

Box 16: The three stages in a highly predictable war

The war came down to a double Rwandan Patriotic Army attack, which alternately or concurrently targeted Kigali, and the takeover of the country without any serious defense line to stop it. Only in the capital city could a consequent FAR resistance prevail, supported by the militias. Three stages can be distinguished.

April 7 to April 22: the protagonists face to face

On the night of April 6 to 7, while dams were installed by the FAR forces in Kigali residential neighborhoods and major intersections, RPF troops stationed near the Ugandan border made movement towards Byumba, Ruhengeri and especially Kigali, to establish junction with the "600 men" based in CND (600 according to the texts of the Accords, 800 or 1,200 according to observers). Gunfire exchange began around 4:00 am, but it was not until 16 hours that an outflow of 200 RPF soldiers, protected by UNAMIR, began to "clear" the area around the CND, whereas throughout the city, soldiers and militiamen were engaged in systematic massacres of opponents and Tutsi.

On April 9, began the military (American, Belgian French) operations to evacuate foreign nationals. The massacres spread in the country, especially in the eastern Bugesera. The RPF attacked the cities of Byumba and Ruhengeri in the north and declared sending 4,000 men to Kigali to stop the massacres. Considering that the Arusha Accords were exceeded, the RPF said that government troops would only have three possible attitudes (join the RPF, remain neutral or fight) and asked for the departure of all foreign troops within 48 hours. On April 12, the arrival on the outskirts of the capital city of RPF fighters from Mulindi was confirmed; the interim government formed two days earlier, was then transferred to Gitarama.

The evacuations of foreigners intensified. On 14 April, the RPF ordered a tacit cease-fire Kigali to allow the departure of the last foreign nationals within the limit of the ultimatum it had set at midnight.

The war soon became total, both in Kigali where the RPF gradually expanded the areas under its control - despite the very strong FAR and militia resistance – and in Byumba and Rural Kigali, where its troops progressed very quickly. The interim government secured its grip on the state apparatus and mainly on the territorial administration. Therefore, the massacres of Tutsi and their "accomplices" (a term that applied to all those who did not join the hunt for the "enemy within"), became the heart of the Interim Government political agenda, reached the South prefectures: Kibuye, Gitarama, and then, from April 19, Gikongoro and Butare. Fighting and massacres redoubled their intensity in Kigali as a prelude to the departure on April 20 of the last Belgian "blue helmets". Reduced to 270 men (Resolution 912 of the Security Council of the UN), UNAMIR was only supported by a political and humanitarian mandate (to foster contacts and negotiations between the belligerents, to observe and to report).

April 21-May 29: The closure of the Tanzanian border and the "Battle of Kigali"

On 21 April, the RPF seized Byumba, evacuated by the FAR, expanding its offensive across the northern front in Ruhengeri, and continued its advance through the east towards the south,

unopposed (see Annex 77). Systematic massacres of grouped civilians were organized and committed by the RPF. The next day, 250,000 Hutu refugees, supervised by the administrative authorities and MRND militia of their communes of origin, crossed the Tanzanian border near Benaco and formed within a few hours the "second city of the country". UNHCR called it "the largest and fastest exodus ever observed in the world." Rwamagana, in the South, was taken on April 27 and on May 1, the closure of the Tanzanian border by the RPF was finalized. The RPF thus pushed the FAR further west and heavily walked on Kibungo. In Kigali, heavy fighting had resumed on April 27 in the morning and, after an apparent cease-of-fire on May 2, heavy weapons fire trade resumed on May 3 between the RPF and the Presidential Guard, in preparation for the launch of the "Battle of Kigali". No negotiation was to be foreseen as the RPF refused all contact with the interim government, asked for a meeting with the FAR and estimated it had not achieved all its military objectives (Gitarama, Kigali). The Interim Government reaffirmed its two main requirements: the recognition of its legitimacy by the RPF and a cease-of-fire prior to the complete cessation of massacres. Intense bombardment of the CND, where the RPF troops were installed, continued on May 4, while the RPF organized its offensive around and in the center of the city. For four days, uninterrupted fighting led to a significant increase of its fighters in the neighborhoods. After the announcement of two separate cease-of-fire, clashes lowered intensity on May 8. The encirclement of Ruhengeri (May 7) preceded that of Kigali. The FAR commandment evacuated the capital city in mid-May and moved to Gitarama. On May 16, all connections to Kigali were cut. On 17 May, the Security Council adopted Resolution 918 establishing the arms' embargo and authorizing an increase in the number of UNAMIR up to 5,500 men.

