

Defense Intelligence Report

9 May 1994
J2-210-94

RWANDA: The Rwandan Patriotic Front's Offensive (U)

Key Judgments

~~(C)~~ The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) will almost certainly translate its military success into political power by demanding a larger role for its Tutsi minority than agreed to in the August 1993 Arusha Accords.

~~(S)~~ The original objective of the RPF's offensive was twofold: to rescue and to reinforce its 600-man battalion in Kigali and to stop the slaughter of Tutsis and moderate Hutus by progovernment forces.

~~(C)~~ In light of the RPF's overwhelming battlefield success, the Hutu-dominated government forces (Forces Armees Rwandaises, or FAR) will be hard pressed to reconquer lost territory. A FAR offensive, however, would most likely achieve some limited gains and prevent the RPF from taking total control of Rwanda. The RPF would probably retain control over most of the west, north, and east, while the government forces would be confined to the southern region centered around Gitarama.

~~(C)~~ Both sides can be expected to eventually return to the negotiating table, considering their inability to overcome the military stalemate, due to logistic constraints, and the RPF's narrow political base.

~~Classified by multiple sources; declassify on OADR~~

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Background

(C/NF) The RPF is a political organization, originally based in western Uganda, comprising Rwandan expatriates and their allies inside Rwanda. Its members are primarily Tutsis; however, the organization includes many Hutus from Rwanda's opposition parties. The president of the RPF, Colonel Alexis Kanyarwenge, is a Hutu. Tutsis make up the majority of the soldiers in the RPF's military wing, the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA). General Paul Kagame, a Ugandan-born Tutsi, commands the RPA and is the de facto head of the RPF. Kanyarwenge serves as the RPF mouthpiece, while Kagame is the mastermind of RPF policy.

(C) The RPF was founded as an opposition party in 1979 as the Rwandaise Alliance Nationale de Unite (RANU). By 1987, expatriate Rwandans of Tutsi ancestry who had served in the Ugandan Army dominated the organization and changed the name to the Rwandan Patriotic Front. This military experience of RPF cadre, coupled with the link to the current Uganda government, are important factors in RPF gains over the past few weeks.

(C) After the Habyarimana regime refused to accept a peaceful resolution of the expatriate Tutsis' refugee status and their return to Rwanda, the RPF launched a conventional military offensive from Uganda into northern Rwanda on 1 October 1990 with approximately 2,000 troops. The FAR, with help from France and Zaire, pushed the rebels back into Uganda. The RPF Commander, Fred Rwigyema, died in the fighting. Former Ugandan Major Paul Kagame took command and reorganized RPF forces into mobile guerilla groups that could better operate from bases in Uganda into the border area's difficult terrain. This flexible force structure contributed to the RPF's recent success against the government.

(C) The rebel-controlled territory gradually expanded. The RPF possessed a little over 2 percent of the country when the rebels and government signed the Arusha Accords in August 1993. The RPF could then have based all its military units inside Rwanda; however, it continued to use Uganda and eastern Zaire for training

and logistic purposes. The force dispositions along the demilitarized zone (DMZ) enabled Kagame to rapidly mobilize his forces for the latest offensive.

(C) The United Nations and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) provided observers (UN Observer Mission in Uganda/Rwanda—UNOMUR) to monitor the cease-fire and patrol the DMZ in the north. In October, the United Nations adopted a resolution to send troops (UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda—UNAMIR) to provide security (2,200 soldiers) during the governmental transition.

Key Points of the Arusha Accords

- Creation of Hutu/Tutsi transitional government
- Multiparty elections in 1995
- RPF integration into and an overall reduction in the armed forces

