

KONGOMANI

Second thoughts about Museveni's new adventures in the DRC



What everybody anticipated has happened: the UPDF, the Ugandan army, entered Congo to deal with the ADF-Nalu, a group of Muslim extremists that is terrorizing the region around Beni and that is held responsible for several bomb attacks in the Ugandan capitol Kampala. The Ugandan president Museveni made a deal with his Congolese counterpart Tshisekedi and as we speak large numbers of Ugandan soldiers are engaged in an offensive against the rebel strongholds in the so called 'Grand Nord' of the Congolese province North-Kivu. To start with the UPDF started shelling and bombarding rebel camps with rockets, heavy artillery and Russian Sukhoi-30 jets. They did this in front of many news camera's to show the outside world that this time they would go to the bottom of the bottle to root out the ADF. To my surprise this operation also received the blessings of the UN. At first sight local residents in the Beni region seem to applaud this operation and the Congolese army, as always, is already boosting loudly that they scored their first victories against the rebels. But I have second thoughts about all this: I'm afraid that this big media show will be a prelude for a much bigger conflict that can set the whole region in flames. The set-up of this operation is riddled with contradictions and those who are applauding and supporting it now are neglecting a lot of things that happened in the recent past.

## **ADF-Nalu**

Nobody seems to know exactly what kind of organization this is, how many members it counts, who is supporting it and how it operates. What we do know is that this organization was founded in Uganda, that it fought against Museveni and that it relocated in Congo afterwards. We also know that the ADF is responsible for many killings in the region around Beni and in Ituri. Some observers are accusing Kampala to have supported the group logistically in the past (despite the fact that they also fought against the ADF) and that is was just another construction to create chaos in the 'Grand Nord' of the Kivu's. Whether or not the ADF is linked to the Islamic State (IS) also remains a question. The Congolese army, the FARDC, was never able to deal with the group. As it is the case with other rebel groups in the region they preferred to avoid clashes with them. Other analysts were even suggesting that the FARDC was feeding the ADF to create chaos in that area to keep observers out so that they could continue their monkey businesses there without being bothered. Another fact is that this region is mainly populated by local Nande; a business community that hates interferences from Kinshasa and that is more orientated towards their Ugandan neighbors. The Nande are also in conflict with the local Hutu's for the political control and the governorship of the province of North-Kivu. One of the latest governors of the province was a Nande but now that Kinshasa installed a military governor in Goma that dream had to be buried for a while. The spiral of violence and the local political and military landscape have become such a big and smelly soup that nobody seems to be capable any longer what kind of ingredients it contains.

But the ADF is killing, looting and terrorizing the locals and something had to be done about that. The FARDC was not able to do that. Monusco, the UN force on the ground, was also standing by and doing nothing. The recent bomb attacks in Kampala were attributed to the Muslim extremists but yet other observers openly think that it was the Ugandan government itself who staged or financed them to create an opportunity to re-enter Congo. President Museveni is getting old and is losing his grip on his often very greedy collaborators. He cracked down on opposition during the last elections and the country is sliding into the gutters economy wise. A war in which he can flex his muscles could be a nice way out to distract the attention from his fellow citizens and the international community.

## **Conflict with Rwanda**

The conflict with Rwanda resulted in the closure of the border between the two countries. Rwanda is accusing Museveni to support several Rwandan rebel groups of which the FDLR (Hutu extremists) and the RNC (renegade collaborators of the Rwandan government) are the most important ones. It is a fact that Uganda is feeding and taking care of the logistics of the FDLR and the RNC in Congo. Museveni is also trying to divert the economical orientation of the province of North-Kivu towards Uganda. I wrote another paper about that a couple of weeks ago. Via ex-ministers like Philemon Mateke and his daughter who is now a minister in Museveni's government the Hutu community in North-Kivu is receiving support to revive the old Hutu culture; in local churches and schools the usage of Kihutu (Hutu dialect) was introduced with a very negative anti-Kigali and anti-Tutsi narrative.

Eugène Serafuli, a former governor of North-Kivu and a close relative of Mateke – Philemon Mateke was born in Kisoro, nearby Congo – is playing a very important role in all this. Several facts show us that they are even trying to revive the Nyatura Hutu militia. The Nyatura militia is composed of Congolese Hutu's and they have always

collaborated closely with the Rwandan Hutu extremists. This strategy is receiving the moral support of the Rwandan opposition in the diaspora that wants to lure Rwanda into a big war so that the international community can step in to stop it and to force the current regime in Kigali to negotiate with them.

Add to that the whole discussion about the M23 rebel group, a mainly Tutsi and pro-Kigali military force that was chased out of Congo several years ago by the South-Africans and by Monusco. The M23 never fought back and fled to Uganda and to Rwanda. But the Congolese government never took any steps to re-integrate them. In the meanwhile they got very frustrated and left their refugee camps in Uganda and found refuge in the Virunga Park, on the border between Rwanda and Congo. Last months they launched several attacks against the FARDC.

