

Kisangani Conflict

Background

Rwanda and Uganda were involved in an intra-war crisis from August 1999 until November 2001, as these former allies in the DRC Civil War turned against one another.

On 2 August 1998, both Rwanda and Uganda invaded the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in support of the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD), in order to depose Congo's President Laurent Kabila. For information on the broader crisis, the DRC Civil War, see Crisis #426. The two nations were formally allied and proclaimed that they had invaded the DRC for purposes of self-defense. Yet this facade, and the Ugandan-Rwandan alliance, shattered in 1999 as tensions between the two nations boiled over into three rounds of violent conflict on the streets of the diamond-rich city of Kisangani.

The Ugandan-Rwandan tensions stem from the fractionalization of the RCD – specifically a larger group known as RCD-Goma – which began to splinter in 1998 and led to the eventual formation of RCD-Kisangani. The initial leader of the RCD, Ernest Wamba dia Wamba, wished to negotiate with the Kabila government, yet the next level of leadership did not. In spring 1999, Wamba was thrown out of the RCD headquarters, and fled to Kisangani on a Ugandan cargo plane with aims to begin a new rebel group with broad grassroots support. The Ugandan government supported this effort. Prior to the onset of the crisis, Rwanda served as the primary backer of the RCD in the Kisangani region.

When he arrived in May 1999, Wamba found the city of Kisangani divided up into a Ugandan and Rwandan zone, each with Congolese rebel allies. The Ugandan commander in the region refused to consult with the Rwandans even though he was supposed to maintain a joint command with his younger, less experienced Rwandan counterpart. Tensions further rose in the summer of 1999 after Ugandan troops arrested Rwandan pilots for failure to notify the Ugandan command of their intended arrival.

Meanwhile, in July 1999, the UN negotiated a ceasefire agreement between the governments of Uganda, Rwanda, and the DRC, among others, dubbed the Lusaka agreements. The agreements, however, did not ease tensions in Kisangani. Wamba subsequently began hosting rallies around the city, denouncing the Rwandans. Rwandan leaders responded with similarly incendiary rhetoric. By the beginning of August 1999, the situation had reached a fever pitch.

Crisis Summary

An intra-war crisis was triggered simultaneously for Rwanda and Uganda on 7 August 1999, as the two sides clashed in Kisangani. It is unclear which side opened fire first. The fighting lasted for a little over one week, during which time over 50 soldiers died between the parties. Reports also indicated numerous civilian casualties and potential abuses. In addition to the Rwandan national forces, the RCD joined Rwanda in their clashes against Uganda in Kisangani. Many of the accusations surrounding abuses in the Kisangani area were levied against this group.

Following a meeting between Rwandan Vice President Paul Kagame and Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni in Uganda's Queen Elizabeth National Park, the two sides agreed upon a ceasefire on 17 August. A formal agreement was signed on 31 August. This did not end the crisis, however, as tensions remained high and the two sides relapsed into violent clashes twice more before crisis termination. Both

sides' major responses to the crisis and overall crisis management techniques involved a combination of the use of violence and the participation in diplomatic talks.

On 5 May 2000, Ugandan and Rwandan forces once again briefly clashed before coming to another ceasefire agreement after meeting in Tanzania for the first instance of attempted mediation in the crisis. The agreement did not last long. On 5 June 2000, Rwandan and Ugandan military units fought once again, leading to over 150 civilian deaths and 700 civilian injuries. Yet again, the two sides met to come to an agreement in order to resolve the ongoing crisis.

The crisis came to an end on 6 November 2001 after a second round of mediation, this time held in the United Kingdom, which was an aid donor to both countries. Presidents Museveni from Uganda and Kagame from Rwanda (Kagame became president in 2000) spoke for nearly six hours and later announced that both sides agreed to cease sheltering the rebels each side had been supporting. The British-led mediation served as a crucial factor in ending the multi-year long crisis.

Due to the ongoing civil war in the DRC, the United Nations took particular interest in the conflict in Kisangani. The UN Security Council quickly called for an end to the fighting between Uganda and Rwanda, and sought the deployment of UN peacekeeping forces to the city. Initially, the rebel forces, particularly the RCD, fought to keep UN forces out of the city; however, they eventually relented. Supporting the UN's effort in the DRC was the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which provided forces and observation groups to the UN.

The United States had very little involvement in the crisis, offering political words of encouragement towards finding a peaceful end to the tensions in Kisangani. Additionally, the US State Department issued a statement criticizing the violence and warned that further conflict could lead to frayed relations with the US.

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