Between 20 and 23 May, the RPF resumed its offensive on Kigali, seized the airport, the Kanombe military camp (May 22) and took the presidential palace (23 May). As the road to the south had been deliberately left open, most militia abandoned Kigali on May 27. On May 29, the RPF completed its encirclement of the capital. Rwanda was now cut in two. The RPF held the whole eastern part of the country and the Kigali airport and the FAR still controlled part of the capital city and the most populous western part of the country.

May 29-July 17: unopposed progress to the Centre, the South and the North

By mid-May, the issue of the war was doubtless. No foreign intervention could any longer save a government discredited by the genocide, and the RPF had no intention of negotiating any share of power sharing with the defeated forces. As an embargo on arms destined for FAR was decreed, only the terms and price of victory could still be debated.

All diplomatic solutions thus failed. Kenya organized a regional summit on June 6, which was not followed. The cease-of-fire on June 15, concluded on the sidelines of the OAU summit in Tunis, was broken the next day by the RPF, which bombarded Kigali center. Fighting still continued for more than a month around places where large numbers of civilians were taken as hostages. On May 29, the RPF seized Nyanza, the former royal capital city, and progressed to Kabgayi, taken on June 2, forcing the interim government to withdraw from Gitarama to Gisenyi, on the northwestern Zaire border. The FAR then launched on June 6 their last significant counter-attack in the Kabgayi region. It failed as previously and Gitarama, the heart of the country and symbol of the Republic, was held on June 13. The front was permanently dislocated, without fold line, and the exodus of millions of people to Zaire and Burundi was initiated.

On 22 June, after ten days of difficult negotiations between the members of the UN Security Council, France, the only candidate country, was given a two-months term to intervene in Rwanda until the establishment UNAMIR 2 troops. The day before, French troops had arrived at the border with Zaire. The "Turquoise" campaign officially began on June 23, as 2,500 men gradually took position in Goma and Bukavu in Zaire. The campaign intended to secure some prefectures to prevent the influx of millions of refugees in Burundi and Zaire (see Box 16).

Meanwhile, the RPF had resumed its advance and finally took control of the center of Kigali on July 4. The airport was reopened on July 7. The RPF grabbed Butare on July 3 and went west to Gikongoro, where its troops met with French troops establishing a "safe humanitarian zone" across the southwest quarter of the country (Gikongoro, Kibuye and Cyangugu), immediately overwhelmed by hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing the RPF arrival. The conquest of the South being deferred, the RPF immediately ordered its forces back to the Hutu strongholds northwest before resistance could be organized in these inaccessible mountainous areas. Hundreds of thousands of people fled to the border with Zaire. On July 14, Ruhengeri was occupied by the RPF, and on the 15th, some 500,000 refugees had reached Zaire; on July 16, thirteen ministers of the interim government and the self-proclaimed president of the Republic took refuge in the southern French humanitarian area and moved to Bukavu (Zaire); On July 17, the RPF arrived in Gisenyi at the northern boundary, pushing forward some 600,000 refugees who crowded into the city of Goma and its surroundings, even though the UN humanitarian airlift to Goma had been suspended after the RPF bombing of the Airport. Some 10,000 soldiers of the FAR, mingled with refugees had also crossed the border.

The same day, Pasteur Bizimungu was appointed by the RPF at the Presidency of the Republic for a period of five years. Twagiramungu, designated by the Arusha Accords as Prime Minister, also took his functions.

On July 18, a "*de facto* cease-of-fire" was declared by the RPF. More than one million refugees had then crossed the border to Goma in Zaire since July 15. On Tuesday 19 July, the Twagiramungu government, composed by the RPF, took the oath in Kigali. The Patriotic Army and the *returnees* thus took control of the cities and the countryside in a country half emptied of its population: one million people had died and three million had fled.

Note:

a. The constant RPF tactic was to encircle the cities and tighten its grip, leaving an output corridor to opposing forces which there endured heavy losses. "Their concept was to take the mountains on both sides of Byumba, and essentially encircle Byumba, but leave the main road down to the open South. So they harassed the city by continuous shooting, to create disorder in the opposing forces. And, at some point, the ability to hold Byumba by government forces, both in terms of stress resistance and capacity was determined as no longer an option. So they began to fall back through the door that the Patriotic Front had left open to them. And along the road to the south, the Patriotic Front has harassed them and caused more than ... more personnel killed, wounded" (Testimony of General Roméo Dallaire, Bagosora et al trial, ICTR, 26 January 2004, p. 3).