I was already asking myself which pretext Uganda would use to re-enter the DRC; the white rabbit that came out of the hat of Museveni's wizard was the ADF-Nalu. Don't get me wrong: if the ADF really is what some people think and if the group really was behind the recent bomb attacks in Kampala the UDF might be doing a good job.

But.....

In Kigali this ADF-UPDF war is being followed with Argus eyes. The ADF was also stopped in Kigali when they were preparing bomb attacks. The RDF is currently fighting Muslim extremists in Cabo del Gado. There are indications that those jihadi's count several Congolese in their ranks and that they are in contact with the ADF. So possible attacks in Rwanda were expected. But the NISS and the Rwandan Police saw them coming. Kigali knows that Museveni was looking for a good pretext to re-enter the DRC and he seems to have found it now. Even better: the Ugandan president could convince the Congolese government to set up a joint strategy to fight the ADF and even the international community and the UN are now backing him up. With this the international community and the present UN force on the ground in the DRC are indirectly admitting their own uselessness, one again.

## Strategy

A Rwandan newspaper just published an article in which it quoted a military analyst who said that the UPDF was just showing off with massive fire power and turning the whole ADF operation into a big training session for future wars. Other military observers think that Kampala is making a big mistake by knocking on the ADF front door so hard so that the organization can hide in the nearby forests to escape the following infantry and special forces operations against them. Groups like the ADF can only survive when they mingle with the local population.

They pull back when they are attacked in full force, they hide in the bush where they can sit out the first big waves, they reorganize, start moving around in small groups and engage in hit and run warfare. The use of extensive firepower could therefore also cause the local population to suffer very hard. Nobody knows yet what kind of damage the heavy UDF bombardments inflicted on the local population.

In Kigali several military commanders look at the UPDF intervention in the DRC as a warning for Rwanda not to intervene in its actions. But they are not impressed by it. "The old silverback gorilla (Museveni) is standing up and banging its fists on his chest to make as much noise as possible," told me one very high up official in Kigali. "But he's not respecting the boundaries of his territory and he's making all that noise to scare off other silverbacks who want to take over from him. We were anticipating a move like this so he's not scaring us. We know and follow every step he takes. He's utterly stupid and he'll walk straight into his own retirement." Other observers in Rwanda are telling me that Museveni is feeding and organizing a war against Kigali with one hand and preaching to fight Muslim extremism with the other. This is true because I talked to several first hand witnesses who confirmed this. Rwanda was informed beforehand of the new offensive and collaboration with the UPDF by Congolese authorities. But the same Congolese government had already signed an agreement with the Rwandan government to work together to fight and to stop the activities of the FDLR and the RNC. The RDF and the FARDC already pushed the FDLR out of the region a couple of years ago but with the new support they are getting from Uganda the Rwandan Hutu extremists were able to reposition themselves.

The drums of a bigger war in the Kivu's are beating louder and louder every day. Media influencers in Kampala are writing that Rwanda is financing and equipping the ADF. Yesterday I read an article in a Ugandan on line newspaper that showed how Uganda is setting up metal detectors at its borders with Rwanda to check for ammunition and explosives and, by doing this, openly insinuating that Rwanda delivered the explosives for the Kampala bomb attacks. Bollox and fake news are in full swing on the social media. I'm also surprised that nobody made the remark that MONUSCO, the UN force in Congo, openly admitted to be in favor of this operation. This – again – shows their total ineffectiveness: millions of dollars are being spent in the DRC to maintain peace but if

their actions are most needed they let the fighting do by others. Haven't we seen this before? Both Rwanda and Uganda were openly criticized in the past for intervening in the DRC. A collaborator of the Kivu Security Tracker or the so called Baromètre Securitaire du Kivu told a French tv-station without blushing that an intervention of Ugandan troops was more acceptable for the Congolese population than a Rwandan intervention. She thereby forgot to mention why Rwanda invaded Congo more than 20 years ago, why it chased out Mobutu and why it allowed Laurent Desiré Kabila to take power. The reason for this was quite simple: the Congolese had allowed the Rwandan Hutu extremists to reorganize themselves in Congo and to start infiltrating Rwanda again. At that time the UN was also present in the region but they did nothing to stop all this. After that bigger outside powers convinced the Rwandans to push on to Kinshasa. It is true that they made mistakes in this process but when the gun smoke cleared up they were accused of everything that had gone wrong, even the fact that Mobutu had pushed his population to starvation, etc. Uganda's first entry into the DRC had other objectives: they were purely business! I respect the publications of the Kivu Security Tracker but they should keep some of their staff in line and correct their mistakes.

