“A PROBLEM FROM HELL”
America and the Age of Genocide

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Chapter 10

Rwanda: “Mostly in a Listening Mode”

“I’ll Never Be Tutsi Again”

On the evening of April 6, 1994, two years to the day after the beginning of the Bosnian war, Major General Romeo Dallaire was sitting on the couch in his bungalow residence in Kigali, Rwanda, watching CNN with his assistant, Brent Beardsley. Beardsley was preparing plans for a national sports day that would match Tutsi rebel soldiers against Hutu government soldiers in a soccer game. Dallaire, the commander of the UN mission, said, “You know, Brent, if the shit ever hit the fan here, none of this stuff would really matter, would it?” The next instant the phone rang. Rwandan president Juvénal Habyarimana’s Mystère Falcon jet, a gift from French president François Mitterrand, had just been shot down, with Habyarimana and Burundian president Cyprien Ntaryamira aboard. When Dallaire replaced the receiver, the phone rang again instantly. Indeed, the UN phones rang continually that night and the following day, averaging 100 phone calls per hour. Countless politicians, UN local staff, and ordinary Rwandans were calling out for help. The Canadian pair hopped in their UN jeep and dashed to Rwandan army headquarters, where a crisis meeting was under way. They never returned to their residence.
When Dallaire arrived at the Rwandan army barracks, he found Colonel Théoneste Bagosora, the army staff director, a hard-line Hutu, seated at the head of a U-shaped table. Appearing firmly in command, Bagosora announced that the president’s death meant the government had collapsed and the army needed to take charge. Dallaire interjected, arguing that in effect the king had died, but the government lived on. He reminded the officers assembled that Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana, a leading moderate, had become the lawful head of state. Many of the stone-faced officers gathered around the table began to snicker at the prospect.

Back in Washington, Kevin Aiston, the Rwanda desk officer at the State Department, knocked on the door of Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Prudence Bushnell and told her that the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi had been killed in a plane crash. “Oh, shit,” she said. “Are you sure?” In fact nobody was sure at first, but Dallaire’s forces supplied confirmation within the hour. The Rwandan authorities quickly announced a curfew, and Hutu militias and government soldiers erected roadblocks around the capital. Radio Mille Collines, the Hutu extremist radio station, named ethnic Tutsi, those they called Ironze, or “cockroaches,” the targets.

Bushnell drafted an urgent memo to Secretary of State Warren Christopher. She was concerned about a probable outbreak of killing in both Rwanda and its neighbor Burundi. The memo read: “If, as it appears, both Presidents have been killed, there is a strong likelihood that widespread violence could break out in either or both countries, particularly if it is confirmed that the plane was shot down. Our strategy is to appeal for calm in both countries, both through public statements and in other ways.” A few public statements proved to be virtually the only strategy that Washington would muster in the weeks ahead.

Lieutenant General Wesley Clark, who later commanded the NATO air war in Kosovo, was the director of strategic plans and policy for the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the Pentagon. On learning of the crash, Clark remembers, staff officers asked, “Is it Hutu and Tutsi or Hutu and Tutsi?” He frantically telephoned around the Pentagon for insight into the ethnic dimension of events in Rwanda. Unfortunately, Rwanda had never been of more than marginal concern to Washington’s most influential planners.

America’s best-informed Rwanda observer was not a government official but a private citizen, Alison Des Forges, a historian and a board member of Human Rights Watch, who lived in Buffalo, New York. Des Forges had been visiting Rwanda since 1963. She had received a Ph.D. from Yale in African history, specializing in Rwanda, and she could speak the Rwandan language, Kinyarwanda. Half an hour after the plane crash Des Forges got a phone call from a close friend in Kigali, the human-rights activist Monique Mujawamariya. Des Forges had been worried about Mujawamariya for weeks because the hate-propagating Radio Mille Collines had branded her a “bad patriot who deserves to die.” Mujawamariya had sent Human Rights Watch a chilling warning a week earlier: “For the last two weeks, all of Kigali has lived under the threat of an instantaneous, carefully prepared operation to eliminate all those who give trouble to President Habyarimana.”

