The Killing Fields of Rwanda
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The Killing Fields of Rwanda

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Appendix
Introduction

This Current Issues Brief provides the reader with a basic outline of Rwanda's location, geography, economy, people and history, and aims to provide a context in which to understand the human catastrophe that has engulfed this central African nation.

The paper outlines United Nations (UN) efforts to establish a mediatory presence in Rwanda and notes other international reactions to the civil war. Particular note is taken of the UN-US disagreement over the nature of the proposed UN mission. The final sections examine international responses to the crisis, particularly the reaction of the Australian Government to UN requests for military assistance in Rwanda.

Background¹

The Republic of Rwanda gained its independence from Belgium in 1962. It is a land-locked nation in Central Africa, sandwiched between Zaire in the west, Tanzania in the east, Burundi in the south and Uganda in the north. The nation has a land area of 26 338 square kilometres and has an estimated population of 7.53 million.² The population is divided into two major groups: the Hutu (85-90 percent of the population) and the Tutsi (9-14 percent). There is also a small community of Twa (a pygmyoid people).

Rwanda is a unitary republic, with political power concentrated in the national capital, Kigali. The current Rwandan constitution was enacted in June 1991 and is derived from both Belgian law and the earlier Rwandan constitution of 1978. Economically, the World Bank estimates that Rwanda's GDP grew at an annual average of 4.7 percent in real terms between 1970-1980 and 0.6 percent between 1980-1991. Per capita GNP was estimated to be $US270 in 1991, placing Rwanda on the list of the fifteen poorest nations in the world. Neighbouring Burundi shares a similar level of poverty. Rwanda's principal exports in 1992 were coffee and tea.

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The original human inhabitants of Rwanda were the Twa, who were hunter-gatherers. Between the fourth and the seventh centuries A.D. the Twa were displaced by a Bantu people known as the Hutu, who were agriculturalists. The origins of the Tutsi people are less certain, though they are believed to have arrived in the area in the 14th or 15th centuries from an area bounded by the present state of Ethiopia. Germany was the first European power to colonise Rwanda and Burundi, commencing that process in 1903. With Germany's defeat in the First World War, however, Belgium was given control of Rwanda-Burundi in 1919. During the 1920s and 1930s the Belgians introduced a number of profound changes to the colony. They interfered with the local subsistence economy by forcing extensive coffee plantings in the colony. Furthermore, Brussels made a number of changes to native society in the colonies during the mid-1920s, which served to increase Tutsi political power and Hutu resentment at the local level to an unprecedented extent. After the Second World War, Belgium was pressured by the United Nations to introduce democracy to the colonies. Dissatisfied with the Belgian progress to this end, it was decided to send a UN mission there in 1957, significantly raising the level of political reform.

Relations between the Hutu and Tutsi tribes have been strained since the Tutsi arrived in the area and gradually subjugated the Hutu, forcing them into a lord-vassal relationship. Tutsi power was based on the possession of cattle and a more advanced knowledge of warfare. The Tutsi remained the dominant group in Rwanda until 1959-61. Despite the traditional tensions, the cultures of both tribes have been largely integrated, with the Tutsi adopting the Bantu (Hutu) language and the Hutu kinship and class system deriving from Tutsi culture.

Conflict in Rwanda

Origins of the Current Conflict

The current conflict in Rwanda is neither an isolated nor totally unexpected incident. Rwanda's strife is also profoundly intertwined with the racial violence in neighbouring Burundi and the southwestern region of Uganda. 

During colonial times the minority Tutsi, who held positions of power in Rwanda and Burundi society, were favoured by Belgian authorities at the expense of the Hutu people. In the 1950s the Hutu reacted

3. Economist Intelligence Unit: 3.

against Tutsi oppression and began pressing for increased democratic reforms before independence was proclaimed. Under pressure from the UN the Belgian colonial authorities supported this push. By contrast, the Tutsi monarchy argued for rapid independence without reforms that would reduce its political power. When Tutsi King Mutara died in 1959 many Tutsi believed that he had been killed by the Belgian authorities. Tensions were increased that same year as the Tutsi established the Union Nationale Rwandaise (UNAR) and the Hutu formed the Party of the Hutu Emancipation Movement (PARMEHUTU). In a 1959 Hutu rebellion against the dominance of the Tutsi minority, thousands of Tutsi were killed. The Belgian colonial administration reacted slowly as 300 000 Tutsi fled the colony for Burundi.

Tutsi-Hutu violence continued throughout the 1960s and 1970s. PARMEHUTU won local elections in 1960 leading to further violence. In late 1961 the Hutu-based PARMEHUTU party toppled the Tutsi monarchy, a power shift legitimised by the 1963 legislative elections. The influx of Tutsi refugees from violence in Burundi during the 1960s had the effect of increasing the Rwandan government's anti-Tutsi policies.

