

The Great Lakes Conflict: Strategies for Building Long-Term Peace

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This is the first of what the IPT's Research Department plans as occasional background briefings. The idea is simple: whenever the IPT can contribute to research and analysis on the issue of conflict resolution, we will share our findings in a number of different ways. These background briefings are oral presentations whereby interested parties can hear about our ongoing research, ask questions, and collect papers and materials that we hope will lead to a deepened understanding and analysis of contemporary conflicts as evidenced in news reporting and policy-making. We also hope to network with people who think that such background briefings are worth developing so we can stay in touch. Under certain circumstances we might use such a venue to also facilitate an urgent response to conflicts requiring immediate attention.

This year our research programme is focusing on four areas--one international, one national, and two provincial. These are the Great Lakes Conflict, developments following from the construction of new political boundaries in South Africa, cooperative forms of governance between local authorities and traditional leaders in KwaZulu-Natal, and the impact of peace education in KwaZulu-Natal schools. In all cases our research is positive and focuses in a non-aligned way on how to build peace and manage conflict through skills training and research.

Today I want to examine the significance of Burundi and to a lesser degree Rwanda in connection with the Great Lakes Conflict. Since Burundi and Rwanda are landlocked, resource-poor and geostrategically unimportant relative to the countries surrounding them they are often neglected in terms of in-depth analyses and news reports. Furthermore, the newsworthiness of the rebel advance in Zaire has overshadowed the civil wars that are raging in these countries. Through this briefing I hope to encourage some media coverage and more thinking and writing about Burundi and Rwanda.

There are many reasons why South Africans and other extra-regional actors should not lose sight of these two small states and what is occurring there. For

purely selfish reasons South Africans have an interest in maintaining stability there. A peaceful Great Lakes Region offers enormous economic opportunities. It is one of the wealthiest regions in the world in terms of natural resources. There are huge deposits of strategically important minerals such as cobalt. There is also copper, diamonds, gold, timber, and much water for which all of Southern Africa is desperate. In terms of hydro-electricity, one set of falls on the Zaire River--the stretch known as Inga Falls--could power all of sub-Saharan Africa with potential left over for export. South Africa also has a tremendous amount to gain in terms of trade, transport agreements and shipping from a healthy and stable Central African Region. Bujumbura for instance is an ideal port that could serve a broad region including three landlocked states. The route across Lake Tanganyika could deliver goods directly to the South African rail network in Zambia and hence South.

Aside from selfish interests, there are humanitarian reasons for our involvement. Today, the situation for people in Burundi is quite severe and it is receiving minimal media attention and insufficient humanitarian aid. First, in the rural areas much of the population now live in government 'regroupment camps' of five to fifteen thousand people, some of which rely entirely on humanitarian aid. The extent of this is unknown but based on recent interviews that I conducted I would say at the very minimum one-half million people live in this manner. They are unable to reach their farms and those that do are sometimes shot by the army because in certain areas, anyone found outside a regroupment camp is assumed to be a rebel. In these camps people are malnourished and eating --with luck-- one meal a day. They do not have enough water to drink let alone to maintain sanitary conditions. They need clothes, blankets, mats to sleep on, food.

The Burundian people also desperately need some monitoring because no one is focusing on these conditions. The UN does some monitoring in areas close to the capital and I can put you in touch with the UN representative there who, by the way, endorsed my effort to come back and alert South Africans to a humanitarian crisis. The OAU representative also endorses these efforts but the OAU quit monitoring some months ago when an embargo was placed on Burundi.

The few people who can get to the interior areas--there are roadblocks and clearances are required-- report appalling conditions in which people are subjected to massacres by both rebels and the army. Hundreds of women and children are dying every month but outside of a few reports usually picked up on the wire services, we do not have sustained investigative reporting to let us know who is doing the killing. The rebels blame the government soldiers and the government blames the rebels. Tutsi and Hutu journalists follow suit distorting stories in terms of their own particular political and ethnic persuasions.

