

**Rwanda: In the Shadow of the Baobab - Kagame Blows Cold and Hot On a Third Mandate**  
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In October 1990, after Fred Rwigyema's death on the third day the struggle to conquer Rwanda, Paul Kagame took over the command over the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and led it to victory in July 1994.

He became Vice-President and Minister of Defense in the transitional government installed after the Rwandan genocide. In March 2000, President Pasteur Bizimungu felt that he could no longer contribute to a regime dominated by the RPF. He resigned and Kagame became the Head of State. He has subsequently won presidential elections in 2003 and 2010.

In 2017, when his second mandate as an elected President expires, he will have led the RPF for 27 years and will have been Rwanda's most powerful individual for 23 years (for 17 of which he has been the country's President). The Constitution, adopted by referendum in May 2003, foresees a maximum of two consecutive mandates for the Head of State. This means that he cannot stand for a new term in 2017.

Very soon after his re-election in August 2010, speculation and rumour developed about the chances that Kagame, with or without a review of the Constitution, would seek a third mandate. On February 27th 2013 he gave a press conference on the issue stating that he is not interested in running again.

This press conference was a reply to earlier announcements by opposition parties such as Victoire Ingabire's FDU-Inkingi and Frank Habineza's Green Party that they would oppose changes to the Constitution allowing Kagame to continue. But at the end of the press conference, Kagame left all options open. He isn't seeking a third mandate and doesn't 'need' this job, but he doesn't exclude the possibility of bowing to the will of the people if they want him to stay on. "At the end of the day, let's remember that Rwandans have to decide," he said.

### **2010: a landslide victory**

On 9 August 2010, Kagame was re-elected with an overwhelming 93% of the vote. In the election itself he faced three candidates who were considered by the traditional opposition as "satellite candidates, phoney opposition players intended to maintain the illusion of pluralism".

The months before the elections had been very tense when the more genuine opposition parties started to prepare their campaigns: the Social Party Imberakuri (PSI) led by Bernard Ntaganda, the Green Democratic Party (GDP) with a leadership that came mainly from the anglophone community and which, according to many, was a result of the discontent within the RPF; and lastly the Unified Democratic Forces (UDF-Inkingi), formed around presidential candidate Victoire Ingabire, who had returned to Rwanda in January after an absence of 17 years.

The leaders of these parties confronted hostility and significant verbal aggression from the authorities and media. Victoire Ingabire in particular, with her clear message and direct, flamboyant style received a lot of national and international attention. However, when the election actually arrived, none of these candidates were able to formally run for office.

In the end, all went well for Kagame. When you have almost complete control over the legislative, executive and judicial institutions, when an independent press has almost completely disappeared, when that section of opinion which has not openly sided with you has attained an extraordinary level of sophistication in the noble art of self-censorship, when for a large part of national and international opinion you represent the ending of genocide and the return to stability, you don't lose elections.

### **The annus horribilis**

In the months before the elections the focus of tensions changed. General Faustin Kayumba Nyamwasa, a long term companion of President Kagame and former Commander in chief of the Rwandese army, left

Rwanda and its regime to join the dissident Colonel Patrick Karegeya in exile in Johannesburg. Karegeya is a former intelligence chief, but above all central to the running of the Congo Desk - created during the war in Congo to manage the exploitation of natural resources in the eastern DRC.

In the months after Nyamwasa's departure, others left too - influential and high profile people like Theodore Rudasingwa (Kagame's former director of cabinet), Gerald Gahima (former Prosecutor General and Vice-President of the Supreme Court) and Kagame's private secretary David Himbara.

All of a sudden, Kagame wasn't struggling with his traditional enemies but with his frustrated comrades-in-arms. The ruling inner circle was losing its coherence and had to fight against its own disintegration. When it looked at itself, it was confronted with the cracks in the mirror that belied the united and serene image which it wanted to show to the public in Rwanda as well as internationally.

Three weeks after Kagame's re-election, the French newspaper Le Monde leaked the draft of the UN's DRC Mapping Exercise Report which aimed to document the most serious violations of human rights in the DRC between March 1993 and June 2003.

