Leave None to Tell the Story

Genocide in Rwanda

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Introduction

"When I came out, there were no birds," said one survivor who had hidden throughout the genocide. "There was sunshine and the stench of death."

The sweetly sickening odor of decomposing bodies hung over many parts of Rwanda in July 1994: on Nyanza ridge, overlooking the capital, Kigali, where skulls and bones, torn clothing, and scraps of paper were scattered among the bushes; at Nyamata, where bodies lay twisted and heaped on benches and the floor of a church; at Nyarubuye in eastern Rwanda, where the cadaver of a little girl, otherwise intact, had been flattened by passing vehicles to the thinness of cardboard in front of the church steps; on the shores of idyllic Lake Kivu in western Rwanda, where pieces of human bodies had been thrown down the steep hillside; and at Nyakizu in southern Rwanda, where the sun bleached fragments of bone in the sand of the schoolyard and, on a nearby hill, a small red sweater held together the ribcage of a decapitated child.

In the thirteen weeks after April 6, 1994, at least half a million people perished in the Rwandan genocide, perhaps as many as three quarters of the Tutsi population. At the same time, thousands of Hutu were slain because they opposed the killing campaign and the forces directing it.

The killers struck with a speed and devastation that suggested an aberrant force of nature, "a people gone mad," said some observers. "Another cycle of tribal violence," said others. The nation of some seven million people encompassed three ethnic groups. The Twa, were so few as to play no political role, leaving only Hutu and Tutsi to face each other without intermediaries. The Hutu, vastly superior in number, remembered past years of oppressive Tutsi rule, and many of them not only resented but feared the minority. The government, run by Hutu, was at war with the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), rebels who were predominantly Tutsi. In addition, Rwanda was one of the poorest nations in the world and growing poorer, with too little land for its many people and falling prices for its products on the world market. Food production had diminished because of drought and the disruptions of war: it was estimated that 800,000 people would need food aid to survive in 1994.

But this genocide was not an uncontrollable outburst of rage by a people consumed by "ancient tribal hatreds." Nor was it the preordained result of the impersonal forces of poverty and over-population.

This genocide resulted from the deliberate choice of a modern elite to foster hatred and fear to keep itself in power. This small, privileged group first set the majority against the minority to counter a growing political opposition within Rwanda. Then, faced with RPF success on the battlefield and at the negotiating table, these few powerholders transformed the strategy of ethnic division into genocide. They believed that the extermination campaign would restore the solidarity of the Hutu under their leadership and help them win the war, or at least improve their chances of negotiating a favorable peace. They seized control of the state and used its machinery and its authority to carry out the slaughter.

Like the organizers, the killers who executed the genocide were not demons nor automatons responding to ineluctable forces. They were people who chose to do evil. Tens of thousands, swayed by fear, hatred, or hope of profit, made the choice quickly and easily. They were the
first to kill, rape, rob and destroy. They attacked Tutsi frequently and until the very end, without doubt or remorse. Many made their victims suffer horribly and enjoyed doing so.

Hundreds of thousands of others chose to participate in the genocide reluctantly, some only under duress or in fear of their own lives. Unlike the zealots who never questioned their original choice, these people had to decide repeatedly whether or not to participate, each time weighing the kind of action planned, the identity of the proposed victim, the rewards of participating and the likely costs of not participating. Because attacks were incited or ordered by supposedly legitimate authorities, those with misgivings found it easier to commit crimes and to believe or pretend to believe they had done no wrong.

Policymakers in France, Belgium, and the United States and at the United Nations all knew of the preparations for massive slaughter and failed to take the steps needed to prevent it. Aware from the start that Tutsi were being targeted for elimination, the leading foreign actors refused to acknowledge the genocide. To have stopped the leaders and the zealots would have required military force; in the early stages, a relatively small force. Not only did international leaders reject this course, but they also declined for weeks to use their political and moral authority to challenge the legitimacy of the genocidal government. They refused to declare that a government guilty of exterminating its citizens would never receive international assistance. They did nothing to silence the radio that broadcast calls for slaughter. Such simple measures would have sapped the strength of the authorities bent on mass murder and encouraged Rwandan opposition to the extermination campaign.

When international leaders did finally voice disapproval, the genocidal authorities listened well enough to change their tactics although not their ultimate goal. Far from cause for satisfaction, this small success only underscores the tragedy: if timid protests produced this result in late April, what might have been the result in mid-April had all the world cried “Never again.”

This study, summarized in the introduction, describes in detail how the killing campaign was executed, linking oral testimony with extensive written documentation. It draws upon interviews with those who were marked for extinction but managed to survive, those who killed or directed killings, those who saved or sought to save others, and those who watched and tried not to see. It presents minutes of local meetings where operations against Tutsi were planned and correspondence in which administrators congratulated their subordinates for successfully destroying “the enemy.” It analyzes the layers of language and the silences that made up the deceptive discourse of genocide, broadcast on the radio and delivered at public meetings. It places the genocide in the immediate political context, showing how local and national political rivalries among Hutu influenced the course of the campaign to eliminate Tutsi. It traces changes in the tactics and organization of the campaign as well as its collapse as the RPF defeated the genocidal government.

Drawing on many sources, including previously unpublished testimony and documents from diplomats and United Nations staff, the study shows how international actors failed to avert or stop the genocide. It ties the expansion of the killing campaign to early international inertia and it shows that international protests against the slaughter, when they finally came, were discussed even at local meetings on the distant hills of Rwanda. Thus the study establishes that the international community, so anxious to absent itself from the scene, was in fact present at the genocide.
The Genocide

The Strategy of Ethnic Division

President Juvenal Habyarimana, nearing the end of two decades in power, was losing popularity among Rwandans when the RPF attacked from Uganda on October 1, 1990. At first Habyarimana did not see the rebels as a serious threat, although they stated their intention to remove him as well as to make possible the return of the hundreds of thousands of Rwandan refugees who had lived in exile for a generation. The president and his close colleagues decided, however, to exaggerate the RPF threat as a way to pull dissident Hutu back to his side and they began portraying Tutsi inside Rwanda as RPF collaborators. For three and a half years, this elite worked to redefine the population of Rwanda into “Rwandans,” meaning those who backed the president, and the “ibyitso” or “accomplices of the enemy,” meaning the Tutsi minority and Hutu opposed to him.

In the campaign to create hatred and fear of the Tutsi, the Habyarimana circle played upon memories of past domination by the minority and on the legacy of the revolution that overthrew their rule and drove many into exile in 1959. Singling out most Tutsi was easy: the law required that all Rwandans be registered according to ethnic group. Residents of the countryside, where most Rwandans lived, generally knew who was Tutsi even without such documentation. In addition, many Tutsi were recognizable from their physical appearance. But shattering bonds between Hutu and Tutsi was not easy. For centuries they had shared a single language, a common history, the same ideas and cultural practices. They lived next to one another, attended the same schools and churches, worked in the same offices, and drank in the same bars. A considerable number of Rwandans were of mixed parentage, the offspring of Hutu-Tutsi marriages. In addition, to make ethnic identity the predominant issue, Habyarimana and his supporters had to erase—or at least reduce—distinctions within the ranks of the Hutu themselves, especially those between people of the northwest and of other regions, those between adherents of different political factions, and those between the rich and the poor.