Cameras and good teams of international journalists in Burundi could really help focus attention and monitor what is a desperate situation and facilitate needed humanitarian relief. Albania may be much less of a humanitarian catastrophe but

CNN is there and the world is responding. After the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 many analysts suggested that the lack of media attention in the months prior to the killings contributed to international indifference and inaction. For months, vitriolic hate messages were pumped out over the state-owned radio and through print media but very few journalists chose to cover that story. Later when journalists covered the refugee camps in Goma, it refocused international attention and the world community responded to the refugee plight.

A third reason to pay attention to Burundi and Rwanda is that there is still a potential conflagration in this area that could involve a large number of states. Kabila's drive toward Kinshasa could be the beginning of troubles rather than the end because of the political alignments in the region. If Kabila fails to stabilise Zaire within the region and should it collapse into secessionist movements, the reverberations would be felt all across Africa in the form of refugee movements, large scale war, and perhaps newly inspired movements for self-determination that would make the impact of the democratic transition in South Africa pale into political insignificance. New international alignments, a reconsideration of African boundaries, massive refugee movements, destabilisation in ten neighboring countries, and neo-colonialist forms of economic occupation are all potential parts of a new African portrait that could follow in the heels of Zaire's present instable position at the heart of the continent.

Part of understanding the either the stability or instability of Zaire depends on understanding Rwanda and Burundi. The current war in Zaire is clearly linked to instability there. The crisis of Ex-Rwandan and ex-Burundian soldiers using refugees as human shields and launching cross-border raids into Rwanda and Burundi was compounded by terrible policy error on the part of Zaire. In late September 1996 the governor of Zaire's Kivu Province asked that the Banyamulenge or ethnic Tutsis of the Mulenge Mountains in Eastern Zaire "return to Rwanda" despite at least two centuries of ancestry in Zaire. The Zairean governor's order of ethnic expulsion was ill-timed, poorly-informed and deplorably bad strategy. It led to the immediate military mobilisation of the Banyamulenge, provided Rwanda and Uganda with allied forces that could stop cross-border incursions from opposition militias with limited direct involvement, and it allowed Laurent Kabila and other anti-Mobutu forces an opportunity to piggy-back this into a revolution. In just eight months this group of allied militias that included many Tutsis occupied one-third of this huge central African country.

A geopolitical understanding that is fundamental to any effort to bring long-term stability to this region is to understand that the ethnic distribution of Hutus and Tutsis is not confined within political boundaries. Of some thirteen million people within the two states, approximately 85% are Hutu and 14% Tutsi. However, two million of an estimated fifteen million Hutus and Tutsis are located across the boundaries of Rwanda and Burundi in neighbouring states. Some 400,000 Tutsis [and some Hutus] trace their ancestry to either eastern Zaire's North Kivu province [the 'Banyarwanda'] or its South Kivu province [the 'Banyamulenge'].

Between 750,000 and one million Hutus are located on the Tanzanian boundary with Rwanda and Burundi. Tens of thousands of both Tutsis and Hutus reside along the Rwanda/Uganda boundary in the Kisoro sub-district.

These ethnic ties have created alliances such as the particularly strong one between President Museveni of Uganda whose revolutionary movement included many Tutsis, the minority Tutsi regimes in Rwanda and Burundi, and Kabila's forces. The Hutus have the sympathies of other neighboring states such as Tanzania, Kenya, and even Sudan. In fact most of the region is aligned in the Hutu/Tutsi conflict and such that there is a delicate yet explosive web of alliances. Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Kabila are in one camp allied with the Tutsis. Tanzania, Kenya, Mobutu's Zaire, and Sudan form a camp more aligned with the Hutus. The possibility exists that the fighting in Sudan could become interlinked with fighting in the Great Lakes region and to a degree that process has begun. Sudan already supports rebel movements inside Zaire that launch attacks into Uganda [Lord's Resistance Army, West Nile Liberation Army].

Consider another scenario. The minority Tutsi regimes in Rwanda and Burundi, both of which are unstable, are Kabila's chief allies. Imagine a shift to democratic rule in Burundi and the Hutus come to power, pushing Kabila's chief allies aside. There would be a mutually deep hostility between these countries that would manifest in covert military aid to warring militias in a new civil war or even direct military action.