Now Habyarimana was dead, and Mujawamariya knew instantly that the hard-line Hutu would use the incident as a pretext to begin mass killing. “This is it,” she told Des Forges on the phone. For the next twenty-four hours, Des Forges called her friend’s home every half hour. With each conversation Des Forges could hear the gunfire grow louder as the Hutu militia drew closer. Finally the gunmen entered Mujawamariya’s home. “I don’t want you to hear this,” Mujawamariya said softly. “Take care of my children.” She hung up the phone.

Mujawamariya’s instincts were correct. Within hours of Habyarimana’s death, armed Hutu took command of the streets of Kigali. Dallaire quickly grasped that supporters of a Hutu-Tutsi peace process were being targeted. Rwandans around the capital begged peacekeepers at the headquarters of the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) to come and get them. Dallaire was especially concerned about Prime Minister Uwilingiyimana, the reformer who had become the titular head of state. Just after dawn on April 7, five Ghanaian and ten Belgian peacekeepers arrived at the prime minister’s home in order to deliver her to Radio Rwanda, so that she could broadcast an emergency appeal for calm.

Joyce Leader, the second-in-command at the U.S. embassy, lived next door to Uwilingiyimana. She spent the early hours of the morning behind the steel-barred gates of her embassy-owned house as Hutu killers hunted and dispatched their first victims. Leader’s phone rang. Uwilingiyimana was on the other end. “Please hide me,” she begged. Leader had not known Uwilingiyimana well. “She was a prime minister,” the American recalls, “I was just a lowly diplomat.” But they had become acquainted through diplomatic functions, and once, when the electricity supply had cut out, Uwilingiyimana had come over to Leader’s home to do her hair. It was considered an emergency.
Well, there was horror and consternation at the deaths and, particularly, that they died badly. But there was also consternation that they did not defend themselves. They did not draw their pistols. I think it tended to confirm in the minds of those people who were following UN peace operations that there was a lot of romantic nonsense built into some of the ground rules and this was another reason to steer clear of UN peacekeeping operations. . . . I heard one person say, "Well, at least you know, our rangers died fighting in Somalia. These guys, with their blue berets, were slaughtered without getting a shot off."  

A fever descended upon Rwanda. Lists of victims had been prepared ahead of time. That much was clear from the Radio Mille Collines broadcasts, which read the names, addresses, and license plate numbers of Tutsi and moderate Hutu. "I listened to [it]," one survivor recalled, "because if you were mentioned over the airways, you were sure to be carted off a short time later by the Interahamwe. You knew you had to change your address at once."

In response to the initial killings by the Hutu government, Tutsi rebels of the Rwandan Patriotic Front, stationed in Kigali under the terms of a recent peace accord, surged out of their barracks and resumed their civil war against the Hutu regime. But under the cover of that war were early and strong indications that systematic genocide was taking place. From April 7 onward, the Hutu-controlled army, the gendarmerie, and the militias worked together to wipe out Rwanda's Tutsi. Many of the early Tutsi victims found themselves specifically, not spontaneously, pursued. A survivor of a massacre at a hospital in Kibuye reported that he heard a list read over a loudspeaker before the attack began. Another survivor said that once the killing was finished:

They sent people in among the bodies to verify who was dead. They said, "Here is the treasurer and his wife and daughter, but where is the younger child?" Or, "Here is Josue's father, his wife and mother, but where is he?" And then, in the days after, they tried to hunt you down if they thought you were still alive. They would shout out, "Hey Josue, we see you now!" to make you jump and try to run so that they could see you move and get you more easily.
In Kigali in the early days, the killers were well-equipped government soldiers and militiamen who relied mainly on automatic weapons and grenades. In the countryside, where the slaughter gradually spread, the killing was done at first with firearms, but as more Hutu joined in the weapons became increasingly unsophisticated—knives, machetes, spears, and the traditional masi, bulky clubs with nails protruding from them. Later screwdrivers, hammers, and bicycle handlebars were added to the arsenal. Killers often carried a weapon in one hand and a transistor radio piping murder commands in the other.

