

Uganda: Still an African Success Story?

A deal bringing an end to the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was reportedly signed at a mini-summit arranged by Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi on 18 April attended by the Congo's Laurent Kabila, Chad's President Idriss Deby, along with President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda and Eritrea's President Isayas Afewerki. Further talks were scheduled for later this month in Italy. But this may prove to be yet another false start to peace in the DRC. First, doubts have been fuelled by the lack of involvement of both the Congolese rebels and their principal sponsor, Rwanda. Second, it is unclear whether Uganda is in a position to withdraw its troops from the eastern Congo.

Already rebel leader Ernest ~~Wamba dia Wamba~~ of the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD) has rejected the peace deal, saying that: "We have said all along that we want to discuss directly with Kabila. The principal belligerents must agree on a cease-fire and any agreement which does not include everybody will have difficulty in being implemented". Patrick Mazimhaka, the Rwandan Minister of State in the President's office noted that: "it makes no sense that there would be an agreement signed ... without Zimbabwe and Angola and Namibia and without the rebels". Kigali has rejected as "null and void" what it has described as a "pseudo-peace agreement".

Laurent Kabila's DRC government has come under increasing military pressure as a result of the forced withdrawal of one of its key backers, Angola, due an upsurge of fighting in the former Portuguese colony. But any deal in the DRC and Great Lakes area will have to convince all parties of the benefits of peace. Of the key players, the mainly-Tutsi Rwandan government in Kigali will have to be convinced that ethnic suicide will not occur if they abandon their policy of aggressive self-defence. President Robert Mugabe will have to back down from his martial predilections in favour of diplomacy, possibly losing preferential mining concessions for Zimbabweans (and, allegedly, his close family members) in the process. Sudan and Angola will have to place their trust also in the diplomatic process and have confidence that their respective opponents — the Ugandan-supported Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and UNITA — will not seek to profit from the end of the strife. There are questions, too, about Kampala's belief in the peace process given its own

~~worsening security situation, compounded by its increasing dependence on revenue from Congolese mining sources.~~

Uganda is a pivotal state in achieving peace in the region. Having placed much store in Museveni as representative of a new, more positive African leadership generation, the West, too, is hoping for a positive role by one of its favoured sons.

Is a Ugandan Withdrawal from the DRC Possible?

On 26-27 April 1999, the Centre for International Studies at Oxford University will stage a seminar at Canada House in London on 'Economic Agendas in Civil Wars'. For Africa, this is appropriate at a time

that questions are being raised about the profit made by both UNITA and the Angolan government by carrying on fighting in that country. That war allows, perversely, a perpetuation of a system where a lack of accountability, bad governance and no transparency are the order of the day. It permits Luanda's elite to skim money from arms transfers; and individuals within the MPLA and UNITA to gain from access to oil and diamond sales respectively. Recent signature bonuses of oil concessions have been procured, for example, to enable Luanda to purchase arms to try to turn the military tide against an ascendant UNITA.

According to estimates by the UK lobby group, *Global Witness*, Dr Jonas Savimbi's UNITA has gained US\$3.7 billion from diamond sales between 1992 and 1998. Diamond sales have also been used to fund conflict in Liberia and Sierra Leone, the latter

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now classified as the world's poorest state by the UN Development Programme, with a average life expectancy of just 35 years.

Similar questions could also be raised about Uganda's commitment to withdraw from the DRC conflict in spite of pledges to do so following the Libyan deal. Domestic conflict still affects the north and the west of the country, involving the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), the Allied Democratic Front (ADF), the West Bank Nile Front (WNBF) and the Uganda National Rescue Front II (UNRF II). Problems in the security situation were highlighted by the killing of four Ugandans and eight tourists at the Bwindi National Park in south-west Uganda on 1 March 1999 by members of the Hutu Interahamwe and former members of the now-defunct *Forces Armees Rwandaises* (FAR).

Currently the ADF comprises several groups including the Ugandan Federal Democratic Army (UFDF/A), the National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (NALU) and the fundamentalist Tabliq Islamic group. The ADF's current chairman is Ssengooba Kyakonye Mukongozzi. Other key leadership personnel include Abubakhr Jamil Mukulu, who is based in Khartoum and travels extensively in the region to countries like Zambia and Tanzania; the Secretary-General Ssentamu Kayiira; Abdul Tamvuku, an ex-MP and former lecturer in philosophy at Makerere University in Kampala; and the financial secretary, Durban-educated Abubakhr Rwabwogo. Many in its leadership ranks appear to have close ties with the former regime of Idi Amin. The ADF apparently has representatives in a number of international capitals, including the US, UK, Kenya, Sweden and Canada.

The ADF is based mainly in the Ruwenzori Mountains bordering the DRC where it has allegedly regularly received air-supply drops from Sudan. Operations in this area are under the command of Henry Matovu. The female ADF commander, Gorette Nabulime, is responsible for the Fort Portal and Kasese operational areas.