In paragraph 517, the report states: "The systematic and widespread attacks described in this report, which targeted very large numbers of Rwandan Hutu refugees and members of the Hutu civilian population, resulting in their death, reveal a number of damning elements that, if they were proven before a competent court, could be classified as crimes of genocide."

This was nothing less than an earthquake for Rwanda. For a decade and a half the regime functioned as the incarnation of genocide victims over those who had perpetrated it. The report, published on October 1st 2010, suggested that this might only be one side of the story, that the reality of Rwanda's traumatic recent history might be much more complex.

The report is nothing more than a very extensive inventory of the most important human rights violations in one decade, and as such it is not a basis for prosecution. Most of the facts reported by the UN researchers were known, but for the first time they were brought together in one comprehensive document and acknowledged at the level of an official UN document.

Thirty months after the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights published the report, there has been insufficient follow-up by governments in Africa's Great Lakes region and by the UN itself.

### **Damage control**

The landscape of Rwanda's political and military elite has changed a lot with Nyamwasa's departure. There are many indications that Nyamwasa and Karegeya tried to organize an armed resistance on Congolese soil, bringing together people from backgrounds as different as the part of the CNDP that had stayed loyal to Nkunda, certain Mai Mai groups, the FRF, bits of the FARDC and FNL.

Contact was even made with some people within the FDLR. All these forces had their reasons to be against Kagame and the ambition was to unite them in an ad hoc movement against the regime in Kigali. To do that, they had to reconcile water and fire. They tried but failed, this was because of several factors.

By the end of 2010 it became clear that they would not be able to raise international support for an armed initiative. The main reason for this was that Kayumba Nyamwasa did not have a sufficiently high profile to incarnate the reconciliation of water and fire.

He had always been considered a hardliner of the regime, whose conflict with Kagame was about the President's attempt to dismantle the parallel economic structure that Nyamwasa and Karegeya had organized around the plundering of Congo's minerals.

It has never been easy to distinguish between hawks and doves inside Rwanda's regime, but Nyamwasa was definitely not to be considered a dove. He did not seem to have much added value to Kagame in terms of democracy, reconciliation nor good governance.

For the same reasons, the political party he founded with Karegeya, Gahima and Rudasingwa isn't much of a threat to the RPF: Kayumba Nyamwasa and his crew aren't a credible alternative to Kagame. 2010 was his annus horribilis, but Kagame won back the full control over the regime.

Since 2011, a change of generation has taken place around Kagame. People who are or could be influenced by Nyamwasa lost space and made way for younger men and women with a different profile: born in the late seventies or early eighties, ambitious, well-trained technocrats rather than military, polyglot intellectuals rather than the leaders who grew up in the refugee camps, fought in the bush against Obote and Habyarimana, eventually getting rich through the plundering of Congo.

The people who shaped Kagame's Brave New World were replaced by the people who grew up in it (mostly receiving training and education abroad).

### **Not another Mugabe**

Over the last few months, some Rwanda watchers have seen indications that Kagame is interested in a Buyoya-type of exit scenario: remain present and influential with a rather low profile on the national level, and play a role on the international scene as a mediator in conflicts. Other people believe he's constructing a more Medvedev - Putin inspired leapfrog.

Both sides believe that Kagame would like to avoid the political damage and loss of credibility if he continues. He is not looking forward to gaining a reputation as the new Mugabe or Museveni. His main concern will be to gain guarantees that he will not be persecuted by international justice.

Speculation has inevitably started on who could succeed him. At some point Richard Sezibera seemed in pole position. Born in 1964 and presently Secretary General of the EAC, Sezibera served as Minister of Health and as Ambassador to the US, Rwanda's Special Envoy to the Great Lakes Region and as Kagame's Senior Advisor. He is a medical doctor who practiced for many years in Uganda and Rwanda and has a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies from Georgetown University.

Another person referred to internally as a potential successor is Donald Kaberaku (1951), currently President of the African Development Bank. He studied in Tanzania and the UK (obtaining a PhD in economics from the University of Glasgow). In October 1997 he was appointed minister of finance and economic planning in Rwanda and is considered as one of the masterminds behind the recovery of the Rwandan economy after the genocide.