Tens of thousands of Tutsi fled their homes in panic and were snared and butchered at checkpoints. Little care was given to their disposal. Some were shoved into landfills. Human flesh rotted in the sunshine. In churches bodies mingled with scattered hosts. If the killers had taken the time to tend to sanitation, it would have slowed their efforts to “sanitize” their country.

Because the Hutu and Tutsi had lived intermingled and, in many instances, intermarried, the outbreak of killing forced Hutu and Tutsi friends and relatives into life-altering decisions about whether or not to desert their loved ones in order to save their own lives. At Mugonero Church in the town of Kibuye, two Hutu sisters, each married to a Tutsi husband, faced such a choice. One of the women decided to die with her husband. The other, who hoped to save the lives of her eleven children, chose to leave. Because her husband was Tutsi, her children had been categorized as Tutsi and thus were technically forbidden to live. But the machete-wielding Hutu attackers had assured the woman that the children would be permitted to depart safely if she agreed to accompany them. When the woman stepped out of the church, however, she saw the assailants butcher eight of the eleven children. The youngest, a child of three years old, pleaded for his life after seeing his brothers and sisters slain. “Please don’t kill me,” he said. “I’ll never be Tutsi again.” But the killers, unblinking, struck him down.

The Rwandan genocide would prove to be the fastest, most efficient killing spree of the twentieth century. In 100 days, some 800,000 Tutsi and politically moderate Hutu were murdered. The United States did almost nothing to try to stop it. Ahead of the April 6 plane crash, the United States ignored extensive early warnings about imminent mass violence. It denied Belgian requests to reinforce the peacekeeping mission. When the massacres started, not only did the Clinton administration not send troops to Rwanda to contest the slaughter, but it refused countless other options. President Clinton did not convene a single meeting of his senior foreign policy advisers to discuss U.S. options for Rwanda. His top aides rarely condemned the slaughter. The United States did not deploy its technical assets to jam Rwandan hate radio, and it did not lobby to have the genocidal Rwandan government’s ambassador expelled from the United Nations. Those steps that the United States did take had deadly repercussions. Washington demanded the withdrawal of UN peacekeepers from Rwanda and then refused to authorize the deployment of UN reinforcements. Remembering Somalia and hearing no American demands for intervention, President Clinton and his advisers knew that the military and political risks of involving the United States in a bloody conflict in central Africa were great, yet there were no costs to avoiding Rwanda altogether. Thus, the United States again stood on the sidelines.

**Warning**

**Background: The UN Deployment**

If ever there was a peacekeeper who believed wholeheartedly in the promise of humanitarian action, it was the forty-seven-year-old major general who commanded UN peacekeepers in Rwanda. A broad-shouldered French Canadian with deep-set, sky blue eyes, Dallaire has the thick, calloused hands of one brought up in a culture that prizes soldiering, service, and sacrifice. He saw the United Nations as the embodiment of all three.

Before his posting to Rwanda, Dallaire had served as the commandant of an army brigade that sent peacekeeping battalions to Cambodia and Bosnia, but he had never seen actual combat himself. “I was like a fireman who has never been to a fire, but has dreamed for years about how he would fare when the fire came,” Dallaire recalls. When, in the summer of 1993, he received the phone call from UN headquarters offering him the Rwanda posting, he was ecstatic. “It’s very difficult for somebody not in the service to understand what it means to get a command. He’d sell his mother to do it. I mean, when I got that call, it was answering the aim of my life,” he says. “It’s what you’ve been waiting for. It’s all you’ve been waiting for.”
Hard-line elements within the Rwandan government and Hutu extremists outside it found the Arusha agreement singularly unattractive. They saw themselves as having everything to lose, everything to fear, and nothing obvious to gain by complying with the terms of the peace deal. The Hutu had dominated the Rwandan political and economic scene for three decades, and they were afraid that the Tutsi, who had long been persecuted, would respond in kind if given the chance again to govern. The accord did not grant past killers amnesty for their misdeeds, so those Hutu leaders who had blood on their hands were concerned that integrating Tutsi political and military officials into the government would cost them their freedom or their lives. The Hutu memories of preindependence Rwanda had been passed down through the generations, and Hutu children could recite at length the sins the Tutsi had committed against their forefathers.

