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Rwanda: Tutsi Exiles Challenge Rwandan Stability (C/NF)

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The invasion by Rwandan exiles threatens the political stability of President Habyarimana's regime and raises the specter of renewed ethnic violence in the region. [Redacted]

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Rwanda: Tutsi Exiles Challenge Rwandan Stability

Rwandan exiles from Uganda invaded northeastern Rwanda on 1 October, threatening the political stability of President Habyarimana's regime and raising the specter of renewed ethnic violence in the region. Initial successes by the exile force, culminating in an attack on Kigali by lead elements on 5 October, prompted Belgium and France to send troops to protect their nationals. Zaire, which has a mutual defense agreement with Rwanda and Burundi, also intervened with some 1,200 troops to aid Rwandan forces battling the invaders in the capital and the northeast. Although Rwanda's Hutu-dominated government has responded quickly and decisively to the invasion, its tactics have sparked international concern over human rights abuses. Dealing with the resulting rise in ethnic tensions and strained economic resources will test Habyarimana's political skills and could threaten his survival.

The core of the invasion force led by Major General Fred Rwigyema is composed largely of Rwandan Tutsi refugees who were recruited into the National Resistance Army of Uganda beginning in the late 1970s. These men, several of whom are NRA officers, are well trained, experienced fighters who entered Rwanda armed with rifles, heavy machine guns, mortars, rocket-propelled grenades, and recoilless cannon, according to

[redacted] their use. Rwigyema, as Commander in Chief of the NRA in Northern Uganda, was in a position to requisition and cache weapons ahead of time for the invasion, but a detailed and reliable inventory of what the rebels took from Uganda is not available.

[redacted] Later reports indicate that at least five armored vehicles may have been captured from Rwandan Army units, as well as trucks, heavy mortars, and light arms.

The initial invasion force of NRA deserters has been joined by additional Tutsi refugees and possibly by

A Complicated Ethnic Equation

Bloody clashes throughout the Rwanda-Burundi region between the numerically superior Hutus and the traditionally ascendant Tutsis between the late 1950s and the early 1970s led to large-scale movements of refugees. The minority Tutsis rule in Burundi, while the Hutus have held power in Rwanda since ousting the Tutsis shortly after independence in 1962. Claiming limited resources, Kigali has rebuffed attempts at wholesale repatriation of its refugees, who often serve to channel ethnic unrest across borders. Some 225,000 Rwandan refugees—mostly Tutsis—live in Uganda and were the pool from which most of the invasion force was drawn. Another 250,000, mostly Rwandan Tutsis, are in Burundi, with smaller populations in Tanzania and Zaire. Border regions in southwestern Uganda have the same ethnic makeup as Rwanda and Burundi—85 to 90 percent Hutu and 10 to 15 percent Tutsi. Ugandan President Museveni has recruited ethnic Rwandans for his insurgency since the late 1970s; they now make up 15 to 20 percent of the Ugandan Army.