Though formed by a prominent Hutu, the PARMEHUTU did not favour all Hutu but mainly those in the Gitarama region in central Rwanda, and Ruhengeri in the north. A number of Hutu lords (leaders of regional tribal groupings) had hoped that the new administration would return their ancestral lands. This did not occur, violence flared again and in 1973 Major General Habyarimana (a Hutu lord) staged a successful coup, forming a new government and banning PARMEHUTU. In 1975 President Habyarimana established the Mouvement Revolutionnaire National pour le Developpement (MRND) and in 1978 established civilian rule under one-party government. In 1981 Habyarimana set up a legislature, although true power continued to reside with the MRND Central Committee.

In response to growing domestic and international pressure, the Rwandan President allowed the creation of other political parties in 1991. Dozens emerged but the most important of these was the Mouvement Democratique Republicain (MDR) which draws its political strength from an association with the former PARMEHUTU. In mid-1992, after considerable political turmoil, an MDR politician (Dismas Nsengiraremye) emerged as Prime Minister. He chose a cabinet.


composed primarily of MRND members, though several other parties were also represented.

As these internal problems continued, Rwanda was also threatened by external forces. In September 1990 some 4000 members of the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), which had sought refuge in Uganda during the years of Rwandan strife, attacked Ruhengiri and Byumba in northern Rwanda (see the map of Rwanda included in Annex A for location). This attack was defeated and thousands of Tutsi are believed to have been killed in response. In 1993 the RPF was estimated to have 12 000 troops and the Rwandan government some 40 000. In February 1993 the RPF launched a new offensive, striking within 30 kilometres of the capital Kigali and was only halted by the intervention of French troops who supported the Hutu-dominated Rwandan government. By late 1993 it was estimated that a million Rwandans had been displaced by the war: many left the country and others congregated in overcrowded camps, surviving on international aid.

The Tanzanian government and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) mediated in peace negotiations and on 4 August 1993 the Arusha Peace agreement was signed between the Rwandan government and the RPF. The agreement was backed by Burundi, Kenya, Uganda, and Zaire. It was also supported by the UN and a number of observer states, namely Belgium, France, Germany and the US. The agreement allowed for the RPF to enter an enlarged transitional government, for the two opposing forces to be merged and for the refugees to return prior to elections in 1994.

The Current Crisis

While 'the roots of the present conflict in Rwanda can be traced to the upheavals of the 1960s', the catalyst to the current round of violence was the deaths of the Rwandan and Burundi presidents in an aircraft crash on 6 April 1994. It has been reported that President Juvenal Habyarimana of Rwanda and President Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi were returning with a comprehensive peace package when their plane was shot down by renegade troops of the Rwandan

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7. Many of the rebels actually served with the Ugandan army while in exile but deserted in order to continue fighting in Rwanda. See: Jeffrey Bartholet and Ruth Marshall, 'A Rebellion in the Heart of Africa', Newsweek, 16 Oct. 1990: 85.


Presidential guards. It is alleged that these guards were opposed to the offer of concessions to the Tutsi-dominated RPF.11

In the aftermath of the killing of the two presidents, the decades-old animosity between the Hutu and Tutsi people was reignited. After two weeks of fighting the RPF rebels were reported to be successfully engaging government troops and were 35 kilometres north of Kigali.12 Following further intensive fighting the rebels declared a unilateral ceasefire but refused to attend peace negotiations with the Rwandan interim government. The RPF argued that the interim government had planned the killing of the two presidents and was now responsible for the mass killings of tens of thousands of Tutsi people.13 The rebel terms for the ceasefire included the cessation of all killing within 96 hours of the ceasefire, the establishment of a tribunal to investigate and bring the killers to justice, delivery of humanitarian aid and international monitoring of the arrangement.14

Simultaneously with the unfolding of events in Rwanda, Burundi was beset by violence as Tutsi and Hutu forces there also clashed. A planned coup in Burundi was uncovered on 25 April but a bloodbath on a scale of that in Rwanda was only averted by the decision of some elements in the army not to support a planned coup.15

The RPF ceasefire in Rwanda appears to have failed from the outset. Violence continued almost unabated and by 1 May rebels had closed the Rwanda-Tanzania border after government troops fled in the face of the RPF advance.16 Rebels also made significant advances in other parts of the country and by 5 May they were shelling Kigali. From a position of strength, rebel leader Major-General Paul Kagame, stated in early May that the RPF would enter neither into negotiations nor a truce with government forces until his troops had gained control over Kigali and other government strongholds. At the time of this statement it was reported that the rebels occupied half of Rwanda and

were within 8 kilometres of the capital.\textsuperscript{17} Two or three days subsequent to this announcement, RPF forces were engaged in heavy fighting in areas to the southwest and northwest of Kigali. By 14 May media reports from Rwanda were claiming that the rebel forces occupied all of northern Rwanda with the exception of a 12 km stretch of the road leading into Kigali.\textsuperscript{18} As at the end of May the RPF has occupied more than two-thirds of the country, including most of Kigali, and appear set to take the headquarters of the Rwanda government at Gitarama.\textsuperscript{19}

Six weeks after the present war began, the death toll has been put at anywhere between 250 000 and 500 000 - the majority of them Tutsi according to the United Nations. In all likelihood, however, the true death toll may never be known.