Hutu extremists opposed to Arusha set out to terrorize the Tutsi and those who supported peace-sharing. Guns, grenades, and machetes began arriving by the plane-load. By 1992, Hutu militia had purchased, stockpiled, and begun distributing an estimated eighty-five tons of munitions, as well as 581,000 machetes—one machete for every third adult Hutu male. The situation deteriorated dramatically enough in 1993 for a number of international and UN bodies to take interest. In early 1993, Mujawamariya, executive director of the Rwanda Association for the Defense of Human Rights, urged international human rights groups to visit her country in the hopes of deterring further violence. Des Forges of Human Rights Watch was one of twelve people from eight countries who composed the International Commission of Investigation. The commission spent three weeks in Rwanda, interviewing hundreds of Rwandans. The crimes that were being described even then were so savage as to defy belief. In one instance the investigators met a woman who said that her sons had been murdered by Hutu extremists and buried in the mayor's back garden. When the authorities denied the woman's claims, the team knew they had to obtain concrete proof. They descended upon the mayor's doorstep, demanding they be allowed to dig up his garden; the mayor nonchalantly agreed on the condition that they reimburse him for the price of the beans that would be uprooted. The investigators, most of whom were lawyers and none of whom had ever dug up a grave (or even done much gardening), began digging. "We dug and dug and dug," remembers Des Forges, "while the mayor sat there and watched us amateurs with a big smirk on his face."
With the sides of the pit on the verge of collapsing inward, the team had found nothing and was prepared to give up. Only the sight of the woman waiting nearby kept them going. "This woman is a mother," Des Forges told her colleagues. "She may get a lot of things wrong, but the one thing she won't get wrong is where her sons are buried." Minutes later the investigators unearthed a foot. More body parts followed. The commission's March 1993 report found that more than 10,000 Tutsi had been detained and 2,000 murdered since the RPF's 1990 invasion.10 Government-supported killers had carried out at least three major massacres of Tutsi. Extremist, racist rhetoric and militias were proliferating. The international commission and a UN rapporteur who soon followed warned explicitly of a possible genocide.11

Low-ranking U.S. intelligence analysts were keenly aware of Rwanda's history and the possibility that an atrocity would occur. A January 1993 CIA report warned of the likelihood of large-scale ethnic violence. A December 1993 CIA study found that some 40 million tons of small arms had been transferred from Poland to Rwanda, via Belgium, an extraordinary quantity for a government allegedly committed to a peace process. And in January 1994 a U.S. government intelligence analyst predicted that if conflict restarted in Rwanda, "the worst case scenario would involve one-half million people dying."12

The public rhetoric of the hard-liners kept pace with the proliferation of machetes, militias, and death squads. In December 1990 the Hutu paper Kangura ("Wake up!") had published its "Ten Commandments of the Hutu," like Hitler's Nuremberg laws and the Bosnian Serbs' 1992 edicts, these ten commandments articulated the rules of the game the radicals hoped to see imposed on the minority:

1. Every Hutu should know that a Tutsi woman, wherever she is, works for the interests of her Tutsi ethnic group. As a result, we shall consider a traitor any Hutu who:
   - marries a Tutsi woman;
   - befriends a Tutsi woman;
   - employs a Tutsi woman as a secretary or concubine.

2. Every Hutu should know that our Hutu daughters are more suitable and conscientious in their role as woman, wife and mother of the family. Are they not beautiful, good secretaries and more honest?

