

Genocide in rwanda: international response

[Politics](#), [International Relations](#)



In the course of a hundred days in 1994, over 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu were killed in the Rwandan genocide. It was the fastest, most efficient killing spree of the twentieth century. My thesis is that the international community utterly failed to prevent and stop this atrocity. I will focus on numerous interconnected aspects that led to international inaction and also on the main actors, Belgium, the United Nations Secretariat, the United States and France, that knew that there was genocide underway in Rwanda - therefore, they had a responsibility to prevent and stop the genocide, but lacked political will.

This led to inaction at the level of the Security Council (SC), where member states fixated on the ongoing civil war rather than discussing the genocide, which would have required them to act under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948, article 5)¹.

Finally, it will be shown that this international letdown had dreadful consequences for the United Nations Assistance Mission For Rwanda (UNAMIR), which, with neither adequate resources nor mandate, became an eyewitness to the extermination.

SUMMARY

The article focuses on the course of the events in the civil war in Rwanda, parallel with the decisions made by the honourable diplomats in the forum for international community, the UN. In 1990, the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) invaded Rwanda from their exile in Uganda, setting off a civil war with the Hutu-dominated Government of Rwanda. The international community did not pay a lot of attention to the systematic discrimination and

violation of human rights in the country, since the government was generally quite stable.

Three years later, this conflict was seen as a good opportunity for international community (the UN) to reestablish its reputation after a failed intervention in Somalia. They believed that the conflict will be solved successfully, since after almost two years of fighting, the RPF and three opposition parties pursued to negotiate a peace agreement. This would become known as the Arusha Accords, signed in August 1993. UNAMIR was sent to Rwanda to help the implementation of the Accords, with Romeo Dallaire as its commander.

The UN, at that time, faced escalating costs for peacekeeping operations, so they granted a reduction of force sent there, on request of the US, Belgium and the UK. During the years before the beginning of the genocide, Hutu Power (Hutu extremist, anti-Tutsi movement) began systematically distributing weapons and spreading propaganda about Tutsi via the Radio et Television Libres des Milles Collines (RTLM). The genocide would be systematic, planned, and had nothing to do with ancient warfare or tribal inclinations. By 1994, tensions were high.

On January 11th, Commander Dallaire sent a fax to the UN headquarters in New York, warning of a massive slaughter being prepared in Rwanda. Also, the reports from intelligence agents were always present during this period, so the representatives of Belgium, France and the US were very well informed about the situation rising. " In January, an analyst of the US Central Intelligence Agency knew enough to predict that as many as half a million persons might die in case of renewed conflict and, in February, Belgian <https://assignbuster.com/genocide-in-rwanda-international-response/>

authorities already feared genocide” (Des Forges 1999, 20). The UN Secretariat is the United Nations’ bureaucratic arm.

As such, it passes on vital information to decision-making bodies such as the SC. The Secretariat and the Secretary General, however, have come under considerable criticism for failing to pass on information before and during the Rwandan genocide. Despite ample information about the genocide, staff spoke in terms of a “civil war” and the need to obtain a ceasefire. As a result, non-permanent members in the SC, who rely on the Secretariat for information, did not come to see the killings as genocide and they misjudged the gravity of the crisis. Instead of strengthening the mission, the SC only made some small changes in the mandate.

On April 6 1994, Rwandan President Habyarimana’s plane was shot down and he was killed. Almost immediately, there was a nationwide call to arms from Hutu Power to begin the slaughter of Rwandan Tutsi. Spread over the propaganda radio station, the message was clear: it was time for the Tutsi in Rwanda to be wiped out. As a consequence of either lack of information or lack of political will to intervene, the policymakers described the conflict as “tribal killings”, “tribal resentments”, rather than genocide. There was also an inadequate understanding of the conflict.

Foreign observers treated the genocide as a collateral damage of war, rather than an ethnic cleanse, which should be attacked directly. Diplomats addressed the problem in the usual way, by promoting dialogue between both sides and tried to maintain the posture of neutrality. If foreign troops have been sent, this would have signalled that the interim government was illegitimate in the eyes of the international community. In the mid-April, after <https://assignbuster.com/genocide-in-rwanda-international-response/>

two weeks of killings, the SC (mostly on the initiative of Belgium, the US and the UK) withdrew most of the UN troops from UNAMIR – from 2500 to only 270 soldiers.

