of the peace process was the Gatumba camp massacre in August 2004, where the forces of the most radical of the Hutu movements, the Front National de Libération (FNL), killed over 150 internally displaced Tutsis. Such massacres had been run-of-the-mill in Rwanda. In Burundi, the shock caused by the extreme violence impacted even the Hutu population and helped, in a subterranean way, to prod the negotiations forward.

As of the date of this writing (January 2016), Burundi is again on the edge of the political cliff. But this tension has very little to do with the ethnic makeup of the country. Instead, an elected Hutu president has decided to violate his own constitution and remain in power, against massive Hutu opposition. Just as President Museveni in Uganda, President Sassou Nguesso in the Brazzaville Congo, or, unsuccessfully, President Blaise Compaore in Burkina Fasso, President Nkurunziza has abused his powers by seizing illegitimate political control. The fact that his Rwandese neighbor, President Paul Kagame, did roughly the same thing—shrouded behind the fig leaf of a fear-saturated referendum—only made it easier.

So, now the milder twin is trying to emulate and ethnicize what is happening, another dreadful example of the "Rwandese virus" at work in Burundi. The assassination of General Jean Bikomagu in August 2015 is another example of the same process at work: Bikomagu, a Tutsi, had been Chief of Staff at the time of President Ndadaye’s murder, and the subsequent horrors had taught him a lesson. As President Nkurunziza tried to ratchet up the ethnic death trap, trying to pin the protest and the violence on his Tutsi population, Bikomagu and a number of other Tutsis, many former FAB, tried to work in the opposite direction, toward ethnic dialogue. Bikomagu was shot by “unknown assailants.” Did they come from the Burundian presidential circles or from those of Kigali? It is not yet known, but there is little difference since, at present, the policies of the false twins are, once more, wedged into each other. The measure of real, great statesmen in the dual former kingdoms will depend on their ability to further the dialogue model, which both are undermining at present. Rwanda used to be the herald of a Hutu “peasant revolution,” while Burundi was the bastion of the Tutsi “conservative aristocracy.”

Now, they are in the opposite situation, but both are trying to ride the dragon of the ethnic divide while abundantly protesting the contrary. Let us hope that, once more, the milder Burundian model will outpace the sharper, more cutting Rwandese approach.

Critical Developments in the Great Lakes Region
By Michael Deibert, Author and Journalist

When one looks around the Great Lakes Region of Africa today, one is confronted by a tableau of authoritarian regimes in various stages of decay. Two decades after many in the West hailed a “new” crop of African leaders taking power in the region, those leaders have stayed on. And on. They have turned out to be not quite so different after all.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Great Lakes Region’s largest and most populous country with an estimated population of 81 million, Joseph Kabila, in power since the January 2001 murder of his president-father, Laurent, shows little comprehension of the deep acrimony his attempt to cling to power is provoking across a wide swathe of the country during this year’s scheduled elections.

In many senses, Congo was and remains the place where the continent’s aspirations for greatness and its tragedies have been most vividly played out, all of its hope and all of its dashed dreams. Congo’s national territory contains more than 1,100 different mineral...
substances, including the largest known diamond resources in the world in terms of carats—approximately 150 million, accounting for 25 percent of the total known reserves. Its southern reaches alone contain 34 percent of the cobalt and 10 percent of the copper reserves in the world. Congo possesses 64 percent of the world’s known coltan reserves, as well as the most important ore from which tin is extracted, cassiterite. The Ituri region is studded with vast deposits of gold.

These extensive natural endowments have brought little reward to Congo’s people, however, in a country beset for nearly 150 years first by colonial pillage, then a chaotic birth of independence, followed by the 32-year dictatorship of Mobutu Sese Seko. For the last 2 decades, a seemingly endless, grinding series of all-out wars and smaller skirmishes have resulted in certain parts of the country being more under control of various militias (many backed by Congo’s neighbors) than that of the central government.

Though Article 70 of Congo’s constitution limits the president to two 5-year terms, renewable only once, and Article 220 states that the presidential term must not be subject to a constitutional amendment, many believe Kabila intends to remain in power. Moves such as the creation of 21 new provinces last year and a ruling by Congo’s Constitutional Court granting the government the right to take “exceptional measures” to maintain “peace and security” in the new provinces, which many view as little more than cover to delay and/or rig forthcoming gubernatorial elections.

In addition to traditional political enemies such as Étienne Tshisekedi of the Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social (UDPS) and former ally-turned-rival Vital Kamerhe of the Union pour la nation congolaise (UNC), Kabila and his ruling Parti du Peuple pour la Reconstruction et la Démocratie (PPRD) now have a very formidable enemy in Moïse Katumbi. A millionaire businessman and owner of the TP Mazembe football club, who, until late 2015, served as the governor of mineral-rich Katanga province. Protests, which started more than a year ago, have continued steadily, including general strikes that have brought economic activity in various parts of the country to a halt. The arrest of members of the protest movement Lucha and their sentencing to 2 years in prison (a sentenced later reduced to 6 months) further turned sentiment against the government.

Meanwhile, armed groups, including local outfits such as the Force de résistance patriotique de l’Ituri (FRPI), Maï-Maï Simba and Raïa Mutomboki, and imported rebel groups such as the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), from Uganda and Rwanda, respectively, continue to victimize civilians in their spheres of influence in the country’s east.

When Kabila looks around, he could hardly be blamed for believing he could extra-constitutionally prolong his reign.

In Uganda, 71-year-old Yoweri Museveni, who took power in 1986 observing that the problem with African leaders is that they stay on too long, is settling into his 30th year in office after “winning” an election that almost every independent local and foreign observer believes was rigged. The election was marked by polling shenanigans (such as late arrival of ballots in opposition strongholds) and arrests of opposition leaders.

