

Uganda: There is a Rising Tide Against Rwanda Out West

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Timothy Kalyegira

How many of us can cast our minds back to the mood in the Great Lakes region in the mid to late 1990s?

Uganda had become a new centre of progressive African politics. The NRM revolution spilled over into Rwanda, then into the then Zaire.

Western diplomats flocked to Uganda, then regarded as the one-stop destination if there was to be any hope of resolving the conflicts in the Great Lakes area.

The handsome NRA and RPA officers and men who fought in Luwero triangle in the early 1980s were now re-drawing the map of Central Africa, as they fought lightning, mobile warfare and rapidly advanced onto town after town in similar fashion as the NRA in western and central Uganda in late 1985.

The people from southwest Uganda, already prominent in politics and the military, now became the new fashionable social class. The boyish haircut, modest casual clothes, and flat open sandals worn by Uganda's First Lady Janet Museveni set the trend among women in Kampala and Kigali. Do you remember those self-confident days?

Those glory days of military conquest and international diplomatic prestige that shaped political, military, and social life in the Great Lakes region in the 1990s in Uganda and the early 2000s in Rwanda appear to be drawing to an end.

That has been the running theme of this column since July 2006 after this writer's encounter with a strange Seer who foretold shocking events soon to take place in Rwanda and Uganda. Recent developments that lend weight to the Seer's prediction.

On Thursday February 8, 2007, the BBC World television, in a new programme "Outlook" aired a special investigative documentary titled "To Kill A President?" looking into the April 1994 assassination of Presidents Juvenal Habyarimana of Rwanda and Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi, and a French aircrew en route from a summit in Arusha, Tanzania.

Among the people interviewed for the programme, narrated by the BBC correspondent Feargal Keane, were President Paul Kagame, a former top army officer in the Habyarimana regime, a handful of defectors from the RPF now in exile in Europe, and French officials.

This BBC television documentary marked the crossing of new territory -- the entry of the English-speaking media into the matter of who shot down the plane. At first, it was the French and the Belgians whose governments and media were hostile to, or at least sceptical of the RPF government in Kigali. Not anymore.

The BBC is, by far, the world's largest news organisation, and this BBC World programme brought into the mainstream around the world the persistent question of who shot down that plane. It has greatly damaged Mr Kagame's international stature.

With the cameras focused up close onto his face, President Kagame was calm but beneath his smile, was a tone of barely concealed disgust in his voice -- as well as possibly the beginnings of a man coming to terms with this new reality, of the RPF stripped of its previous international acceptance.

President Kagame is starting to appear more on television and radio to deny any involvement in the shooting down of the plane than advancing the "African Singapore" economic miracle that some optimists had started believing Rwanda was.

In April 2004, a team of investigators from the University of Maryland in the United States published a report questioning the claim that most of the victims of the genocide were the Tutsi.

"The study, which international prosecutors are using, concludes that many of those killed may not have been minority Tutsis, as commonly believed, but majority Hutus... Our research strongly suggests that many of the victims, possibly even a majority, were Hutus," says the report published on February 6, 2007 by the university's Outlook newspaper.

Meanwhile, a British-based group of investigators, the Sanders Research Associates, published a report in December 2005 that questioned the basis for apportioning blame for the 1994 Rwandan genocide. The Sanders report stated: "There is a stunning lack of documentary evidence of a [Habyarimana] government plan to commit genocide.

There are no orders, minutes of meetings, notes, cables, faxes, radio intercepts or any other type of documentation that such a plan ever existed. In fact, the documentary evidence establishes just the opposite." (View from Rwanda: The Dallaire Genocide Fax: A Fabrication, Sanders Research Associated Ltd., December 1, 2005)

A new scepticism questioning the RPF government -- something improbable just five years ago -- is making its way quietly through the English-speaking western world, particularly Canada, Britain, and the United States.

There are the breathtaking new realities taking shape in the Great Lakes region of East and Central Africa. Starting in 2005 for Uganda and 2006 for Rwanda, regimes that were the toast of the world a decade ago are now coming under constant and mounting scrutiny, their leaders plucked off the pedestals onto which the western world placed them in the mid 1990s.