

## The Case of Rwanda: US and UN Actions result in Escalation of Genocide and higher Costs\*

Milton Leitenberg

The two small neighbouring countries of Burundi and Rwanda in Central Africa are inhabited primarily by two ethnic groups, Hutu and Tutsi, in the same proportions: 85% Hutu and 15% Tutsi. In 1972, the Tutsi-led government and army of Burundi slaughtered up to 250,000 Hutu. The *Jeunesse revolutionnaire*, a paramilitary organisation of young men attached to the Tutsi ruling political party, did much of the killing. A subsequent report by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace excoriated the United States administration of President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger for 'indifference, inertia, and irresponsibility' in its response to the massacres.<sup>1</sup>

In October 1993, fighting broke out again in Burundi, following an attempted Tutsi coup against the first democratically elected president of the country, a Hutu. Amnesty International estimates that around 100,000 people were killed in the three months between October and December 1993; other estimates of the number of dead vary between 50,000 to 200,000.<sup>2</sup>

### RPF Invasion

In October 1990, a group of Rwandan exiles, primarily Tutsi who had served for years in the Ugandan armed forces, invaded Rwanda. For the next three years, a war between the Hutu government and the invading force, known as the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), partitioned the country. Under strong pressure from the international community of aid donors, a peace agreement had been brokered by emissaries from the United Nations and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in August 1993, and a cease-fire was in effect from that time until mid-April 1994. However, the Hutu president continually delayed implementation of the peace agreement, and the governing Hutu party had been recruiting young toughs into militias - the *Interahamwe* ('Those who stand together') and the *Impuzamugambi* ('Single Minded Ones') - and training them under Rwandan army supervision all through the early months of 1994. This process was under observation by the United

\* This chapter originally appeared with the title: 'International Incompetence Produces Genocide.' *Peacekeeping & International Relations*, 23 (6), November-December 1994, pp. 6-10.

Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR). By April 1994, 10,000 Hutu had been recruited into these militias, and some arms had been distributed to them.

On April 6, 1994, the Presidents of Burundi and Rwanda were both returning to the Rwandan capital from a UN-mediated parley of the contending parties of both countries with other regional leaders. The Rwandan president was under strong international pressure once again, now to implement the 1993 peace agreement. The airplane in which they were travelling was shot down as it approached the capital's airport. In less than an hour, roadside barriers began to go up in the Rwandan capital, and the killings began, carried out at first by the Presidential Guard.<sup>3</sup> It was not a spontaneous outbreak of violence; it clearly had been planned. The first victims were members of the political opposition, both Hutu and Tutsi. The killings were at first confined to the capital, but the response of the United States and other Western countries was only to evacuate their own nationals in great haste. Presented with this Western 'hands off' reaction, a major role in the massacres was passed on to the militias, who fanned out into the government-controlled portion of the country with the aid of the army.

### Use of Force

Under the terms of the peace accord, UNAMIR - a 2,500-member UN-observer force - was present in Rwanda at the time, without Chapter VII provisions to use force.<sup>4</sup> Article 42 in Chapter 7 of the United Nations Charter provides for the use of force: '... such action as may be necessary...', in any circumstance of 'threat of the peace, breach of peace, or act of aggression.' It provides for the use of 'all necessary means,' the diplomatic phrase which means the use of force. The UN had authorised such use sparingly in the postwar years: in the Korean war, in the Congo, for the US-led coalition that fought Iraq after its invasion of Kuwait in 1990, in UN resolution 794 for the US-led coalition that went to Somalia in December 1992, as well as for the UN forces that replaced it. Force is also authorised for certain of the missions that UN forces have been assigned in Yugoslavia, although for the most part it has not been applied there. On the very day before, April 5, the UN Security Council had extended UNAMIR's mandate for six weeks, but threatened to end it unless '... full and prompt implementation by the parties ... of the transitional institutions provided for under the Arusha Peace Agreements...' took place.<sup>5</sup>

