

GENOCIDE IN RWANDA

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In April 1994, the systematic slaughter of almost one million men, women, and children began in Rwanda. On May 5, 1998, the United States House of Representatives held a special meeting concerning the genocide in Rwanda, four years too late. The genocide in Rwanda was not a high priority in the United States in 1994 and only years later would Americans appreciate the extent of the horror and death of the genocide. In 1994, the U.S. was already devastated by failure in Somalia and had seen the devastating results of ethnic warfare in Burundi. Due to these events, it did not want to intervene in Rwanda. The U.S. played no role in Rwanda and contributed to the massacre by not recognizing the genocide early enough and not offering military and humanitarian support in a timely fashion.

The origins of genocide in Rwanda reside in the colonial era. Rwanda was ruled by Germany from 1894 until the end of World War I.¹ At the conclusion of WWI, Belgium took control of Rwanda and neighboring Burundi. In 1924, the Belgians enforced a system of indirect rule to govern the two newly acquired territories.² To separate the native people of Rwanda, short and dark people were categorized as Hutus; taller, lighter-skinned people were categorized as Tutsis. The colonial powers believed that the Tutsis were descendants of the Oromo tribe who originated in Ethiopia.³ The German colonizers believed this attribute made the Tutsis more “white,” and thus superior to sub-Saharan Africans.⁴ Another way to classify a person as Hutu or Tutsi was by occupation. Hutus generally worked in agriculture, whereas Tutsis usually worked as herdsmen.⁵

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¹ Paul J. Magnarella, *Justice in Africa: Rwanda's Genocide, Its Courts, and the UN Criminal Tribunal* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2000), 9.

² Ibid.

³ Gerard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 17.

⁴ Alain Destexhe, *Rwanda and Genocide in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 38.

⁵ Arthur Jay Klinghoffer, *The International Dimension of Genocide in Rwanda*. (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 6.

This proved to be a horrible way to classify Hutus and Tutsis. Many Hutus were classified as Tutsis if they owned ten or more heads of cattle.⁶ Many Hutu chiefs bribed government officials to change their identity cards to say they were ethnically Tutsi so they were supported by the colonial government.⁷ The lines defining one as a Hutu or Tutsi were very thin and often altered to accommodate those in power at the time. In reality, the Hutus and Tutsis were not ethnically different. The two groups had similar religions and cultural beliefs, a common mythology, and near identical languages.⁸ Both the German and Belgium governments supported Tutsi monarchies. The Tutsi monarchy suppressed the Hutu population and encouraged education and literacy for the Tutsi population only. Small incentives such as these created hatred among the Hutu and Tutsi of Rwanda.

The United Nations and Rwandan government officials decided Rwanda deserved its independence, setting 1962 as a tentative date. With Rwanda on the brink of independence, the Belgians realized that in order to continue to profit from its soon to be former colony, they would have to side with the Hutu majority.⁹ Once Rwanda achieved independence, the Hutu population would control the government because they made up a majority of the population. The Hutu population knew that they would soon be leading Rwanda and tried to prepare for the task ahead.

In 1957, an extremely important document was written that would play a vital role in the genocide in 1994. Nine Hutu intellectuals wrote the *Bahutu Manifesto*, which outlined the unjust treatment of Hutus. The authors believed the privileged lifestyle the Tutsi population had been living had to be ended. The document also called for identity cards to distinguish the different ethnic groups. The most influential part of the *Bahutu Manifesto* was the “Ten Commandments,” which listed rules that the Hutu population should support and obey. The Commandments were supposed to lead to Hutu political, economic, and social control of Rwanda. The most influential of the Ten Commandments were:

- 1) Every Hutu must know that a Tutsi woman, wherever she may be, is working in the pay of her Tutsi ethnicity. Therefore, a traitor is any Hutu who marries a Tutsi woman, makes a Tutsi his concubine, or makes a Tutsi his secretary or protégé.
- 5) Strategic posts such as political, administrative, economic, military, and security posts must be given to the Hutu only.

⁶ Ibid., 7.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Destexhe, *Rwanda and Genocide*, 36.

⁹ Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, 12.

