

## A review of: “The Rwandan Patriotic Front 1990-1994”

by Adrien Fontanellaz and Tom Cooper<sup>12</sup>

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The Rwandan Civil War is a theme that has been thoroughly documented; however, the research of the war concerning the military features of the conflict is missing evaluation. The authors, Adrien Fontanellaz and Tom Cooper concentrated on these sides of the bloodshed, taking into consideration to be understandable for the average reader; they omitted most of the footnotes from inside the text and left them at the end of the book, so the researchers interested in the work can also find it interesting to read. The aim of the authors is to interconnect the conflict with the countries of Uganda and Zaire. They intended to summarise the documents, articles and books related to the topic, however the magnitude of the theme suggests that it is impossible to take into consideration the full spectrum of works. Their main intention was to avoid insensitive expressions like „terrorist” in order to describe the situation in a well-fashioned manner.

The Rwandan Civil War was a bloody conflict that devastated the country and had a serious impact on the neighbouring states as well. The disaster that culminated in 800,000 deaths and 860,000 refugees destroyed the society, infrastructure, environment and political situation of Rwanda was a catastrophic event that characterizes the past and recent conflicts of the continent. The Civil War is a very complex and terrible series of events which are difficult to summarize on such short notice. The several leaders who took part in the conflict are innumerable and they are responsible for the lives of hundreds of thousands whichever side they were on. The numerous clashes between the ethnic tribes of the Hutu and Tutsi resulted in a cruel war that caused the death of many innocent civilians. The consequence of the bloodshed was horrible and it ended only after four years of killing, raping and murder.

The main figures were Juvénal Habyarimana, the leader of the FAR (*Forces Armées Rwandaises*), the Rwandan military and the president of the country, Yoweri Museveni, the president of Uganda, the head of the Front for National Salvation (*FRONASA*), the president of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, Mobutu Sese Seko, president of Zaire, Paul Kagame, the leader of

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the RFP (*Rwandan Patriotic Front*), Fred Rwigyema who was the founder of the organization and Colonel Alexis Kanyarengwe, vice-president of the front, Colonel Gilbert Canovas from the French Army and advisor of the FAR. They all played a major part in the events, which ended in the victory of Paul Kagame and the RPF, but unfortunately the Civil War carried tragic events with itself: a massive genocide took place, where mainly the Hutu ethnic tribe decimated the Tutsi minority of the country.

The book consists of six chapters, each of which follows the events of the Civil war as they happened. The first chapter contains the introduction of the Rwandan Civil War. In describing the early history of Rwanda, the book goes on to tell that from the 1880s, the Germans made Rwanda into a protectorate (*Ruanda-Urundi*), then the Belgians created a mandate of the area called *Rwanda-Urundi* (1947-1962). The country became independent in 1962. The two main ethnic groups were the Hutu and the Tutsi. The Tutsi were the aristocracy, while the Hutu were the leaders of the country. In 1959, a civil war started between the previously peaceful groups, and the Hutus forced a lot of the Tutsis to flee from the state to Uganda. From 1973, Chief of Staff of the FAR, Juvénal Habyarimana orchestrated a coup d'état, and became the president of Rwanda, who based his rule on the catholic values and created a stable economy sympathetic to Western supporters. His army, however, was characterized by clientelism, and it was seriously divided. Habyarimana kept close ties with foreign supporters, foremost the Belgians (who gave him advisors) and the French, who supported the country militarily. By 1990, the FAR had been strengthened. Its HQ was in Kigali, and its elite force was the Presidential Guard. The air force was very weak, it lacked manpower and aircrafts. The FAR was responsible for the domestic protection of the country. One of the main jobs of the FAR was to exercise counter-insurgency attacks (*COIN*) against rebels. It hosted mainly the Hutu ethnic group.

The second chapter is about the Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Army and Front. There were several reasons why this ethnic group gained a foothold in the territory. The first one is that when in 1990 the *Anglo-German treaty* separated Rwanda and Uganda, thus a lot of Rwandans stuck in the new country. The second was in the early 1900s when the Belgians imposed harsh economic laws on the Rwandans who went to Uganda for better work. The third one is that in 1959 the disturbing events caused 336,000 persons to emigrate to the neighbouring countries, including 78,000 to Uganda; they were called the '59ers'. In Uganda they settled mainly in refugee camps and they became farmers. The chapter then continues to describe the subsequent Ugandan Liberation War, which had consequences on the Rwandan refugee community. They wanted to return to their homeland, and there Fred Rwigyema and Paul Kagame became their leaders, who first took part in the Ugandan army. Accordingly, a lot of Rwandan refugees served in the country's force, where they improved their military skills. The Tutsi received high ranks in the Ugandan army. Soon they began organizing their own movements within their community. In 1987, they created the RFP (*Rwandan Patriotic Front*) which later became one of the main participants in the Civil War. In 1989, Rwigyema became president of the RPF, while Colonel Alexis Kanyarengwe was elected vice-president. Harsh

conditions from the Museveni-government led the Tutsi refugees to think that moving to Rwanda was an option. Political decisions opted Rwigyema to act and begin to invade the country in 1990. They used guerrilla tactics, but they also waged ordinary warfare with a few fighters. The RPF also had an alliance with the Ugandan NRA (*National Resistance Army*).