From the start, those in power were prepared use physical attacks as well as verbal abuse to achieve their ends. They directed massacres of hundreds of Tutsi in mid-October 1990 and in five other episodes before the 1994 genocide. In some incidents, Habyarimana’s supporters killed Hutu opponents—their principal political challengers—as well as Tutsi, their declared ideological target.

Habyarimana was obliged to end his party’s monopoly of power in 1991 and rival parties sprouted quickly to contend for popular support. Several of them created youth wings ready to fight to defend partisan interests. By early 1992, Habyarimana had begun providing military training to the youth of his party, who were thus transformed into the militia known as the Interahamwe (Those Who Stand Together or Those Who Attack Together). Massacres of Tutsi and other crimes by the Interahamwe went unpunished, as did some attacks by other groups, thus fostering a sense that violence for political ends was “normal.”
Preparations for Slaughter

Through attacks, virulent propaganda, and persistent political manoeuvering, Habyarimana and his group significantly widened divisions between Hutu and Tutsi by the end of 1992. During 1993 a dramatic military advance by the RPF and a peace settlement favorable to them—which also stipulated that officials, including the president, could be prosecuted for past abuses—confronted Habyarimana and his supporters with the imminent loss of power. These same events heightened concerns among a broader group of Hutu, including some not previously identified with Habyarimana. Increasingly anxious about RPF ambitions, this growing group was attracted by the new radio Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) and by a movement called Hutu Power, which cut across party lines and embodied the ethnic solidarity that Habyarimana had championed for three years. In late October, Tutsi soldiers in neighboring Burundi seized and murdered the Hutu president, freely and fairly elected only months before. In massacres touched off by the assassination, tens of thousands of Burundians died, both Hutu and Tutsi. The crime, energetically exploited by RTLM, confirmed the fears of many Rwandan Hutu that Tutsi would not share power and swelled the numbers supporting Hutu Power.

Meanwhile the Habyarimana circle was preparing the organization and logistics to attack the minority. During 1993, some loyalists from Habyarimana’s party expanded the recruitment and training of the Interahamwe. But others, perhaps concerned that the militia were too tainted by partisan rivalries, proposed a “civilian self-defense force” which was to recruit young men through administrative rather than party channels. The recruits were to be trained by former soldiers or communal police who would direct them in attacking the “enemy” in their communities. In early 1993, Col. Théoneste Bagosora sketched out elements of the program in his appointment book, the intellectual Ferdinand Nahimana advocated such a force in a letter to friends and colleagues, and administrators began preparing lists of former soldiers who could command its ranks.

Soldiers and political leaders distributed firearms to militia and other supporters of Habyarimana in 1993 and early 1994, but Bagosora and others concluded that firearms were too costly to distribute to all participants in the “civilian self-defense” program. They advocated arming most of the young men with such weapons as machetes. Businessmen close to Habyarimana imported large numbers of machetes, enough to arm every third adult Hutu male.

Aware of these preparations, the RPF anticipated further conflict. They too recruited more supporters and troops and, in violation of the peace accords, increased the number of their soldiers and firearms in Kigali. They understood the risk that renewed combat would pose to Tutsi, particularly those who had come out publically in support of the RPF in the preceding months, and warned foreign observers to this effect.

The Attack

By late March 1994, Hutu Power leaders were determined to slaughter massive numbers of Tutsi and Hutu opposed to Habyarimana, both to rid themselves of these “accomplices” and to shatter the peace agreement. They had soldiers and militia ready to attack the targeted victims in the capital and in such outlying areas as Cyangugu in the southwest, Gisenyi in the northwest and Murambi in the northeast. But elsewhere they had not completed the arrangements. In the center of the country, they had successfully disseminated the doctrine of
Hutu Power, but they were unsure how many ordinary people would transform that ideology into action. In other areas, particularly in the south, they had not won large numbers of supporters to the idea, far less organized them to implement it.

On April 6, the plane carrying President Habyarimana was shot down, a crime for which the responsibility has never been established. A small group of his close associates—who may or may not have been involved in killing him—decided to execute the planned extermination. The Presidential Guard and other troops commanded by Colonel Bagosora, backed by militia, murdered Hutu government officials and leaders of the political opposition, creating a vacuum in which Bagosora and his supporters could take control. Soldiers and militia also began systematically slaughtering Tutsi. Within hours, military officers and administrators far from the capital dispatched soldiers and militia to kill Tutsi and Hutu political leaders in their local areas. After months of warnings, rumors and prior attacks, the violence struck panic among Rwandans and foreigners alike. The rapidity of the first killings gave the impression of large numbers of assailants, but in fact their impact resulted more from ruthlessness and organization than from great numbers.

**Recruiting for Genocide**

The genocide was not a killing machine that rolled inexorably forward but rather a campaign to which participants were recruited over time by the use of threat and incentives. The early organizers included military and administrative officials as well as politicians, businessmen, and others with no official posts. In order to carry through the genocide, they had to capture the state, which meant not just installing persons of their choice at the head of the government, but securing the collaboration of other officials throughout the system.

Bagosora and his circle sought first to obtain the backing, or at least the acquiescence, of the majority of military commanders. They began negotiating for this support even as troops under their command slaughtered civilians in the streets. Bagosora’s first proposal, to take power in his own right, was rejected by a number of influential officers as well as by the ranking representative of the United Nations in Rwanda. But his next move, to install a regime of extremists masquerading as a legitimate government, was accepted by the soldiers, the U.N. representative, and the international community. The day after Habyarimana’s death, the RPF renewed combat with the government forces, a response to the continuing attacks by the Rwandan army on civilians and on RPF headquarters. With the resumption of the war and the ensuing pressure for solidarity, officers opposed to Bagosora found it increasingly difficult to challenge his actions.

As the new leaders were consolidating control over military commanders, they profited enormously from the first demonstration of international timidity. U.N. troops, in Rwanda under the terms of the peace accords, tried for a few hours to keep the peace, then withdrew to their posts—as ordered by superiors in New York—leaving the local population at the mercy of assailants. Officers opposed to Bagosora realized that a continuing foreign presence was essential to restricting the killing campaign and appealed to representatives of France, Belgium and the U.S. not to desert Rwanda. But, suspecting the kind of horrors to come, the foreigners had already packed their bags. An experienced and well-equipped force of French, Belgian, and Italian troops rushed in to evacuate the foreigners, and then departed. U.S. Marines dispatched to the area stopped in neighboring Burundi once it was clear that U.S. citizens would be evacuated without their help. The first impression of international indifference to the fate of Rwandans was confirmed soon after, when the Belgians began...
arranging for the withdrawal of their troops from the U.N. peacekeeping force. Ten of these soldiers, a contingent different from those of the evacuation expedition, had been slain and, as the organizers of the violence had anticipated, the Belgian government did not want to risk any further casualties.