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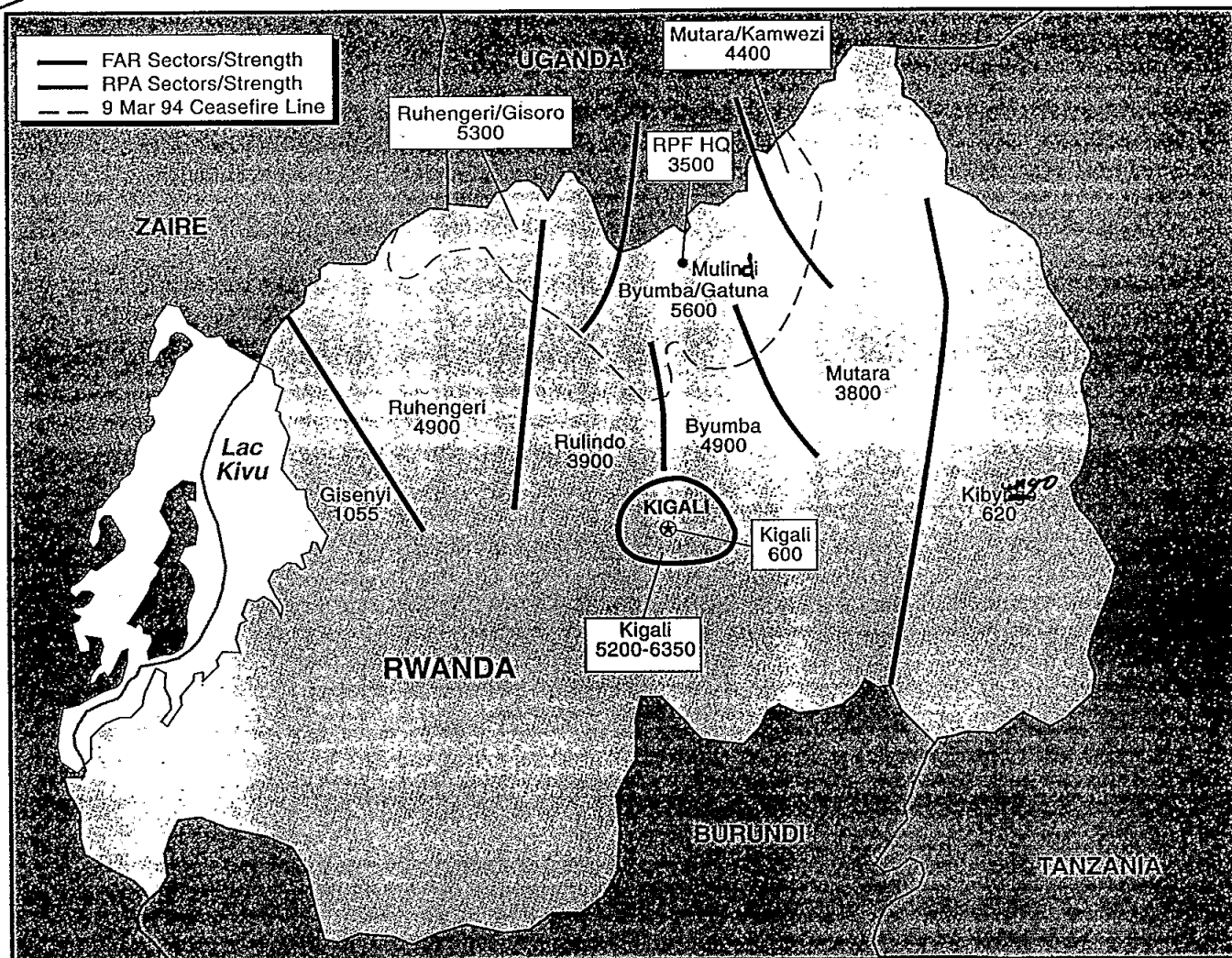
Disposition of Forces Prior to 6 April 1994

(S/NF) At the time of the 6 April crisis, the majority of the forces of both sides were deployed in the north along the cease-fire line (see figure 1). Government military and paramilitary forces numbered approximately 39,000, while the RPF had approximately 15,000 combat troops with 5,000 administrative and support personnel, for a total of 20,000.

(S/NF) The bulk of the FAR combat units rotated into and out of the seven operational sectors, primarily along the DMZ. The sector name came from the location of each sector's headquarters (figure 1 shows dispositions in each sector). This disposition did not allow for a defense in depth and explains how the RPF was able to infiltrate units to Kigali prior to its major defeat of government troops along the DMZ.

(S/NF) The total strength of government forces arrayed along the northern front was approximately 18,700 soldiers and gendarmes. Military and paramilitary forces stationed in the capital numbered approximately 5,200-6,350. The troops stationed in Kigali served as

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(C) Approximate Distribution of Forces Prior to 6 April 1994.

the Strategic Reserve. The government forces were better equipped than the RPA and, prior to the 1990 civil war, were very competent by regional standards.