A week after the killing began, estimates of those massacred reached 20,000, then 50,000. At some point very soon after they began, General Romeo Dallaire, the Canadian commander of UNAMIR, requested the Office of the UN Secretary-General to provide him with new Rules of Engagement for his forces, so that he could protect innocent civilians. The request was rejected. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Rwanda, an African diplomat, reported to UN headquarters in New York that the situation was a resurgence of 'tribal warfare',

and therefore the UN should not be involved. In mid-April, Belgium decided to recall the 440 troops it had serving with the UNAMIR force after ten of its disarmed soldiers had been murdered on April 7 by members of the Presidential Guard who also assassinated a government minister whom the troops were protecting. After that, the remaining UN troops stayed in their barracks. UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, with the support of the US administration, essentially recommended to the Security Council that the entire remaining UNAMIR force be withdrawn. He noted that with the withdrawal of the Belgian contingent, UNAMIR would be unable to carry out its mandate, and hence that 'In these circumstances, I have asked my Special Representative and the Force Commander to prepare plans for the withdrawal of UNAMIR, should this prove necessary.'<sup>6</sup> In the end, such a retreat was considered to be too great an embarrassment, and the Security Council allowed 270 troops to remain.

The Organisation of African Unity criticised the UN's decision to withdraw all but a symbolic and non-functional presence as 'a sign of indifference or lack of sufficient concern' for Africans. Yet, in a pattern of response typical of the OAU once killings begin in an African state, not a single African country sent new or additional troops to Rwanda (until the end of August), except for the small units from Senegal, Chad, and the Congo that accompanied the much-criticised French forces when these were deployed in June. An Ethiopian battalion replaced the French troops when these were withdrawn at the end of August.

### Three Options

By April 29, three weeks after the killing had started, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali reported that as many as 200,000 people had been killed - massacred - in Rwanda. By now having reversed his recommendation of early April to withdraw the peace-keeping troops, he proposed three options, the first of which was again prompted by General Romeo Dallaire and called for Security Council approval of a plan to send in 5,500 additional troops.<sup>7</sup> It was understood by all that it would take months for the troops to be raised from member nations, equipped and actually deployed. Again, Security Council members from African countries and other developing nations favoured forceful action. But the US opposed this option, no African nation actually volunteered troops, and the Security Council asked the Secretary-General to 'consult' with the OAU and to undertake new diplomatic steps. As could be expected, the now-desperate 'diplomatic' appeals from the Secretary-General to the parties in the Rwandan conflict produced nothing.

The major reason for Security Council inaction was the criticism and opposition by the United States. Rwanda became the first application of President Clinton's admonition in an address to the United Nations on September 27, 1993, that the UN must learn 'when to say no.' The UN needed to ask 'hard questions' before sending

peacekeeping forces to any additional sites, and it must recognise that it 'cannot become engaged in every one of the world's conflicts.'<sup>8</sup> The United States would only agree to a UN resolution that authorised sending a new force after Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali had reported back on various conditions adapted from those recently established for itself by the US administration, some of which are patently unachievable in the real world, or cannot be realistically determined in advance. Presidential Decision Directive 25 (PDD-25) was formally issued in May 1994, and listed seven factors that the government would consider if required to vote on peace operations in the UN Security Council, six additional and more stringent factors to consider if the participation of US forces was involved, and three final factors if the US forces might be engaged in combat: 16 considerations in all. The document (drafting of which originally began in February 1993 as PD-13) underwent a most extraordinary evolution from US Ambassador Madeleine Albright's statement of June 1993 on 'assertive multilateralism.' As a result of the casualties suffered by US forces in Somalia, it became a policy of stringent conditionality.

### Conditions

The great likelihood is that these conditions will most often be used to rationalise inaction, which is unquestionable their effect to date. *New York Times* editorials applauded the US 'prudence.'<sup>9</sup> Although she was not herself altogether in agreement with the administration's Rwanda policy, US Ambassador Madeleine Albright presented a disingenuous defense of the US opposition in a TV performance on May 19. She claimed that the United States was only 'trying to help' the UN by calling for delay and re-examination.<sup>10</sup> A secondary consideration was the 30% of the UN peacekeeping costs that the US would have to bear for any new peacekeeping deployment while the US was already grossly in arrears for past assessments. US National Security Council officials stated that US involvement in Rwanda was '... not in our national interest,' and that all UN forces should be withdrawn. Up to late April, the US administration's position was to get the UN Security Council to approximate the strictures of PDD-25; after that, the US did put forward a military scheme for the disposition of a UNAMIR force that was an alternative to that favoured by General Romeo Dallaire.

