

Rwandan Dictator Paul Kagame's Paranoia Strikes Deep

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"Dissidents say Kagame shuttered houses of worship because they were the last spaces in Rwanda where people felt safe from his totalitarian grip."

He's the President of Rwanda and the current President of the African Union, [feted by the Brookings Institute](#), one of the most venerable ideological pillars of US capital interests. So why is Paul Kagame manifesting more and more signs of paranoia? Let's consider just a few possibilities:

Assassination rumors

The *Indian Ocean Newsletter* reports that French intelligence warned Yoweri Museveni that Kagame was plotting to have his plane shot down over Rwanda, causing him to cancel a flight from Uganda to Burundi for a summit. If said plot had come to fruition, it would have been Kagame's second presidential assassination by plane shoot-down over Rwanda. In 1994, his men shot down the plane carrying Rwandan Hutu President Juvenal Habyarimana and Burundian Hutu President Cyprien Ntaryamira from Arusha, Tanzania, to Kigali, Rwanda. That shoot-down triggered the infamous hundred days of ethnic massacres known as the Rwandan Genocide.

Is the claim credible? No hard evidence has been proffered. The *Indian Ocean Newsletter* is one of several regional reports included in *Africa Intelligence Report*, an online journal that describes itself as "the first information site on Africa for a professional audience" and charges substantial fees for all site access or per-article access. Credible or no, Kagame has his online attack dogs busy denying it.

"Kagame has been kidnapping or assassinating Rwandan refugees in Uganda."

Are relations between Kagame and Museveni tense? No doubt about that. The two have been both partners and competitors in crime for many years, with recent emphasis on the competition. The most notorious moment of this partnership occurred in 2000 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where invading Rwandan and Ugandan forces fought each other over the gold and diamond smuggling trade.

More recently Kagame has been in the habit of kidnapping or assassinating Rwandan refugees in Uganda whom he considers his political enemies, triggering Museveni's recent [crackdown](#) on Rwandan spies. He's also been trying to force Rwandans who've crossed into Uganda fleeing famine to return home. He knows from firsthand experience that significant

numbers of refugees outside Rwanda may return as an insurgency, maybe even an insurgency backed by Uganda, like his own.

Speaking of insurgencies

An armed insurgency against Kagame has been reported. All the Rwandan exiles that I know seem to believe this, but no one knows or wants to say how serious it might be. My own guess is that an insurgency could succeed only if significant numbers of Kagame's own troops turned against him. He has been seen wearing a bulletproof vest in Rwanda. A [video](#) identified as Rwandan insurgents in training appeared on Facebook, where it was shared 237 [263 NOW] times.

Political prisoner Victoire Ingabire in peril



According to her political party, the United Democratic Forces of Rwanda, internationally celebrated Rwandan political prisoner Victoire Ingabire was moved into a cell with a former military officer whom she feared would kill her. The party said that the threatening cellmate has been removed for now. Ingabire attempted to run against Kagame in the 2010 presidential election but went to prison instead. The African Union's highest court, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, [ruled](#) that Ingabire should be freed because Rwanda denied her the rights guaranteed by the Rwandan Constitution, but the current President of the African Union scorns its highest court. In 2010, Victoire Ingabire's courage radically changed international perception of the Kagame regime, exposing him as a totalitarian military ruler and war criminal. Congolese historian and activist Bénédicte Kumbi Njoko calls her African sister "a force of nature."

7000 Rwandan churches and mosques shut down

Kagame has shut down 7000 Rwandan churches and mosques during the first six months of this year. This is not a matter of rumor or speculation; it's reported by Reuters, AP, the BBC, and Christian journals including [Christianity Today](#), [Baptist Press](#), [Religion News Service](#), [World Watch Monitor](#), and [Christian Persecution News](#).

One hundred twenty-three religious leaders have gone missing, pastors have been imprisoned, and Human Rights Watch has been expelled from the country—again. Rwanda's population of 12 million is roughly 60% Roman Catholic, 26% Protestant, 11% Seventh-day Adventist, and 3% Muslim, so it's safe to say that the vast majority of those targeted are Christians of one sort or another.

This has caused shock around the world, and in the US Senate and State Department,

making it one of Kagame's most puzzling paranoid expressions yet.

Last week, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo appeared in the Senate, where [Arizona Senator Jeff Flake](#) asked him,

"The country of Rwanda, right now, and you may be familiar with this because of this week's focus on religious freedom, has indicated a move towards severe restrictions on religious freedom, particularly from outside groups. What are the plans of the State Department to let them know that that is not in their interest or ours?"

Pompeo responded,

"Senator, I share your concerns. I'll need to get back to you in terms of what actions we think will fit. I know we'll call it out. I know we'll label it for what it is. We do need to see. It is tragic and anyway, I share your concerns. It's a huge challenge for us."

Indeed. Rwanda has been a longstanding US ally, military proxy, and geostrategic lynchpin in East Africa, Central Africa, and the rest of the African continent.

"Didn't Kagame know that even his staunchest defenders couldn't give this a positive spin?"

How will Christians and Christian Zionists react to this? Paul Kagame's Rwanda has been hand in glove with Israel ever since he seized power in 1994. Both claim victim's license to invade their neighbors—Congo and Palestine—and the US has staunchly supported that license politically, militarily, and financially. The US is Rwanda's [top bilateral donor](#).

Mike Pompeo attended last week's Christian persecution exhibition in Washington, DC, which prominently featured the case of Rwanda, alongside those of Iraq, Syria, Iran, Turkey, Libya, Sudan, Nigeria, and Pakistan. So did Sam Brownback, the Trump Administration official assigned to look after the interests of Christians around the world, although his actual title is "Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom." The Kansas Republican extremist is the first Catholic to hold the position. He is also a prominent member of "The Fellowship," aka "The Family," which was the subject of Jeff Sharlet's book [The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power](#). Sharlet characterized Brownback himself as "God's Senator" in a frightening 2006 *Rolling Stone* profile.

"Paul Kagame's Rwanda has been hand in glove with Israel ever since he seized power in 1994."

David Himbara, former economic advisor to Paul Kagame, and Justin Bahunga, Spokesman for the Rwandan Democratic Forces, and others say that Kagame shut down the churches, using building code violations as an excuse, because they were the last spaces in Rwanda where people felt safe from his totalitarian grip.

Wasn't this an extraordinarily stupid move, especially given the theocratic tendencies of the Trump Administration? Didn't Kagame know that even his staunchest defenders, Bill Clinton and Tony Blair, couldn't give this a positive spin? I asked David Himbara, who responded,

“Totalitarian regimes aren’t always smart. They tend to shoot first and ask questions after.”

It’s hard to imagine the State Department and the Pentagon cutting Kagame loose while he’s still of greater use than not, but how much longer will that be? And what will it take to tip the balance?

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