

BURUNDI CRISIS: THE REGIONAL RAMIFICATIONS

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Abstract: From April 2015, Burundi has fallen gradually into conflict. Starting with peaceful demonstrations against the candidacy of Pierre Nkurunziza in the presidential elections, more than 200,000 people have now fled the country, thousands have been arrested, a failed coup d'état has taken place and hundreds of people have been killed. While international actors are trying to bring different parties to the negotiating table, Burundi is mutating into an ever more complex situation with no straightforward solution in sight. This paper outlines the background to the 2015 electoral crisis outlining the causes and the drivers of the current conflict. It begins with a discussion of the positions at the two ends of the Burundian political spectrum with regard to the electoral process and the resulting violence. It then goes on to discuss how the current political and security struggles in Burundi have affected the relationship with its immediate neighbor Rwanda. A brief overview of effects of the crisis in Burundi on the country itself, Rwanda and the region are presented. The final part of this paper examines the role of the International community in the crisis.

Keywords: Burundi Crisis, Ramifications.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over a year ago on the 26th of April 2015, thousands of Burundians took to the streets of Bujumbura following the announcement of the ruling CNDD-FDD party that the incumbent president Pierre Nkurunziza would run for a third term despite a two term constitutional limit (International Business Times, 2016). This attempt by the government to revise the country's constitution signaled trouble because such revisions eliminated restrictions on the number of terms an individual can serve as president, conveniently allowing the incumbent President, Pierre Nkurunziza, to go beyond the current two term limit. Hence it directly challenged the concessional power-sharing system agreed on at Arusha that ended Burundi's civil war, less than a decade ago in 2006 undermining the delicate and carefully-designed ethnic balance it set for Burundi's institutions and which have brought the country 10 years of peace after decades of Hutu-Tutsi massacres (Yahoo news, 2015)

The president's announcement of a third term did not as quickly bring a resolution. Instead, Burundi's unrest has evolved into a crisis with street clashes between government forces and armed opposition groups, grenade violence targeting police, militia violence against IDPs attempting to flee, and security agents conducting searches and arrests of suspected rebels throughout the country. In the beginning of the crisis, attacks on civilians were centralized in and around the capital Bujumbura. As time went by, these attacks and civilian fatalities have become prevalent across the country. Local reporting indicates that violence against civilians has largely been carried out against opposition supporters and civilians trying to flee violence; this violence was carried out by government forces or affiliates of the government (ACLED 2016).

Following public protests and government violent repression, including the use of torture and lethal force (Amnesty International, 2015) a dissident group within the armed forces under the command of General Godefroid Niyombare attempted a coup. At the time, President Nkurunziza was in Dar es Salaam attending a regional summit about the Burundi

crisis. Less than 48 hours later, it became clear that the plotters had failed to overthrow the government (Van Acker, 2015).

The failed coup d'état on May 13 was a turning point in the crisis, and it can help us understand the current dynamics. Nkurunziza's weak leadership over the past 10 years and a misinterpretation of the power relationships in Burundian politics led many people to believe that they could easily do without the president. By overthrowing him, they thought they could kill two birds with one stone: reinforce the American principle of a two-term limit in Africa, and promote the emergence of a different kind of politics in Burundi, with "visionary" leaders such as the Second Vice President Gervais Rufyikiri (World policy Blog, 2016).

There have been hundreds of cases of arbitrary arrest and detention in the months that followed, targeting members of the opposition, journalists, human rights defenders and their families, people attending the funerals of those who have been killed, and inhabitants of neighbourhoods perceived to be supportive of the opposition. Fear of this violence, and the specter of more bloodshed, are driving ordinary Burundians out of their homes. There are now well over 280,000 internally displaced people and refugees across the Great Lakes region (Center for Security policy, 2015).