On May 11, the Secretary-General formally asked that the plan be approved, and on May 17, a Security Council resolution was finally passed. By this time senior aid officials in Rwanda were quoting a figure of half a million dead. On May 25, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali announced his defeat and failure in attempting to raise contributions of military forces from UN member nations. During all these weeks, the US government had also instructed its spokesmen 'not to describe the deaths there as genocide, even though some senior officials believe that is exactly what they represent.'<sup>11</sup> Obviously, had US administration spokesmen openly

referred to 'genocide', it would have been more difficult to simply stand aside and watch the slaughter continue. Two days later on May 27, President Clinton met with the UN Secretary-General and declined to commit any US forces to Rwanda. In a Memorial Day address to the American public, Clinton stated, '... we cannot dispatch our troops to solve every problem where our values are offended by human misery, and we should not.' He repeated the same sentiments almost verbatim in a second Memorial weekend address at the US Naval Academy: 'We cannot solve every such outburst of civil strife or militant nationalism simply by sending in our forces.'<sup>12</sup>

On June 3, the leaders of fourteen African states, stung by the UN Secretary-General's description of the situation as 'a scandal', offered to send troop contingents - at some indeterminate time, after they were armed, supplied, etc., including, in one case, a request for 200 artillery pieces for a contingent of 1,000 men. On its side, the US Department of Defense consumed weeks in disputing with the UN the level of repayment that it should receive for supplying 50 armoured personnel carriers. In mid-June it was still demanding that it reimbursed \$ 15 million for the shipping costs to and from Rwanda, spare parts, etc.. Estimates of those dead had now reached 500,000, even 800,000.<sup>13</sup> The 50 US vehicles did not arrive until mid-July.

On July 20, with a cholera epidemic spreading among a portion of the four million Hutu refugees who had fled following the victory of the Rwanda Patriotic Front, for fear of retribution for the months of slaughtering Tutsi and other Hutus, USAID Administrator Brian Atwood stated that he would recommend that the UN now dispatch a *large* peacekeeping force, President Clinton asked for \$ 320 million of emergency relief funds, and, on July 22, suggested sending 4,000 US troops to the area, but primarily to the refugee camps in Zaire, rather than inside Rwanda. The governments of Britain, Canada, and Australia committed small contingents for humanitarian assistance missions also, before the United States did, but except for some of the Canadians, these troops did not reach the area until after US forces had arrived. The UN Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Refugees stated that there were eight tasks which were beyond their capacity and those of the voluntary agencies to carry out, and the United States obligated itself to carry out four of them. Now the *New York Times* editorial headline was 'At Last, Rwanda's Pain Registers.'<sup>14</sup> All of this four months after the troops and money could have prevented the catastrophe in the first place.

### Unique Capabilities

Nevertheless, US officials from the President on down remained adamant that the US military forces deployed to the area would be engaged only in humanitarian relief activities and would not do any 'peacekeeping'.<sup>15</sup> US Secretary of Defense William

Perry explained that the United States military had 'unique capabilities' for airlift and logistics - but not for peacekeeping.' 'It would not be the best use of our forces.' It was on this occasion that Perry also provided the US government estimate of four million Rwandan refugees. Four days later, while visiting the refugee camp in Goma, Perry explained that 'The United States does not have combat forces here, therefore we are not providing peacekeeping.'<sup>16</sup> Obviously: the combat forces were not there because they had not been ordered to be there by the President or by the Secretary of Defense. At the very moment that William Perry was speaking, 2,000 first-line US Marine and Army personnel had been ordered to fight fires in Washington state.<sup>17</sup> The armed forces of the United States, the world's most thoroughly equipped, trained and ready military force, was suddenly incapable of performing peacekeeping duties, and was only uniquely capable of logistics.