Discussion about the new peacekeeping force continued until mid-May, mostly because of the slowness of bureaucracies, since participating nations tried to get more from the situation and give the least possible. “ What was extraordinary was that such behaviour continued to be acceptable in the context of genocide, by then openly acknowledged by national and international leaders” (Des Forges 1999, 24). International leaders had available means other than armed force, which could influence the conflict but decided not to use them. During the first weeks even simple actions, with almost no expense, could have saved thousands.

Major donors of aid to Rwanda did not ever threaten to withhold the financial assistance from a government guilty of genocide. Radio RTLM was communicating orders for the implementation of killings, naming persons to be killed and revealing areas for future attacks through the entire course of genocide. The broadcast stations could have been interrupted without military action. They discussed the idea shortly in the SC, but dropped it soon, because the traditional American commitment to freedom of speech, which was more important than disrupting the voice of genocide.

Third cost-free action that could be done was imposing an embargo on arms to Rwanda, which only happened on May 17th, after almost two months of killing. The potential effect of these actions would also be weakened by continued French support of the interim government. Two weeks after the start of the massacres, governments refused to admit Rwandan delegation

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sent to justify the genocide - with exception of France. The Rwandan representatives were greeted in Paris at the highest levels and France officials offered help to genocidal government, on a condition to end bad publicity about the slaughter.

France also helped to flee some of the perpetrators of the genocide later. When the Rwandan representatives came to the meeting of the SC, most members failed to condemn the slaughter clearly. But there were also actors that did criticize the decisions made by the SC. The Organization of African Unity, government of Tanzania, Human Rights Watch, The International Federation for Human Rights and the International Committee of the Red Cross all stepped up their efforts to demand action from national governments and the UN.

When the non-permanent members of the SC began to doubt the interpretations of the crisis as presented by the secretariat, changes started to happen. The ambassador of the Czech Republic organized a meeting with representatives of the Human Rights Watch, where he discussed the problem and informed himself. He said " The issue of Rwanda is not a national priority for the Czech Republic, but as a human being, I cannot sit here and do nothing" (Des Forges 1999, 494). The ambassador of New Zealand (in that time the president of the SC), threatened to open session for public and that way forced all the states to compromise and draft a statement.

The diplomats from Czech Republic, New Zealand, Spain and Argentina took the initiative to insist on the measures to halt the genocide and were persistent in pushing for action in Rwanda (ibidem). 3ANALYSIS In the case of Rwanda, the international response to the crisis consists of various complex

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factors, mentioned above. A misguided view of African conflicts, the bureaucratic nature of the United Nations and peacekeeping fatigue in general are just some of them.

Every state that was in a position to decide differently has its own reasons for being inactive – most of them are influenced by their national interests or maybe even better, a lack of a national interest in that region. Unfortunately for the people of Rwanda, their country did not “qualify” for a peacekeeping operation that would bring the actual peace. To support my thesis further, I would like to point out some of the matters that seem to present the international community that knew and ignored what was happening and consecutively failed to prevent and stop the genocide.

Firstly, there was plenty of intelligence to support the likelihood of the genocide. One sample was the “Dallaire fax”. Dallaire’s claims were discharged because he was new to operating in Africa and assumingly, not enough experienced in that field. Secondly, during the actual events media coverage in the Western World delivered considerable proof of genocide. In the United States, the Washington Post and New York Times had front page reporting about the events in Kigali for a two week period. The evidence proves that the UN and US officials claim of non-awareness, was completely baseless.

The main actors Belgium, the US and France had sufficient information on what was going on and the quick and effective evacuation of foreign nationals show that they also had the capacity to intervene (Barnett 1997). Another failure amongst the international community was by the hesitant use of the word ‘genocide’ instead they described the ongoing conflict as ‘civil

war' or 'acts of genocide', despite evidence to the contrary. Such statements would imply that the United Nations would be legally bound to intervene in accordance with the Genocide Convention of 1948.

Another demonstration of international let-down was the departure of the UN troops. Romeo Dallaire sent a request for additional peacekeepers, however, the request was denied by the UN because the United States opposed the notion. To further frustrate the circumstances, the bodies of ten Belgium militiamen were found which led to withdrawal of all Belgium peace corps. After this event, General Dallaire was left with 270 peace keepers for the whole country - most of them unarmed and only allowed to shoot in self-defence (Putterbaugh 2010).

