

Burundi is at the danger point

by Linda de Hoyos

The death of former Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere in October has brought a halt to negotiations to end the six-year war in Burundi. Nyerere, whose country borders Burundi and has taken in 300,000 Burundian refugees, had led the Arusha peace process until he was hospitalized for leukemia in London in October. The halt to the negotiations could not have come at a more dangerous point.

In September, military operations by groups opposing the regime of President Pierre Buyoya came closer to the capital city of Bujumbura than ever before. The Buyoya regime reacted by initiating a harsh campaign of repression against the civilian population.

As of this writing, there remains a deadlock on how to proceed with negotiations, as hundreds of thousands of civilians, mostly women, children, and the elderly, are being used as virtual hostages by the military regime in power. The collapse of the talks, in combination with the panicked response of the Tutsi military and increasing military operations, puts an urgency on effective intervention from the international community, which will require an end to the credibility given to the murderous Buyoya regime—a regime that is currently deployed, along with Rwanda and Uganda, as an occupation force in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (D.R.C.).

The fighting in Burundi would appear at first glance to be an ethnic conflict similar to that portrayed in Rwanda, between Hutus and a minority Tutsi community. It is the case that both Rwanda and Burundi today are military regimes based on a mono-ethnic Tutsi armed forces. However, whereas in Rwanda various Hutu-centered governments were in power during 1959-94, Burundi has been ruled since independence by successive Tutsi military regimes, most of them centered on a narrow base of a clique from the southern Bururi province.

The military regimes carried out pogroms against the Hutus in 1965, 1972, and 1988, which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people; Hutu men and male children were especially targeted. In 1993, President Buyoya cooperated with an international effort for elections in Burundi, which brought to power the Frodebu party government of Melchior Ndayaye. Frodebu at the time was not only Hutu, but included Tutsi members and leaders. In October 1993, documents released in 1997 showed, Buyoya attempted a coup against Ndayaye, which was not successful but resulted in the murder of the first elected President. In

the ensuing panic, another 100,000 people are believed to have been killed.

The international community is silent

The international community did nothing; the murder of Ndayaye and the bloodletting that followed were met by a universal silence. The events, however, did not go unnoticed in Rwanda, and were a major factor in the mass slaughter that occurred in that country in the wake of the assassination of Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana.

Inside Burundi, from October 1993 until July 1996, the Burundian Tutsi military, led by its Bururi clique, carried out a campaign to regain power with a twofold strategy: a campaign of targeted assassinations of leaders of the elected government, especially Tutsi leaders who did not agree with the Bururi clique's oligarchical outlook, and a campaign of retribution against the civilian population. Frodebu was turned into a mere shell, as its leaders were killed or driven out of the country. In defense of the population and political leadership, Ndayaye's Interior Minister Leonard Nyangoma formed the National Council for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD), and its armed wing, the Forces for the Defense of Democracy, which launched war against the regime. Today, other groups are also fighting against the regime.

Rather than defending the elected government, the UN Security Council imposed "power-sharing agreements" on the Frodebu government, which did not include sharing of the military power, and which gave the Buyoya Tutsi military a free rein, leading eventually to the coup. Democratic leaders such as Nyangoma and others were then labelled in the international press as "extremists" and "rebels." In July 1996, Buyoya, who had become a World Bank adviser in the interim, overthrew the remaining shards of the Frodebu government and took power in a military coup.

None of this would have been possible if the international community had acted to place pressure on the Tutsi military. This was never done, because the Burundian military was allied with the Tutsi military of Rwanda and with the Ugandan military of London warlord Yoweri Museveni, with the mission of overthrowing the Mobutu regime in Zaire and seizing the vast mineral wealth of eastern Congo for British Commonwealth extraction companies such as Banro Resources. (Although the Buyoya regime has consistently denied its presence in the D.R.C., on Oct. 23, for instance, according to sources reporting to the Missionary News Agency [MISNA] in Nairobi, Burundian troops assisted forces of the Rwandan-backed Rally for Congolese Democracy in carrying out a massacre at the Kihungwe market near Uvira in South Kivu, in which 75 people were killed, most of them women.)

The international protection given to the Tutsi warlords of the region, has led to a catastrophe for the Burundian people. In 1996, after coming to power, Buyoya instituted a policy of moving hundreds of thousands of Burundians into concentration camps, where many died of starvation and disease, including the biggest typhoid epidemic since World War II.