3. Hutu women, be vigilant and try to bring your husbands, brothers and sons back to reason.

4. Every Hutu should know that every Tutsi is dishonest in business. His only aim is the supremacy of his ethnic group. As a result any Hutu who does the following is a traitor:
   - makes a partnership with a Tutsi in business;
   - invests his money or the government's money in a Tutsi enterprise;
   - lends or borrows money from a Tutsi;
   - gives favors to a Tutsi in business (obtaining import licenses, bank loans, construction sites, public markets . . .)

5. All strategic positions, political, administrative, economic, military and security should be entrusted to Hutu.

6. The education sector (school pupils, students, teachers) must be majority Hutu.

7. The Rwandese Armed Forces should be exclusively Hutu. The experience of the October [1990] war has taught us a lesson. No member of the military shall marry a Tutsi.

8. The Hutu should stop having mercy on the Tutsi.

9. The Hutu, wherever they are, must have unity and solidarity, and be concerned with the fate of their Hutu brothers.
   - The Hutu inside and outside Rwanda must constantly look for friends and allies for the Hutu cause, starting with their Bantu brothers;
   - They must constantly counteract the Tutsi propaganda;
   - The Hutu must be firm and vigilant against their common Tutsi enemy.

10. The Social Revolution of 1959, the Referendum of 1961, and the Hutu Ideology, must be taught to every Hutu at every level. Every Hutu must spread this ideology widely. Any Hutu who persecutes his brother Hutu for having read, spread and taught this ideology, is a traitor.13

Staunch Hutu politicians made plain their intentions. In November 1992 Leon Mugesera, a senior member of Habyarimana's party, addressed a gathering of the National Revolutionary Movement for Development Party (MRND), saying: "The fatal mistake we made in 1959 was to let [the Tutsi] get out . . . They belong in Ethiopia and we are going to find them
a shortcut to get there by throwing them into the Nyabarongo River. I must insist on this point. We have to act. Wipe them all out!” When the Tutsi-dominated RPF invaded Rwanda in February 1993 for a second time, the extremist Hutu media portrayed the Tutsi as devils and, alluding to Pol Pot’s rule in Cambodia, identified them as “Black Khmer.” As genocidal perpetrators so often do as a prelude to summoning the masses, they began claiming the Tutsi were out to exterminate Hutu and appealing for preemptive self-defense. Although the threats against the Tutsi and the reports of violence did not generate mainstream Western press coverage, they were reported regularly in the Foreign Broadcast Information Service and in diplomatic cables back to Washington.

But Dallaire knew little of the precariousness of the Arusha accords. When he made a preliminary reconnaissance trip to Rwanda, in August 1993, he was told that the country was committed to peace and that a UN presence was essential. It is hardly surprising that nobody steered Dallaire to meet with those who preferred the eradication of Tutsi to the ceding of power. But it was remarkable that no UN officials in New York thought to give Dallaire copies of the alarming reports prepared by the International Commission of Investigation or even by a rapporteur from the United Nations itself.

The sum total of Dallaire’s intelligence data before that first trip to Rwanda consisted of one encyclopedia’s summary of Rwandan history, which Major Beardsley, Dallaire’s executive assistant, had snatched at the last minute from his local public library. Beardsley says, “We flew to Rwanda with a Michelin road map, a copy of the Arusha agreement, and that was it. We were under the impression that the situation was quite straightforward: There was one cohesive government side and one cohesive rebel side, and they had come together to sign the peace agreement and had then requested that we come in to help them implement it.”