The third chapter describes the invasion that the Ugandan Tutsi community executed against Rwanda. The Rwandan Civil War started with a conversation among Rwigyema and Kagame on 28 September 1990. In October 1990, Habyarimana was in New York so the two officers planned to invade Rwanda at the time. They began the movements three months before the invasion, soldiers and supplies were gathered. They planned to attack unexpectedly to ensure their victory. The Ugandans however received information about the attack. The FAR reacted by placing battalions to the border. They also detained lots of Tutsis in retaliation of the events, and tortured and executed them. In response, the Belgian government stopped aiding Rwanda. On 2 October 1990, another incident happened: Fred Rwigyema was shot dead allegedly by one of his comrades. This of course had a negative effect on the discipline of the troops. Since after his death, the RPF began to become more radical. Habyarimana reacted as well: he called for help from France, Belgium and Zaire. The French were the most active in supporting the regime. Thus the combined FAR-foreign powers counter-attacked. The RPF responded as well, and advanced further. A stalemate developed in Nyagatare. Meanwhile, the RPF started to recruit young men for the fights. On 23 October 1990 the RPF started to mobilize. Finally, the FAR repulsed the RPF from the area. This way, the FAR defeated and chose away the RPF to Uganda. Thus the October-war ended.

The fourth chapter focuses on the re-birth of the RPA (the military wing of the RPF). After Rwigyema's death, Paul Kagame became the leader of the RPA. He began to invade Rwanda again. The RPA encamped in the Virunga Mountains to hold their positions. They gathered ammunition and supply from several countries, including East Europe and neighbouring states. The RPF then mobilized reinforcements from the Tutsi community. Until 1991, they gathered 5,000 soldiers. By 1992, their number reached 12,000. They went to train in Uganda. The atmosphere of the training was brutal and their treatment was harsh. The training officers welcomed the soldiers to give their lives in battle. The FAR reinforced their army as well. Their army's number reached 27,000 persons during preparations, but their discipline was poor. They collected weapons as well: Egypt, South Africa, Greece, Poland, France (for example the special commando, *GSIGP*) were the transporters. On January 1991, the RPF began a new offensive. After exchange of fire and territory, the RPF was repulsed into Uganda. All over 1991, there were clashes between the two sides. However, after fierce fights, the RPF started to gain foothold in Northern Rwanda. Later on, The RPF resumed its fighting against the FAR on 28 May 1992, which is called Byumba Offensive – named after the province the RPF attacked. With the intervention of the French, the RPF withdrew, but later they reestablished themselves and captured a 10-30 km area in the Rwandan territory. After that a ceasefire came into existence which lasted until six months, during which a peace agreement talks took place in Arusha, Tanzania.



Chapter five discusses further attacks and the tragic Rwandan genocide. It was the Hutu who committed the first atrocities against the Tutsi population in January and March 1991 which resulted in 300-1,000 deaths. The following year, nearly 3,000 Tutsi were murdered (41). The RPA was neither innocent, as they were responsible for several killings in February and November 1993. The RPA again prepared for war. The attacks started on 7-8 February 1993. This time the insurgents approached the capital itself. The French didn't hesitate to intervene. The RPF was repelled, and a demilitarized zone (DMZ) was created at the border. This was the time when the UN intervened: UNOMUR (*United Nations Observer Mission Uganda-Rwanda*), a border-patrolling unit was dispatched to the area. Because of its weakness, the UN sent another mission, UNAMIR (*United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda*) to Rwanda, to observe the compliance of the *Arusha Peace Treaty*. UNAMIR was unsuccessful too. During the conflict several radical militias were created, which committed horrible crimes against humanity using machetes and AK-47 assault machine guns (47). For example, these were the *Interhamwe* and the *Impuzamugambi*. The main event triggering the Rwandan genocide was Habyarimana's murder: his airplane was shot down. The Tutsi suspected Hutu soldiers committed the action, so they started to kill the Hutu civilians between 7-10 April, where approximately 20,000 people died.

The sixth chapter evaluates the 100-days campaign and the end of the Rwandan Civil War. With Habyarimana gone the army lost its potential and internal difficulties arose. Its supply decreased, because France and UNAMIR stopped providing weapons to the FAR. The UN implemented an arms embargo on the country as well. The RPF however mobilized its troops which reached 20,000 persons. Nevertheless, the FAR was in preparation for war too, gathering 24,000 troops. Kagame orchestrated a two-sided plan, with two directions for the soldiers, both reaching at the end the capital, namely Kigali. Their plan was to attack at night by the element of surprise. The assault started on 6-7 April. The FAR counter-attacked on 8 April. By 10 April, the RPA was at the gates of Kigali. After exchange of fire the FAR received a major blow: the RPF got access to their maps, order of battle, and other intelligence sources. From then on, the insurgent campaign was in advantage. The final encounter between the FAR and the RPA for Kigali took place in May-June 1994, when the desperate FAR units tried to use militiamen to win the war. The sides reached a stalemate, but the tired FAR forces sought a final solution to end the bloody massacre, trying to break out of the town. Nevertheless, the RPA repulsed the effort, and on 19 June they officially conquered Kigali and Gisenyi and proclaimed their victory and a new rule led by Paul Kagame (55). This signaled the official end of the Rwandan Civil War. Because of strong Hutu propaganda, approximately 1,244,000 refugees fled the country to Zaire and 577,000 to Tanzania in November. Subsequently the French and the UN sanctioned the UNAMIR II in August to control the situation.

In conclusion, it can be said that the Rwandan Civil War and the genocide was a brutal and tragic event. This book presents a well-documented description on the conflict relying on proper and numerous sources. The authors use thorough methods to make the situation and



the historical event understandable even for the average reader. Therefore, I recommend this book not only for scientific researchers, but also to the everyday man who wants to learn more about the ongoing conflicts on the black continent.