- 6) The armed forces of Rwanda must be exclusively Hutu. No member of the military should marry a Tutsi.
- 8) The Hutu must stop feeling pity for the Tutsi.
- 9) The Hutu, wherever they may be, must be united, show solidarity, and be preoccupied with the fate of their Hutu brethren. The Hutu must be firm and vigilant in their enmity against their common Tutsi enemy.¹⁰

Tension between the two groups obviously began to escalate after the release of this document. In 1959, the Hutu, with the support of Belgium, overthrew the Tutsi monarchy and took control of the government. During the overthrow, Hutu extremists massacred many Tutsis. Some estimate that as many as 130,000 Tutsi refugees fled to other African counties to avoid persecution.¹¹ This event planted the seeds for future genocide.

After Rwanda claimed its independence on July 1, 1962, the Hutus continued to control the government through force. The 1960s proved to be an extremely bloody and violent decade. Refugee Tutsis living in exile in Burundi banded together to battle the Hutu. The group moved north and began to attack Hutu extremists and political figures. In retaliation for the attacks, Hutus attacked local Tutsis. Lemarch wrote, "In late 1963 and early 1964 thousands of innocent Tutsi were wantonly murdered in what has been described as a genocide."¹²

In July 1973, Major Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu, overthrew President Kayibanda and declared himself the new Rwandan president. A dictatorship was established under his rule.¹³ The Tutsi minority was oppressed, although a few Tutsi were allowed to participate in government or hold officer positions in the army. Habyarimana continued to rule Rwanda until 1991, when opposing political parties were allowed to run against his party. Refugee Tutsis living in exile in Uganda formed the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) to run against Habyarimana's party.¹⁴ The clashes between these two groups led to the death of thousands of Hutus and Tutsis. Hutu extremists staged mini-massacres of Tutsis. The international community failed to take notice, setting the stage for a worse genocide a few years later.

On April 6, 1994, President Habyarimana's plane was shot down.¹⁵ It is believed that Hutu extremists shot the plane down because before confirmation of the president's death, roadblocks were set up in Kigali that checked identification cards and executed Tutsis, human rights activists, and Hutus who sympathized with Tutsis. The state-controlled radio Mille Collines spread the call for genocide and urged revenge upon the Tutsi population. It aired propaganda against the Tutsis and encouraged the mass murder of men, women, and children.¹⁶ Over the course of three months, 500,000 to one million Tutsis, Hutu who sympathized with Tutsis, and peace activists were killed.¹⁷ Machetes were used to mutilate the bodies, inflicting a slow and painful death. Many victims were violated, raped, and humiliated. Inhumane crimes were committed against women and children: fetuses were taken out of wombs, doctors killed patients, teachers killed students, and neighbors killed neighbors while the world sat watching.

After the atrocities of World War II and the Holocaust, the United Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was established. This was an agreement among the members of the international community that if a genocide occurred, it would be put down by members of the United Convention. It also ensured that those responsible for the crimes would be brought before a tribunal to be punished. This group did nothing about the Rwandan genocide. The UN describes genocide as "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group."¹⁸ The Rwanda genocide put the UN, the global community, and legal polices to the test. The international community did put down genocide a year later. In 1995, genocide in Bosnia gained international attention. The United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization sent troops on a peace-keeping mission to Bosnia.¹⁹ By formally recognizing the genocide in Bosnia,

¹⁵ Linda Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide* (London: Verso, 2004), 133.

¹⁶ The radio broadcasts that aired propaganda allowed the genocide to reach the rural areas of Rwanda. If not for the radio broadcasts, many rural dwellers of Rwanda would not have known about the genocide.

¹⁷ M. Khan Shaharyar, *The Shallow Graves of Rwanda*. (New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2000), 9.

¹⁸ Memorandum from Assistant Secretary for Intelligence and Research Toby T. Gati to

Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs George Moose and Department of State Legal Adviser Conrad Harper, "Rwanda – Geneva Convention Violations", circa May 18, 1994. Secret/ORCON (originator controlled), 2.

¹⁹ Richard, Sobel, "Trends: United States in Bosnia," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 62 (Summer, 1998), 250.

¹⁰ Magnararella, *Justice in Africa*, 12.