Against the backdrop of Rwandan military acquiescence and foreign flight, Bagosora and his circle moved to recruit administrators and political leaders for the killing campaign. They expected and received support from politicians, prefects and burgomasters associated with Habyarimana’s party, but to expand the killing campaign more broadly they needed the collaboration also of administrators and local leaders from the other parties, those that were predominant in central and southern Rwanda. Adherents of these parties, stunned by the murder of their Hutu colleagues in the first days, were ready to oppose soldiers and militia whom they believed to be fighting to restore exclusive control to Habyarimana’s party. The new authorities hurried to dispel these concerns in a meeting of prefects on April 11 and through radio appeals for Hutu unity broadcast by the minister of defense and influential politicians on April 12. They stressed that partisan interests must be put aside in the battle against the common enemy, the Tutsi.

By April 15, it was clear that the U.N. Security Council would not order the peacekeepers to try to stop the violence and might even withdraw them completely. By this date, the organizers of the genocide had also expanded their ranks considerably and were strong enough to remove opponents and impose compliance with the killing campaign. On April 16 and 17, they replaced the military chief of the staff and the prefects best known for opposing the killings. One prefect was later imprisoned and executed and the other was murdered with his family. Three burgomasters and a number of other officials who sought to stop the killings were also slain, either by mid-April or shortly after. The leaders of the genocide held meetings in the center and south of the country to push hesitant local administrators into collaboration. At the same time, they sent assailants from areas where slaughter was well under way into those central and southern communes where people had refused to kill and they used the radio to ridicule and threaten administrators and local political leaders who had been preaching calm.

The Structure

By April 20, two weeks after the plane crash, the organizers of the genocide had substantial, although not yet complete, control of the highly centralized state. The administration continued to function remarkably well despite the disruptions in communication and transport caused by the war. Orders from the prime minister were handed down to the prefect, who passed them on to the burgomasters, who called local meetings throughout the communes where they read the instructions to the population. The same language echoed from north to south and from east to west, calling for “self-defense” against “accomplices.” Slaughter was known as “work” and machetes and firearms were described as “tools.” Reports on the situation at the local level and minutes of meetings held by people out on the hills were handed back up through the administrative channels.

By appropriating the well-established hierarchies of the military, administrative and political systems, leaders of the genocide were able to exterminate Tutsi with astonishing speed and thoroughness. Soldiers, National Police (gendarmes), former soldiers, and communal police played a larger part in the slaughter than is generally realized. In addition to leading the first killings in the capital and in other urban centers, soldiers and National Police directed all the
major massacres throughout the country. Although usually few in number at sites of massive killing, their tactical knowledge and their use of the weapons of war, including grenades, machine guns, and even mortars, contributed significantly to the death tolls in these massacres. It was only after the military had launched attacks with devastating effect on masses of unarmed Tutsi that civilian assailants, armed with such weapons as machetes, hammers, and clubs, finished the slaughter. In addition, the military encouraged and, when faced with reluctance to act, compelled both ordinary citizens and local administrators to participate in attacks, even travelling the back roads and stopping at small marketplaces to deliver the message.

The administrators were charged with driving Tutsi from their homes and gathering them at places of slaughter, with assembling the masses of assailants, providing transportation and “tools” for the “work,” arranging for the disposal of the corpses, and directing the division of looted property and confiscated land. They transformed administrative practices, benign in themselves, such as obligatory labor for the common good (umuganda) or the use of security patrols, into mechanisms for executing the genocide.

The political leaders provided the militia for attacks, dispatching them around the country as needed. They prodded reluctant administrators and military officers to greater activity, sometimes using party supporters to harass or threaten those who hesitated to participate. Political leaders also incited Hutu to kill in more direct language than that used by officials who often spoke in ambiguous and allusive terms.

Even as leaders of the genocide were exploiting existing hierarchies, they also created a fourth channel dedicated to implementing the “civilian self-defense” program. The system was formalized only late in May, but such key elements as the recruitment of participants by administrators and the reliance on former soldiers to command them were in use during the massacres of early April. With headquarters in Bagosora’s own office, the “civilian self-defense” hierarchy was staffed largely by retired officers-cum-politicians, much like Bagosora himself.

Through these hierarchies, organizers carried out a killing campaign, a perversion of previous campaigns that called on citizens and officials alike to contribute extra efforts for some public good. The urgency and importance of the objective was deemed to justify departing from usual bureaucratic practice. Zeal for killing took on more significance than formal rank: subordinates could prevail over their superiors, in both civilian and military spheres, if they showed greater commitment to the genocide. This flexibility encouraged ambition and initiative among those willing to trade human lives for personal advantage. Actors could also bypass the usual limits set by law or administrative practice, with politicians or soldiers speaking for government officials, militia approving candidates for administrative position, and medical assistants calling in military strikes.

These practices, which promoted rapid and effective execution of the killing campaign, now complicate the task of assessing responsibility for crimes. All who seek accountability for the genocide must take care to ensure that officials of lesser rank but greater power not escape blame for crimes that are wrongly imputed to their superiors alone.
Strategies of Slaughter

In the first days of killing in Kigali, assailants sought out and murdered targeted individuals and also went systematically from house to house in certain neighborhoods, killing Tutsi and Hutu opposed to Habyarimana. Administrative officials, like the prefect of the city of Kigali, ordered local people to establish barriers to catch Tutsi trying to flee and to organize search patrols to discover those trying to hide.

By the middle of the first week of the genocide, organizers began implementing a different strategy: driving Tutsi out of their homes to government offices, churches, schools or other public sites, where they would subsequently be massacred in large-scale operations.

Towards the end of April, authorities declared a campaign of “pacification,” which meant not an end to killing, but greater control over killing. Sensitive to criticism from abroad—muted though it was—authorities ended most large-scale massacres. They also sought to rein in assailants who were abusing their license to kill, such as by slaying Hutu with whom they had disputes or who were allowing Tutsi to escape injury in return for money, sexual favors or other considerations. They ordered militia and other citizens to bring suspects to officials for investigation and then murder instead of simply killing them where they found them. Authorities used “pacification” also as a tactic to lure Tutsi out of hiding to be killed.

By mid-May, the authorities ordered the final phase, that of tracking down the last surviving Tutsi. They sought to exterminate both those who had hidden successfully and those who had been spared thus far—like women and children—or protected by their status in the community, like priests and medical workers. As the RPF advanced through the country, assailants also hurried to eliminate any survivors who might be able to testify about the slaughter.

Throughout the genocide, Tutsi women were often raped, tortured and mutilated before they were murdered.

Popular Participation

The density of the administrative and political hierarchies, characteristic of Rwanda for many years, gave genocidal leaders rapid and easy access to the population, but did not guarantee mass participation in the slaughter. As authorities played on popular fears and greed, some people picked up their machetes and came readily. Others came more slowly and some refused to come, even at the risk of their lives.

Both on the radio and through public meetings, authorities worked to make the long-decried threat of RPF infiltration concrete and immediate. Throughout the country they disseminated detailed false information, such as reports that Tutsi had hidden firearms in the bushes behind the Kibungo cathedral, or that they had prepared maps showing fields to be taken from Hutu in Butare, or that they had killed local administrative officials in Nyakizu. Authorities counted on such news to convince Hutu that their Tutsi neighbors were dangerous agents of the RPF who had to be eliminated. Community leaders and even clergy assured Hutu that they were justified in attacking Tutsi as a measure of “self-defense.”