In Uganda, in Rwanda, during his 22-year-old rule—either de facto or direct—Paul Kagame and his Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) have sponsored at least half a dozen rebel movements in Congo over the years, including the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie (RCD), the Congrès national pour la défense du peuple (CNDP), and the Mouvement du 23-
Mars (M23). These proxy armies were often denied outright or cast by Rwanda as a bulwark against the FDLR, a Hutu-dominated group that is hostile to Rwanda’s current Tutsi-dominated government and that has roots in Rwanda’s 1994 genocide. However, such concerns often seemed secondary to the desire of Rwanda’s political-military elites to pillage Congo’s natural resources.

Recklessly adventurist from a military standpoint abroad, the Kagame regime has grown ever more grotesquely bellicose and repressive at home. Both Kagame and Foreign Minister Louise Mushikiwabo gloated publicly over the January 2014 murder of former Rwandan intelligence chief Patrick Karegeya in Johannesburg, South Africa — one of several killings of prominent Rwandan dissidents at home and abroad. Kagame went so far as to say days later that, “You cannot betray Rwanda and get away with it. There are consequences for betraying your country” and, on a different occasion, “those who talk about disappearances . . . we will continue to arrest more suspects and if possible shoot in broad daylight those who intend to destabilize our country.” Freedom of political activity and the press remain severely restricted in Rwanda.

The autocratic state in perhaps the most advanced state of decomposition is Rwanda’s southern neighbor, Burundi, ruled for the last 11 years by Pierre Nkurunziza, a former football coach and leader of the Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie–Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie (CNDD–FDD), a Hutu rebel group (though it is believed that Nkurunziza himself had a Tutsi mother).

Nkurunziza has built himself world-class soccer stadiums while his government’s security forces have slaughtered those opposed to him hanging on for an (unconstitutional) third term.

In May 2015, 2 months before the election was to be held, Nkurunziza’s former CNDD–FDD comrade-in-arms Godefroid Niyombare launched a coup attempt against Nkurunziza, who was out the country. The coup failed, and after wholesale reprisals, Nkurunziza claimed he had won the July 2015 election, despite internal and external observers citing low turnout and fraud. Since then, the president’s attacks against his enemies have increased, and recently, evidence of mass graves has been found in the Buringa area, on the outskirts of Burundi’s capital, Bujumbura. Human Rights Watch recently observed that “government forces are killing, abducting, torturing, and arbitrarily arresting scores of people at an alarming rate.”

There are all the ingredients for a political and social explosion in the countries herein detailed (particularly Burundi). The recalcitrance of the leaders of the Great Lakes Region to allow real representative democracy to take hold has and will continue to create pressures that, as they cannot find an outlet at the ballot box or via a truly free press, could well spill over into violence.

Despite their many positive attributes, examining the countries of the Great Lakes Region today, both outsiders and citizens of the nations themselves have reason to be worried.

Armed Group Proliferation and Local Governance in the Eastern DR Congo

By Judith Verweijen, Ph.D., Research Fellow, Nordic Africa Institute, Sweden Conflict Research Group, Ghent University

More than a decade after the signing of a peace accord that formally ended the Second Congo War, more armed groups operate in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo than during the two Congo Wars (1996–97; 1998–2003). A recent count identifies over 70 armed groups in the Kivu provinces alone. Most of these groups are not larger-scale rebel movements. They have a limited number of fighters and relatively circumscribed spheres of influence. What explains this proliferation of smaller-scale armed groups in the eastern Congo? And what is the relationship between these groups and local governance structures? How do armed actors affect conflicts related to public authority and the quality and nature of local governance? And how, in turn, do local authorities shape patterns of armed group organization?

These questions occupy center stage in the second phase of the Usalama Project of the Rift Valley Institute, which is part of the Political Settlements Research Programme (PSRP) funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Taking a qualitative, fieldwork-oriented approach, the Usalama Project traces the trajectories of armed groups and analyzes the contexts in which they operate by means of ethnographic methods, primarily interviews with a wide range of informants, including local authorities, representatives of civil society, small- and large-scale business interests, and members of armed groups. The research design encompasses a structured, focused comparison of three sub-areas within the Kivu provinces, allowing for the study of developments at the very micro level.

As the project approaches the end of the data analysis phase, a number of initial findings emerge. Three factors were identified that explain the recent rise of a multitude of smaller armed groups: first, the growing involvement of local-level political actors in armed mobilization; second, the continuing volatility of local conflict dynamics, including conflicts surrounding local authority; and third, counterproductive military policies, in particular military operations. In the following, these factors are further analyzed, with a focus on the local governance dimension.

The “Democratization” of Militarized Politics

As the findings of an earlier phase of the Usalama Project indicate, in the period immediately following the signing of a peace accord in 2002, the decisive impetus for renewed armed mobilization was mostly given by national and provincial elites. These were sometimes connected to regional actors, such as governments and elites from neighboring countries in the Great Lakes Region.

The peace accord consisted of a double political and military power-sharing arrangement between the ex-belligerents, who agreed to divide positions in the politico-administrative apparatus and integrate their troops into a new national army, the Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC, Armed Forces of the DR Congo). However, within the new post-settlement order, many military leaders and allied politicians and businesspersons saw their power, income, and status diminish in comparison to the era of the Congo Wars. Smaller factions felt that they had been discriminated against in the distribution of ranks and positions in the national army. At the same time, given that the wars had hardened ethnic boundaries, many communities continued to feel threatened by opposing communities that often maintained links to armed groups claiming to defend their cause. As the new national army was not perceived to be neutral nor capable of effective security provision, communities
feeling insecure often endorsed military leaders and allied elites in their efforts to either refuse integration into the FARDC or create new armed groups.