Although Dallaire gravely underestimated the tensions brewing in Rwanda, he still believed that he would need a force of 5,000 to help the parties implement the terms of the Arusha accords. But the United States was unenthused about sending any UN mission to Rwanda. “Anytime you mentioned peacekeeping in Africa,” one U.S. official remembers, “the crucifixes and garlic would come up on every door.” Washington was nervous that the Rwanda mission would sour like those in Bosnia, Somalia, and Haiti were then doing. Multilateral initiatives for humanitarian purposes seemed like quagmires in the making. But President Habyarimana had traveled to Washington in 1993 to offer assurances that his government was committed to carrying out the terms of the Arusha accords. In the end, after strenuous lobbying by France (Rwanda’s chief diplomatic and military patron), U.S. officials accepted the proposition that UNAMIR could be the rare “UN winner.” Even so, U.S. officials made it clear that Washington would give no consideration to sending U.S. troops to Rwanda and would not pay for 5,000 troops. Dallaire reluctantly trimmed his written request to 2,500. He remembers, “I was told, ‘Don’t ask for a brigade, because it ain’t there.’” On October 5, 1993, two days after the Somalia firefight, the United States reluctantly voted in the Security Council to authorize Dallaire’s mission.

Once he was actually posted to Rwanda in October 1993, Dallaire lacked not merely intelligence data and manpower but also institutional support. The small Department of Peacekeeping Operations in New York, run by the Ghanaian diplomat Kofi Annan (who later became UN secretary-general), was overwhelmed. Madeleine Albright, the U.S. ambassador to the UN and a leading advocate of military intervention in Bosnia, recalls, “The global 9-1-1 was always either busy or nobody was there.” At the time of the Rwanda deployment, with a staff of a few hundred, the UN was posting 70,000 peacekeepers on seventeen missions around the world. Amid these widespread crises and logistical headaches, the Rwanda mission had low status.

Life was not made easier for Dallaire or the UN peacekeeping office by the United States’ thinning patience for peacekeeping. The Clinton administration had taken office better disposed toward peacekeeping than any other administration in U.S. history. But Congress owed half a billion dollars in UN dues and peacekeeping costs. It had tired of its obligation to foot one-third of the bill for what had come to feel like an insatiable global appetite for mischief and an equally insatiable UN appetite for missions. The Clinton White House agreed that the Department of Peacekeeping Operations needed fixing and insisted that the UN “learn to say no” to chancy or costly missions.

In the aftermath of the Somalia firefight, Senate Republicans demanded that the Clinton administration become even less trusting of the United Nations. In January 1994 Senator Bob Dole, a leading defender of the Bosnian Muslims at the time, introduced legislation to limit U.S. participation in UN peacekeeping missions. Against the backdrop of the Somalia meltdown and the congressional showdown, the Clinton admin-
istration accelerated the development of a formal U.S. peacekeeping doctrine. The job was given to Richard Clarke of the National Security Council, a special assistant to the president who was known as one of the most effective bureaucrats in Washington. In an interagency process that lasted more than a year, Clarke managed the production of a presidential decision directive, PDD-25, which listed sixteen factors that policymakers needed to consider when deciding whether to support peacekeeping activities: seven factors if the United States was to vote in the UN Security Council on peace operations carried out by non-American soldiers, six additional and more stringent factors if U.S. forces were to participate in UN peacekeeping missions, and three final factors if U.S. troops were likely to engage in actual combat. U.S. participation had to advance U.S. interests, be necessary for the operation's success, and garner domestic and congressional support. The risk of casualties had to be "acceptable." An exit strategy had to be shown." In the words of Representative David Obey of Wisconsin, the restrictive checklist tried to satisfy the American desire for "zero degree of involvement, and zero degree of risk, and zero degree of pain and confusion." The architects of the doctrine remain its strongest defenders. "Many say PDD-25 was some evil thing designed to kill peacekeeping, when in fact it was there to save peacekeeping," Clarke says. "Peacekeeping was almost dead. There was no support for it in the U.S. government, and the peacekeepers were not effective in the field." Although the directive was not publicly released until May 3, 1994, a month into the genocide in Rwanda, the considerations encapsulated in the doctrine and the administration's frustration with peacekeeping greatly influenced the thinking of U.S. officials involved in shaping Rwanda policy.