Authorities offered tangible incentives to participants. They delivered food, drink, and other intoxicants, parts of military uniforms and small payments in cash to hungry, jobless young
men. They encouraged cultivators to pillage farm animals, crops, and such building materials as doors, windows and roofs. Even more important in this land-hungry society, they promised cultivators the fields left vacant by Tutsi victims. To entrepreneurs and members of the local elite, they granted houses, vehicles, control of a small business, or such rare goods as television sets or computers.

Many poor young men responded readily to the promise of rewards. Of the nearly 60 percent of Rwandans under the age of twenty, tens of thousands had little hope of obtaining the land needed to establish their own households or the jobs necessary to provide for a family. Such young men, including many displaced by the war and living in camps near the capital provided many of the early recruits to the Interahamwe, trained in the months before and in the days immediately after the genocide began. Refugees from Burundi, in flight from the Tutsi-dominated army of Burundi, had also received military training in their camps and readily attacked Rwandan Tutsi after April 6.

In some regions, particularly those where Habyarimana's supporters were strongest, authorities needed to do little more than give the signal for Hutu to begin attacking Tutsi. In other areas, such as central and southern Rwanda, where Tutsi were numerous and well integrated and where Habyarimana's party had little standing, many Hutu initially refused to attack Tutsi and joined with them in fighting off assailants. Only when military and civilian authorities resorted to public criticism and harassment, fines, destruction of property, injury, and threat of death did these Hutu give up their open opposition to the genocide.

In some places, authorities apparently deliberately drew hesitant Hutu into increasingly more violent behavior, first encouraging them to pillage, then to destroy homes, then to kill the occupants of the homes. Soldiers and police sometimes threatened to punish Hutu who wanted only to pillage and not to harm Tutsi. Authorities first incited attacks on the most obvious targets—men who had acknowledged or could be easily supposed to have ties with the RPF—and only later insisted on the slaughter of women, children, the elderly, and others generally regarded as apolitical.

Just as communities were readier to kill some Tutsi than others, so individual Hutu would agree to attack one person and not another or, in an extension of the same logic, would attack one person and save another. Hutu who protected Tutsi ordinarily helped those to whom they were linked by the ties of family, friendship, or obligation for past assistance, but sometimes they also saved the lives of strangers. Even such persons as Colonel Bagosora and leading figures of the interim government saved the lives of Tutsi close to them, testimony to the extent to which ties between Hutu and Tutsi survived even the most persistent efforts to eradicate them. In some cases, former officials now seek credit for saving the lives of a few favored Tutsi, as if having done so reduced their responsibility for directing or permitting the slaying of so many others.

The Masquerade of Legitimacy

Many Rwandans say that they killed because authorities told them to kill. Such statements reflect less a national predisposition to obey orders, as is sometimes said, than a recognition that the "moral authority" of the state swayed them to commit crimes that would otherwise have been unthinkable.
Itself the chief actor in a masquerade of legitimacy, the interim government gave its officials and citizens the cover of “legitimate” orders to hide from themselves and others the evil they were doing. Administrators broke the genocide down into a series of discrete tasks which they executed without consideration of the ultimate objective of the work. Cultivators turned out for the long-standing practice of communal labor although they knew that they were to cut down people as well as the brush in which they found them. Priests announced public meetings without consideration of the message to be delivered there. Businessmen contributed money to the “self-defense” fund established by the government as they had contributed to similar collections in the past, even though the money was to buy “refreshments” for the militia and fuel to transport them to their places of “work.”

As part of the “pacification” effort in late April, authorities ordered churches, schools, hospitals, and shops to resume their functions, ignoring the absence of Tutsi who used to participate in these various activities. They presumed to create a veneer of “normalcy” in a world where untold numbers of people were violating the laws, religious teachings, and cultural norms that they had always lived by.

**Survival Tactics**

Many Tutsi and those Hutu associated with them fought to save their lives. We know of their heroic resistance, usually armed only with sticks and stones, at such places as the hills of Bisesero, the swamps of Bugesera, and the church at Cyahinda, but we have no way of knowing about the countless small encounters where targeted people struggled to defend themselves and their families in their homes, on dusty paths, and in the fields of sorghum.

Some tens of thousands fled to neighboring countries and others hid within Rwanda, in the ceilings of houses, in holes in the ground, in the forest, in the swamps. Some bought their lives once, others paid repeatedly for their safety over a period of weeks, either with money or with sexual services.

Many Tutsi who are alive survived because of the action of Hutu, whether a single act of courage from a stranger or the delivery of food and protection over many weeks by friends or family members.

**The End of Hutu Power**

When organizers of the genocide gained control of the state, they suppressed dissent but did not extinguish it. In May and June, when the interim government was weakened by military losses and by the first signs of international disapproval, Hutu in one community after another began refusing to undertake further searches or to participate in guarding barriers. As the majority of participants withdrew, they left execution of the genocide in the hands of smaller, more zealous groups of assailants, who continued to hunt and kill in hopes of profit or because they were committed to exterminating the last Tutsi.

With the campaign against Tutsi no longer a strong bond, Hutu of different areas and parties once more began to fight against each other. Some revived old battles. Others competed in new rivalries over power or over goods and property taken from Tutsi. Interahamwe and other young men who had been authorized to terrorize Tutsi began robbing, raping, and killing Hutu as the number of Tutsi declined.
Hutu used the discourse of the genocide in conflicts with other Hutu: they accused each other of being Tutsi, of having hidden Tutsi, or of supporting the RPF. Just as some charged enemies with too great lenience towards Tutsi at this time, so others would charge their opponents with violence against Tutsi once the genocide was ended.

The Rwandan Patriotic Front

In defeating the interim government and its army, the RPF ended the genocide. At the same time, its troops committed grave violations of international humanitarian law by attacking and killing unarmed civilians. Unlike the genocidal authorities who undertook a complex campaign involving all the machinery of the state and aiming to involve all Hutu citizens, the RPF ran a straightforward military campaign where civilians generally provided only information or support services.

The RPF permitted its soldiers to kill persons whom they took to be Interahamwe or other supposed participants in the genocide. They killed some in the course of their military advance, but they executed most in the days and weeks after combat had finished. They selected the victims from among civilians grouped in camps, sometimes relying on accusations by survivors, sometimes on their own interrogations. They executed some persons apparently because they were linked with parties opposed to the RPF or showed potential for becoming political leaders rather than because they were thought guilty of involvement in the genocide.

In a number of places, such as in the communes of Ntyazo, Mukingi and Runda, RPF soldiers massacred unarmed civilians, many of them women and children, who had assembled for a meeting on their orders. The people were told to come to receive food or to be given instructions or to gather before being transported to another site. The RPF soldiers also massacred several hundred people in the Byumba stadium in mid-April.

In a series of raids in Kigali in early April, RPF soldiers killed dozens of political and military leaders, many of them past government employees or persons close to Habyarimana’s political party. They killed family members, including women and children, in a number of these cases.

The RPF was commonly acknowledged by military experts to be a highly disciplined force, with clear lines of command and adequate communication. Although it may have become less disciplined during the months of the genocide due to the incorporation of new recruits, RPF commanding officers like General Paul Kagame maintained the authority necessary to ensure compliance with their orders. The crimes committed by RPF soldiers were so systematic and widespread and took place over so long a period of time that commanding officers must have been aware of them. Even if they did not specifically order these practices, in most cases they did not halt them and punish those responsible.