Popular support for armed mobilization allowed elites liaising with armed groups to reinforce their own popularity and power within their local constituencies. An enhanced local power position could in turn be translated into increased access to provincial and national power circles. The principle of power sharing had introduced the logic that violence pays, as political and military actors able to mobilize the most military power received the best positions in the state apparatus. Thus, disgruntled officers had incentives to return to the bush, hoping they would receive higher ranks and better positions upon their (re)integration into the army. Rather than closing the door after the first round of rebel integration, the FARDC adopted an open door policy, allowing in all armed groups that (still) wanted to integrate into the army.5

In recent years, however, the effectiveness of liaising with armed groups to gain access to important positions—at least within the national political arena and army—seems to have diminished, partly as the FARDC has stopped the wholesale integration of rebel groups. By contrast, manipulating armed groups continues to yield benefits to those seeking to enhance their power, status, and income at the provincial or local level. Therefore, a wide array of political actors operating at the subnational level have adopted this strategy, including provincial ministers and parliamentarians, electoral candidates who failed to obtain sufficient votes, medium-size businesspersons, and mid-level commanders. This development may be described as a type of “democratization of militarized politics”: whereas at first, it was primarily national ministers, parliamentarians, and larger-scale businesspersons that tried to harness armed groups to further their own ambitions, this strategy has now been successfully copied by second-tier actors.

These actors include local authorities, who in many areas of the eastern Congo, come in two kinds: appointed administrators and local representatives of state agencies such as customs and the intelligence services on the one hand, and customary chiefs, who are designated by communities on the basis of customary principles, rather than appointed by the state, on the other. While chiefs have a legal statute that defines their mandate and jurisdiction, they often collide with politico-administrative authorities, whose power they commonly try to undermine.

Partly as a legacy of the colonial era, customary chiefs are seen to represent particular ethnic groups. Furthermore, they act as custodians of communal land regarded as ancestral, and therefore closely connected with collective identity. Consequently, for armed groups claiming to protect particular ethnic communities and their ancestral grounds, the support of customary chiefs is an important moral endorsement.6 For their part, chiefs liaise with armed groups to reinforce their own political and moral authority. For example, it allows them to enjoy the perception of being serious about defending the community, or be better able to impair politico-administrative authorities that operate within their constituency. Thus, there is a close connection between armed group presence and local conflict dynamics.

**Volatile Local Conflict Dynamics**

Partly as a result of the weak capacity of local governance structures to regulate conflicts, a multitude of disputes, often related to local authority, identity, and land and other natural resources, continues to create volatility in the eastern Congo. These conflicts feed into armed mobilization in various ways.7 Importantly, groups and individuals in conflict may approach armed groups for a “solution,” such as the intimidation of opponents to accept a proposed settlement. They may also solicit protection from armed groups when feeling threatened by their opponents,
which often occurs when the latter have similarly liaised with an armed group to reinforce their position. In this way, dispute settling may become profoundly militarized, making conflicts ever harder to resolve.

Many of the conflicts in which armed groups intervene are directly or indirectly related to local authority, including that of a customary nature. Frequent sources of local conflicts are succession disputes between customary chiefs, and disagreement concerning the administrative boundaries of customary entities. In other cases, communities that were not granted a customary chiefdom in the colonial era claim an administrative entity of their own, to the dismay of other groups currently ruling those lands. Identity-related claims often aggravate such conflicts, particularly where communities claiming to be “born from the soil” accuse others of being outsiders, immigrants, or foreign invaders. This raises the stakes and when armed groups get involved, often leads to “local security dilemmas,” whereby two communities mutually distrusting each other seek protection from armed actors.

Within conflicts surrounding local authority, particularly where certain authorities are disputed, bad governance often works as a “conflict multiplier.”

When people feel that local leaders do not live up to expectations (for example, selling land in an unjust manner for personal gain), they may support competitors who claim these leaders’ position. Contested authorities are again more likely to engage in bad governance, harnessing their resources and contacts, including armed actors, in order to remain in power. The result is a negative spiral of bad governance, conflict, and armed mobilization.

**Counterproductive Military Operations**

Aside from integrating rebel groups into the national army, which ended up fuelling rather than diminishing armed mobilization, the Congolese government has tried to stabilize the eastern Congo by means of military operations, sometimes with the support of the United Nations peacekeeping mission in the DR Congo (MONUSCO). Although such operations have occasionally weakened individual groups, they have done little to stem overall armed mobilization, as evidenced by the rising number of armed groups.

One reason for the limited effectiveness of military operations is that they have rarely been harmonized with political processes. Thus, armed groups were attacked without clear prospects of negotiations or an idea of what future negotiations could lead to, except for army integration. Furthermore, few follow-up measures were foreseen—in terms of holding and building—in the areas cleared of armed groups. Between 2009 and 2012, the donor-funded International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy (I4S) rehabilitated road and administrative infrastructure and supported the deployment of state agents in some of these areas; however, this failed to have a sustained impact. Aside from the technocratic approach of the I4S, which did not allow for mitigating local conflict dynamics, many of its zones of intervention simply remained too insecure in order for the newly deployed state agents to do their work.

That many areas targeted by military operations were plunged into deep insecurity is, to a large extent, a result of the operational weaknesses of the FARDC. When attacked by the military, many armed groups simply withdraw into impenetrable terrain such as mountain areas and dense forests. Lacking well-developed systems of logistics, particularly air support, the FARDC can only reach into those areas very briefly, if at all. Therefore, armed groups tend to sustain limited casualties, allowing them to return once the FARDC withdraws. Upon their return, such groups have often sought to take revenge on the local population, accusing them of betrayal for aiding the FARDC.