Back in the United States, Rwanda was extremely low on the list of American priorities. When Woods of the Defense Department's African affairs bureau suggested that the Pentagon add Rwanda-Burundi to its list of potential trouble spots, his bosses told him, in his words, "Look, if something happens in Rwanda-Burundi, we don't care. Take it off the list. U.S. national interest is not involved and we can't put all these silly humanitarian issues on lists...just make it go away." 

Every aspect of Dallaire's UNAMIR was run on a shoestring. It was equipped with hand-me-down vehicles from the UN's Cambodia mission, and only eighty of the 300 that turned up were usable. When the medical supplies ran out, in March 1994, New York said there was no cash for resupply. Very few goods could be procured locally, given that Rwanda was one of Africa's poorest nations. Spare parts, batteries, and even ammunition could rarely be found. Dallaire spent some 70 percent of his time battling UN logistics.

Dallaire had major problems with his personnel as well. He commanded troops, military observers, and civilian personnel from twenty-six countries. Although multinationality is meant to be a virtue of UN missions, the diversity yielded grave discrepancies in resources. Whereas Belgian troops turned up in Rwanda well armed and ready to perform the tasks assigned to them, the poorer contingents showed up "bare-assed," in Dallaire's words, and demanded that the United Nations suit them up. "Since nobody else was offering to send troops, we had to take what we could get," he says. When Dallaire expressed concern, a senior UN official instructed him to lower his expectations. He recalls, "I was told, 'Listen, General, you are NATO-trained. This is not NATO.'" Although some 2,500 UNAMIR personnel had arrived by early April 1994, few of the soldiers had the kit they needed to perform even basic tasks.

The signs of militarization in Rwanda were so widespread that, even though Dallaire lacked much of an intelligence-gathering capacity, he was able to learn of the extremists' sinister intentions. In December high-ranking military officers from within the Hutu government sent Dallaire a letter warning that Hutu militias were planning massacres. Death lists had become so widely known that individuals had begun paying local militias to have their names removed. In addition to broadcasting incitements against Tutsi, Radio Mille Collines had begun denouncing UN peacekeepers as Tutsi accomplices.

In January 1994 an anonymous Hutu informant, said to be high up in the inner circles of the Rwandan government, came forward to describe the rapid arming and training of local militias. In what is now referred to as the "Dallaire fax," Dallaire relayed to New York the informant's claim that Hutu extremists "had been ordered to register all the Tutsi in Kigali." "He suspects it is for their extermination," Dallaire wrote. "Example he gave was that in 20 minutes his personnel could kill up to 1,000 Tutsis."

"Jean-Pierre," as the informant became known, said that the militia planned first to provoke and murder a number of Belgian peacekeepers, in order to "guarantee Belgian withdrawal from Rwanda." The informant was prepared to identify major arms caches littered throughout Rwanda, including one containing at least 135 weapons, but he wanted passports
and protection for his wife and four children. Dallaire admitted the possibility of a trap but said he believed the informant was reliable. He and his UN forces were prepared to act within thirty-six hours. "Where there's a will, there's a way," Dallaire signed the cable. "Let's go." He was not asking for permission; he was simply informing headquarters of the arms raids that he had planned.

Annan's deputy, Iqbal Riza, cabled back to Dallaire on behalf of his boss, rejecting the proposed arms raids. "We said, 'Not Somalia again,'" Riza remembered later. "Now in Somalia, those troops—U.S., Pakistani—they were acting within their mandate when they were killed. Here, Dallaire was asking to take such risks going outside his mandate. And we said no." The Annan cable suggested that Dallaire focus instead on protecting his forces and avoiding escalation. The Canadian was to notify Rwandan President Habyarimana and the Western ambassadors in Kigali of the informant's claims. Dallaire contested the decision, talking by telephone with New York and sending five faxes on the subject. Even after Dallaire had confirmed the reliability of the informant, his political masters told him plainly and consistently that the United States in particular would not support such an aggressive interpretation of his mandate. "You've got to let me do this," Dallaire pleaded. "If we don't stop these weapons, some day those weapons will be used against us." In Washington Dallaire's alarm was discounted. Lieutenant Colonel Tony Marley, the U.S. military liaison to the Arusha process, respected Dallaire but knew he was operating in Africa for the first time. "I thought that the neophyte meant well, but I questioned whether he knew what he was talking about," Marley recalls.

