

'Rice Wars' terror in Uganda, Rwanda

by Linda de Hoyos

Uganda is heading for "a holocaust, for carnage, for total destruction," unless the Western powers—especially the United States—adopts a policy of supporting the emergence of democratic institutions in Uganda, warns Michael Mabikke, the general secretary of the Young Democrats of Uganda, in the accompanying interview. The reason for this dire prediction is that Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, by moving toward an entrenched dictatorship organized around his own person, is fast destroying in Uganda all capabilities for a peaceful transfer of power within the country.

Mabikke speaks for those courageous political leaders in Uganda, including Paul Ssemogerere, chairman of the national Democratic Party, and Cecilia Ogwal, chairman of the Interim Executive Council of the Ugandan Peoples Congress, who insist that only through non-violent political work can a government come to exist in Uganda that is capable of addressing the needs of its people, whose life expectancy and living standards otherwise continue to fall. In answer to a demand from one section of the Ugandan Peoples Congress that Museveni must be overthrown through a violent coup, Ogwal declared: "They are warmongers. They are not in touch with the realities in Uganda. I stand by my statement that we are for peaceful change of government. . . . Nothing will divert us from peaceful struggle for democracy."

Unfortunately, for those leaders in Uganda who seek to put a definitive end to the politics of violence that has wracked this pivot country of East and Central Africa for the last 32 years, the current policy of the United States does not support their efforts.

Instead, under the aegis of Susan Rice, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, John Prendergast at the U.S. National Security Council, and their mutual mentor, Roger Winter of the U.S. Committee for Refugees, the policy of the United States toward Uganda has been full-throttled support for Museveni. Ignored is the fact that Museveni has outlawed all activities of political parties; ignored is the fact that insurgencies are springing up like mushrooms in violent protest to the dictator's rule; ignored are the realities of arbitrary arrests, detentions, torturings, beatings, vote fraud, rampant corruption, and nepotism—the usual accompaniments to brutal dictatorial rule. All these considerations have been pushed aside at the U.S. State Department and its environs, in service to a policy to *use* Museveni's willingness

to deploy his army—his only remaining base of power—on behalf of the financial interests of primarily British Commonwealth financial diktats and the geopolitical goals of Israel.

In short, war is the policy coming from Rice et al., for Uganda and its satellite Rwanda.

Since August, Museveni's armies, along with his Rwandan allies, have launched two separate invasions: one against Sudan, in alliance with the Sudanese People's Liberation Army of John Garang; and against the Democratic Republic of Congo—the two-front war that this magazine had warned since January was in the making.

What is overlooked completely in the Western press reporting of these wars is the fact that, *since these wars are not in the interests of the people of either Uganda or Rwanda itself, the prosecution of the war has necessitated a drastic increase in the violence perpetrated against the citizens of both countries.*

Concentration camps in Rwanda

The Rwandan army, under Defense Minister Paul Kagame, former head of intelligence of Museveni's National Resistance Army, moved across the border into the Congo on Aug. 2. Simultaneously, it has now been reported by the Center for the Struggle against Impunity and Injustice in Rwanda, the Rwandan army launched a campaign of terror in northwestern Rwanda in the districts of Ruhengeri and Gisenyi to force the largely Hutu inhabitants of the area into concentration camps. According to the Brussels-based Center, eyewitnesses who have since escaped from Rwanda to Nairobi, have reported large-scale massacres carried out by the Rwandan Patriotic Army over Aug. 2-3 and again on Oct. 2 in the Ruhengeri district bordering Congo.

It further appears that the Rwandan army has adopted the tactics used against insurgency by the brutal Burundian Tutsi military, by which the military surrounds a village, demands that all assemble, kills those who try to escape the dragnet, and then marches the rest into concentration camps, where there is no food, no clean water, no sanitation, no medical services. In Rwanda, such camps now exist in the communes of Nyarutovu, Gatonde, Ndusu, Nyamutera, and Cyabingo in Ruhengeri; and in the commune of Giciye in Gisenyi. The death rates at such camps are very high; such camps in Burundi in 1997 produced the biggest typhoid epidemic since World War II, according to the World Health Organization.

Such camps also exist in Northern Uganda, under the name of "protected villages," where people, caught in the deadly crossfire between the rebel Lord's Resistance Army and the Ugandan army, are brought without any means of subsistence.

The Associated Press on Oct. 29 corroborated the Center's report on the camps in Rwanda, saying that upwards of 400,000 people were now internally displaced in northwest

Rwanda, creating fears of a “humanitarian catastrophe.” International relief agencies, AP reported, have been prevented by the Rwandan government from going into the camps, since their personnel might be able to meet with witnesses to the killings that had taken place during the military operations.