### Willingness

As of September, the US Senate was only willing to authorise \$ 170 million of the \$ 320 million that President Clinton had asked for. In addition, the Senate wrote into the legislation the provision that all US forces had to be withdrawn from Rwanda by October 1 unless Congress specifically approved a longer stay.<sup>18</sup> As the US troops began to be withdrawn from the area, it became known that the Department of Defense had decided not to carry out some of the four tasks that the US administration had publicly announced that it would assume on behalf of the United Nations and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.<sup>19</sup> This was corroborated by an internal US administration evaluation of the mission.

As for Mobutu's government in Zaire, it did nothing to disarm the 40,000 soldiers of the former Hutu government's army that were on its territory and in the large refugee camps in Zaire, who were actively preventing Hutu refugees from returning to Rwanda,<sup>20</sup> to the point of actually carrying out small-scale massacres of Hutu refugees in order to enforce their control by terror. UN human rights monitors have no access to the camps - in fact will not travel there for lack of security - while they report on summary retribution against Hutu in the area surrounding the Rwandan capital. In October and November 1994, it became known that voluntary aid agencies distributing food in the refugee camps in Zaire did so by delivering the aid into the hands of the *Interahamwe* - the killers of several months before.<sup>21</sup> By way of analogy, one can imagine the allied nations in Europe in 1946 and 1947 delivering UNRRA aid to displaced persons camps via the control of unreconstituted and armed German SS troops that had managed extermination concentration camps a few years before. Incomparable national and international irresponsibility and incompetence was stubbornly maintained to the very last moment.

The first provisional budget drawn up by the UN authorities for the UNAMIR force mandated for Rwanda was estimated in August 1994 at \$ 37 million. This was

revised to \$ 100 million in September 1994. (As of November 13, a budget has still not been agreed upon by the UN General Assembly.) Presuming that a force of this size had been mandated and deployed in April, the US financial responsibility - at 30% of the total peacekeeping assessment - would have been \$ 30 million.

### Automatic Thresholds

The case provides a classic example of the requirement for automatic thresholds of civilian casualties that would compel the rapid deployment of United Nations or other large multinational forces. There are two circumstances in which this should be considered mandatory. The first is massive massacre of civilian populations, exactly as was occurring in Rwanda, and as had previously occurred in both Rwanda and Burundi between the same two ethnic groups. The second circumstance is evidence of premeditated actions that lead to large-scale civilian starvation during war or armed conflict. There have been some 16 events since 1945 in which these conditions have been met, with mortalities in these events ranging from around 100,000 to around 1.5 million, and a cumulative mortality of over eleven million people. Many of these have occurred in Africa: Burundi, Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Uganda, Angola, Mozambique, and Rwanda. It is also interesting to note that there are a substantial number of repeat offenders among these. It is inconceivable that any international body would set such thresholds above 50,000 dead human beings, if that high. In the Rwandan case, such numbers were reached in a matter of a few weeks.

And it is obvious that such deployment would have to be under Chapter VII provisions of the United Nations Charter, with the mandate to use deadly force without waiting for the approval or tolerance of the combatants, or of a governing perpetrator. Two sides warring for supreme power or one or more of them slaughtering its own population will not suddenly agree to issue polite invitations to UN or other forces. In Rwanda, both the government carrying out the genocidal massacres and the Rwandan Patriotic Front fighting to seize political power rejected suggestions of a UN intervention force. The latter feared that a UN presence would maintain the status quo, with the government continuing to hold power in the capital. Astonishing as it may also seem to outside observers, the contending parties in Burundi at present - military leaders and leaders of political factions - rejected a United Nations proposal in mid-August 1994 to deploy a peacekeeping force with observer and monitoring functions, despite witnessing the carnage between their ethnic brethren directly across the border in Rwanda.<sup>22</sup>