A third scenario is that Tanzania invades Burundi in order to restore a Hutu democracy. Tanzania currently offers direct support for Hutu rebels in terms of training bases and a location from which to offer cross-border raids. It has deep ties with Hutu leaders many of whom serve and have influence in Tanzania's army. That could also see this region explode into conflagration because of existing alliances.

Long Term Policy Responses

Now I would like to consider some proposals that may or may not lead to the long-term resolution of this conflict. About ten ideas of how to respond to the crisis in Burundi and Rwanda are being discussed in the media, through academic publications, and in debate. The proposals include negotiations, sanctions, peace-keeping forces, peace-building forces, a return to indigenous forms of democracy, a coalition government, a UN sanctioned transitional protectorate, partition into Hutuland and Tutsiland, a redrawing of political boundaries, and the creation of a Central African Confederation. By reviewing these I hope to show that some ideas are based on a poor analysis of the region while others offer hope. I believe that such an exploration can help us to locate a role that South Africans and other extra-regional actors can play in building peace.

1. Negotiations

The first step in any solution is obviously a ceasefire and negotiations. The UN five point peace plan has these merits and I have little to criticise with regard to international diplomatic efforts.

However, I do have some warnings about the evolution of these negotiations. At some point negotiations must be regional or they will fail because of the complex alliances already described in addition to a vast number of other issues owing to cross-boundary social, political, economic, and physical linkages requiring regional consideration.

I also think that the negotiations should not only be between factions with militias but should be transparent and appeal directly to affected populations in terms of a referendum or the lack legitimacy will sabotage any final agreements. In other words, secret negotiations among elite actors are unlikely to eliminate the structural factors and the philosophies that foment genocide and massacres. For example, delegations to the Arusha negotiations in 1992 and 1993 to restore democracy in Burundi and Rwanda included only the political elite representing groups with a militia and a history in exploiting ethnicity. The final outcome was not entirely surprising: more genocide, ethnic massacres, and coups.

Thus, there must be open negotiations that recognise all concerned actors including Hutu and Tutsi intellectuals, civil servants, businessmen, members of civil society, and eventually the public at large, the vast majority of which are consistently united against violence but consistently ignored because they lack a militia.

2. Economic Pressure for Democratisation

Another idea is to apply economic pressure that will force undemocratic nations to become democratic and hence more stable. This plan is already in effect in Burundi and its impacts can be observed. A total embargo followed quickly on the heels of the July 1996 coup that brought the minority Tutsi regime of Pierre Buyoya to power. The full embargo was imposed on July 31, 1996 by Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda, Zaire, Ethiopia, and Zambia and with the support of the OAU and UN.

Unfortunately, the sanctions fail in terms of consistency, clear objectives, and monitoring. There is no monitoring nor any reward for meeting any objectives, and the objectives change like moving goal posts. In Burundi it has failed to win local support, has hampered humanitarian efforts in the region and ground monitoring to a standstill because of the withdrawal of key aid agencies like the Red Cross, petrol shortages and a general lack of supplies.

Destabilisation does appear to be occurring but rather than moving Burundi toward democracy, extremist Tutsi forces are on the rise. During my visit between the 15th and 30th of March there was an attempted coup and three landmines that were laid under cars exploded in the streets killing seven people with such force that body parts were widely scattered. Since my departure four more landmines have exploded killing more people. These explosions are widely attributed to Tutsi extremists seeking to undermine the more moderate elements within the ruling Uprona party.

It is my opinion that If sanctions are used they must be carefully targeted, timetabled, monitored, and with a capacity to meet the need for exemptions with immediacy. We must also ask if they address any of the structural factors underlying the conflict or if they are simply punishment. The present sanctions are punitive and therefore foggy in their intent. They do not build a healthy economy as most citizens have been deeply hurt by inflated prices and shortages such as fuel, medicine, fertilisers, spare parts, papers, and many retail items. A huge black market has developed but factories have shut down, food production declined and unemployment risen. In the urban area of Bujumbura, the port has closed and the surrounding area of Lake Tanganyika has become a security zone which prevents local fishermen from using this resource for food.