**International Responses to the Rwanda Crisis**

The United Nations

The United Nations deployed an observer force to Rwanda in June 1993 to 'monitor the Uganda/Rwanda border [and] verify non-transit of military assistance to Rwanda'.\textsuperscript{20} This involvement in what became known as the UN Observer Mission Uganda/Rwanda (UNOMUR) was located on the Rwanda/Ugandan border. A second operation was subsequently established in Kigali in October 1993 to monitor the August 1993 peace agreement: it became known as the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR). The UN intended to merge UNOMUR with UNAMIR but on 20 April 1994 the UN announced that it had decided to reduce its 2500-strong UNAMIR contingent by 500, removing all non-essential forces from the country.\textsuperscript{21} Two days later (22 April) the UN voted to withdraw all but 270 UNAMIR personnel, leaving an infantry company of 150 troops as well as some military observers and civilians.\textsuperscript{22} This action was prompted by several instances where rebel and government troops

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\textsuperscript{17} 'No peace deals, vows rebel chief', *Sunday Herald Sun*, 8 May 1994: 27.

\textsuperscript{18} 'Thousands flee rebel advance', *Canberra Times*, 14 May 1994: 9.


\textsuperscript{21} Anthony Goodman, 'Rwanda death toll may be 100 000, UN told', *The Age*, 21 Apr. 1994: 1.

\textsuperscript{22} 'UN to pull troops out of Rwanda', *Weekend Australian*, 23 Apr. 1994: 18.
\end{flushright}
fired upon UN forces. The remembrance of the killing of a number of UN troops in Somalia may have also prompted the decision to withdraw. One thousand UN troops were withdrawn to Nairobi, waiting for an end to the violence before returning to Rwanda.

Though UN forces in Rwanda had been deployed with the intention of supervising the 1993 peace agreement rather than as a peacekeeping or peace enforcement mission, their withdrawal was received critically by many in the international community. In particular, a spokesman for the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) has described the UN withdrawal as 'incomprehensible' as the massacre of Rwandans continues without let.\textsuperscript{23} Indeed the UN, and the international community generally, has been characterised as dithering while hundreds of thousands of Rwandans have perished. The UN Secretary-General, Dr Boutros-Ghali, urged the Security Council to reverse its hands-off approach to Rwanda given that further massacres were likely. He proposed that the UN should send a force of 5500 troops as a deterrent to further 'genocide' in Rwanda.\textsuperscript{24} The UN leader argued that troops could be landed at the airport and from there aid could be distributed to the interior of the country.

Boutros-Ghali's proposal met with opposition from the United States which argued that the UN contingent should undertake a less ambitious mission, providing instead 'safe' areas on the Rwandan borders where the 1.2 million refugees of the civil war could be provided with aid. Under the American proposal the UN forces would not attempt to intervene in the conflict between the Rwandan government and the rebels. But one observer has criticised this strategy, pointing out that the UN has been unsuccessful in maintaining the 'safe areas' in the Bosnian conflict.\textsuperscript{25} Washington's cool response to Boutros-Ghali's proposal, and its more modest intervention strategy, is apparently in line with the Clinton Administration's ruling that future US involvement in UN operations should be determined by a set of criteria, including national interests. On 17 May it was agreed that the UN should send 5500 African troops to Rwanda but the UN and the US continued to differ as to where the

\textsuperscript{23} Phillip McCarthy, 'Despair for Rwanda as nations dither', \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 2 May 1994: 11.

\textsuperscript{24} Renee Slama and Serge Arnold, 'Call for Rwanda peace force', \textit{The Australian}, 12 May 1994: 10.

force should be deployed.\textsuperscript{26} Initially the American determination not to send troops into the Kigali airport appeared to have been vindicated by the fact that neither the RPF nor the Rwandan government would agree to give the UN access to that facility. In recent days, however, the airport has fallen into RPF hands and the rebels have claimed that they would accept the UN presence.