The declared goal of the ADF is to overthrow the government. Its manifesto states that, upon taking over power, it will hold multi-party elections within 24 months and hand over the leadership of Uganda to a democratically-elected president and his party. It would also re-write the National Constitution by removing "articles unacceptable to Ugandans" given that the existing constitution it believes was "fraudulently and treacherously created by Museveni's sycophants through bribery and exploitation".

To this end, the ADF has attacked government installations and instigated a terror campaign against the civilian population involving abduction, murder and mine-laying.

The main sources of support for the ADF are from Sudan, Libya, and from the DRC and its Angolan, Sudanese and Zimbabwean allies.

There is evidence currently to suggest that the ADF have stepped up their military campaign significantly, particularly in the area around Kasese County with the return of about 400 of their number from the DRC where they had received training from Angolan and Zimbabwean instructors. About 800 ADF members remain in the DRC.

These terror acts follow on from the Valentine's Day bombings in Kampala in 1998, aimed at creating alarm particularly among foreign nationals. The ADF is playing on these fears issuing statements that it will deliberately target foreigners: a press release of 4 April ascribed to NALU/NULU warns "all Canadian, European, and US nationals about travelling to Uganda. We will shoot any of these people once got [sic] in Uganda". It goes on to add that "Any foreigner caught [in Western Uganda] will have his/her head chopped off regardless of age". This can only have a negative effect on Uganda's tourist flows. Bwindi National Park was the source of 70% of all Ugandan tourist income, with tourism responsible for 5% of its Gross Domestic Product.

The Bwindi attacks also coincided with the creation of the Rwandan Liberation Army (ALIR), the military wing of the Rwandan Liberation Movement (PALIR). Under the leadership of General Augustin Bizimungu, the aim of the ALIR is apparently to unite all Interahamwe and Rwandan Hutus.

What Does This Mean For Uganda?

The deterioration in the security situation has a number of implications.

It places in jeopardy the progress made by President Museveni in transforming his country once more into the 'pearl of Africa' since he took over in 1986. Museveni has seemingly successfully lifted his country out of 24 years of post-independence conflict and, in doing so, has won the favour of Western governments and donors alike. During his visit to Uganda in March 1998, President Bill Clinton praised the country as an example of the African renaissance. Washington continues to see Uganda as a bulwark against the spread of militant Islam. Uganda was one of the first states to benefit from the US African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI) peacekeeping training programme intended to help provide 'African solutions to African problems', though it is ironic that these troops have most likely now been deployed to fight in the DRC.

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Uganda is today something of a benign dictatorship — a “no-party democracy” under the control of the “movement”, an umbrella political grouping designed to encompass all Ugandans and to encourage nation-building in which Museveni’s National Resistance Movement (NRM) is the ruling authority. Museveni was elected President under the new constitution in May 1996 by 74% of those Ugandans who voted.

The President plans, however, to put the one-party system to the test in a referendum towards the middle of next year, despite his fears that tribalism and sectarianism will dominate the political scene. He aims to develop a middle-class before permitting multi-party democracy, and apparently hopes that the referendum will result in a continuation of the *status quo*. Yet not only have several opposition parties objected to the referendum on the basis that there can be no compromise on the principle of the right to form and vote for political parties, but the ADF and the LRA have indicated that they will disrupt the event militarily.

Opposition to Museveni’s rule will, inevitably, be related to the country’s economic performance. Since he took over and with the assistance of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, Museveni has revitalised this sector which had been destroyed by a combination of misrule and war. Between 1960-80, the economy shrunk at 2.2% annually. As a result, despite growth rates averaging 6.4% for the last decade, per capita income is only now approaching the level of 1971, the year that Idi Amin took over and the economy began its “precipitous collapse”. Inflation has been brought down from an average of 65% between 1985-95, to 7% today.

In spite of these improvements, Uganda ranks at position 160 out of 174 countries according to the UN’s Human Development Index. Half of the population survives on just one dollar per day. Its per capita GDP remains low at US\$550, though in constant terms this has climbed substantially from US\$420 when Museveni took over in 1986, its lowest point since 1960. Economic revitalisation is made more difficult by rapid population growth, up from 9.8 million in 1970 to 20 million today. At current rates the population will double again by the year 2021. The country remains dependent on aid for 55% of its budget, receiving a total of US\$1 billion in development loans, grants and import support in 1997/8.

The 1997/8-1999/2000 policy framework paper aims to achieve 7% real GDP growth with inflation at 5%. However, the continued wars have made the realization of these goals doubtful.

Problems In The UPDF

There are reported concerns about the morale in the Ugandan People’s Defence Force (UPDF), with a lack of

cohesion in units and a general lack of combat preparedness. Yet the defence outlay has risen from 1.9% to 2.2% of GDP between 1998 and 1999 primarily as a result of the UPDF’s role in the DRC, known as *Operation Save Haven*. At the end of February, 16,100 men were deployed across the border. Per capita military spending has risen (at constant 1985 prices) from US\$5 in 1985 to US\$8, reflecting an increase in the numbers of armed forces personnel from 15,000 to 52,000.