(S/NF) As a response to the civil war in the north, the military expanded from 7,000 to 31,000. The new conscripts received little training, which severely reduced the military's overall effectiveness. Thus the RPF, a much smaller and less equipped force, has been able to achieve significant gains in its latest offensive. The government is expected to replace its losses through rapid conscription, which will further degrade the quality

of government forces. Numerical superiority in this case does not equate to battlefield success in Rwanda.

(S/NF) The government's elite units tend to be better led and disciplined and remain relatively effective organizations. These units allow the government to hold onto portions of Kigali, particularly the airport. They are key to government survival; should these elements be rendered combat ineffective, little will stand in the way of a total rebel military victory.

(S/NE/AVN) The RPA is predominantly a light infantry force armed with a variety of small arms and infantry

support weapons. It deployed its forces in three sectors in northern Rwanda, while keeping its logistics and training units in Uganda and eastern Zaire (see figure 1). The RPF located its headquarters in Mulindi. In Kigali, a special RPA battalion was based near the National Assembly for security of RPF officials negotiating with the government. The RPA is a highly disciplined and cohesive fighting force with reasonably good leadership. Replacements for combat losses will probably come from the huge Tutsi refugee population still in southern Uganda. [REDACTED]

Crisis Overview

(C) President Habyarimana supported a reconciliation but delayed forming a transition government. Hutu hardliners were against the Accords, and the Armed Forces were not favorable to integration and demobilization. It is believed that including a high number of Tutsis in the new military fueled antipathy to the President among hardline elements within the army, particularly the Presidential Guard. It is believed that the plane crash that killed the Rwandan and Burundian presidents and their entourages was actually an assassination conducted by Hutu military hardliners.

(S) Almost immediately after President Habyarimana was killed, in Kigali the Presidential Guard began the systematic execution of prominent Tutsi and moderate Hutus sympathetic to reconciliation. Multiple sources indicate that the violence by the Presidential Guard and various youth militias was not spontaneous, but was directed by high-level officials within the interim government. It appears that, in addition to the random massacres of Tutsis by Hutu militias and individuals, there is an organized, parallel effort of genocide being implemented by the army to destroy the leadership of the Tutsi community. The original intent was to kill only the political elite supporting reconciliation; however, the government lost control of the militias, and the massacre spread like wildfire. It continues to rage out of control.

(S) In addition to civilian deaths, fighting erupted between the government forces and the RPF battalion in Kigali. The Presidential Guard and rebel com-

pounds were within 500 meters of each other, near the Parliament complex. The RPF had little choice but to launch an offensive to rescue its besieged battalion in Kigali and to stop the wanton slaughter of civilians. Rebel elements seized the high ground between central Kigali and the airport and began to consolidate their positions until help could arrive from the north.

RPF Offensive

(S) (NF) Around 8 April, the RPA Commander decided to launch an offensive with two objectives: to reinforce the Kigali battalion and to stop the massacre of Tutsis and moderate Hutus. The RPA attacked along the entire front to penetrate government lines and then to infiltrate troops south into Kigali. The force in Kigali attacked to expand its position and tie down government forces to prevent reinforcements from moving north. The original government force disposition prevented a defense in depth, so upon penetration of the front line, the RPA rapidly expanded its territorial control and moved quickly to Kigali.