In early November 1994, the RPF reported that it had arrested twenty-five soldiers for capital crimes, eight of them accused of killing civilians between June and August 1994 and by the end of the year military prosecutors had supposedly completed investigations in some twenty such cases. One major, one corporal and four soldiers indicted for these crimes were tried and convicted in 1997 and 1998. The major was sentenced to life in prison and the others to imprisonment for terms ranging from two to five years.
After some early but limited reports of killings by the RPF, the first substantial charges against RPF forces were made by Robert Gersony, a consultant to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. After interviewing hundreds of Rwandans inside and outside the country in July and August 1994, he concluded that the RPF had engaged in widespread and systematic slaughter of unarmed civilians. In September 1994, the U.N., in agreement with the U.S. and perhaps others, agreed to suppress the report but demanded that the RPF halt the killings. The number of killings declined markedly after September in the face of this international pressure.

Numbers

Establishing a reliable toll of those killed in the genocide and its aftermath is important to counter denials, exaggerations, and lies. The necessary data have not been gathered but speculation about death tolls continues anyway, usually informed more by emotion than by fact. In July 1998, the Rwandan government announced plans for a census of genocide survivors.

Even the size of the Tutsi population in Rwanda on April 6, 1994 is debated. Demographer William Seltzer, who has studied the data, estimates the number as 657,000, a figure extrapolated from 1991 census data. Some critics assert that the number of Tutsi was underreported in that census and in the prior census of 1978 because the Habyarimana government wanted to minimize the importance of Tutsi in the population. Although frequently said, no documentation has been presented to support this allegation. The 1991 data show Tutsi as forming 8.4 percent of the total population. This figure seems to accord with extrapolations from the generally accepted census data of 1952, taking into account the population loss due to death and flight during the 1960s and the birth rate, which was lower for Tutsi than for Hutu.

Whether or not census data were purposely altered to reduce the number of Tutsi, the figures underestimated the Tutsi population because an undetermined number of Tutsi arranged to register as Hutu in order to avoid discrimination and harassment. Although many Rwandans know of such cases, there is at present no basis for estimating how many persons they represented.

Deliberate misrepresentation of ethnicity complicates assessing how many of the victims were actually Tutsi. At a reburial ceremony for a family slain during the genocide, the only two survivors, both priests, talked separately with our researchers. One maintained that his family was Tutsi but claimed to be Hutu while the other declared that the family was really Hutu, but was said to be Tutsi by neighbors who coveted their wealth. In addition to such cases of questionable identity, there are Hutu who were killed because they looked like Tutsi.

A U.N. expert evaluating population loss in Rwanda estimated that 800,000 Rwandans had died between April and July 1994, but this figure included those who had died from causes other than the genocide. Seltzer estimated the number of persons killed in the genocide as at least one half million. Professor Gérard Prunier estimated that 130,000 Tutsi were alive in July, but his figures did not include those in Zaire or Tanzania, perhaps another 20,000. If this number of 150,000 survivors is subtracted from an estimated population of 657,000 Tutsi, this leaves 507,000 Tutsi killed, close to Seltzer's minimum assessment, and representing the annihilation of about 77 percent of the population registered as Tutsi. Using other data from Butare prefecture, our researchers computed an estimated loss of 75 percent of the Tutsi
population in that prefecture. Based on these preliminary data, we would conclude that at least half a million persons were killed in the genocide, a loss that represented about three quarters of the Tutsi population of Rwanda.

Estimates of persons killed at any one site vary widely, often by a factor of ten or more, perhaps because most have been made by untrained observers. At the parish of Rukara, for example, estimates ranged from 500 to 5,000. In 1995, a Rwandan government commission set the death toll at the Murambi Technical School in Gikongoro at some 20,000, a figure which some have since raised to 70,000, although the bodies exhumed there at the time of the 1996 commemoration of the genocide numbered in the range of 5,000. As many as 50,000 have been said to have perished at Bisesero, but a recent list of persons killed at that site totaled just over 5,100 names. Similarly, some claim that 35,000 were slain in the Nyamata church, which appears to have a capacity of some 3,000.

Establishing the number of persons killed in the genocide will not help much in assessing the number of people involved in their execution. The circumstances of the crimes varied enormously: there were professional soldiers armed with machine guns or grenade-launchers firing into crowds, each of whom may have killed dozens, if not hundreds, of people, and there were groups of assailants armed with clubs or sharpened pieces of bamboo who jointly killed a single person. There can be no simple formula to assess how many killers murdered one victim or how many victims were slain by one killer.

The first estimate of numbers slain by the RPF was made by Gersony in his 1994 report. He concluded that the RPF killed between 25,000 and 45,000 persons in the months of April to August 1994. Seth Sendashonga, former minister of the interior and early member of the RPF, estimated that the RPF killed some 60,000 people between April 1994 and August 1995, with more than half killed in the first four months of that period. It seems likely, although not certain, that these estimates include persons killed in the course of combat, both civilians and militia.

Although our research indicates considerable killing of civilians by RPF forces during this period, including massacres and executions, we have too little data to confirm or revise these estimates. In any case, they appear more likely to be accurate than claims that the RPF killed hundreds of thousands of people from April to August 1994.
International Responsibility

The Rwandans who organized and executed the genocide must bear full responsibility for it. But genocide anywhere implicates everyone. To the extent that governments and peoples elsewhere failed to prevent and halt this killing campaign, they all share in the shame of the crime. In addition, the U.N. staff as well as the three foreign governments principally involved in Rwanda bear added responsibility: the U.N. staff for having failed to provide adequate information and guidance to members of the Security Council; Belgium, for having withdrawn its troops precipitately and for having championed total withdrawal of the U.N. force; the U.S. for having put saving money ahead of saving lives and for slowing the sending of a relief force; and France, for having continued its support of a government engaged in genocide. In contrast to the inaction of the major actors, some non-permanent members of the Security Council with no traditional ties with Rwanda undertook to push for a U.N. force to protect Tutsi from extermination. But all members of the Security Council brought discredit on the U.N. by permitting the representative of a genocidal government to continue sitting in the Security Council, a council supposedly committed to peace.

Tolerating Discrimination and Violence

From 1990 on, influential donors of international aid pressed Habyarimana for political and economic reforms. But, generally satisfied with the stability of his government, they overlooked the systematic discrimination against Tutsi which violated the very principles that they were urging him to respect. They discussed but did not insist on eliminating identity cards that showed ethnic affiliation, cards that served as death warrants for many Tutsi in 1994.

When the Rwandan government began massacring Tutsi in 1990, crimes that were solidly documented by local and international human rights groups and by a special rapporteur for the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, some donors protested. At one point, the Belgian government went so far as to recall its ambassador briefly. But none openly challenged Rwandan explanations that the killings were spontaneous and uncontrollable and none used its influence to see that the guilty were brought to justice.

In addition, the lack of international response to the 1993 massacres in Burundi permitted Rwandan extremists to expect that they too could slaughter people in large numbers without consequence.