In order not to exceed IMF guidelines (which made available a three-year US\$145 million Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility loan in 1997), the gold and diamond mining operations of the UPDF around Kisangani are to a large extent financing the DRC deployment and, at the same time, preventing Kinshasa from gaining the revenue. Both the former Minister of Defence Major-General **Salim Saleh** and the UPDF commander Brigadier **James Kazini** are reputedly profiting personally from these activities. General Saleh, Museveni’s brother, was forced to step down from the cabinet in December last year amidst allegations of involvement in an improper take-over of the Uganda Commercial Bank (UCB). In September last year, a light aircraft carrying a number of Saleh’s business associates including his brother, Lt.-Colonel **Jet Mbaza**, crashed while apparently on a gold-purchasing mission in eastern Congo.

According to the UN’s Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), the Goma-based pro-RCD monthly paper, *Les Coulisses*, has accused Uganda of “plundering” the eastern DRC: “The people who came as liberators are now massively looting and smuggling from Congo”. These accusations come at a time when the Uganda Revenue Authority and Civil Aviation Authority have complained to the Ugandan Defence Ministry about “dubious deals” between Ugandan army officers and their DRC civilian collaborators. However, Ugandan officers have responded by blaming Rwandan army elements for the “anti-Ugandan propaganda”. “They are angry that Uganda has helped the genuine Congo rebel leaders **Jean-Pierre Bemba** and **Wamba dia Wamba**, who they thought were their creation, to unite”, one officer is quoted as saying.

It thus remains to be seen whether the UPDF can in fact afford to withdraw from the DRC. Already the Ugandan Minister of State for Foreign Affairs **Amama Mbabazi** has played down the Libyan peace accord, saying: “The peace agreement is simply a statement of our desires: what we would like to happen in Congo. But it’s not enough just to talk about ceasing hostilities or withdrawing our forces. We need details on how we would go about implementing a ceasefire, while our withdrawal is contingent on our security concerns being addressed and an international peacekeeping force coming in”.

These doubts are compounded by a high rate of HIV infection in Ugandan society in general and in the UPDF in particular. Around 30% of all Ugandans are estimated

to be HIV-positive despite a commendable Aids-awareness campaign led by the President. This situation has contributed to bringing down average life expectancy from 63 years in 1960 to 55 today. There have been reports that UPDF personnel are using the proceeds of diamond and gold sales from Congolese mines to fund expensive anti-viral HIV treatments.

Negotiations with The Rebels and other possible Outcomes

One way out for Museveni from trying to fight wars on external and domestic fronts simultaneously, is to try to negotiate a truce with at least some of the rebel movements. Although the President has until now refused to do so on the grounds that they are "bandits", there are signs that he may be relenting. Apparently Museveni wrote to **Joseph Kony**, the leader of the LRA, in July last year proposing dialogue. Although this was not positively received, there are reports that an amnesty for LRA members is being considered as a result of a government campaign started last October led by then Local Government Minister **Kahinda Otafiire**.

The LRA may well succumb to this offer given that it has come under international pressure as a result of its use of child soldiers, abductions and generally barbaric attacks on civilians. And it now appears that the LRA has upset its Sudanese hosts. On 17 April, Kony was reported to have been apprehended by government authorities in Sudan. The Ugandan semi-official newspaper *New Vision* reported that Kony was no longer at his base at Jablein in southern Sudan and was under house-arrest at an unknown location. Other LRA officials had their passports seized, and another senior LRA member, **Yassin O'jwang**, had fled to Aden in Yemen.

The UN Children's Educational Fund has said that some 40,000 people from the northern districts of Gulu and

Kitgum have lost limbs to Kony's rebels. The LRA is reported to abduct children from their schools, communities and homes. The children who attempt to escape or resist are murdered along with those who cannot keep up or become ill. If they do manage to escape, they must then face the wrath of the government. In January 1999, the Ugandan army executed five teenage boys between the ages of 14 and 17 suspected of being rebel soldiers.

But this practice is not unique to the rebels. According to the *Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers*, street children have been forced to join the government army in order to be sent to fight in the DRC.

President Museveni has played for high stakes in the Congo. He may, however, have misjudged his situation both regionally and at home. He probably did not predict the involvement of Zimbabwean, Angolan, Sudanese and Namibian troops in support of Kabila. Nor could he have reckoned on the galvanising effects his deployment would have had on his domestic military opponents, particularly the Allied Democratic Forces coalition.

The foreign aid community can only be wondering at the cost of these military ventures and their effects on the Ugandan economy. Washington's continued empathy to a degree hinges on its suspicion of Sudan's Islamic connections, but Museveni will, too, have to reciprocate by displaying a willingness to engage in regional and domestic diplomacy.

The President is facing increasing numbers of domestic detractors who expected him to live up to his promise in 1986 of only ten years in power, and whose succour may be flagging amidst the upsurge in LRA/ADF terror campaigns and the long, slow economic reform process. In these circumstances, the referendum on multi-party government in the year 2000 may well prove a most difficult test of President Museveni's own convictions.