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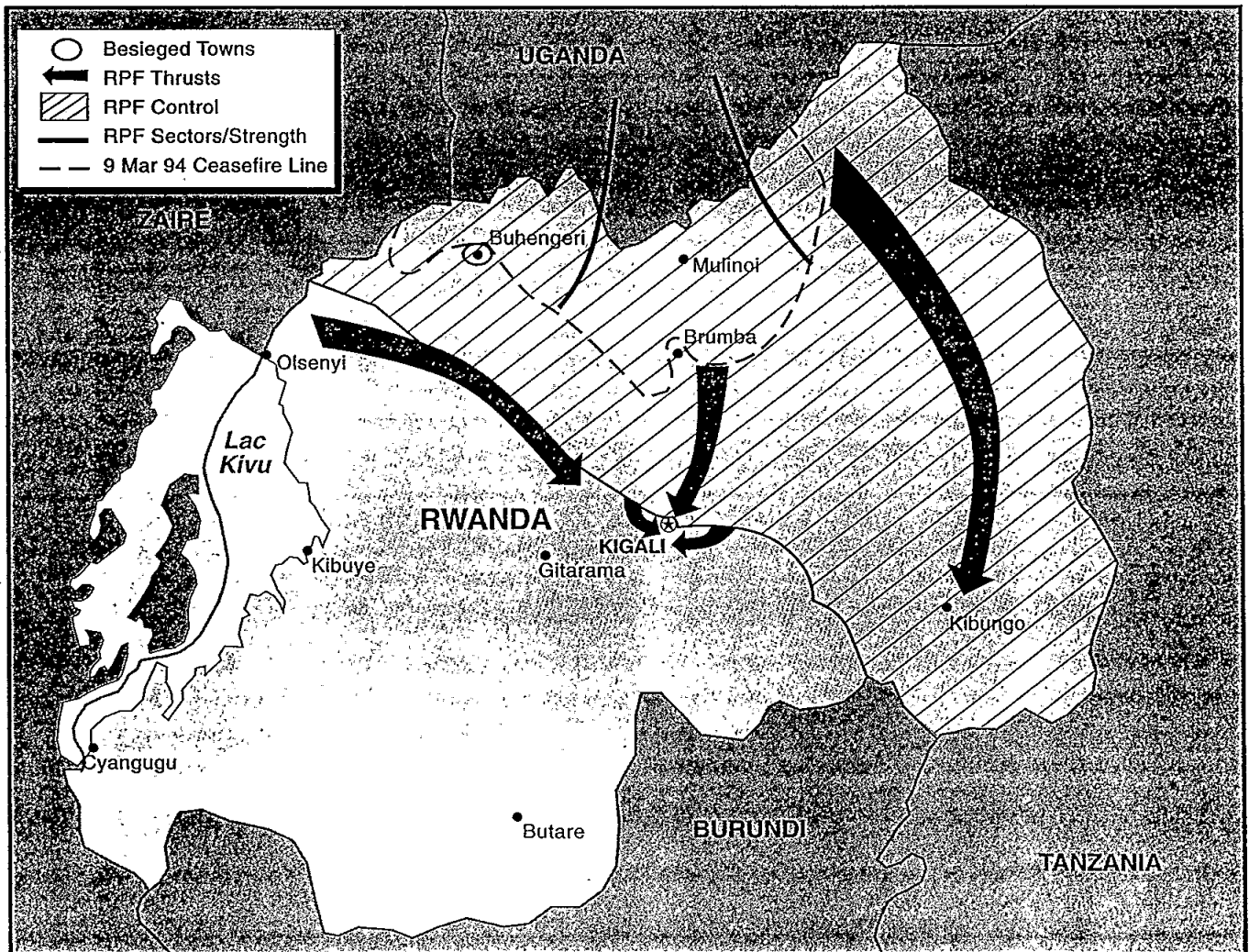
(S) (NF) By 12 April, rebel forces had gained control of most of Mutara province and positioned a battalion-sized force approximately 12 kilometers from Kigali. On 14 April, this force had linked up with the troops in Kigali. Additional RPF units attacked from the southwest and isolated the airport from central Kigali. The majority of government forces withdrew from the capital toward Gitarama, the seat of the interim government, while the paracommando battalion, gendarmes, and

some Presidential Guard elements challenged RPF gains. The paracommando battalion counterattacked, and it appeared that the RPF attack had stalled; however, the RPF was consolidating and reinforcing its gains.

(S/NF) Both sides declared cease-fires early in the week of 26 April. They appeared to be posturing for the final battle for Kigali, the prize for the political elites battling for control of Rwanda. It appears that the battle began on 6 May as the RPF seized additional areas on the periphery of Kigali. As of 8 May, their forces were 300 meters from the vital western intersection to Gitarama and had taken the high ground to the northeast of the airport. On 9 May, rebels attacked

the Kanombe barracks, key to the government's defense of the airport. The RPF must figure out how to eliminate the government forces at the airport without hitting the UNAMIR troops there and, at the same time, not to destroy the airport, which is critical for humanitarian assistance. Figure 2 shows the RPF-controlled areas and RPF thrusts as of 9 May.