The FARDC might similarly mistreat civilians based on accusations that they are collaborating with armed groups, although such accusations are also levied
merely for the purposes of extortion. Indeed, the FARDC has a bad track record when it comes to behavior toward civilians, which is one of the reasons people do not always feel safer after the army has retaken control over former rebel-held areas. This is especially the case in areas previously controlled by larger rebel movements that were militarily strong, implying there was a measure of stability as their position was not contested.

In such areas, insecurity and distrust towards the national armed forces often prompt people to seek protection from the smaller armed groups that, benefiting from the dislodgement of bigger rebel movements, are able to increase their activities. Furthermore, in some of these zones, the population has created Local Defense forces in response to rising insecurity. Local Defense forces are armed vigilante groups that consist of villagers who conduct part-time security duties such as patrolling their own village at night. These groups are often closely linked to customary authorities, who may manipulate them for personal gain or to help their own client networks. For example, Local Defense forces might try to liberate friends of the customary chief from police custody, they might prevent the occupation of contested land by an opposing party, or they might intimidate opponents of the chief. In this manner, what originates as an initiative to enhance security, and often does, albeit imperfectly, ends up contributing to the further militarization of local governance.

Conclusion and Prospects

In recent years, the eastern Congo’s political-military landscape has become profoundly fragmented, involving dozens of armed groups entangled in dense political and social networks, and myriad conflicts that defy easy solutions. This fragmentation drives and is driven by a complex interplay among armed group activity, local conflict dynamics, bad governance, and elite politics. Enduring stabilization of the eastern Congo will require addressing each of these components and their interdependencies.

However, the prospects for progress in the short term appear bleak. The Congo is currently caught up in an erratic electoral process that absorbs most of the government’s and international actors’ attention. Furthermore, an ill-planned decentralization exercise promises to unleash further power struggles and political fragmentation. As past decentralization and electoral efforts illustrate, the risks of ethnic outbidding and armed group manipulation by politicians are not merely hypothetical during such political turmoil. At the regional level, the worsening political and security situation in Burundi might have further enkindling effects on armed mobilization in the eastern Congo, given that traditionally, most Burundian armed groups have had rear bases in South Kivu. In sum, while addressing the eastern Congo’s security conundrum, which has now lasted over 2 decades, continues to be urgent, rapid improvement might prove elusive.

Notes


2 For more information on these research projects, see www.usalama.net (for the Usalama Project) and http://www.politicalsettlements.org (for the Political Settlements Research Programme).

3 Part of these findings were also published in a policy briefing. See Judith Verweijen and Claude Iguma Wakenge, Understanding Armed Group Proliferation in the Eastern Congo, Usalama Project Briefing Paper (London: Rift Valley Institute, 2015), http://riftvalley.net/publication/understanding-armed-group-proliferation-eastern-congo#.VoUxTBFWJps


6 Kasper Hoffmann, “Myths Set in Motion. The Moral Economy of Mai-Mai Governance,” in Rebel Governance in Civil War, eds. Ana
African Standby Force: Not Quite Ready for Burundi, or Elsewhere
By MAJ John Ringquist (U.S. Army), Ph.D., Adjunct Professor, National Intelligence University

The African Union Peace and Security Council’s decision in December 2015 to send 5,000 African Union peacekeepers to Burundi, despite potential challenges from the Burundian government, demonstrates a new level of assertiveness by African Union leaders. Unfortunately, the political desire to deploy the African Standby Force is not matched by fiscal realities. Although provisions in the African Union charter require a two-thirds majority in order to send forces against the wishes of the country in question, in order to protect civilians, the cost may be too high without international donor assistance. In the case of Burundi, the African Union decision was motivated by concerns about a potential genocide in Burundi, but the cost of sustaining the force likely would be borne by donors due to the excessive costs anticipated for the deployment of the African Standby Force. The deployment of forces under African Union mandate is not new, and African Union forces have been a vital part of ongoing security operations in Somalia. However, a capable, operational African Standby Force is nowhere near ready for deployment, despite years of training and planning.

Field maneuvers such as those held late in 2015 were designed to test the operational readiness of the East African Standby Brigade, and are the latest in a series of initiatives by the African Union to demonstrate African ability to solve African problems, a matter of vital regional concern in the wake of Burundi’s political upheaval. African Union forces have deployed in support of peacekeeping operations to 11 countries in the last decade, and personnel contributions to United Nations and African operations to more than 30,000 personnel annually. The African Union has deployed forces to Burundi, Darfur, and Somalia under previous humanitarian and stability mandates, and it has gone further in expanding from peacekeeping to counter-terrorism and stabilization missions. However, African Union efforts do not translate into African Standby Force capability, despite efforts to create a single unified force.