Economies and Peacekeeping

In September 1993, U.N. staff and member states wanted a successful peacekeeping operation to offset the failure in Somalia. They believed that Rwanda promised such success because both parties to the conflict had requested the U.N. presence and because the agreement between them, hammered out in a year of negotiation, seemed to have resolved all major issues.

Faced with escalating costs for peacekeeping operations, the U.N. staff and members wanted not just success, but success at low cost. Demands for economy, loudly voiced by the U.S. and others, led to the establishment of a force only one third the size of that originally recommended and with a mandate that was also scaled down from that specified by the peace accords. Peacekeeping staff had proposed a small human rights division, which might have
tracked growing hostility against Tutsi, but no money was available for this service and the idea was dropped.

Belgium, too, wanted to save money. Although it felt concerned enough about Rwanda to contribute troops to the force, it felt too poor to contribute the full battalion of 800 requested and agreed to send only half that number. Troops from other countries that were less well trained and less well armed filled the remaining places, producing a force that was weaker than it would have been with a full Belgian battalion.

As preparations for further conflict grew in February 1994, the Belgians were sufficiently worried by the deteriorating situation to ask for a stronger mandate, but they were rebuffed by the U.S. and the United Kingdom, which refused to support any measure that might add to the cost of the operation.

The concern for economy prevailed even after massive slaughter had taken place. When a second peacekeeping operation was being mounted in May and June, U.N. member states were slow to contribute equipment needed for the troops. The U.S. government was rightly ridiculed for requiring seven weeks to negotiate the lease for armored personnel carriers, but other members did not do much better. The U.K., for example, provided only fifty trucks.

**Warnings, Information and the U.N. Staff**

A January 11, 1994 telegram from General Roméo Dallaire, commander of the U.N. peacekeeping force, to his superiors was only one, if now the most famous, warning of massive slaughter being prepared in Rwanda. From November 1993 to April 1994, there were dozens of other signals, including an early December letter to Dallaire from high-ranking military officers warning of planned massacres; a press release by a bishop declaring that guns were being distributed to civilians; reports by intelligence agents of secret meetings to coordinate attacks on Tutsi, opponents of Hutu Power and U.N. peacekeepers; and public incitations to murder in the press and on the radio. Foreign observers did not track every indicator, but representatives of Belgium, France, and the U.S. were well-informed about most of them. In January, an analyst of U.S. 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 authorities already feared a genocide. France, the power most closely linked to Habyarimana, presumably knew at least as much as the other two.

In the early months of 1994, Dallaire repeatedly requested a stronger mandate, more troops and more materiel. The secretariat staff, perhaps anxious to avoid displeasing such major powers as the U.S., failed to convey to the council the gravity of warnings of crisis and the urgency of Dallaire’s requests. The paucity of information meant little to the U.S. and France, which were well-informed in any case, but it led other council members with no sources of information in Rwanda to misjudge the gravity of the crisis. Instead of strengthening the mandate and sending reinforcements, the Security Council made only small changes in the rate of troop deployment, measures too limited to affect the development of the situation.

When the violence began, the secretary-general’s special representative, Roger Booh-Booh minimized both the extent and the organized nature of the slayings. Meanwhile Dallaire was fairly shouting the need for immediate and decisive action. Given the two points of view, the staff generally presented the more reassuring assessment to council members.
By late April, representatives of the Czech Republic, Spain, New Zealand and Argentina sought information beyond that provided by the secretariat and became convinced that the slaughter was a genocide that must be stopped. They pushed the Security Council to support a new peacekeeping operation with a stronger mandate to protect civilians. Had these non-permanent members been fully informed earlier—such as on January 11—they might have found their voices in time to have called for firm measures to avert the violence.

Obfuscation and Misunderstanding

From the first hours after the killings began, U.S., Belgian, and French policymakers knew that Tutsi were being slain because they were Tutsi. Dallaire delivered that same information in a telegram to U.N. headquarters on April 8. Early accounts by journalists on the spot also depicted systematic, widespread killings on an ethnic basis. The simultaneous selective slaughter of Hutu opposed to Hutu Power complicated the situation but did not change the genocidal nature of attacks on Tutsi and, in any case, killings of Hutu diminished markedly after the first days. Given the pattern of killings, given previous massacres of Tutsi, given the propaganda demanding their extermination, given the known political positions of the persons heading the interim government, informed observers must have seen that they were facing a genocide.

They knew, but they did not say. The U.S. may have been the only government to caution its officials in writing to avoid the word “genocide,” but diplomats and politicians of other countries as well as staff of the U.N. also shunned the term. Some may have done so as part of their effort at neutrality, but others surely avoided the word because of the moral and legal imperatives attached to it.

Instead of denouncing the evil and explaining to the public what had to be done to end it, national and international leaders stressed the “confusing” nature of the situation, the “chaos” and the “anarchy.” After a first resolution that spoke fairly clearly about the conflict, the Security Council issued statements for several weeks that left both the nature of the violence and the identity of its perpetrators unclear. Secretary-General Boutros Ghali spoke of the genocide as if it were a natural disaster and depicted Rwandans as a people “fallen into calamitous circumstances.”

Some policymakers could not get beyond the old cliches, like one official of the U.S. National Security Council who described the genocide as “tribal killings,” an explanation echoed by President Bill Clinton in June 1998 when he talked of “tribal resentments” as the source of troubles in Rwanda. In a similar vein, an adviser to French President François Mitterrand suggested that brutal slaughter was a usual practice among Africans and could not be easily eradicated. Other diplomats, more up to date, promoted the idea of a “failed state,” ignoring all indications that the Rwandan state was all too successful in doing what its leaders intended. They seemed unable to dissociate Rwanda from Somalia, although the two cases had few points of comparison beyond their common location on the African continent. Most journalists simply exploited the horror and made no effort to go beyond the easy explanations. A leading columnist for the New York Times even managed on April 15, 1994 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.”
Genocide and War

From the start, the genocide was intertwined with the war and the war complicated efforts to halt the extermination campaign. The organizers used the slaughter of Tutsi to draw the RPF into renewed combat. Later, in the face of RPF advances, they demanded a cease-fire as a prerequisite for ending the genocide. The RPF resumed the war in part to stop the massacres and insisted on an end to the genocide as a condition for a cease-fire. An early initiative by the RPF to halt the genocide failed at least in part because combat had resumed. RPF representatives proposed a joint operation against the killers with Rwandan army troops not involved in the slaughter and with U.N. peacekeepers, but even Rwandan soldiers previously opposed to Habyarimana would not switch sides during a war and U.N. troops could not move because there was no longer a peace to keep. At about this time, France and Belgium, and perhaps the United States, briefly discussed using troops of the evacuation force to halt the killings, but they dropped the idea. The RPF, suspicious of French intentions, warned that it would attack soldiers who stayed longer than was necessary to evacuate foreigners and Rwandan government soldiers, who had already proved that they would kill Belgian troops, were presumed ready to kill more. Whether these risks provided the real reason or merely a pretext for their rapid departure, the French and Belgian troops boarded their planes and flew away. According to Dallaire, the evacuation force left him and the peacekeepers “on the tarmac, with the bullets flying and the bodies piling up” around them.