Though the United States has baulked at becoming directly involved in any large-scale military operation in Rwanda, it has promised to contribute $US35 million aid to the country and has despatched envoys to neighbouring states to initiate peace talks. Washington has also offered to supply 50 armoured vehicles and help airlift troops into Rwanda.\textsuperscript{27}

The Rwanda crisis illustrates some aspects of the dilemma of contemporary UN peacekeeping efforts. This is the subject of a forthcoming Parliamentary Research Paper \textit{The United Nations and International Security}.

\textbf{Australia and the Rwanda Crisis}

Within ten days of the renewed violence in Rwanda, the Australian government responded with $A500 000 in aid for civilians dispossessed by the war. This funding was distributed through the Australian International Development Assistance Bureau (AIDAB) and included medical and other emergency assistance.\textsuperscript{28} Two weeks later, as the extent of the tragedy became known to the outside world, Australia committed a further $A1 million in aid to the people of Rwanda. This funding was divided between three organisations. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) received $A700 000 for the coordination of international relief to Rwanda. A further $A200 000 was provided to World Vision Australia to assist in the provision of relief kits for families, while Community Aid Abroad also received $A100 000 to provide water, sanitation and shelter for refugees who have fled into neighbouring Zaire.\textsuperscript{29} Numerous Australian non-government organisations (NGOs) are also contributing to relief.

\textsuperscript{26} Phillip McCarthy, 'UN agrees to send 5500 more troops to Rwanda', \textit{The Sydney Morning Herald}, 18 May 1994: 1.

\textsuperscript{27} 'Clinton limits military help', \textit{Canberra Times}, 30 May 1994: 9.


programs in Rwanda and surrounding states, including CARE Australia, the Red Cross and Australian Catholic Relief.30

In mid-May Australia was asked by Dr Boutros-Ghali to contribute approximately 300 troops to a UN mission to Rwanda. It was requested that Australia supply movement control officers, communicators, engineers and medical personnel.31 From the outset, however, the Minister for Defence (Senator Ray) was cautious about the UN request for Australian participation unless there was 'a clear role for Australian troops in Rwanda and a finite period for a deployment.32 Australia grew more reserved in its support for a Rwandan mission as it became apparent that the UN was uncertain about the aims of the proposed operation. Indeed, there are now increasing calls (notably from former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser) for Australia to limit its contribution to aid, rather than troops.33 Moreover, the Department of Defence is apparently cautious about the deployment of ADF troops, and Senator Ray assured a recent Senate Estimates Committee hearing that:

We expect there to be a clear mission, clearly established timetable and political processes put in place for a possible resolution. None of these currently exist. There were probably two broad plans put to the United Nations and they have chosen a middle course probably taking the worst aspect of both plans. We do not find that very encouraging at the moment. Given the circumstances you [Senator MacGibbon] have accurately described, one of the paramount matters on my mind is that before we commit any Australians to that area I must protect their security. If I cannot be assured of protecting their security we do not commit.34

The Australian government has decided to keep its Rwanda options open until the UN agrees upon a set of mission objectives. Canberra has, however, indicated that it would be prepared to assist with the protection of refugees that have fled into surrounding countries.35

30. Ian McPhedran, 'Aid sought for Rwanda', Canberra Times, 10 May 1994: 7. Also see CARE Australia, 'Rwanda - CARE flies in more aid to Tanzania', Press Release, 10 May 1994. CARE announced that it was flying in $A 600 000 in aid to Rwandan refugees in Tanzania.


The 300 000-strong Camp Benaco near Ngara in Tanzania, is the largest refugee camp in the world, though it is only one of a number of camps now catering to displaced Rwandans. Care Australia is providing much-needed food and medical supplies to one third of the camp.36 The work done in these camps is essential to the survival of thousands of refugees but their creation adds to the disturbing number of camps that already exist throughout Africa.

Conclusion

The war in Rwanda is not the consequence of a set of short-term factors but has its origins in decades of inter-tribal tension. Nor is the Tutsi-Hutu tribal cleavage peculiar to Rwanda but also complicates the security of Burundi and the south-western part of Uganda. Given the long-term nature of the problem, it would seem that a peace enforcement mission would be little more than a stop-gap measure. Furthermore, it could well be an expensive venture given that both warring factions in Rwanda have warned that UN troops will be regarded as hostile forces.

Western states are cognisant of the fact that once the United Nations has committed troops to Rwanda it may be difficult to withdraw. This is reflected in Washington's insistence that any UN operation should focus on the provision of safe areas on Rwanda's borders rather than a more ambitious peace enforcement effort, or a relief program located at Kigali airport. Canberra, too, is aware that there must be a political solution to the Rwanda conflict before troops are committed, or else the operation could degenerate into a problem without end such as would appear to be the case in Somalia.

There appears to be increasing international support for the supply of aid simultaneously with diplomatic efforts to negotiate a feasible peace, rather than deploying troops in to what might well become a quagmire for the UN.