Peacekeeping Forces

This is an extra-regional solution initially promoted by the United Nations, Canada, the United States, France and some members of Frodebu, the mainly Hutu political party. It involves the use of international armed forces to protect civilian populations, secure transport routes, protect aid workers, and create havens or corridors for refugees.

The idea of peacekeeping forces has four main problems. First, those who would provide peacekeeping forces are reluctant to take such a step because intervention has a poor record in Africa.

Second, it cannot achieve consensus within the targeted countries because Rwanda, Burundi, and the AFDL reject the plan.

Third, increased destabilisation might result as local armies split into factions or contact with ethnic Tutsi militias results in a three-sided war.

Fourth, the plan fails to address most-of the structural causes of conflict except, perhaps, to counter-balance the mono-ethnic army ... but then that places the neutral army on the side of the Hutus. Speculation that the former Hutu president wanted to bring in peacekeeping troops to neutralise the Tutsi Army was a key factor leading to the coup staged by President Pierre Buyoya. Therefore this is probably an idea that should follow from regional negotiations and not be imposed before then unless all sides agree to the need for a neutral force.

Peace-Building Forces

In both Rwanda and Burundi, institutional capacity has been shattered by war and polarised by ethnic selectivity in key positions of government and civil society. The justice system, the police, the media, human rights organisations, NGOs, the educational system and every conceivable aspect of a civil society is seemingly ethnicised. An intervention of international NGOs, judges, lawyers, clergymen, conflict resolution practitioners and professionals of all kinds could greatly assist these war-ravaged countries. Media experts could assist radio stations, television, newspapers to find ways of deconstructing genocidal philosophies. Church leaders could also play a similar role.

However, as Bryan Rich from Search for Common Ground, a Washington-based organisation working for peace in Burundi told me "college students with good hearts" cannot help. What is required are relatively few community-based professionals with good logistical backing who can "build well-targeted programmes with local people."

South Africans are in a particularly good position to help because they are perceived as Africans who will not impose value-laden theories of democracy or civil society that might be unacceptable to Burundians. South Africa is also widely perceived as having the interest, neutrality, and the organisations to carry out the task. This was the only intervention that I found that was supported by all sides in the conflict.

Council of Elders

This proposal is based on a traditional form of democracy- *bashingantahe*. Over the centuries, mixed groups of mature, respected Hutus and Tutsis adjudicated disputes in the hill areas where people live. Although it seems that the Tutsis were advantaged within this system in the past, Hutus clearly had some representation. Once the Europeans introduced party politics within a centralised state bureaucracy the tradition system faded away and ethnic relations were formalised into political party opposition groups competing for power.

This idea is local to the area and enjoys significant popularity among the Tutsi in Burundi. There are divided feelings on the part of the Hutu. Therefore it would be difficult to obtain or maintain consensus on reviving such a political structure at a regional scale but it is already being implemented within Burundi at both local and national scales to reduce conflict between the two major ethnic groups. Since it enjoys some popularity and is perceived as a form of indigenous democracy, it can certainly be part of any equation for peace. Those with an interest in working out forms of cooperative governance between traditional societies and contemporary government structures might take an interest in analysing and understanding this aspect of Burundian society.

Power Sharing Formula

Coalition governments in Rwanda and Burundi do not have a good record. They seem to be tried and failed plans that have ended in coups, massacres, and destabilisation. Rwanda and Burundi both introduced forms of multiparty democracy in the early 1990s owing to internationally-sponsored negotiations [Arusha 1992-1993] and because 'democratisation' was one of the key terms of international aid.

Within months, Burundi's attempt at democracy unravelled with the assassinations of its First Hutu President, members of cabinet and parliament and an ensuing series of violent reprisals against the Tutsis. All attempts at power-sharing ended in a July 1996 coup that brought a Tutsi president to power and suspended 'democracy' to restore order. Rwanda's attempt at democracy ended similarly: a genocide of the Tutsis in 1994 followed by a military coup.