Foreign policymakers treated the genocide as a tragic byproduct of the war rather than as an evil to be attacked directly. 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. To increase the chance of success, they sought to maintain a posture of neutrality between the parties, which meant not condemning the genocide. This was true for the staff of the U.N. as well. Dallaire was instructed to concentrate on getting a cease-fire even though he believed that objective was unattainable and clearly secondary to ending the killings. But diplomatic hopes of halting the genocide by ending the war could not produce results so long as the organizers of the slaughter saw the genocide as a way of winning the war.

Some policymakers, particularly in France and in Belgium, were wedded to the notion that an ethnic majority was necessarily the same as a democratic majority. They could not bring themselves to condemn the genocide because they feared increasing the likelihood of an RPF victory and the subsequent establishment of a government dominated by the minority.

Military Action and Inaction

Of approximately 7,000 Rwandan army forces in the vicinity of the capital on the day that the slaughter was launched, some 1,500 to 2,000 elite troops—the Presidential Guard plus soldiers of the paracommando and reconnaissance units—backed by some 2,000 militia carried out most of the killings of civilians. When the RPF renewed hostilities with the Rwandan army late that day, their 1,000 or so soldiers drew some of the Rwandan troops away from attacks on civilians, but not enough to halt the slaughter. Three days later, when the RPF proposed assembling a force with Rwandan army soldiers opposed to the attacks and U.N. peacekeepers, they believed 900 soldiers would suffice to end the killing of civilians. The commander of the Belgian contingent of the peacekeepers concluded that the U.N. troops together with the evacuation troops present from April 9 to April 15 would have been strong enough to halt the violence. Dallaire too agreed that a joint force could have stopped the killers.
and he was ready to lead the peacekeeping soldiers themselves into action, if he received additional troops and materiel.

The number of troops needed to restore order grew as participants from more areas were drawn into the killing campaign, but, according to Dallaire and other military experts, 5,000 experienced soldiers could have ended the genocide even in the later weeks.

Because the operation of the genocide was highly centralized, stopping the killing in Kigali would have quickly quelled violence elsewhere in the country. Any serious challenge from foreign troops would have signaled that the interim government was illegitimate in the eyes of the international community and unlikely to receive the support it would need to survive, far less prosper. This would have discouraged Rwandans from joining the killing campaign and might even have stimulated some opponents of the genocide to come together to oppose it.

But instead of using the peacekeeping troops to stop the genocide, the U.N. sought primarily to protect its soldiers from harm. Dallaire was ordered to make avoiding risk to soldiers the priority, not saving the lives of Rwandans. To do so, he regrouped his troops, leaving exposed the Rwandans who had sought shelter in certain outposts under U.N. protection. In the most dramatic case—for which responsibility may belong to commanding officers in Belgium as much as to Dallaire—nearly one hundred Belgian peacekeepers abandoned some two thousand unarmed civilians, leaving them defenseless against attacks by militia and military. As the Belgians went out one gate, the assailants came in the other. More than a thousand Rwandans died there or in flight, trying to reach another U.N. post.

The next day and for several days after that, the Security Council debated the complete withdrawal of the peacekeeping operation, a decision which would have abandoned some 30,000 unarmed civilians then in U.N. posts, just as the others had been deserted the day before. The Belgians promoted this idea aggressively outside the council while the U.S. led the forces in its favor at the council table. A member of the secretariat even suggested that protection of civilians might not be an appropriate activity for a peacekeeping operation. But Nigeria, other council members, and finally the secretary-general insisted that the lives of “innocent civilians of Rwanda” must be taken into account. They delayed the decision long enough for U.S. policymakers and others to reconsider their position.

On April 21, the Security Council withdrew most of the U.N. troops and left only a few hundred peacekeepers to protect civilians already directly under the U.N. flag. Eight days later, after refugees began pouring out of Rwanda in numbers massive enough to threaten stability in the entire region, the secretary-general and Security Council acknowledged that the war and the genocide could be addressed separately and that they should try to halt the killings.

When the U.N. began discussing sending a new force with a stronger mandate to protect Tutsi civilians, the RPF categorically opposed the move, fearing that such a force might intervene in the war and rob them of a victory that they now were confident of achieving. In an April 29 press release, they declared that a new military force would serve no purpose because “the genocide is almost completed” and most Tutsi were already dead or had fled. At the time some 100,000 Tutsi were alive and awaiting rescue. The RPF certainly knew of the 60,000 in Kigali, Kabgayi and Cyangugu and of untold thousands of others clustered at Bisesero or in Bugesera and scattered throughout Butare, where large scale killing had begun only nine days before. RPF opposition to a new U.N. force complicated and slowed the effort to mount a
rescue operation for Tutsi civilians. RPF troops had proved their effectiveness and peacekeeping staff and member states preferred not to risk direct combat with them. Whether the RPF would in fact have fired on a U.N. force seems unlikely: it would later make similar threats against the French but in the end reached an accommodation with them.

Discussion about the size, mandate, and strategy for a new peacekeeping force continued until May 17, in part because of U.S. rigidity in applying its new standards for approval of peacekeeping operations, in part because of hesitations sparked by RPF opposition to any intervention. Manoeuvering by nations supplying troops and those supplying equipment consumed another two months, so that the second peacekeeping force landed only after the RPF had defeated the genocidal government. The slowness and ineptness of national and international bureaucracies in mounting the operation was not unusual, nor was the attempt by participating nations to get the most or give the least possible. What was extraordinary was that such behavior continued to be acceptable in the context of genocide, by then openly acknowledged by national and international leaders.

In early April some French authorities considered using the soldiers of their evacuation force to back the Rwandan army against the RPF but decided not to do so. In mid-June they undertook Operation Turquoise purportedly to save lives but also to preserve “territory and legitimacy” for the interim government. French soldiers went to rescue Tutsi in southwestern Rwanda, to the general acclaim of press and public. Others who went to the northwest, ready to impede the RPF advance and to protect the interim government, were hailed by RTLM but drew little foreign notice. Some French soldiers were slow to act to save Tutsi, as at Bisesero, apparently because they accepted the official Rwandan explanation that the Tutsi were RPF infiltrators. In the humanitarian zone which they established, French troops took some measures against the militia but they permitted genocidal officials to continue exercising their functions. Even after conceding a RPF victory, the French took no action against the genocidal authorities, permitting—and apparently in some cases assisting—them to flee the country.

Some 2,500 well-equipped elite French forces saved 15,000 to 17,000 lives. The barely 500 U.N. peacekeepers, poorly equipped and minimally supplied, protected about twice that number during the course of the genocide.

