Talking or Fighting?
Political Evolution in Rwanda and Burundi, 1998-1999

By: Filip Reyntjens

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Introduction

Just like in 1997, there is a great deal of continuity in the political evolution of Rwanda and Burundi, but its regional impact is felt even more, especially in the case of Rwanda. Although the civil war is still ravaging the country, in Burundi the search for a political solution is moving at a snail's pace, through the dual process of political partnership within the country and the Arusha negotiations. On the other hand, the regime in Rwanda continues to favour the military option, which, moreover, has met with some success following the second intervention in the Congo and the regroupment of an important section of the population in the Northwest. While, in Burundi, the political landscape remains divided and even fragmented, in Rwanda the RPF has reinforced its grasp on a tightly-controlled system, notably through the destruction of the MDR. Cohesion within the RPF, however, is by no means guaranteed. At the political level, the system in Burundi is undoubtedly more inclusive than that of the Rwandan regime, whose base continues to shrink. While Rwanda has opted for the path of almost absolute control, Burundi continues its quest for political solutions, although the process is fragile and success is far from guaranteed. In August 1998, Rwanda reaffirmed its ambitions as a regional military power. Furthermore, even more than in 1996-1997, the Congolese operation opens up access to resources which not only help finance the war, but also enrich some political and military actors in Kigali. Although the Burundian army has also become involved in the Congo, its ambitions seem more limited. Furthermore, the regional alliances have become clearer and more visible, which does not necessarily mean that they are stable.

Descriptors: Political Conflicts, Rwanda, Burundi, Genocide, Human Rights, Civil War, Governance, Justice.

Contact:
Nordiska Afrikainstitutet
The Nordic Africa Institute
P.O.Box 1703,
SE-751 Uppsala
Tel.:(46)18-56-22-00
Fax: (46)18-56-22-90
E.mail:nai@nai.uu.se
Internet: www.nai.uu.se