

FOREIGN POLICY INTERVIEWS

HON. SAM KUTESA

Uganda's foreign minister discusses the challenge of Somalia and the principles of peace

INTERVIEW BY MICHAEL WILKERSON | AUGUST 10, 2009



On July 24, *Foreign Policy* sat down with Uganda's foreign minister, Sam Kutesa, to discuss his country's role in the region and the prospects for peace in Somalia, the [world's most failed state](#).

Excerpts:

Foreign Policy: Why is Uganda in Somalia?

Sam Kutesa: We are in Somalia on behalf of the African Union and on behalf of the U.N. Security Council as a peacekeeping mission. That is why Burundi is there, and that is why Djibouti is joining. So it is not just Uganda.

When there is nobody in charge of Somalia, as has been the case, it becomes a free-for-all. All sorts of extremists can find that place as an anchor for them. It constitutes a threat to the stability of the

region -- [there is] arms trafficking and now you have a problem of piracy. The problem of piracy is not on the high seas. It originates on the land because of instability in Somalia.

FP: Do you think that AMISOM, the African Union's peacekeeping force, can prevent the Somali government from collapsing? From what I understand, the military situation on the ground is pretty bad, and AMISOM is just in small clusters of areas, like the presidential palace. In the greater scheme of things, is AMISOM merely protecting a government that has already fallen?

SK: First of all, I don't think we're protecting a government that has already fallen. We are protecting a government that came in from Nairobi. It has never occupied the rest [of Somalia]; it hasn't been kicked out. We are protecting it where it was stationed, and we hope it will expand.

Let me tell you, al-Shabab or Hizb al-Islam, they have no capacity to overrun us. But it is our rules of engagement. We are not involved in pushing them away. That will be done by Somalis, who are trained by us and others in AMISOM. If it were a question of pushing them away, that would not have been a problem, but that's not allowed under our rules of engagement.

FP: It has been reported that the Ugandan force is helping to supply weapons to the nascent military forces of the TFG. Is that a problem in terms of trying not to get too deeply involved, where the other militias will vilify Uganda or see AMISOM as the enemy?

SK: We are not supplying [weapons] as Uganda. But there is a partial lifting of the embargo on sending arms to the Somali transitional government. And the United States and other countries that support that government are supplying them with arms because there is a partial lifting of that embargo. It is true that when [the weapons] come, we receive them and hand them out. But we are not the source.

FP: But will the anti-government militias associate AMISOM as the weapons supplier and thus someone they have to attack?

SK: I would imagine so because AMISOM are not just supplying weapons. We have personnel there. So I think your question is redundant. If we have personnel there, obviously we are already a

legitimate target for them. They already think you are there to stop them from their main objective of taking power. And that's what we are doing.

We are neutral in this one sense. We are neutral in the sense that we, Uganda, have no national interests in Somalia. They have accused the Ethiopians of having national interests; they have accused the Kenyans. But as Ugandans there is no other earthly reason that we are in Somalia other than to make sure another African state doesn't become a failed state.

FP: On the issue of post-conflict peace-building, what model [do you think] works?

SK: Without a doubt, Burundi. Burundi succeeded because the initiative was led by the region, and the international community supplemented the regional efforts. Earlier on, there were attempts to broker a peace process in Burundi. The Carter Center [an Atlanta-based NGO headed by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter] had been approached to broker the talks, and they tried. But by the time President Carter got to know the names of the Burundians [involved], it became a mess. So, the region took [over] the initiative.

And you can see that [in] Burundi now the entire conflict has ended. All the parties have formed a part of government. And now they are building peace. They've had elections and they're preparing for another set of elections, so we think that model has worked.

FP: What about Somalia, where there is a full-fledged civil war and also peacekeeping troops?

SK: We have a twin mandate [as part of AMISOM]. One is to protect the Transitional Federal Government and its institutions. The second mandate is for us to train Somalis to take over the security of their country -- in other words to train an army, to train a police force.

Our view is: Yes, it is true that there is a fully fledged civil war. But, it is the Somalis who need to end that.

What we are trying to do on behalf of the Security Council and the African Union is to create capacity for the Somalis to take over their security. Just to give you an example: In Uganda in 1979, the Tanzanians came in and got rid of Idi Amin. But the Tanzanians could never hope to stay there forever, nor would the Ugandans accept them.

I think the same thing would happen in Somalia. Ugandans are not supposed to be there forever. It would be the Somalis that want to kick us out faster than anybody else. But what did Tanzania do? It created capacity for the UNLA -- Uganda National Liberation Army -- and withdrew. And that's what we are attempting to do even in Somalia: to create the peace by using Somalis.

FP: Uganda has been called a strategic ally of the United States against terrorism in the region. From Uganda's perspective, is there a danger of al-Shabab expanding outside Somalia?

SK: Anywhere where there is no government or the state has collapsed, there is a danger that all sorts of extremists will penetrate that area and use it, and it is best to safeguard against that state collapsing. It is nothing to do with our long-standing relationship with the United States against terrorism. It is sheer common sense in the region. Even those states that may appear as if they are supporting al-Shabab -- if the extremists take over those [states] as has always been said -- will be the first victims. If you ride on the back of a tiger, you will end up inside it.