Sometimes other names appear - they seem to come and go in waves. But Sezibera, in particular, is to be taken seriously.

### **The M23 misadventure**

At the time of writing these lines, the latest offshoot of the RCD-CNDP tree 'M23' has been involved in several days of heavy internal fighting between the factions loyal to Bosco Ntaganda and Sultani Makenga. The draft of a peace agreement between M23 and the DRC government is circulating, but it remains to be seen if it will ever be signed.

M23 started nearly one year ago as another rebellion led by Congolese Tutsi. A settlement might be found around an old school arrangement which integrates the rebels in to the army, giving them grades and control over men and mines. Things might calm down for a while until the next time someone believes that his community's interests are best served by a new rebellion.

This episode has weakened everybody - including the Rwandan government. It seems they overplayed their hand. As soon as it became clear that Kigali was very actively supporting M23, its most loyal partners took extraordinary measures. Nations like the UK, USA, Sweden, Holland and Germany suspended at least a part of their aid. Rwanda received heavy criticism and now knows that any future moves and actions will be looked upon with great suspicion.

As usual, the events in Congo have divided the Tutsi and, more generally, the Rwandan community in Congo as well as in Rwanda. Unlike earlier Tutsi-led rebellions, M23 wasn't able to mobilise a lot of support among Congolese Hutu and the Banyamulenge. The Tutsi of South Kivu declared from the very beginning that they had nothing to be gained from the M23 rebellion, with which they did not identify at all.

The backbone of M23 were Tutsi from the North Kivutian territories of Rutshuru and Masisi, and since the Framework Agreement was signed in Addis Ababa, they are mainly fighting each other. What separates them (strategy, geography, clans, economic interests, political affinities) is felt within the inner circle of power in Rwanda and affects cohesion there.

### **Not really, Mr. Blair**

I do truly believe that the Rwandan regime is working on a succession scenario. However, anybody who has traveled to Africa knows that nothing, apart from scrub and mushrooms, grows underneath a baobab tree. It is very difficult for new and younger leadership to emerge in the shadow of a strong leader. Kagame led the RPF for more than 22 years and turned the country into a virtual one party state.

It is not easy to replace such a leader, even in the most serene conditions. And conditions aren't serene in Rwanda after one year of the M23. The country has been weakened by the events, as has any other actor in Central Africa involved in it, with the possible exception of Museveni.

Kagame has, however, managed an effective policy of damage limitation. Important international partners threatened to leave, but some of them have come back already. On February 22th Tony Blair wrote a letter, together with Howard G. Buffet, Stand with Rwanda.

According to Mr Blair "Slashing international support to Rwanda ignores the complexity of the problem within DRC's own borders and the history and circumstances that have led to current regional dynamics.

Cutting aid does nothing to address the underlying issues driving conflict in the region, it only ensures that the Rwandan people will suffer - and risks further destabilizing an already troubled region ... Cutting aid to Rwanda also risks undoing one of Africa's great success stories."

I do not belong to the group of people who believe that the alpha and the omega of Congo's scourge, woe and disaster can be reduced to Rwanda's role in it, but I do believe that a huge part of Rwanda's success story is due to the surplus it extracts from Congo's minerals, and that the Rwandan government is aware that it needs to consolidate this extraction if it wants to prevent the walls of its reign from tumbling down.

Congo's complex problems are the fruit of its own colonial and post-colonial history, but the fall of Mobutu's empire and the difficulties of reinventing and rebuilding the new Congo after the departure of le Président-Fondateur, have been complicated by the fact that Rwanda exported its problems on to Congolese soil.

Of course, "the international community should support the three regional governments - DRC, Rwanda, and Uganda - in their efforts to build a sustainable solution to the conflict", as stated by Mr Blair, but I don't really think this will happen without a delicate balance between support and pressure.

Not only pressure on the DRC (as it seems is the case in the Framework Agreement signed last month in Addis Ababa), but on all partners involved, Rwanda included. Pressure which does not foresee measures or sanctions is no pressure at all.

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