Crackdowns in Uganda

In Uganda, the Museveni regime drastically tightened its dictatorship in July, using a campaign against terrorism as its foil, one month before the Ugandan invasion of Congo and one month before the terror-bombings of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania.

In the beginning of July, Minister of Internal Affairs Maj. Tom Butime announced to Parliament a new law to be passed designating all members of the insurgent Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and the Allied Democratic Forces as “terrorists.” “We shall now handle those terrorists fast, fairly, and firmly,” he said. “Under this law, once you’re arrested on suspicion of being a terrorist, *the onus is upon the suspect to prove that he is not one*” (emphasis added).

The government went into action. On July 4, the military swept up 4,000 in Gulu municipality in Northern Uganda, in search of collaborators with the LRA. Only 32 were eventually taken to military barracks for questioning, of which seven were detained. By mid-July, the newspapers were reporting deaths and torturings in jail among those who had been picked up in sweeps like the one in Gulu. On July 16, two suspects Michael Opolot and Sam Ogwang were reportedly tortured to death in jail in Kumi District. Regional police commander Raphael Makokha made no attempt to deny the incident, but said, “It happened and it is a very sensitive issue.” He said there would be a police review of the matter, but in fact, such operations are not carried out by local police, but by the Internal Security Organization (ISO) of the Museveni national government.

By July 22, the government-supported newspaper *New Vision* could report in a single day: Museveni’s rejection of cease-fire or negotiation with any insurgent group; the arbitrary arrest of 40 Asians of Kashmiri and Sri Lankan origin; the announcement of trial for treason for members of the rebel West Nile Front Group who had been taken; the burning down of 69 homes in Kembuzi, Kiboga district, because they had been put on a forest reserve; and the blocking of a rally by the Uganda Young Democrats at the Catholic Social Center in Mbarara district (see interview).

Simultaneously, ISO raids were carried out against Muslims, coming under suspicion for terrorist activity, which Museveni claims is sponsored by Sudan. On Aug. 17, the Amir of Uganda Sheikh Abdul Hakim Sekimpi held a press conference on behalf of the Muslim community: “We express our disappointment and dismay over the constant arrests of our people without any clear accusation against them. While some are arrested after midnight, others have been picked from taxis on the road. . . . As we talk, more than 50 Muslims

have never been produced in courts of law and yet abductions still continue.”

The arbitrary arrests of Muslims in Uganda had begun in April, but escalated after Butime’s pronouncement. On Oct. 27, Ogen Kevin Oliro, correspondent for the *Monitor*, reported on the case of Abdul Kadir, a 14-year-old boy who was arrested as part of a sweep of 20 Somalis carried out in mid-September by the Ugandan ISO, along with personnel from the U.S. FBI. The arrests, according to the report in the *Washington Post*, had “foiled” a terror-bomb attack on the U.S. embassy in Kampala. But subsequently, all those detained were released. “They had all been falsely accused of ‘terrorism’ in a wild-goose chase into which Uganda security operatives misled America’s FBI.”

But the 14-year-old Abdul Kadir was overlooked. For the next month, according to the *Monitor* report, Kadir was put under continuous torture by the ISO agents: “Sometimes he couldn’t tell whether it was day or night. His confinement room was dark most of the time. Every day his captors beat him up, until they reduced him to a near skeleton—moving, but no longer human. Then his captors thought of a novel idea. How about making their prey play ‘the Batman’? So they would hang him upside down, dangling by the legs—just like bats do. They did this every day, depending on their mood,” reported Oliro.

Three days after Oliro’s report appeared in the *Monitor*, he was seriously injured by unknown assailants who attacked him on the street.

As indicated by the Young Democrats’ general secretary Mabikke, the extra-legal campaign against “suspected terrorists” has been accompanied by a crackdown on political parties. After a conference of the African Development Foundation at which Democratic Party Chairman Paul Ssemogerere spoke, the Foundation was summarily closed by the Museveni government, on charges that it was functioning as a political party, when Article 269 of the Museveni constitution prohibits any party from engaging in any political activity. Attempts by the Young Democrats to hold educational forums on civil rights were shut down by AK-47-toting ISO operatives acting on “orders from above.”

As stated by Cecilia Ogwal in September, “There is an unprecedented level of panic which has gripped the government of Uganda. Every day scores of ordinary citizens are being bundled up and taken to unauthorized places for detention. . . . We are convinced that the cause of the incessant insecurity is due to the intransigence of the NRM, which revolves around the Machiavellian principle that minority rule feeds and thrives on instability and conspiracy. By this philosophy, Mr. Museveni, having lost an election in 1980, had to wage war in order to come to power. He has maintained his rule by more wars.” And in this mission, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Museveni has the strong support of Susan Rice and the gang now in control of U.S. policy toward Africa.