

Opinion

How RPF military pressure and political clarity forced Habyarimana back to Arusha talks

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Rwanda Patriotic Army fighters during the Liberation War in 1990s. Courtesy

In the previous article in this series, we witnessed how the RPF justified its decision to resume hostilities. It contended that it had achieved its objective as the regime had learnt a lesson. In this article, we realise that even the MRND government had to bow to the demands of the RPF. Indeed, the necessity of the resumption of negotiations became evident.

To that effect, a campaign against RPF

was carried out, accusing it of having committed “massive acts of violation of human rights” during the February 8, 1993 attack. RPF defended itself by specifying that, certainly, some deaths had occurred but they had not been premeditated massacres. Furthermore, the MRND and CDR armed militia participated in the war and many had been killed on the battlefield.

The resumption of political contacts was a culmination of a meeting held in Bujumbura between representatives of political parties in government and the RPF. The meeting was held from February 25 to March 2, 1993 in the absence of the MRND. This meeting took place on the eve of the Dar-es-salaam meeting between Prime Minister Dismas Nsengiyaremye and the RPF. The parties noted their convergence on the fact that they had denounced “the dangers the rescue was likely to face due to the politics of racism, regionalism, war mongering and dictatorship of President Habyarimana and MRND party as well as his entourage.” They noted the

systematic blockage of Nsengiyaremye's government regarding negotiations, administrative improvements, and security restoration, as well as the total paralysis of the government.

The President and his party were at the centre of organized terrorism, which "transformed into a real Genocide... RPF was drawn into the resumption of hostilities on the front and also violated the ceasefire agreement... the requirements of that meeting were the following: installation of a ceasefire, withdrawal of foreign troops which would be replaced by a neutral international force of the OAU and UN, immediate resumption of negotiations, resettlement of displaced persons after the ceasefire and punishing the administrative authorities who were involved in the massacres.

It is worth noting that the French Minister of Cooperation, M. Debarge, was around for a "mediation mission." On March 1, he paid a visit to the Prime Minister and the President of the Republic. The divisions that occurred within the opposition parties after the RPF attack were not strange to him. He was also aware of the role of France in the Rwandan crisis. He requested the parties to speak the same language as the President of the Republic and to form a common front around him

against RPF. Religious leaders also went to Bujumbura to meet RPF with an objective of convincing it to revive negotiations.

Proper negotiations started immediately after the Prime Minister accepted the essential demands of RPF on February 22. The President of the Republic and his MRND party were not of the same view; they opposed it. CDR maintained its position of refusing to negotiate with RPF. The Prime Minister himself led a delegation at the resumption of the Arusha negotiations. The crisis came to a close after the Dar-es-salaam Accord signed by Prime Minister Nsengiyaremye and the RPF President.

These accords imposed a ceasefire and a withdrawal of RPF forces from positions occupied before February 8, 1993, the resumption of the Arusha negotiations on March 15, 1993 and an immediate withdrawal of foreign troops (secret part of the accord), which were to be replaced by a group of neutral military observers referred to as GOMN. CDR rejected the accord and withdrew from ARD (l'Alliance pour le renforcement de la démocratie - Alliance for the reinforcement of democracy (ARD) on March 27, 1993. This was because, in its opinion, MRND had betrayed it by accepting that the agreement signed in Arusha should not be revised.