The crises have had enduring impacts on the population, including persistent fear of attack, social fragmentation, indiscriminate violence, and ongoing struggles for political power and access to resources. With Nkurunziza and CNDD-FDD determined to remain in power and the opposition showing no signs of quitting, the crisis will not end anytime soon. The longer it continues, the more likely that deeply embedded Hutu-Tutsi divisions will rise to the forefront and further chaos (Center for Security policy, 2015).

2. THE CAUSES OF THE BURUNDI CRISIS

The question of the constitutionality of a third term is absolutely central in the present crisis. The protesters have repeated their view that the constitution does not allow for a third term and expressed their fear of a carving up of the 2000 Arusha Peace agreement. The issues around the third term and Arusha have been widely discussed in the media and other essays. The roundtable tried to take a slightly different viewpoint and explored the key issues of the present crisis beyond the question of the third term: local grievances and post-war reconciliation and integration, the economy (and especially agriculture and aid), and whether the "ethnic factor" is still relevant (Centre for the Study of African Economies, 2015).

But there is little doubt that the protests are fuelled by a much broader set of grievances and frustrations, most notably the lack of economic and social perspectives, and the increased sense of insecurity caused by the instability in the country (Van Acker, 2015). To strengthen this argument, President Kagame pointed out that the bigger issue that led to the crisis is not entirely about presidential terms but rather what the leader has delivered to his people (The New Times, 2015).

Disputes over land, generational and family divisions, economic needs, and personal score-settling underlie reportedly long-running and pervasive local-level violence in Burundi. (Sommers, M. 2013). Poverty and food insecurity are widespread, raising the stakes of competition over access to scarce resources such as food, land, and revenue-generating opportunities. The return of Burundian refugees displaced during the civil war and in prior iterations of ethnic violence has caused tensions in rural areas, and the adjudication of conflicting claims over land restitution is very sensitive. Some analysts contend that the government has attempted to exercise greater political and ethnic control over the national commission charged with resolving competing land claims related to refugee returns, and that these efforts have created further tensions. (International Crisis Group, 2014).

3. BURUNDI 2015 CRISIS: AN OVERVIEW OF RWANDA-BURUNDI RELATIONS

The current Burundian crisis has been monitored closely by local, regional and international media. Calls have been made by various actors both State and non-state actors to implore the government of Burundi to stop the violence in the country. Rwanda is one of the parties concerned about this crisis.

According to Radio France International-Africa (RFI-Afrique), on 8th November 2015, President Paul Kagame of Rwanda was worried about the situation in Burundi. He noted that the problems in Burundi fall back on Rwanda and that Burundi should take sole responsibility in the crisis, instead of blaming Rwanda. He advised that Burundi should learn from what happened in Rwanda and insisted that Rwanda should preserve and keep fighting for its peace. The emission also

indicated that relations between the two countries had dwindled as Bujumbura accused Kigali of supporting the latter's opponents. (wwwrfifr, 2015)

The relations between Rwanda and Burundi have soured in past year, with both countries pointing accusing fingers at each other. In its part, Burundi claims Rwanda is interfering with its internal matters by facilitating the training of rebels opposing the government of Burundi in refugee camps in Rwanda territory, hosting opponents of Burundi regime who orchestrated the failed coup, helping rebels launch crossbow derived attacks against Burundi. Rwanda has accused Burundi of harbouring rebels from FDLR (Democratic Forces of the Liberation of Rwanda), a group which Rwanda considers as terrorists. (Insightonconflictorg, 2015)

Evidence in this regard has been presented by both sides in different forums. Some factions of the international community have even confirmed these allegations. Some of the documents supporting both suspicions are discussed below. (Senategov, 2015)

The Final Communiqué of the 10th Extraordinary session of the Regional Inter-Ministerial Committee (RIMC) of the International Conference of Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), part 4.1 (3):