The tactical and strategic challenges facing the African Union for an intervention such as the one proposed in Burundi are significant. It is important to consider that force certification is no guarantee of operational capacity, despite performance metrics. The African Standby Force’s troops are intended for deployment under Article IV of the African Union’s Peace and Security Council. However, the African Standby Force contingents from East, Central, and North Africa lack deployment capacity. The remaining African Union forces that could respond to a hypothetical genocide scenario likely will not be able to do so without necessary assets. Most African Union forces lack organic airlift and infrastructure for a highly mobile reaction mission, and sustainability for long periods of time would be hampered by lack of funds. Much of the funding for the African Union mission comes from external donors, and in May 2015, the African Union announced the need for $1 billion to make the African Standby Force operational. African Union operations often transition to the United Nations following an African-led first response for that exact reason.
The significance of the Amani Africa II Exercise in December 2015 may be in the African Union’s ability to assemble a multitude of military forces in response to a potential operational need. Enhanced by the assistance of European Union trainers and exercise support, African Union personnel gained experience from working through the political and military challenges with counterparts on common doctrine and standards. However unprepared the African Standby Force may be for a long-term deployment, the most likely component to respond to the deteriorating situation in Burundi is the East Africa Standby Brigade, despite the objections of member state Burundi. The military forces of Rwanda, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, and Uganda are all experienced with peacekeeping operations as well as asymmetric warfare, albeit to various degrees. However, with Rwanda and Tanzania reluctant to deploy forces, a serious escalation in violence would likely be the only catalyst for deployment.

The African Standby Force differs from United Nations operations, the African Union has settled on diplomacy and inter-Burundian dialogue, reportedly due to a 20 percent loss of European Union funding for the African Union’s peace and security architecture. The African Standby Force may be regarded by many observers as “almost ready” for Africa’s security challenges, but until the political will and financial support necessary for the proper employment of the African Standby Force materialize, the force will remain on “standby.” Despite the rhetoric of “African solutions for African problems,” unless the African Union supplants United Nations and European Union initiatives with African Union-provided training, funding, and logistics, the African Standby Force will not be a true measure of African capability and capacity for regional stability operations.

Notes


7 Ibid.


Burundi—Poverty and Politics

By Tenley Erickson, Department of Defense

Amid growing concerns that violence in Burundi is spiraling out of control, the international community has so far been unable to bring factions together to the negotiating table. The situation could escalate into another civil war, and potentially another genocide, just a decade after the 12-year-long war ended. Although ethnic tensions are clearly increasing and could escalate into mass attacks by the majority ethnic Hutu group against the Tutsi minority, Burundi’s current conflict has not yet become a full-blown ethnic conflict. This is due, in part, to the fact that the majority of Burundians are war-weary. Additionally, reconciliation efforts, while far from entirely effective, have had some positive impact on the Burundi social fabric. In this article, I argue that the primary concerns that ignited protests in 2015 stem from frustrations over the ruling party’s growing despotism, corruption, and inept handling of the economy.

Weak Economy Fueling Disgruntlement

Even before the current crisis, Burundi’s economy was performing poorly and was relatively stagnant. More than a dozen years of war left the country destitute, and in 2014, Burundi’s per capita gross national income was just $270, the second lowest in the world according to World Bank data (Figure 1). That same year, the country ranked last in the International Food Policy Research Institute’s Global Hunger Index. According to UNICEF, 58 percent of Burundian children under 5 currently suffer from chronic malnutrition. The United Nations ranksBurundi’s Human Development Index at 184 out of 187 countries, having only risen from a Human Development Index of 0.3 after the civil war to 0.4 today (Figure 2).

Afrobarometer surveys from 2011 to 2015 highlight not only overwhelming dissatisfaction with President Nkurunziza’s regime (more than 80 percent), but also a serious disintegration of self-reported living standards.

Figure 1. GNI per capita, World Bank.
More than half the population suffers from chronic malnutrition, according to the World Bank 2015 figures, and 80 percent of the population lives on less than $2 per day. Respondents who described their living conditions as very bad almost doubled from 2011 to 2015, with around 30 percent reporting their situation as dire (Figure 3).

### Land Disputes a Primary Source of Conflict

The population of Burundi, now approximately 10 million, is almost 40 percent higher than 10 years ago, according to the UN Development Programme. The population growth rate is 2.5 percent per year, more than twice the average global rate. Although land disputes are one of the main sources of civic unrest and crime in any agrarian country, the situation is particularly acute for Burundi’s subsistence farmers who face growing land shortages, excessive subdivision and land degradation, and land governance problems.

The demand for land is exacerbated by the return to Burundi of half a million refugees who fled the country’s 1993–2005 civil war or previous ethnic violence. As a result, rising numbers of land disputes, which account for 85 percent of court cases, are an ongoing source of instability. According to Phillippe Rieder’s 2014 field study, courts usually rule in favor of the party that pays better, leaving returnees disgruntled and impoverished. As a result, Burundians on the whole consider themselves poorer than before the crisis.

Food shortages are another significant issue affecting inequality and the standard of living. The average farm of just over an acre provides barely enough land for farmers to sustain themselves. Consequently, food shortages have reached chronic levels. In the 2013 Global Hunger Index of 120 countries, Burundi had the worst hunger and malnourishment rates.

In the face of deteriorating standards of living, insufficient opportunity, and a maturing youth bulge, the regime-sponsored youth group militia *Imbonerakure* offers an attractive alternative to poverty.
Opportunity in War

With regard to the relationship between poverty and insecurity, Rieder’s survey of former Burundian child soldiers cites economic reasons for joining militia groups. Becoming a rebel was a career choice for these disenfranchised youths for whom war meant viable economic opportunities rather than a social disaster.

He stresses that, in Burundi, economic and political issues cannot be separated. In fact, Burundians of all ethnicities are frustrated with the situation and usually blame it on power-hungry politicians. Many feel that with only one political party in power, things have gotten worse since the end of the war. Where the state does nothing to ease economic distress, the anger concentrates on political elites, and interethnic tensions become less apparent. According to Rieder, if the ruling party continues to ignore the suffering of the poor, it risks alienating those who lost the civil war in the short term, and even its own constituency in the long term. “There is a widespread consensus among Burundians that reconciliation is necessary. Many furthermore agree, at least hypothetically, that some form of justice, preferably restorative in nature, should be administered in order to leave the troubled past behind.” As a result, the discontent of badly integrated ex-combatants, former refugees, and internally displaced persons has augmented increasing popular opposition to the government.

