

Routed Rwandan Army Plans Intifada-Style Comeback

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Hutu exiles are in training, writes Chris McGreal in Bukavu, Zaire

RWANDA'S defeated Hutu army is regrouping and training in Zaire in preparation for what its leaders say will be a combined guerrilla and civil disobedience campaign modelled on the Palestinian intifada.

Although the military leadership has abandoned its threats to bring down the victorious Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) before Christmas, there is evidence of preparations to restart the war which claimed hundreds of thousands of lives in fighting and genocide.

Thousands of members of the routed Rwandan forces have been moved from Goma to a special military camp near Bukavu for training. The camp, at Chimanga, is about 50 miles from Zaire's border with south-west Rwanda, which United Nations military intelligence sources say is likely to be

the favoured target.

Thousands more young males, many in their mid-teens, have been recruited from the civilian refugee camps to bolster the force.

The political leadership of the defeated Hutu extremist regime is divided. With the prospect of war crimes trials looming, members of the most powerful faction are pressing the army to act swiftly. They also fear that the UN's threat to send troops to police the refugee camps might seriously weaken their power base.

After their defeat in July, Hutu army commanders threatened a conventional attack to force the RPF-led government to share power and grant an amnesty for genocide. But when the Zairean army confiscated many of their larger weapons, they reconsidered.

Colonel Theoneste Bagasora, the second-in-command, says he plans guerrilla attacks to destabilise the go-

vernment and provoke a popular uprising.

"I do not foresee a conventional war, first of all because the Zairean government has taken our weapons and ammunition. But a war can happen, and it will still be full of dead.

"There is a conventional war and there is another way, like the one the Palestinians fought with guns and with disobedience and destabilisation. This has taken them much time, but in the end they returned. There is no reason for us not to return," he said.

Thousands of soldiers have left Mugunga camp near Goma, where the bulk of the defeated army was housed. Witnesses say many were transported by bus to Chimanga. Panzi, another military camp near Bukavu, has all but been emptied of able-bodied soldiers. Army commanders have been ordered out of hotels into the field.

The Chimanga camp is about two miles from a larger civilian refugee settlement. The road is controlled by Rwandan soldiers, but a foreign visitor estimates there are 5,000 men in the camp and an equal number who have passed through it.

They pursue a rigorous programme, with weapons training at night, the visitor says. The head of camp, Colonel Munyakazi, is said to have instilled discipline and morale.

Rwandan troops and militia have

also been training at Kanganiro camp, south of Bukavu, where the borders of Rwanda, Zaire and Burundi meet. There have been numerous cross-border raids into Rwanda, with returnees murdered and arson attacks on homes. Some aid workers believe the attacks originate from Kanganiro.

The Hutu army faces several obstacles before it can challenge an RPF dominated by Tutsis who believe they will be fighting for survival.

The possible return of the exiled army's weapons depends on whether Zaire's president, Mobutu Sese Seko, feels it would serve his efforts to rebuild his influence in central Africa, and on the nature of his revived friendship with France.

Col Munyakazi has bragged of French military offers to help train his men. There is no firm evidence of direct French involvement, or of illicit French weapons shipments of the kind that breached the UN arms embargo towards the end of the war. But contacts are maintained, and French military attaches have flown to Goma and Bukavu from France and Kinshasa in recent weeks.

The exiled army is also receiving hard currency, to pay soldiers and, if it wishes, buy weapons in a region awash with cheap guns. Some has come through extreme rightwing organisations in Belgium, where the Hutu leadership has sympathisers,

such as the Belgian senator Jan van Erps.

There are already signs of increasing destabilisation. Armed refugees have made paramilitary forays into Rwanda from Goma camps. Some are aimed at looting, but others at discouraging collaboration with the RPF. The largest attack, using rifles and grenades, left 36 dead in Gisenyi province. Anti-tank mines have been freshly laid.

The RPF has sought to create a buffer zone by permitting peasant

farmers to work fields near the border by day while evacuating them at night.

But the UN and RPF expect the focus of destabilisation to be in the south-west. Refugee camps have provided cover for subversion and for members of the Interahamwe militia who led the genocide. The RPF intends to close the camps within weeks. Unrest in neighbouring Burundi also offers cover for attacks in the south-west.