¹¹ Ibid., 13.

¹² Magnararella, *Justice in Africa*, 13.

¹³ Ibid., 14.

¹⁴ Destexhe, *Rwanda and Genocide*, 45.

the U.S. was able to protect the Muslims from the Serbs. However, nothing was done to protect Tutsis from Hutus in Rwanda.

During Clinton's campaign for president in 1992, he promised to be directly involved in the consolidation of democracy throughout Africa.²⁰ He also wanted to support UN preventive diplomacy and peace-keeping missions where needed. In 1993, civil war broke out in Somalia, and President Clinton sent troops under Operation Restore Hope to preserve order. During the mission thirty U.S. soldiers lost their lives. As a result, Americans lost faith in the cause and wanted their troops to return home safely. In 1994, President Clinton removed troops from Somalia. Also beginning in 1993, 50,000 people were killed in an ethnic dispute in Burundi.²¹ Hutus and Tutsis made up the majority of the population in Burundi, and similar tensions to those in Rwanda took place. Uneven distribution of wealth, political power, and economic power between the Hutus and Tutsis led to physical altercations.²² These altercations turned into massacres but were not inspected by the UN or the international community. These two events kept the U.S. from promising military aid to help end the genocide in Rwanda.

The events in Somalia and Burundi helped shaped American and international policy. The U.S. implemented the presidential decision directive, which refused U.S. aid to some UN missions which were not in the interest of U.S. relations.²³ This policy was intended to "allow systematic slaughter that did not implicate national interests."²⁴ Another aspect of the presidential decision directive said, "The United States would henceforth be extremely wary of non-military involvement in humanitarian crises and of peacekeeping missions undertaken by other countries-because these could lead to eventual U.S. entanglement."²⁵ In order for the U.S. to support a peace-keeping mission, all financial support, equipment, and troop requirements must be met without the support of the U.S. This policy was put into effect to try and reduce the amount of money the U.S. was putting into the UN.²⁶ This policy made it extremely difficult for the UN to go on peacekeeping missions without the approval of the

²⁰ Adar G Korwa, "The Clinton Administration and Africa: A View from Nairobi, Kenya," *Journal of Opinion* 26 (1998), 70.

²¹ House, *Rwanda's Genocide: Looking Back*. 108th Cong., 2nd sess., 2004, H.R. 108-96, 26.

²² Peter Uvin, "Ethnicity and Power in Burundi and Rwanda: Different Paths to Mass Violence," *Comparative Politics* 31 (April, 1999), 253.

²³ Destexhe, *Rwanda and Genocide*, 50.

²⁴ *Rwanda's Genocide: Looking Back*, 36.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ The US supplies roughly thirty percent of the UN's budget. Destexhe, *Rwanda and Genocide*, 50.

United States. When the U.S. decided it did not want to intervene in Rwanda, it also made that decision for the world.

The United States received classified information on January 11, 1994 from Canadian General Romeo Dallaire that hinted towards a possible genocide in Rwanda.²⁷ Dallaire was the Force Commander of United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) in Kigali and was present during the genocide.²⁸ While stationed in Rwanda, Dallaire learned that the government was paying people to create lists of Tutsis to be executed. He also learned there was a plan to start a civil war and kill several Belgian peacekeepers. The Hutus believed if their peacekeepers were killed, Belgium would remove its troops. Dallaire sent a fax, soon to be known as the genocide fax, to Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan.²⁹ The fax was filled with classified information about possible hints and movements towards genocide. Annan responded that Dallaire should not get involved militarily in the situation. He also said, "Such situations and alarming reports from the field, though considered with the utmost seriousness by United Nations officials, are not uncommon within the context of peace-keeping operations."³⁰ The information received in the fax was passed on to President Habyarimana and the American, French, and Belgian Embassies. The U.S. did not want to intervene and prevented other countries from executing a large intervention as well.³¹

After President Habyarimana's plane was shot down, ten Belgian peacekeepers were shot while trying to protect the Rwandan prime minister. As a result, Belgium removed its troops and other countries followed. The country immediately erupted into civil war. The United States had the information, troops, and supplies to prevent the genocide in Rwanda but did not use any of its resources.