Ethnic Violence as a Political Weapon

Since 2005, the social antagonism in Burundi has shifted from ethnic groups to political parties as individuals have scrambled for political-economic advantage. Following the war, corruption dominated power relations and permitted the creation of an “ethnically diverse oligarchy,” according to the International Crisis Group. Rieder found both Burundi elites and peasants alike increasingly believed that the essence of the crisis was political, not ethnic. But he notes that even during the civil war, questions of political-economic advantage and affiliation sometimes overrode ethnicity. He says a majority of Burundian peasants would be content to “bury the past,” but points out that:

. . . it’s not ethnicity, almost everybody lacks money or food, everybody wants a piece of the pie. The problem we still have here is that people are hungry, they are greedy, they want what others have, so they are still killing other people because they want to steal what they have.

In most cases, Burundians emphasized that insecurity and poverty were a much bigger concern than ethnic issues. Burundians mainly blame their elites for causing the conflicts and view rural perpetrators as people who are just following orders. Most of the hostility and disappointment in Burundian society today is directed against the political establishment.

Field research of other scholars finds that “mutual hatred” is not the main reason for the bloodshed in the Great Lakes Region. In periods of peace, both groups coexisted with few violent incidents, and mixed settlements and intermarriages are common in most regions. We should rather focus on the modus operandi of the state, the economic significance of political power, the exploitation of ethnic identity for political (and thus economic) gains, and the circumstances of impunity and insecurity that drive

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**Burundi's Ethnic Groups**

Tutsis make up 14 percent of Burundi’s 10 million people, while Hutus are 85 percent of the population. The Twa (Pygmy) constitute approximately one percent. According to the Arusha agreement, Tutsis should hold 40 percent of posts in the government and the national assembly, as well as 50 percent of all seats in the Senate and the military.

East Africa Living Encyclopedia
violence. This becomes evident through analysis of local coexistence and the progression of society-state relations. Furthermore, Rieder (2014) reports that young educated Hutu, in general, do not want another war or a return to ethnicity-oriented politics, despite being critical of the current government. Nevertheless, although most peasants claim that they have personally reconciled with their neighbors, and to a certain extent mutually recognize victimhood, the situation remains unstable mainly because of party politics. Ethnic attacks become more likely as a regime finds its options dwindling. Genocide as a weapon of state control is an extreme reaction when ruling elites feel cornered and existentially threatened. Ethnic violence boils up in the context of a crisis in which national leaders exploited ethnic identity for political gains. Leaders revert to the primordial ethnic allegiances they know their constituencies understand instinctively.

**Policy Implications of Stabilization of Conflict Areas**

Intra-state conflict tends to polarize identities even where there once was a high degree of cooperation and intermarriage (such as Rwanda prior to 1994). Social identification, such as religion, race, nationality, regionalism, and ethnicity, comes to the fore, creating fissures that split communities apart. These fractures then become institutionalized into irrational emotional drivers, leading to cycles of resentment, demonization, and revenge.

The reasons for these conflicts are not completely understood, despite the fact that research in ethnic war is currently a prominent field of conflict studies. Ethnicity is often the most evident unifying influence, but appears to be more a symptom than a causal factor. A body of evidence suggests that, in new democracies, ethnic violence may be more of an election tool used by weak governments rather than an eruption of hatred within the ethnic majority toward a minority group.

These emotions are more easily mobilized where increasing economic insecurity and frustrations stemming from economic deprivation act as catalysts for ethnic tensions. A major study conducted by the World Bank-funded Development Economic Research Group found that countries that achieve an average per capita income growth rate above 7 percent per year have a lower risk of conflict. Additional studies show that, while democracy has a dampening effect on conflict in the developed world, this is not the case in developing regions. In fact, in developing countries, economic development appears to lead to peace, whereas democratization has the opposite effect.

As the situation in Burundi illustrates, democratic development is a tenuous process in low-income countries. The less mature democracies are, the poorer and more unstable they tend to be. The risk of post-conflict violence is typically high when the growth is slower than the population growth. As resources become scarcer, intra-state conflict tends to rise.

This suggests that in developing countries, economic development is not just a humanitarian issue, but also a basic security concern. Policies that foster economic development in the developing world are more likely to enhance overall security than democratization efforts alone. The focus on ethnic tension alone is insufficient to understand the developing crisis in Burundi. As the ruling elite found its political position weakening, they increasingly used the economically disadvantaged youth to stir up fear and hatred, against all opposition, not just of Tutsis. Instead of an ethnic genocidal mob, Nkurunziza’s supporters have created a paramilitary force that has mobilized primarily for economic advantages and power. Nevertheless, although ethnicity has so far played a minor role, it is clearly an effective rallying factor.
Spiral of Violence

This latest conflict, touched off by President Nkurunziza’s decision to unconstitutionally run for a third term last April, has caused hundreds of deaths and more than 200,000 refugees to flee to neighboring countries.34 A former rebel leader, Nkurunziza came to power in 2005 following the signing of the Arusha Accords. The constitution created subsequent to the accord says a president can serve for one term, renewable once. But Nkurunziza’s party argued that he was eligible for a third term because he was chosen by lawmakers and was not popularly elected.

Burundian opposition to Nkurunziza has become increasingly vocal since the 2010 elections. In a January 2015 survey by an independent research group, 62 percent of Burundians polled said they disapproved of a third term.35 Additionally, several prominent members of Nkurunziza’s party—including his former spokesman—opposed his candidacy. Furthermore, the leaders of the attempted coup in May and the political opposition coalition are predominantly Hutus opposed to President Nkurunziza’s continued rule.