'Took note of the claim vide the letters of the Minister of External Relations and International Cooperation of Burundi addressed to the ICGLR Executive Secretary on the 1st September 2015 informing the Member States that Burundi was a victim of an Act of Aggression by an ICGLR member State, namely the Republic of Rwanda. The Government of Burundi insisted on adherence to the Pact on security, stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region and the Protocol on Mutual Defense and Non-Aggression, and requested the dispatch of the Expanded Joint Verification Mission (EJVM) to conduct verification in Rwanda'. (Djuma yussuf, 2015)

The *EastAfrican* of 3rd October 2015, a weekly newspaper in the region, reported that authorities in Kigali rejected this decision, saying that the Ministers in New York had not agreed to the same. The paper indicated that Kigali refused to be party to a decision made without its participation since the Ministers only agreed that the draft communiqué would be circulated for comments before its approval. (Allafricacom, 2015)

The Ministry of External Relations and International Cooperation of Burundi issued a Statement through its Minister, H.E. Ambassador Alain Aimé Nyamitwe at the ICGLR Inter-ministerial meeting in Luanda on 11th February 2016. This statement gave a report of the 'acts of aggression and violation of Humanitarian Law by the Republic of Rwanda', against Burundi. Burundi claimed that Rwanda allows recruitment of rebels from refugee settlements and trains them in military camps; and harbours opponents of the President Nkurunziza's regime. (Burundi-embassy-osloorg, 2016)

This statement also indicated that the Regional Ministerial Committee (RIMC) decided to deploy an Extended Joint Verification Mechanism in Rwanda to verify the accusations leveled against it by Burundi, which to the date of the statement, no report had been availed from Rwanda. On the other hand, Burundi claims that the same mechanism was deployed in Burundi to verify the allegations by Rwanda of the presence of FDLR forces in Burundi, 'without any resistance'. These acts of aggression from Rwanda have since not ceased. Recent reports indicate that the security officials of the Democratic Republic of Congo intercepted elements of Burundian youth accompanied by former elements of Burundian army and Rwanda citizens who were planning to attack Burundi. (Burundi-embassy-osloorg, 2016)

A testimony issued to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 10th February by Linda Thomas-Greenfield, Bureau of African Affairs in the U.S. Department of State indicated that there were credible reports that recruitment of Burundian refugees may have occurred in Rwanda, 'with training provided to facilitate their participation in armed groups seeking to overthrow through violent means the government of Burundi'. However, it was noted that Rwanda promised to investigate these reports and that it would take appropriate action. A similar report was presented by Thomas Perriello, U.S. special Envoy of the Great Lakes of Africa in the Department of State. (Senategov, 2015)

A letter dated 12 November 2012 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established that the Burundi rebel group, '*Front National pour la Révolution au Burundi*', had transformed itself into '*Front du Peuple Murundi*' and allied itself with M23 in south Kivu. It is worth noting that South Kivu is a region in DRC bordered by both Rwanda and Burundi. Page 3 of the Executive summary of this letter indicates that: 'the Government of Rwanda continues to violate the arms embargo by providing direct military support to the M23 rebels, facilitating recruitment, encouraging and facilitating desertions from the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and providing arms, ammunition,

intelligence and political advice'. In view of the foregoing, one may argue that the Burundi rebel group allied to M23, is therefore supported by Rwandan officials. (Securitycouncilreportorg, 2016)

4. RE-THINKING RWANDA-BURUNDI RELATIONS

Questions regarding the political and diplomatic relations between Rwanda and Burundi have intensified in the wake of the 2015 Burundian crisis. As presented above, tensions and mutual accusations continue to plague both countries. Thomas-Greenfield notes that Rwanda should play a constructive role in supporting regional stability by providing a 'political not military solution to Burundi's crisis.' (Senategov, 2015).