All in all, this means that Rwanda was really abandoned by the international community. What interests me the most, is that the UN decided to send troops in after the Arusha Accords. It seems that public and the media, had an ill opinion about the UN missions, because of the loss of the US soldiers on the mission in Somalia a year before. So the civil war became a good opportunity to reinstate good name of the UN occurred. They did not do this because of their moral responsibility to protect and safeguard peace; they did it because of their reputation. Doesn't that cast even a bigger shadow over the institution as a whole?

There should be a mechanism introduced, which would help to prevent situations like genocide in Rwanda - when human lives are at risk, this should be a national interest of every country, of every institution or organization. But in the case of Rwanda, there was a complete opposite - when first victims fell, when the potential danger presented itself - they

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recalled troops back home. Another mechanism is obviously not working in the system of the UN; Dallaire had many opportunities to confiscate the arms, to help the civilians - but he could not because he did not have the required authorization.

A lot could have been done if the countries knew more about the situation and the possibilities which could have been seized, without much expenses and force. At the same time, Yugoslavia was falling apart. The US had a big role in that conflict, where it presented itself as a major peacemaker; and Rwanda was not getting the attention it should (Barnett 1997). Another thing that I find appalling is the arms trade that was happening at that time. Belgium, Israel, France, the UK, Netherlands and Egypt were the main distributors of weapons to Rwanda.

These were forces that equipped the genocidal government of Rwanda for the killings and they set example of what will happen if small arms and light weapons are sold to a country with ethnic, religious or nationalistic frictions. In modern wars light weapons are responsible for most of the killings of civilians and combatants, since they are used more often than heavy artillery in human rights violations of international law. Yet the international community continues to ignore trade in those weapons, or they even trade themselves.

Trade with these arms has helped to undermine peacekeeping efforts and allowed local troops to challenge UN militias (Goose and Smyth 1994). There would be another positive effect of the embargo on trading arms - the international community would expel Rwandan government from their circle, which would stigmatize it. Hutu supporters would not follow a government

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that would not be legitimate in the international society and could not make business within this society. 4CONCLUSION After one hundred days of unimaginable violence and hatred, the RPF prevailed and declared a ceasefire. RPF tried and created mass graves for almost million bodies spread across the country. An effort to rebuild their country and to appoint a new government was made by both, Hutu and Tutsi leaders. This tragedy could have been prevented. The death of a million people in the Rwandan genocide of 1994 must be viewed as an abysmal failure on the part of the international community to respond to a humanitarian crisis of proportions rarely seen. Therefore, I can confirm my thesis - various and complex factors, explained in this essay, influenced main actors and impaired the functioning of the SC to the point of inaction.

They had the means and especially a responsibility to protect civilians, prevent a genocide, but lacked political will, because of their national interests. Did we learn anything from this experience? The slogan "never again" which was coined immediately in the aftermath of the Holocaust in the twentieth century, still poses challenges to the world community - it was a promise that genocide would be prevented and stopped. But the West abandoned Rwanda and it continues to abandon Dafur, Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria and many other countries.

The task of genocide prevention can be accomplished only through the mutual cooperation of countries around the world and one can only hope that an awareness of this will go some way toward preventing unnecessary reluctance to intervene in similar conflicts in the future. 5GLOSSARY OF TERMS GENOCIDE [d?? n? s? jd] - iztrebljenje skupnosti 1. The deliberate <https://assignbuster.com/genocide-in-rwanda-international-response/>

killing of people who belong to a particular racial, political, or cultural group.

2. Deliberate and systematic destruction of a racial, religious, political, or ethnic group. 3.

“ The Rwandans who organized and executed the genocide must bear full responsibility for it. ” 4. Synonym: slaughter; hypernym: kill; hyponym: ethnic genocide. EMBARGO [ˈɛm.bɑːr.ɡoʊ] - prepoved uvoza 1. A government order that limits trade in some way. 2. An official ban on trade or other commercial activity with a particular country. 3. “ Imposing an embargo on arms to Rwanda would have been another effective, cost-free way of indicating international condemnation of the interim government, but this measure, first raised in the Security Council at the end of April, was implemented only on May 17.”