The ruling party exacerbated opposition by election fraud and intimidation in the run-up to and aftermath of the elections in mid-2015. Coercion and threats committed by youth militia known as the Imbonerakure have risen since early 2014, in collusion with government authorities. According to human rights analysts, in some areas the Imbonerakure act as a paramilitary force to combat his waning popularity.36 UN officials identified the Imbonerakure as “one of the major threats to peace in Burundi and to the credibility of the 2015 elections as it is responsible for most politically motivated violence against opposition.”37 Humanitarian agencies reported in April 2015 that the escalation of violence in response to Nkurunziza’s violation of the Arusha accords was not only a return to insecurity for Burundi, but that it would undoubtedly have a destabilizing effect on the region.

Ethnic divides in Burundi widened in late 2015 when government forces apparently conducted extrajudicial killings against Tutsis, according to Tom Perriello, the U.S. special envoy to the African Great Lakes Region.38 Officials reportedly intensified anti-Tutsi rhetoric, ostensibly to rally support for Nkurunziza and intimidate the opposition. Tutsi soldiers have complained that discrimination increased after the attempted May coup as the government sidelined officers whose loyalty was questioned.39 Since then, ethnic divides have become more evident; Tutsi defections from the Army have increased, and several high ranking officers have been assassinated.40

The Burundi military had been considered a critical element of averting a resurgence of civil war because it brought Hutu and Tutsi soldiers into a unified force. Created by the Arusha Accords, which established

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**Imbonerakure**

Imbonerakure means “those who see far” in the Kurundi language.

The group was formed in 2010 from the ruling party’s former rebel militia, CNDD-FDD, which never fully demobilized.

It is believed to encompass around 50,000 members across the country.

Pierre-Claver Mbonimpa, Burundi’s most prominent human rights activist, was jailed in 2015 for claiming that the Imbonerakure was receiving military training in the DRC.

The United Nations mission in Burundi reported in early 2014 that both weapons and uniforms were being distributed to the Imbonerakure.

In many rural areas, the Imbonerakure acts “in collusion with local authorities and with total impunity,” behaving as a “militia over and above the police, the army, and the judiciary,” according to a UN report.

IRIN, 2015
ethnically balanced military and government bodies, the military was based on an agreement of the Hutu majority to allocate 40 percent of army leadership positions to the Tutsis. Bolstered by international assistance designed to institutionalize conflict resolution mechanisms through training, institution development, and economic aid, the military has been viewed as a safeguard against further ethnic divisiveness.

Early on as opposition to Nkurunziza’s third term mounted, the army, for the most part, resisted fracturing along political and ethnic lines. However, during protests against Nkurunziza’s bid for a third term, security forces including the military and police intervened, sometimes breaking up protests that occurred in volatile neighborhoods heavily populated by Tutsis. At the beginning of the protests, the then-defense minister, a Tutsi, stated that the military would not allow a violation of the Arusha Accords. The army chief of staff, a Hutu who is a staunch supporter of Nkurunziza, contradicted the defense minister, who was subsequently removed from his position. This began the unraveling of the Hutu-Tutsi military unification.

**Impasse Despite International Pressure**

Since the crisis began in early 2015, increasing international pressure and sanctions from groups such as the African Union, key regional ally Tanzania, and the highly influential Catholic Church, as well as UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, have been unable to convince Nkurunziza or members of the ruling party to recognize the futility of obstinacy. Despite anticipated economic problems as a result of the sanctions, the president continues to refuse to negotiate with the opposition coalition, the National Council for Respect of the Arusha Accords and Restoration of the Rule of Law (CNARED).

As the crisis drags on and the Nkurunziza government toughens its stance, both sides are likely to increasingly resort to armed conflict in this winner-takes-all atmosphere. Nkurunziza’s supporters are more likely to use violence against the opposition and focus efforts against the Tutsi minority. Already, defected army Lt Colonel Edouard Nshimirimana has announced the creation of a rebel group, the Republican Forces of Burundi (FOREBU). Nshimirimana has claimed this group attacked two military bases on December 11, 2015, killing 87 in an operation that succeeded in obtaining arms and ammunition. Following the attacks, the government responded with 2 days of reprisal assaults against mostly Tutsi areas in the capital, committing atrocities and mass killings according to human rights watchers. According to latest figures, more than 400 people have been killed and 220,000 have fled to neighboring countries since April.

In coming months, the government will probably continue to dig in its heels and use the militant Imbonerakure to intimidate the opposition, making negotiations even more difficult. Although the group is believed to be highly loyal to the president and his allies, it does not operate in a vacuum. It undoubtedly is mobilized, financed, and directed by the ruling elite, not unlike in the Rwandan Interahamwe, the civilian group responsible for much of the killing in the 1994 genocide. However, unlike the Rwandan situation, which was predominantly ethnically motivated, Imbonerakure currently tend to hunt down anyone perceived to oppose the Hutu president’s third term, endangering all three ethnicities—Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa.