Calls for preventive diplomacy are recommended in order to re-establish the friendly relations between these two countries that share similar culture, history and ethnic composition. The authors of the present paper also recommend a constructivist approach rather than the current realist approach in the application of the respective foreign policies of both countries, with respect to Rwanda-Burundi relations. This approach will highlight the importance of common ideas, identities, norms, culture and history shared by the two States, as opposed to approaches related to material capabilities and power gain. Emphasis should be placed on the social nature of State interaction. (Shafique,2011). The argument here is that the shared social compositions of countries form the basis of diplomacy and war, by constructing the identities and interests of the actors involved. Rwanda and Burundi political tensions have resulted from the construction of identities and interests of the regimes in place brewed from competition for power between Tutsi and Hutu, over a long period of time. For instance, it may be time to broaden Rwanda-Burundi relations by strengthening their cultural and societal dimensions such as education, arts, and literature. Areas like educational institutions, research centres and cultural centres can be explored in both countries to emphasis on their shared identities.

5. EFFECTS OF THE CRISIS

The crisis started immediately when President Pierre Nkurunziza won a doubtful third term which started violence among neighboring states including Rwanda. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, more than 265,000 refugees have fled Burundi and more than 1000 Burundians were killed during the crisis although the number could have increased.

The Burundi Crisis made the African Union peace and Security Council authorize the deployment of five thousand peacekeepers as part of the African and prevention mission in Burundi. When the President of Burundi threatened to fight against the force, the African Union abandoned its plan. The United Nations secretary General proposed sending a force of 3000 police to the country but in response the President of Burundi said he would only accept twenty unarmed police officers.

The crisis has affected the economy of Burundi which led to a decline due to government corruption and the ruling party's stranglehold on the remaining commercial and employment opportunities. The youth of Bujumbura of both ethnic groups expressed their anger on the street but they met a brutal police reaction.

The government of Burundi accused Rwanda of interfering in its political crisis, this brought a bad relation between the neighboring states which made Rwanda definitely deny the Burundian accusations, instead the Rwandan officials claim that this was a way of Burundi to look for attention.

Due to the above mentioned accusation Rwanda has expelled more than 1500 Burundians in the past weeks after they refused to move refugee camps, according to Burundian officials. Rwanda Minister of disaster management and refugee affairs said that the expulsions were part of the regular crackdowns on those living illegally in the country and were not targeting Burundians specifically.

Rwanda has been hosting tens of thousands of people who have fled more than a year ago of political violence in Burundi and others who have been there for work, often without formal permission. They were asked to go to refugee camps or return back to Burundi. Those who refused to go to refugee camps were chased.

Just like any crisis, it brought a very big number of refugees who flew Burundi to seek for peace and this caused a miss place of many Burundians, the crisis also led to a big number of orphans and widows in the country of Burundi not forgetting the destroy of infrastructure including roads, hospitals, schools, business centers etc. The above mentioned

problems have made many Burundians suffer. Children have failed to get school fees, clothes, medication, and food and were to live. Many of them are living in very poor conditions.

6. THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

The impact of this crisis remains till date one of the biggest challenges for the international community and puts at the centre of the debate sovereignty. With the international community desiring to intervene on grounds of R2P (Responsibility to Protect) a UN based norm, the government declared that any form of intervention will be considered a military invasion. There have however been several attempts by the international community at resolving the crisis in Burundi. We shall consequently look at the role played by the UN, the AU and a few concerned states such as South Africa and even INGOs.

7. THE UN AND THE AU

The UN has ever since the very first civil war in Burundi passed several different resolutions. Such was the 29th January 1996 Security Council Resolution: S/RES/1040. This resolution supported the facilitation of a comprehensive political dialogue by the Secretary-General to end the conflict there. It was followed by a series of other resolutions such: S/RES/1545 of 21st May 2004 establishing a UN operation in Burundi (UNOB). This was also followed by the S/RES/1577 of December 1st of the same year. All these resolutions one after the other just goes on to show the international community's ability to resolve the conflict in Burundi in the face of sovereignty.