All of this is nevertheless far from consideration by any UN member state or international body. The UNAMIR forces that were in Rwanda when the killings started should have been immediately reinforced by substantial deployments from additional states. And the UN Security Council quickly should have provided the

authorisation for UNAMIR to use force. Nations that feared France's motive for sending peacekeeping troops to Rwanda later in June could have resolved such doubts best by joining the force in contingents of equal size. The French forces were notably deployed with explicit and well-announced orders to fire upon anyone who threatened or attacked civilians in their area, or their own forces. It is inconceivable that any nation, not to speak of a great power, should panic and withdraw its forces on taking a small number of casualties, as was the response of the US administration and of members of Congress following the events in Somalia. Other nations took casualties in Somalia earlier, and have done so since those suffered by the US forces.<sup>23</sup> Until the great powers in the UN Security Council are willing to act together, and to absorb a comparatively small number of casualties to prevent massive mortality, there will continue to be after the fact hand-wringing and aid efforts when it is too late.

### Conscious Manipulation

There is one last point of major importance given the attention that 'ethnic' wars and conflicts are getting at the moment. Few if any of these are spontaneous, historically inevitable, or driven by historical grievances. They owe their occurrence to conscious manipulation by senior national political figures or parties, in or out of office, for immediate political purposes at the present time. This was the case for Rwanda and the ruling Hutu party; Serbia ('Yugoslavia') and Slobodan Milosevic; Kenya and the sudden attacks on Kikuyu villagers in the last year or two prompted by President Daniel Arap Moi's party; India and the Bharatiya Janata Party in the events in 1992 and 1993; the war in Sudan; and the possibility of North-South, Hausa and Fulani versus Yoruba conflict which may yet develop into open fighting in Nigeria. These frequently genocidal conflicts are initiated and prompted by political actors for present political ends.

Between 1948 and 1988 the US Senate would not ratify the UN Convention on Genocide on the rationale that its enforcement might lead to encroachments on national sovereignty. The result of similar logic on the international level is that the world has watched some 15 occasions since 1960 in which several hundred thousand to several million people have massacred each other while no international agency has intervened to stop the slaughter.

### Notes

1. Roger Morris et al., *Passing By: The United States and Genocide in Burundi, 1972*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1973. In 1962-1963, in Rwanda on the other hand, approximately 100,000 Tutsi were killed in civil strife. Milton Leitenberg.



2. Mary Gray and Sarah Milburn Moore, 'Next Arena for Genocide?' *The Washington Post*, August 24, 1994; 'The Great Fear in Burundi' [editorial], *The New York Times*, August 23, 1994.
3. 'Genocide in Rwanda, April-May 1994,' *Human Rights Watch, Africa*, 6 (4), May 1994, 13 p.
4. UNAMIR was created by UN Security Council Resolution 872, on October 5, 1993, and it deployed its first personnel on November 1, 1993. It evolved from UNOMUR, the United Nations Observer Mission to Uganda-Rwanda. There had also been an OAU Neutral Military Observer Group, NMOG I, made up of 50 OAU member states between July 1992 and July 1993, and NMOG II, 132 OAU member-state personnel after August 1993 which was absorbed by UNAMIR. The funds to support the two OAU NMOGs were supplied by the United States.
5. UN Security Council Resolution 909, April 5, 1994.
6. UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, letter to the President of the UN Security Council, April 13, 1994. At that time the Secretary-General must also have spelled out more detailed options in Security Council discussions, as his report of April 20 suggests:
 

*'The Council will recall that in response to its request I presented, on 14 April, two broad alternatives for dealing with this highly unstable and unpredictable state of affairs in Rwanda. Both options were predicated on the establishment of a cease-fire, without which it would be impossible for UNAMIR to continue to perform its responsibilities under the present mandate.'*

*'The first option was to retain UNAMIR at a reduced strength (that is, without the Belgian contingent) for a limited period of three or four weeks following the cease-fire. The parties would have been required to reach agreement on the restoration of the Arusha process within this period, in which case UNAMIR would resume its role under its mandate. Otherwise, UNAMIR would be withdrawn in its totality.'*