As government supporters have increasingly blamed the Tutsi for the country’s problems, those supporters are potentially giving the Imbonerakure a more ethnically defined mission. The group, numbering at least 50,000 young men, is easily motivated by emotionally-charged rhetoric. Perhaps even more than political entrepreneurship and economic factors that drive the political elite, disadvantaged Burundian youth are motivated by personal desires such as respect, power, and revenge.
Refugees report that in order to rally supporters, the government uses a powerful party slogan that elicits the fear of giving power back to the Tutsis if Nkurunziza steps down. As Burundians sought safety in neighboring countries, they told aid workers they fled because of direct threats by Imbonerakure, warnings from friends, growing violence, abductions, murders, and sexual violence. Many report being targeted because they are Tutsi. With the resources and the support of the government, the more power the Imbonerakure wield, the more committed they become to maintaining their status. As one refugee told reporters, “Now they have an illusion of power, that they are the kings of their local areas. It can be very dangerous.”\(^{47}\)

Nkurunziza refuses to allow an African Union peacekeeping force to help stabilize the crisis. Humanitarian aid workers and journalists, for the most part, have also left the country, reducing the visibility of human rights violations. Regional partners have limited ability to influence Nkurunziza, who now faces possible charges from the International Criminal Court. Ugandan President Museveni and Tanzanian President Kikweti are attempting to negotiate an agreement between the Burundian government and the opposition, but Nkurunziza has so far stonewalled any meeting.

A new rebel movement rallying behind “being Tutsi” or adopting an ideology of national renewal, such as the Union Nationale Rwandaise (UNAR) in the 1960s in Burundi, could easily exploit the grievances and frustrations of young Tutsis. Young, disgruntled men do not need a lot of convincing to join an armed movement. An insurrection that could be interpreted as pro-Tutsi, however, would probably re-ethnicize politics and entail serious repercussions by the CNDD-FDD government, possibly resulting in ethnic cleansing or even genocide.\(^{48}\)

Rwanda has been accused of supporting the Burundian opposition and trying to destabilize Burundi.\(^{49}\) The Rwandan government’s response is that the international community has done little to resolve the growing internal violence in Burundi. Given Kigali’s history of genocide, which evolved from Burundi’s civil war, it is not inconceivable that President Kagame would intervene in Burundi in order to try to control the potential spillover effect. According to the International Crisis Group, Rwanda “has grave reason to be alarmed by the prospect of ethnically motivated conflict in its own backyard.”\(^{51}\)

Notes


14 Rieder, Comparative Reconciliation Politics in Rwanda and Burundi.
16 Rieder, Comparative Reconciliation Politics in Rwanda and Burundi.
17 Ibid.
19 Rieder, Comparative Reconciliation Politics in Rwanda and Burundi.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
26 Mike McGovern, “Popular Development Economics—An Anthropologist Among the Mandarins.”
27 Ibid.
35 Ibid.


44 IRIN, “Who Are the Imbonerakure and Is Burundi Unravelling?”

45 Jeffrey Gettleman, “Burundi Crackdown Puts Hutus and Tutsis, and the West, on Edge.”


47 IRIN, “Who Are the Imbonerakure and Is Burundi Unravelling?”

48 Jeffrey Gettleman, “Burundi Crackdown Puts Hutus and Tutsis, and the West, on Edge.”

49 Rieder, Comparative Reconciliation Politics in Rwanda and Burundi.


Research Corner: World Wide Human Geography Data Call* and Other Research Projects on the Great Lakes Region

From The Carter Center:

CrowdMap: https://2015burundi.crowdmap.com/reports/download
INAMA: http://burundi.peacedirect.org
EWER: https://burundielections.ushahidi.com
CNAP: http://www.cnaburundi.bi/index.php/fr/observatoire-de-la-violence-armee
ACLED: http://www.acleddata.com/data/re realtime-data-2016/

From Development Initiatives:

IATI data: http://d-portal.org/ctrack.html?country=BI&tongue=eng#view=main
If you scroll down to the map and “view all” you can view those activities (approximately 20 percent) that have been geocoded.

Geocoded microdata from the 2010 Demographic and Health Survey can be accessed (after registration) here: https://idhsprogram.com/data/dataset/Burundi_Standard-DHS_2010.cfm?flag=0

From ISciences:


From CIESIN:

The GPWv4 data collection is now in Beta and can be accessed here: http://beta.sedac.ciesin.columbia.edu/data/collection/gpw-v4/sets/browse
Source information is here: http://beta.sedac.ciesin.columbia.edu/downloads/docs/gpw-v4/gpwv4-documentation-metadata.xlsx

From GSDI Newsletter:


From CCOE:


From Previous Data Call Message:

Humanitarian Data Exchange: https://data.hdx.rwlabs.org/group/bdi

World Bank Data:

African Development Bank Group:
http://www.infrastructureafrica.org/documents/tools/list/arcgis-shape-files?page=1

Mapmaker Data—Burundi:
http://www.mapmakerdata.co.uk.s3-website-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/library/stacks/Africa/Burundi/index.htm

USGS EarthExplorer (search Burundi):
http://earthexplorer.usgs.gov/

DIVA GIS (search Burundi):
http://www.diva-gis.org/gdata

Michigan State CLIP:
http://clip.msu.edu/index.htm

United Nations Cartographic Division (pdf):

Open Street Map:
http://www.openstreetmap.org/relation/195269

Open Street Map Wiki:
http://wiki.openstreetmap.org/wiki/wikiProject_Burundi

Quandlr Statistical Data:
https://www.quandl.com/collections/burundi

WHO Health Data:
http://www.who.int/countries/bdi/en/

UNHCR Burundi Reports:
http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texts/otx/page?page=49e45c056&submit=GO

From the WWHG Catalog:
Burundi maps & reports – ReliefWeb:
http://reliefweb.int/country/bdi


John T. Hughes Library
Selected Bibliography

Articles


Strizek, H. "Development killers - The conflicts in the Great Lakes region of Africa are far from being resolved anytime soon." *Internationale Politik* 59, no. 11-12 (Nov-Dec 2004): 80-86.


**Books**