**Tolerating Genocide**

During the first weeks, when firm opposition to the genocide would have saved hundreds of thousands of lives, international leaders refused even simple actions which would have required no military force and no expense. Complicit in the refusal to speak the word “genocide,” they failed to denounce the evil, either jointly—which would have been most effective—or even singly, in outraged voices. Condemning evil, warning of its consequences, and naming the authorities apparently responsible for it would have made clear to Rwandans that these leaders were branded outlaws by the world community. Representatives of various governments and branches of the U.N. were in touch with Rwandan authorities and may have criticized the genocide, but they did so discreetly. Anthony Lake, national security adviser to the president, did issue a single appeal to Rwandans leading the genocide, calling on them by name to stop the killings. This innovative step, excellent in itself, was not followed by the others needed to give it real force.
In 1994, as for the preceding several years, Rwanda depended heavily on foreign financial support. Donor nations and the World Bank had withheld aid or threatened to do so to pressure the Rwandan government at several critical moments, including when it balked at signing the peace accords. All Rwandans in positions of responsibility understood the importance of foreign financial support: even burgomasters and communal councils were responsible for raising funds for local development projects by direct appeals to foreign governments. Any public condemnation of the genocide by the combined donors and the World Bank, particularly if accompanied by an explicit warning that they would never fund a genocidal government, would have shown Rwandans that the interim government was unlikely to succeed and made them less likely to implement its orders.

Radio RTLM, which had incited to genocide before April 6, communicated the orders for implementing the killings after that date. It instructed people to erect barriers and carry out searches; it named persons to be targeted and pointed out areas which should be attacked. Even the more restrained national radio, Radio Rwanda, broadcast directives important to the execution of the genocide. So important was this means of communication that officials admonished citizens to keep listening to the radio for instructions from the interim government. Broadcasts from these stations could have been interrupted without military action on the ground. The U.S., and perhaps other nations, considered jamming the radio broadcasts, but in the end rejected the measure.

After more than two weeks of massacres, most governments refused to admit Rwandan representatives sent to try to justify the genocide. Egypt and France, however, did receive them. The French action had great importance—because France was the strongest past supporter of the Rwandan government, because the delegation was received at the highest levels, and because one of the Rwandans was the effective head of the most virulently anti-Tutsi party in the country and clearly identified with the genocide. Two weeks later, when a Rwandan army officer came to Paris to request aid, a high-ranking official told him that France had just sent some communications equipment to Rwanda and that further aid could be forthcoming if Rwanda managed to end bad publicity about the slaughter.

Members of the Security Council gave more importance to maintaining diplomatic procedures than to condemning perpetrators of genocide. Rather than demand that the Rwandan representative resign from the council, they continued collaborating with him, thus treating his government as an honorable member of the world community. They did not insist that he absent himself from discussions about Rwanda or even that he observe the usual custom of abstaining from such discussions. They thus afforded him the chance to know and communicate to his government all proposals for U.N. action in Rwanda.

The Security Council also received the delegation meant to repair the Rwandan image abroad and heard it out with the customary courtesy. Faced with representatives just arrived from the capital of a genocidal government, most members of the council failed to denounce the slaughter clearly and forcefully. On an occasion of great symbolic importance, they once more put decorum before the obligation to speak as the conscience of the international community.

Although many genocidal killings were done with machetes, clubs, or other such weapons, military and militia used firearms to begin major massacres, to execute some persons, and to threaten opponents of the genocide into compliance. Rwandan soldiers also needed ammunition for the war against the RPF. 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.

During the genocide, the frequently ignored nonpermanent members of the Security Council in the end showed the strongest commitment to action. Nigeria made an effort in the first week to have the U.N. force strengthened and reminded others to think not just about the foreigners, relatively little at risk, but also about the Rwandans who were targeted by the violence. Later, the Czech Republic, Spain, Argentina, and New Zealand demanded that a second and stronger force be sent to Rwanda. As the Czech representative declared at one point, "Rwanda is not a priority for the Czech government, but as a human being I cannot sit here and do nothing."

Rwandans Listened

When foreign governments, the pope, and the secretary-general began to find their voices, Rwandans listened. The major business and financial leaders feared loss of international funds and high-ranking military officers feared interruption of the supply of arms and ammunition. Leading intellectuals debated strategies to counter international criticism and diplomats were sent on mission to persuade the world of a series of lies: that the killings were less serious than depicted abroad, that they were a spontaneous outburst of rage by a grief-stricken people, that they were justified by the need of "self-defense," and that—in any case—they had been halted.

After France insisted that Rwanda avoid further international criticism, Radio RTLM immediately broadcast the news that the French were ready with further aid, but on condition that there be "no more cadavers visible on the roads" and that people "no longer kill...while others stand around and laugh." After the U.S. communicated its disapproval, Rwandan authorities cared enough to send orders down to the hills that killings should be brought under control and removed out of sight. At a communal council meeting in remote Bwakira commune in the western prefecture of Kibuye, the burgomaster warned local leaders that satellites passing over head could track continued violence and that such displays would make re-establishment of good relations with the U.S. impossible.

International censure, timid and tardy though it was, prompted Rwandan authorities to restrict and hide killings. If instead of delaying and temporising, international leaders had immediately and unambiguously called the genocide by its awful name, they would have shattered the masquerade of legitimacy created by the interim government and forced Rwandans to confront the evil they were doing. Once Rwandans were faced with the consequences for themselves as individuals and for their nation of being declared international outlaws, they would have made choices in a different context. Perhaps those completely committed to exterminating Tutsi would have continued that course. But they had been few at the start and they would have found it more difficult to recruit others—or to retain their loyalty—once it was clear that the interim government could not succeed in the international arena.

For international condemnation to achieve maximum effect would have required complete and public support by all major international actors in Rwanda. These policymakers sadly lacked the breadth of vision to see that genocide in Rwanda was detrimental to the interests of their own nations and the world community as well as to the people of Rwanda. They placed
lesser diverse interests of their governments before the need to avert or end a genocide and so violated the pledge of “Never again” made nearly fifty years before.

The Future

Even as the international community resolves not to repeat the culpable passivity of 1994, it risks yet another kind of inertia: that of not acting until confronted by a catastrophe similar in kind and scale to that of the genocide. Circumstances have changed. Although some of the insurgents currently attacking the Rwandan government may intend to continue exterminating Tutsi, they lack the means to execute campaigns of the extraordinary scale and speed of the 1994 genocide. Rather they carry out limited but ongoing slaughter that deadens public concern simply by its very repetitiveness. Meanwhile the Rwandan government, eschewing any genocidal ideology, has nonetheless engaged in massive slaughter of civilians whom it counts as supporters of the enemy, both in Rwanda and in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

It is increasingly difficult to assess the nature and extent of violence and to identify leaders responsible for it. Faced with possible punishment for massacring large numbers of civilians, government officials have restricted access to troubled regions, interfered with efforts to gather testimony, destroyed evidence, and misrepresented events. Their opponents, the insurgent leaders, often remain in the shadows, with their programs and even their names unknown. Although their alleged crimes are generally more widely publicized, it is difficult to find the information needed to assess the truth of the charges against them.

International leaders, chasing the ever-moving goal of stability, ignore crimes against humanity and tolerate obstruction of efforts to reveal the full horror of ongoing abuses in the region. By failing to demand accountability for current crimes, they undermine the credibility of justice being meted out for the genocide and by tolerating impunity for present slaughter, they help perpetuate insecurity. As long as they decline to take a principled, public and effective stand against the killings of civilians, they offer neither model nor encouragement to forces—whether in government or in the insurgency—who themselves might oppose such violence. By accepting the “normality” of slaughter for political reasons, they may be contributing to the conditions that will produce the very repetition of genocide they have vowed to prevent.