Consequently, a joint statement by the UN, AU and the EU on the crisis in Burundi on November 8th 2015 calling on dialogue and a ceasefire by both fighting parties giving the rising deaths and the consequently refugee situation was a called for concern. Voice of America further threw light on the discussions of both Presidents Obama of the US and President Jacob Zuma, where the American leader with a lot of concern, called on the South Africans to take up leadership over the issue in Burundi.

Furthermore, prior to the crisis, the UN Security Council passed Resolution: S/RES/2137 extending the mandate of the UN operation in Burundi. This did not see the situation getting better, hence, resolution S/RES/2248 which saw the Security Council imposing sanctions on certain members of the Burundian community suspected of fuelling the crisis. This was further followed by a letter from the Secretary General: S/2016/352 on April 15th 2016 making proposals for the increase of UN presence in Burundi. This was strongly rejected by the Burundian government which claimed everything was under control.

Finally, on April 1st 2016, the UN Security Council further passed resolution S/RES/2279 requesting the Secretary-General to further present proposals on the expansion of UN presence in Burundi. However, these processes have come to serious criticism based on the fact that the Security Council has seemed to have very little interest on the crisis in Burundi when we compare its resolutions to those passed on Libya, namely resolutions: S/RS/1973 and S/RES/1974 which called on any member of the international community to intervene with every means necessary to resolve the situation in Libya, a stark difference with the case in Burundi.

8. OTHERS

There have been several other comments and attempts made by several institutions including INGOs such as International Crisis Group (ICG), the media such as BBC, Aljazeera to name just a few went on to propagate the acts of violence and carnage.

According to the ICG, given the crackdown on journalists, the Burundian community turned to the social media such as Whatsapp, twitter and even Facebook to have their voices heard. This according to ICG gave the locals an opportunity to add their voices to the rest of the world's to gain international interest on what was going on the ground.

Also, the BBC on 18th December 2015 on its website announced the African Union in one of its Peace and Security Council meetings arrived at wanting to the decision to deploy a 5000 men strong peacekeeping force, calling the carnage in Burundi "genocide." However, the government of Burundi through a spokesperson, Philippe Nzoboariba told the BBC Great Lakes region that the AU better used the proper legal procedure and that the peacekeepers had rather been sent to

the neighbouring Rwanda, putting the relationship into further strain. It is worth noting that this was the first time the AU imposed the deployment of troops in another country despite harsh rejection from designated country.

9. CONCLUSION

The Burundian crisis has brought to light three major issues faced by the international community. Firstly the hypocrisy within the UN and several different organizations, the inability of the AU to build the necessary consensus to carry out a decisive action on issues on the continent and finally the difficulty faced in trying to get states to comply with resolutions, decisions and treaties.

Contrary to the crisis in Libya, where the UN Security Council passed a blanket sanction on the Libyan people which called for any and every member of the international community with the ability and capability of arresting the issue to do so with every “means necessary,” giving way for the NATO alliance declaring a no fly zone over Libya, the case of Burundi has witnessed nothing close to the UN resolutions passed in Libya. Thus far, no firm step has been taken against Burundi.

Furthermore, the AU has proven its inability to rally its members for a general cause, a fact that portrays the continental organization as the same ‘old boys club’ which spends its time protecting leaders of its member states rather than protecting the masses of these countries in conflict. Consequently, this has caused dissident voices within the continent requesting the voting of the delegates to its assembly, while others requesting for the body to be given more power and others calling for it to be totally disbanded. However the outcome, it will be unfair for us to mark the continental body a total failure given some of the strides it has made over the years in crises such as Apartheid South Africa, Liberia, Sierra Leon and even Somali to name but these.

Finally, the constant invocation of sovereignty by states in crisis in protestation of foreign intervention in order to arrest the dying situation in most of those countries has made conflict resolution a difficult task for those institutions such as the AU and the UN. This goes to show how difficult compliance has become within international law within the international community. However, given the situation in Burundi and its impact on not just its relationship with Rwanda, but with the international community, it is rather unfortunate that we had to leave the situation to get to such a deplorable situation before we could even attend to it.

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