Ironically, the United States was captivated by other events at the time, such as the release of Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List*. On April 8, 1994, Prudence Bushnell, a deputy assistant secretary of state for African affairs, gave a short speech at a State Department conference, explaining the evacuation of U.S. citizens and the violent conflict in Rwanda.³² Ironically, the next speech, given by Michael McCurry, talked about the international community's reaction to *Schindler's List*. Many countries were preventing the movie from being shown. Just minutes after the genocide in Rwanda was mentioned, McCurry said, "This film movingly portrays the twentieth

²⁷ House, *Rwanda: Genocide and the Continuing Cycle of Violence*, 105th Cong., 2nd sess., 1998, H.R. 49-306, 191.

²⁸ Magnararella, *Justice in Africa*, 30.

²⁹ House, *Rwanda: Genocide and the Continuing Cycle of Violence*, 191.

³⁰ Magnararella, *Justice in Africa*, 32.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² House, *Rwanda's Genocide: Looking Back*, 25.

century's most horrible catastrophe and it shows that even in the midst of genocide, one individual can make a difference. The most effective way to avoid the recurrence of genocidal tragedy is to ensure that past acts of genocide are never forgotten."³³ Two speeches about genocide made within minutes of each, yet, the second speech overshadowed the first one. The U.S. was compelled to help those who survived the Holocaust. Despite this, the American public failed to recognize the genocide in Rwanda as a pressing issue.

The United States did not publicly define the crisis in Rwanda as genocide. Although the U.S. would not publicly acknowledge it, unclassified documents by the Department of State, show that the government did know a full-blown genocide was occurring in Rwanda.³⁴ With consent of the Clinton administration, the word genocide was finally used on May 4, 1994, in a speech given by UN Secretary General Annan. A declassified government document showed the U.S. government had extensive knowledge and information regarding the genocide in Rwanda. The document warns governmental officials not to use the word genocide or the U.S. will have to commit themselves to stopping the genocide.³⁵

It is argued that radio jamming could have prevented thousands of deaths. The genocide was encouraged through the radio station Milles Collines. The station said, "We will not repeat the mistake of 1959. The children must be killed too."³⁶ The United States had the capabilities to jam the radios to prevent the spread of genocide. Upon General Dallaire's request to jam the radio, the U.S. requested eight thousand dollars an hour to complete the mission.³⁷ The U.N. could not afford to support this cost. A human rights advocate said that radio jamming was "the one action that, in retrospect, might have done the most to save Rwandan lives."³⁸

The U.S. secretly considered offering radio-jamming equipment to other African nations. In a de-classified document, the issue was raised that if the U.S. jammed the radio, they would be forced to play a larger role in the conflict. The U.S. did not want to become heavily involved in the crisis in Rwanda but felt they had to do something. The U.S. believed it could offer radio-jamming equipment for others to intervene. The unclassified document made public by the Freedom of Information Act suggested that the U.S. offer its equipment to a

³³ Ibid., 26.

³⁴ Discussion Paper, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Middle East/Africa Region, Department of Defense, May 1, 1994. Secret, 1.

³⁵ United States Department of State. Discussion Paper Rwanda, 1.

³⁶ Destexhe, *Rwanda and Genocide*, 32.

³⁷ House, *Rwanda's Genocide: Looking Back*, 13.

³⁸ Ibid.

neighboring African country.³⁹ The U.S. tried to get other countries to intervene in the crisis but would not use technology or force to end the genocide themselves.

In a 1998 speech at Rwanda, President Bill Clinton said he felt that Rwanda was his greatest failure.⁴⁰ He knew the U.S. had failed to react to a worldwide crisis that could have been averted. Video footage of the massacre showed how brutal and inhumane the genocide was; the world witnessed men, women, and children perish by means of a machete. New technology such as radio jamming could have been used to prevent the spread of the genocide. Rwanda was one of the great tragedies of the twentieth century and the U.S. directly contributed by not recognizing the genocide and by not offering military assistance and humanitarian support.

³⁹ "Rwanda – Geneva Convention Violations", 2.

⁴⁰ House, *Rwanda: Genocide and the Continuing Cycle of Violence*, 203.