4. Synonym: prohibition; hypernym: trade barrier; hyponym: arms embargo.

PEACEKEEPING [ˈpiːs.keɪ.pɪŋ] - vzdrzevanje miru 1. The preserving of peace.

2. International enforcement and supervision of a truce between hostile states or communities. 3. “ Faced with escalating costs for peacekeeping operations, the UN staff and members wanted not just success, but success at low cost. ” 4. Synonym: mediation, pacification; hypernym: operation;

hyponym: peacekeeping mission. CEASE-FIRE [ˈsiːs.faɪər] - ustavitev ognja 1. A temporary stopping of fighting.

2. An agreement to stop fighting a war for a period of time so that a permanent agreement can be made to end the war. 3. “ Accustomed to dealing with wars, not with genocides, diplomats addressed the familiar part of the problem in the usual way, by promoting a dialogue between the belligerents and seeking a cease-fire. ” 4. Synonym: armistice; hypernym:

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peace; hyponym: long-lasting cease-fire. WARFARE [w? rf? r] - vojno stanje

1. Activity that is done as part of a struggle between competing groups, companies, etc. 2. A lack of agreement or harmony 3.

“ A leading columnist for the New York Times even managed to put the new and the old cliches in the same sentence, referring to a “ failed state” and to a “ centuries-old history of tribal warfare. ” 4. Synonym: conflict; hypernym:

action; hyponym: tribal warfare. Unknown words 1. ammunition [cmjunis? n]

the objects (such as bullets and shells) that are shot from weapons - strelivo

2. belligerent [belidz? r? nt] angry and aggressive : feeling or showing readiness to fight - bojevit 3. cadaver [k? deiv?] a dead body - truplo 4.

calamitous [k? lc? mit? s] causing great harm or suffering - nesrecen, razdejalen

5. inept [inept] lacking skill or ability - nesmiseln, nespodoben 6. inertia

[in??: si?] lack of movement or activity especially when movement or activity is wanted or needed - lenivost, lenoba 7. interim [int? rim] intended to last,

continue, or serve for a limited time - zacasen 8. paucity [p?: siti] a small amount of something : an amount that is less than what is needed or wanted

- malenkost, majhno stevilo 9. purport [p??: p? t] the main or general meaning of something - smisel, pomen, smoter

10. reconnaissance [rik*? nis? ns] military activity in which soldiers, airplanes, etc. , are sent to find out information about an enemy -

poizvedovanje 11. to balk [b: k] to show unwillingness to accept, do, engage in, or agree to - preprecevati, ovirati 12. to condemn [k? ndem] to say in a

strong and definite way that someone or something is bad or wrong - obsoditi 13. to deteriorate [diti? ri? reit] to become worse or of less value -

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poslabsati se 14. to rebuff [ri:b?? f] to refuse (something, such as an offer or suggestion) in a rude way - odbiti, odkloniti 15. to shun [s? n] to avoid (someone or something)

DEBATE PREVIEW

I will focus our debate on four discussable questions - each one of them related to the international response to the Rwandan genocide.

Firstly, in my seminar I presented the role of France as a Rwandan government's number-one supplier of weapons. Does this fact alone make France more culpable for the genocide than the rest of the international community? How should responsibility be allocated for what happened, both inside and outside Rwanda? How has the international community, in particular Belgium, France, the United States, and the UN, faced up to the question of responsibility and blame in the years since the genocide? Secondly, the UN authorized the troops as the "peace-keepers," not "peace-makers."

By UN mandate, UN troops were permitted to use their weapons only in self-defense. If the generals had disobeyed orders and authorized their troops to fire on fighters who were killing masses in front of their eyes, would they have done the right thing? Next, I mentioned that various factors contributed to the inactivity of the international community, such as the disastrous U. S. humanitarian intervention in Somalia in 1993, less than a year before, which ended with the U. S. helicopter shot down and the bodies of U. S. soldiers dragged through the streets of Mogadishu.

Does this justify the U. S. and the UN's refusal to intervene? Can we risk our own citizen's lives in order to save foreign and can we risk the reputation of an intergovernmental institution, which possibly could never be restored again in order to help - even if that means that some major countries may not want to cooperate at all in the future? Finally, I will also encourage a debate over possible solutions for halting genocide and violation of human rights - when and how should the governments act, who should contribute the resources etc.