This policy somewhat abated during the two years that the Arusha peace process under the sponsorship of Nyerere were undertaken.

Events have escalated

But since mid-September, events in Burundi have escalated. As it appeared that the capital of Bujumbura, which the Tutsi military had moved to ethnically cleanse in 1995, might come under a siege from various Hutu forces, the Buyoya regime took swift, retributive action against the local population. At the end of September, the military forcibly removed 260,000 people from their homes and put them into 30 camps. Humanitarian agencies have not been permitted to visit the camps. According to MISNA, "for the past weeks thousands of civilians of Runyaga, Kanyosho, and Isale (all in Rural Bujumbura province) have been crowded into concentration camps, without water or food. Dozens have already died from fatigue and violence. The men are held separate from the women; they are interrogated, often beaten, and sometimes tortured in atrocious manners. Some even had their eyes extracted. Though the authorities justify a similar mass deportation as a necessary step for a 'census,' no humanitarian organization or agency has been permitted to bring aid, even to the women and children." There are reports that new camps have also been set up in southern Burundi, where fighting has been intense.

MISNA says that the round-up of hundreds of thousands of people was carried out with back-up from the Ugandan armed forces, although this has been denied by Uganda. "Military forces surrounded the areas all situated outside the capital. They then began the mass operation, gathering all the residents and closing them in temporary camps near the Catholic and Protestant churches in the area. . . . The units conducting the operations also opened fire, killing many people."

A month has not improved the situation. UN special rapporteur for human rights Marie-Thérèse Keita visited Burundi at the end of October, and reported that "massacres, numerous assassinations, arbitrary executions, and forced displacement to supposedly protected areas" are all ongoing in Burundi. Keita was not permitted to leave the capital, and therefore did not visit the 50 camps which by the time of her visit were holding 314,000 people.

Without pressure for immediate negotiations which attack the central issues, as opposed to giving the Burundian military plenty of time to fill its pockets in the Congo, the danger is rising that a total conflagration could break out in Burundi or in the capital Bujumbura similar to the panicked chaos and mutual murder that gripped Rwanda in 1994. According to Amnesty International, as of Sept. 30 "the situation in Bujumbura is reported to be extremely tense, with rumors of attacks or infiltration by Hutu-dominated armed opposition groups." The Buyoya regime has permitted the re-formation and arming of Tutsi youth militias, which had carried out the ethnic cleansing of Bujumbura.

Book Review

The evil of banality

by Mary Burdman

The Road to Democracy: Taiwan's Pursuit of Identity

by Lee Teng-hui

Tokyo, PHP Institute, Inc., 1999

229 pages, hardbound

Lee Teng-hui, the President of Taiwan, is an obsessive proponent of what he terms "democracy" and having an "affirmative" outlook. However, his "political philosophy" embraces some of the worst evils which have afflicted modern American culture since the 1950s: Here is the utter banality of "democracy and a nice life," of "positive thinking," the awful prosings of Dale Carnegie and Norman Vincent Peale, imposed on the strategic issues of modern East Asia.

Just where such "positive thinking" can lead, is revealed in the following passage, on Lee's conversion to "Christianity" as a young man. "The Christian concept of love," he asserts, "boils down to taking an affirmative view of life. Among the great thinkers of history are many people who tried to look back on their lives in a positive light. . . . The ultimate aspiration even of Friedrich Nietzsche, well known for his 'God is dead' thesis, was in his later years to live 'a life to which I can say "ja"!' " Actually, Nietzsche, the philosopher of world fascism, died a demented syphilitic.

An agent provocateur

Lee Teng-hui claims to be a "liberal democrat," but "agent provocateur" would be a more apt epithet. Lee is, in fact, a mouthpiece for a small, but dangerous circle of neo-conservatives in the United States, such as U.S. Senator Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), and their counterparts in Japan, who are trying to create a U.S.-Japan-Taiwan monolith which, as conceived by this mob, would be totally against the national interests of everyone. Lee is in a position to inflict real damage, on China, the United States, and Japan.

Lee grew up in Taiwan under the colonial rule of the Japanese empire, in a family of police officials and landowners. He was educated in Japanese, as were all members of the elite at that time. From his studies at the Kyoto Imperial University, he ended up in 1945 in Nagoya, serving as a sec-