## **Muscle flexing**

The muscle flexing and chest banging strategy of Museveni only makes sense if the UPDF is planning to stay very long in the DRC. They are already planning to repair the big road axes between the bigger cities of the 'Grand Nord'. I can't get rid of the impression that this war will be kept running for a long time so that this longer presence can be justified. But pretexts to leave the 'Grand Nord' and move more southwards can easily be found by the Ugandans. They can f.i. accuse the Rwandans to support the ADF, they can say that the ADF fled to the south and they can come up with other arguments to convince the outside world that they'll also have to occupy the southern part of the province. A stick to beat a dog can be found everywhere. Allow me to portray this worst case scenario because this could put the whole region in flames. Rwanda would probably not tolerate to have UPDF elements and hardware on the Congolese side of their border. The RDF is probably better equipped, motivated and trained as the UDF. The Ugandans have jets but the Rwandans have the missiles to shoot them down, tanks are lesser effective tools in a mountainous region like the Kivus. The Rwandan troops are more skilled and battle hardened and they are used to take casualties.

I think that Kigali would have more or less 3 options to counter this move.

The first one would be to convince the Congolese government that the RDF can put up positions in the Rutshuru plain and the outskirts of Masisi to block the UPDF from moving to Goma and to avoid that the UDF will reinforce itself via the Congolese border between Ishasha-Bwindi and Jomba-Kisoro. In that case Museveni would probably think twice before he gives the order to put that plan in action. In this scenario the Congolese government would have the job to be the referee of this stand-off situation. The international community would have the possibility to intervene diplomatically as well. Rwanda would use this presence to neutralize their arch enemy, the FDLR.

The second option is already less rosy: the UDF would move into the Rutshuru plain, the RDF would block immediately the access to its borders and mess up the logistical support for the UPDF from Uganda. In this scenario the RDF would never allow the UPDF to make use of the airport in Goma. The risk that this will evolve in an open war is very real in this scenario.

A third option would be less likely given the fact that Rwanda cannot trust the international community to stop this madness: it implicates that Rwanda would allow the Ugandans to drive down with their tanks to Goma and to allow the Ugandan S-30 jets to land there. It would only react if the UPDF or some of the proxy groups they already finance and equip with weapons cross the Rwandan-Congolese border. In this case the international community could step in to convince Uganda to leave the region. If Uganda would have the boldness to attack pre-emptively strategic targets in Rwanda those scenarios can be thrown in the garbage bag to start with and the conflict will not only be fought out on Congolese soil.

## **Provocation**

It is my opinion that the Congolese government made a big mistake to allow the UPDF to roll and to fly into Congo with S-30 jets, heavy rocket launchers and heavy tanks. One does not need that stuff to neutralize the ADF treat. Good intelligence, special forces operations and well directed and planned attacks could do that job as well. The

fact that high ranking Rwandan officers compare Museveni with an old chest banging gorilla that is fighting for its status speaks for itself: many people here in Rwanda look at the UDPF offensive as another provocation. But this time it is not a bunch of FDLR Hutu extremists or Paul Rusesebagina's men who are manning the guns. This treat is more serious! The fact that the UN is giving its blessing for this operation is probably the biggest mistake they made since they planted their first blue flag in the DRC, years ago. Rwanda is already surrounded by hostile countries and forces: Burundi and Uganda to start with. The Congolese can sell their services to the biggest spender and are not being looked at as trustworthy partners in Rwanda. The previous much smaller provocations to lure the RDF out of their tents all failed. The NISS is following closely the ongoing events in the DRC. Kigali is probably quicker informed (or as quick!) about what is happening there as Museveni himself. They know the UDPF inside outside and they know their weaknesses. The RDF is not scared to fight the UPDF. In fact the RDF already gave the UPDF a beating in Kisangani, years ago. The situation might be different now and the UPDF might be better prepared but Museveni should think twice before sending his troops into the frontline against the RDF.

What strikes me when I talk about this with many Rwandans is the fact that most of them are willing to fight for their country. I already warned you in my previous paper that this pot was already boiling very hard. But now the soup in the kettle is spilling over. If the UPDF will leave the area around Beni and the Ituri forests and move to the south Museveni's real intentions will become very clear. His own collaborators in Kampala might not be willing to fight against a better organized, disciplined and better motivated RDF force to bolster his ego. A possible bigger war with Rwanda might also initiate the end of his reign. The opposition against the old man in Uganda is getting stronger by the day. If the Burundian army or the Imbonerakure would be stupid enough to attack in the south of Rwanda their days in power would be counted as well. The Congolese government will also be held responsible for a disaster like this: if they allow the Ugandans to use their soil to attack or to destabilize Rwanda you can't blame the Rwandans to intercept that aggression on that same soil. And Tshisekedi would put the safety of his own citizens at stake. To be followed...

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- **COMMENTS** *1 Comment*
- **CATEGORIES** *Uncategorized*

## Double standards when it comes to Rwanda



So Rwanda is not invited to participate in the upcoming US summit for democracy. Opposition members and Kigali bashers are seeing this as a confirmation for the claim that President Kagame is a dictator. But I'm sure that a lot of people who know the country well and who love it will miss a lot of sleep over all this. The fact is that Rwanda is not a real democracy and that it developed its own model to develop the country. Europeans and