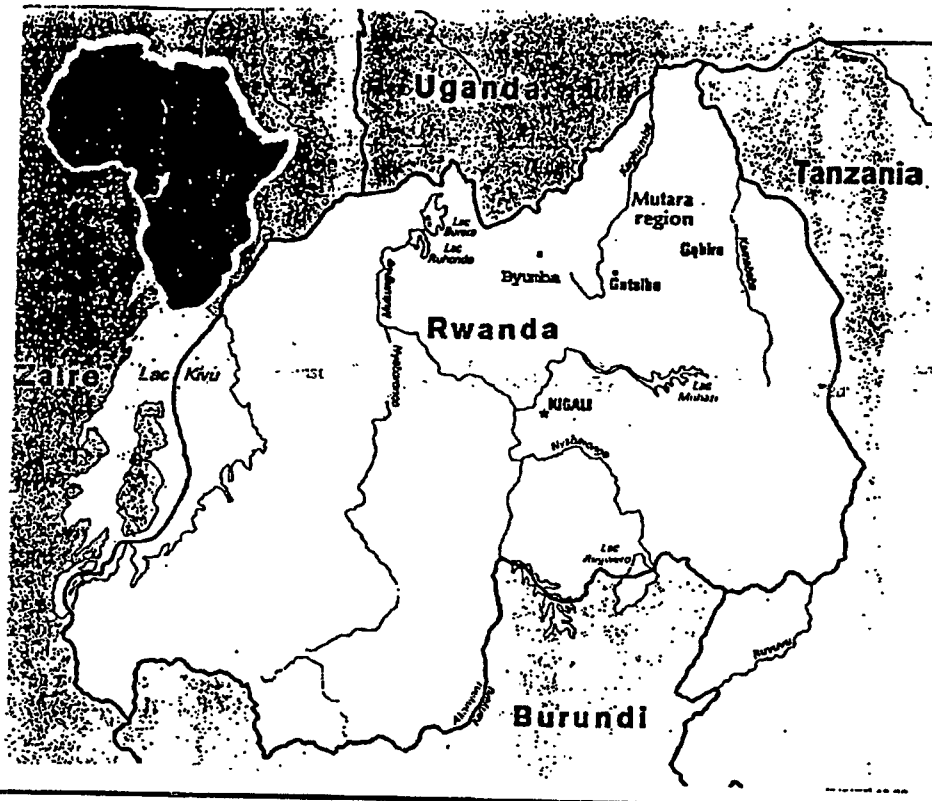
other disaffected Tutsi and even Hutu individuals in Rwanda and from neighboring states, increasing rebel numbers but not necessarily their military potential. The core force probably numbers 1,000 to 2,000 men. Total rebel numbers are unclear; reports range from several hundred to several thousand but the actual number is most likely less than 5,000. Uganda says it has attempted to seal its border to prevent further recruitment among Tutsi refugees and isolate rebels from logistic and materiel support, but the border remains porous. Tutsi-dominated Burundi has not sealed its border but has augmented border patrols.

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The current front is in the northeast from Gashira to Byumba. The rebels have cut off Rwanda from its major land supply route, especially for fuel, making Rwandan forces dependent on foreign supply by air to Kigali and also from Zaire. Rwandan troops and their Zairian allies appear to be making progress on the front, pushing rebel forces back as far as the Muvumba River near the Ugandan border. At least some of the rebel forces, however, have broken into small groups and are using guerrilla tactics to infiltrate the

local populace, engage Rwandan troops in small skirmishes, and confiscate weapons and supplies. Some rebels may have infiltrated Kigali and other areas.

The stated objective of the invasion is to overthrow President Habyarimana's regime, ostensibly for his corruption and abuse of power, and to repatriate refugees—predominantly Tutsis—from Uganda.

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Tanzania, and Zaire. Internal support for the ethnically based rebel force appears limited, however; Tutsis are officially only 9 percent of the population and their true share is only 10 to 15 percent. The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a banned dissident group, has claimed to be behind the invasion, but there is no confirmation of this from rebel forces. The RPF is most likely using the invasion for its own interests, as will disaffected elements of Habyarimana's regime that have been concerned about the threat posed by Tutsi refugees in the region and object to any accommodation of Tutsi interests. Some Rwandan Army officers reportedly are among some 3,000 mostly Tutsi residents that Kigali has admitted have been arrested for alleged involvement in the invasion, but this also may have been a pretext for Habyarimana to move against those in the military he suspects of disloyalty. [redacted]

The capital has remained stable following the rebel attack on 5 October; the nighttime curfew continues and French and Belgian troops are in control of the Kanombe airport and access roads. Paris and Brussels have insisted, however, that their forces are in Rwanda solely to evacuate and protect French and Belgian nationals and will not intervene in the fighting. Rebel interdiction of the land supply route has begun to cause shortages of food and supplies in the capital, while the

departure of European expatriates has curtailed medical and other services. Although there is no direct threat to the small American community in Rwanda, the most likely security threat in the immediate future is acts of sabotage and other guerrilla attacks. [redacted]

Without reinforcements or greater logistic and materiel support, rebel forces are unlikely to be able to mount a serious attack against Kigali or the airport. Although Uganda has officially closed the border, unconfirmed reports continue to surface alleging that refugees are crossing over from Uganda and other neighboring countries to join the insurgency. Ugandan President Museveni has called for a political solution to the conflict, arguing that Rwanda and Zairian troops will be unable to defeat the exile force. Uganda and France have called for a regional peace conference. A protracted guerrilla war will increase the likelihood of ethnic reprisals, particularly, as is likely, if arrests and detentions are seen to degenerate into purges of Tutsi elements, and will give further opportunity for disaffected groups within the government to move against Habyarimana. [redacted]