Part of the reason for these failures is that there is so little power and resources to share. There must be something to distribute and an ability to create a viable middle class and this is missing in Rwanda and Burundi. These two countries have the highest percentage of disturbed, overpopulated land in Africa. Discounting uninhabitable areas like parks and lakes, the population density within Rwanda and Burundi exceeds **400** persons per square kilometre. In recent times, these two countries have numbered among the poorest ten countries in the world. Today some two million Rwandese and Burundians rely on international aid for sustenance and their per capita income averages less than eight-hundred rand a year.

This situation leads to competition for limited resources. Of course, demagogues find this quite convenient as an escalator to power. Demagogues have consistently mobilised masses in one ethnic group against the other through the promise of gaining land. For instance, in early 1996 Hutus at Masisi in North Kivu massacred ethnic Tutsis in an attempt to reclaim land in Zaire. In 1994 Tutsis claimed the houses, plots, and property of nearly two million Hutus expelled by the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Army in 1994.

Since the Tutsis and Hutus compete for control of the state and scarce resources there exists a dangerous win/lose situation where the loser always seeks retribution. Since independence this cycle of violence has escalated to the degree that many Hutus accept a philosophy of genocide. The Tutsis are represented as 'immigrants' or 'Ethiopians' who enslaved Hutus, took their land and killed them without justification. The basic tenet of this philosophy is that by killing every member of every Tutsi generation, the Hutus will regain the land they lost in the Sixteenth Century Tutsi invasion. This is why there is no distinction between civilians and soldiers in war and a 'strike first' policy.

Tutsis engage more often in selective assassinations and massacres than genocide. Perhaps this owes to the hopelessness of eliminating eighty-five percent of the population and the Tutsi social need for Hutus to serve them. In Burundi in both 1972 and 1988, Hutu uprisings were ruthlessly put down by the Tutsi-dominated government. In each case tens of thousands of Hutus were selectively exterminated--the leaders, the better educated, and the elite.

This history of violence has led to a great fear of the opposite ethnic group. The Tutsis refuse to give up their control of the army because they see it as a form of security against genocide. The Hutus cannot imagine a stable democracy as long as the Tutsis control the army. In Burundi today the Tutsis occupy the urban areas, own most business, and dominate the government, justice system, security forces, and army. The Hutu have had few economic alternatives other than subsistence farming, labouring on plantations run by the Tutsis, or fighting their way back to power. For some this means genocide.

Under these conditions there is little or no hope of fostering a western-style democracy or of maintaining coalition governments for long. Any power-sharing must be coupled with strong commitments from outside countries like South Africa to help assist in both economic development and to help restore balance within civil society, government, and the armed forces. Otherwise, I believe power sharing arrangements are a false hope.

UN-sanctioned Transitional Protectorate

A U.N. or OAU-sanctioned protectorate has been suggested by a number of academics and researchers. It aims for international administration of Rwanda and Burundi through trusteeship authority. Variations on the theme include issuing a mandate for a U.N. body, a group of African countries, the SADC, an African Security Council, or even a Franco-African joint management team to manage these two countries if not a substantial number of African states in the Mazrui plan. Since the plan is largely a form of benevolent colonialism, it lacks transparency and is not a product of consensus. It might help foster some degree of regional problem-solving but it stands to address very few of the underlying structural problems. It is also quite an unwelcome idea within Rwanda and Burundi.

Partition into Tutsiland and Hutuland

The idea of partitioning Rwanda and Burundi into Hutu and Tutsi zones was once suggested by former President Bagaza in Burundi but he soon retracted the idea under public pressure. Today it is hard to find a Hutu or Tutsi who supports this idea. Among extra-regional actors it has more appeal. For example Herman J. Cohen, Senior Associate at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies and a former U.S. ambassador suggested this idea last year in an interview on the Cable News Network [CNN].