(S/NF) According to the U.S. Ambassador prior to the offensive, RPF-controlled areas were devoid of civilians because of Hutu distrust and fear. It appears that this perception of the RPF by Hutus is changing because displaced persons have been moving into rebel territory. Though lacking sufficient forces to



(C) RPA Offensive Thrusts and Occupied Territory as of 9 May 1994.

occupy every town, as the RPF moves into an area, the massacres stop.

Political and Military Implications

(S/NF) The RPF is making an effort to expand its power base among the Hutu and has taken steps to change the Hutu perception that it will massacre them. If it is viewed as the provider of basic needs by Hutus and Tutsis alike, the RPF's political power base could expand beyond that of Tutsis and moderate Hutus of the opposition parties. Furthermore, refugees have

been seen moving north into RPF areas. Unless the government can stop the massacres, it will lose its legitimacy as the stabilizing force in Rwanda. In addition, humanitarian aid organizations are reluctant to venture into government areas to assist the hundreds of thousands of displaced persons. According to the U.S. Ambassador to Rwanda, the routes through RPF territory will be the best way for humanitarian assistance to reach the displaced people left in Rwanda.

(S) Even if the RPF fails to capture Kigali, which would be a decisive military and political victory, its

FAR and RPA Force Composition and Location of Government Forces

Major Tactical Units	Strength	Location
25 Infantry Battalions	13,000 (600-800 each battalion)	Seven operational sectors
2 Commando Battalions	1,000	Ruhengeri and Gisenyi sectors
1 Paracommando Battalion	1,000	Kigali
1 Armored Reconnaissance Battalion	690	Kigali
Presidential Guard Battalion	600	Kigali
Headquarters/Support Units	4770	Kigali
Training Battalion	600	Butare
Subtotal	23,460	
10 Gendarme Territorial Groups	5,300	One group per prefecture
1 Gendarme Territorial Company	400	Kigali
2 Gendarme Intervention Battalions	920	Kigali
1 Route Security Company	200	Kigali
1 Gendarme Air Assault Company	200	Kigali
1 Gendarme Headquarters	200	Kigali
Subtotal	7,200	
Major Unit Total	30,660	
Total Forces Available	Approx. 39,000	
RPF Forces		
5 Light Infantry Battalions	5,800 (about 1,000 each battallion)	Ruhengeri/Gisoro sector
5 Light Infantry Battalions	5,600	Byumba/Gatuna sector
4 Light Infantry Battalions	4,400	Mutara/Kamwezi sector
RPF Headquarters/Security	3,600	Mulindi
Kigali Battalion	600	Kigali
Administrative/Support Troops	5,000	Uganda/Northern Rwanda
Total	Approx. 20,000	

current military posture allows it to bargain from a position of strength at the inevitable peace talks. It is virtually guaranteed that the RPF will emerge with a larger portion of the spoils than previously attained from the Arusha Accords. The RPF has stated that its objective is a resumption of the transition process begun by the Arusha Accords. In addition, it wants those responsible for the massacres brought to justice. These will be the initial positions at the peace talks. Being a minority party makes the RPF dependent on coalition politics if it wants to adhere to its stated policy of support for democracy in Rwanda. The country's deeply rooted ethnic animosity and its tenuous security conditions make it nearly impossible for the RPF to govern by itself, despite its military victories. Any new Rwandan government that would hope to reestablish order and obtain the loyalty of the military and security forces would have to be broad-based and include a majority of Hutus. While understanding the basics of Rwandan politics, the RPF's role in a reorganized armed forces is the most problematic, yet this critical issue precipitated the current

crisis and has to be addressed in any meaningful peace accord. Because of its military dominance, the RPF will quite naturally expect wider representation (especially in key command positions) in the new force drawn from the 20,000-man, predominantly Tutsi RPA and the 30,000-man Hutu FAR. In this way, the RPF could ensure its safety and preempt Hutu plotting. The military issue will probably be the biggest hurdle for achieving a long-term settlement to the Rwandan problem.

(U) Each classified title and heading has been properly marked; all those unmarked are unclassified.

(U) This document contains both sensitive compartmented and collateral information. Individual portions are marked to indicate specifically individual classifications and control markings applicable to their content, including WNINTEL when appropriate for collateral-level portions.

(U) This report contains information as of 9 May 1994. Questions and comments may be addressed to MAJ R. Orth, USA, J2M-2A [REDACTED]