*'The second option, following the cease-fire, was to withdraw the bulk of UNAMIR, leaving my Special Representative and the Force Commander in Kigali to act as intermediaries for political negotiations for an indefinite period, subject to review by the Security Council, rather than the limited period envisaged in the first alternative. In order to ensure the security of this United Nations team, about 200 to 300 United Nations military personnel would also have remained in Kigali.'*

*'The two options above were not mutually exclusive. If the efforts under the first had failed to succeed by the end of the stipulated period, it would have been possible to move to the second scenario instead of withdrawing UNAMIR in its totality.'*

'Special Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda,' UN Security Council, S/1994/470, April 20, 1994.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Clinton said that in UN Security Council deliberations lately, the United States had begun asking tougher questions about new peacekeeping missions, such as: 'Is there a real threat to international peace? Does the proposed mission have clear objectives? Can an end point be identified...? How much will the mission cost?'
 

'From now on, the United Nations should address these and other hard questions for every proposed mission before we vote and before the mission begins,' Clinton said. 'The United Nations simply cannot become engaged in every one of the world's conflicts,' Ruth Marcus, 'Clinton Seeks Limits on Peacekeeping,' *The Washington Post*, September 28, 1993.
9. 'Horror in Rwanda, Shame in the UN,' *The New York Times*, May 3, 1994; 'Look Before Plunging into Rwanda,' *The New York Times*, May 18, 1994. When the New York Times finally published a guest editorial sharply critical of the US administration's 'prudence' that

it had been supporting, it published two additional editorials reaffirming its own position, one on the same day and one on the prior day.

10. McNeil-Lehrer interview with US Ambassador Madeleine Albright, PBS-TV, May 19, 1994.
11. 'Officials Told to Avoid Calling Rwanda Killings Genocide,' *The New York Times*, June 10, 1994.
12. Douglas Jehl, 'US Policy: A Mistake; Tragedy in Rwanda Seen as preventable,' *The New York Times*, July 23, 1994.
13. 'Preliminary Report of the Independent Commission of Experts Established in Accordance with Security Council Resolution 935 (1994),' UN Security Council, S/1994/1125, October 4, 1994, para. 43.
14. 'At Last Rwanda's Pain Registers,' *New York Times*, July 23, 1994.
15. McNeil-Lehrer interview with US Secretary of Defense William Perry, PBS-TV, July 27, 1994. It was on this occasion that Perry also provided the US government estimate of four million Rwandan refugees.
16. Interview with US Secretary of Defense William Perry, National Public Radio, July 31, 1994.
17. '1,000 Marines are Called in to Help Combat Fires in Northwest,' *New York Times*, July 30, 1994; 'Marines Join States' Battle Against Fires,' *New York Times*, August 16, 1994.
18. 'Appropriations: Defense Bill Adds \$ 170 Million for Relief to Rwanda,' *Congressional Quarterly*, July 30, 1994, p. 2159.
19. R. Jeffrey Smith, 'US Mission to Rwanda Criticized: Relief Officials Say Pentagon Has Avoided Some Commitments,' *The Washington Post*, September 5, 1994.
20. Kevin Fedarko, 'Rwanda: The Swagger of Defeat,' *Time*, August 15, 1994, p. 25.
21. Raymond Bonner, 'Rwandans Who Massacred Now Terrorize Camps,' *The New York Times*, October 31, 1994.
22. Jerry Gray, 'Burundi is said to rebuff UN Effort to restore Calm,' *The New York Times*, August 16, 1994.
23. The political responses of US administrations are notably *not* driven by 'public opinion': 60% of poll respondents in June and July 1994 favoured deployment of a large UN force in Rwanda, under Chapter VII provisions, and with US participation in it. Careful polls showed similar figures regarding Somalia, both before and after US forces suffered fatal casualties. News Release, 'New Poll on US Troops for UN Peacekeeping in Rwanda,' Program on International Policy Attitudes, Washington, D.C., July 29, 1994, 2 pages, mimeographed.

Contemporary Genocides:  
Causes, Cases, Consequences

Albert J. Jongman (Ed.)

1996