Its chief problem is that it would be nearly impossible to operationalise. First, segregation within Rwanda and Burundi is a very local matter: either by rural hillside community or rural/urban [more Tutsis in the cities]. Second, there is widespread intermarriage [usually Hutu men who marry Tutsi women] and an overwhelming 85% Hutu majority. Thus, who would move where would be as deep of a political crisis as the current one. Third, the mass movement of people could be destabilising [e.g. India/Pakistan 1948]. The result might be continued violence in the form of state to state war.

New Political Boundaries

The Berlin Conference delimitations of 1884 and subsequent boundary adjustments left the traditional Kingdoms of Rwanda and 'Urundi' as tiny landlocked countries without sufficient resources for healthy economic development. Lucrative mineral deposits were left on the Zaïrean side of the border. The prime wealth of both states rests in their fertile soil but this resource is not distributed evenly. There is also too much land in subsistence farming to build up a viable economy.

A number of international scholars and African intellectuals suggests a conference to re-negotiate Central--and some say all--African boundaries. An effort could be made to rationalise the size of states, distribute resources more intelligibly, further align cultural and political boundaries, and eliminate the landlocked status of states like Rwanda and Burundi. Adjacent to the borders of Rwanda and Burundi, there is plentiful undeveloped low-density land.

However good or bad this idea may be, changing the political boundaries of states enjoys so little official support on the African continent that it is quite unlikely to happen except by force as in Eritrea or by internal collapse such as in Somalia, Liberia, or Zaire where a de-facto kind of independence operates in certain regions.

Confederation in a Central African Regional Organisation

A key problem facing these Central African states is that the government is the biggest provider of jobs and opportunities. In other words, it is a prize to fight over. The scholar R. J. Rummel [1995] has found empirical and statistical evidence to indicate that the distribution of power [ranging from democracies to dictatorships] is a better predictor of genocide than ethnic antipathies. This picture fits Rwanda and Burundi well and helps explain the motivations for the constant genocides, coups, and massacres: the central state bureaucracy is the greatest provider of goods.

A confederation of autonomous provinces that included at least Zaïre, Rwanda and Burundi if not Uganda and Tanzania could allow for decentralisation, softer boundaries, and 'automatic' land reform as people and goods would be free to

move. As in Europe, interstate cooperation might increase while participation at a grassroots level is also allowed to expand. Furthermore, this could be accomplished *without* the contentious problem of redrawing state boundaries. The end result might be a geography of loosely aligned states, regions and city-states. This idea seems to meet most of the criteria for a good solution but the main obstacle would be finding consensus because of entrenched power relations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I hope I have shown that if we are to reach for a lasting peace and not just cease-fires, talks, and moves toward democracy, collapse, and a return to the battlefield then we must engage in a preliminary analysis of the kinds of solutions that would bring peace and stability to the entire region. By doing so it allows us to see the ways we can and cannot assist Rwanda and Burundi.

In the short term, humanitarian assistance is of the highest order. Just some focused media attention might help expose the horrific tragedy that is occurring there. One can also see that South Africans are well-positioned to assist in building a stronger civil society that can help maintain democracy through its transitional phases. Such a peace-building force was seen as a positive idea by all sides that I talked with in the conflict. South African researchers and NGOs might also consider work with traditional leaders to help facilitate cooperative forms of governance because this is a system that commands respect in rural areas. We have such programmes in South Africa and we might eventually be able to extend some expertise to Central Africa or bring people here to study our programmes. If there is a power-sharing phase toward democratisation, South Africans might also consider some economic commitment to the region to defuse ethnic competition for scarce resources.

In the long term process toward peace, we might look ahead as policy analysts and see that movement toward decentralised political structures within the framework of a Central African confederation is probably the best long-term solution. However, this would require initial negotiations that included all regional actors. We must monitor those negotiations to make sure they are inclusive and regional.

It also seems clear that the options least likely to succeed at this time are partition, peace-keeping forces, total embargoes, and protectorates. They are not widely welcome in the areas these proposals are meant to serve. We have a responsibility to share that.