Even a rise in political assassinations in the spring of 1994 could not attract mainstream attention to Rwanda. On February 21, 1994, right-wing extremists assassinated Felicien Gatabazi, the minister of public works. Martin Bucyana, president of the hard-line Hutu Coalition pour la Défense de la République (Coalition for the Defense of the Republic, or CDR), was killed in the southern Rwandan town of Butare the next day, giving outsiders the impression of tit-for-tat skirmishes rather than a trial balloon for something more ambitious. Dallaire wanted to investigate these murders, but he could do little but watch as the feared Interahamwe units became more conspicuous around town, singing, blowing whistles, wearing colorful uniforms, and toting weapons. Machetes hung from belts around their waists, as guns once hung in cowboys' holsters. Grenades were available at the market for next to nothing. On February 23 Dallaire reported that he was drowning in information about death squad target lists. "Time does seem to be running out for political discussions," he wrote, noting that "any spark on the security side could have catastrophic consequences."

The Peace Processors

The United States was alarmed enough about the deterioration for the State Department's Bureau for African Affairs to send Deputy Assistant Secretary Bushnell and Central Africa Office Director Arlene Rendler to Rwanda in late March. The daughter of a diplomat, Bushnell had joined the foreign service in 1981, at the age of thirty-five. With her agile mind and sharp tongue, she had earned the attention of George Moose when she served under him at the U.S. embassy in Senegal. When Moose was named the assistant secretary of state for African affairs in 1993, he made Bushnell his deputy. In meetings with President Habyarimana, the able Bushnell warned him that failure to implement Arusha might cause the United States to demand the withdrawal of UN peacekeepers, whose mandate was up for review on April 4. Bushnell ran through all of PDD-25's "factors for
involvement.” She described the congressional mood in the United States. Before leaving, Bushnell said, “President Habyarimana, your name will head this chapter of Rwandan history. It is up to you to decide whether it will be a chapter of glory or a chapter of tragedy.” Before she departed Rwanda, Bushnell received a handwritten note from the mercurial president in which he promised to comply with the Arusha agreement and set up the transitional government the following week.

For all the concern of the U.S. officials familiar with Rwanda, their diplomacy suffered from several weaknesses. First, it continued to reveal its natural bias toward states and negotiations. Because most diplomatic contact occurs between representatives of states, U.S. officials are predisposed to trust the assurances of government officials. In the case of Rwanda, several of these officials were plotting genocide behind the scenes. Those in the U.S. government who knew Rwanda best viewed the escalating violence with a diplomatic prejudice that left them both institutionally oriented toward the Rwandan government and reluctant to do anything to disrupt the peace process. This meant avoiding confrontation. An examination of the cable traffic from the U.S. embassy in Kigali to Washington, between the signing of the Arusha agreement and the downing of the presidential plane, reveals that setbacks were perceived as “dangers to the peace process” more than as “dangers to Rwandans.” As was true in the Iran-Iraq war and the Bosnian war, American criticisms were steadfastly leveled at “both sides,” although here Hutu government and militia forces were usually responsible.

The U.S. ambassador in Kigali, David Rawson, proved especially vulnerable to such bias. Rawson had grown up in Burundi, where his father, an American missionary, had set up a Quaker hospital. He entered the foreign service in 1971. When in 1993, at age fifty-two, he was given the embassy in Rwanda, his first, he could not have been more intimate with the region, the culture, or the peril. He spoke the local language—almost unprecedented for an ambassador in central Africa. But Rawson found it difficult to imagine the Rwandans who surrounded the president as conspirators in genocide. He issued pro forma démarches about Habyarimana’s obstruction of power-sharing, but the cable traffic shows that he accepted the president’s assurances that he was doing all he could. The U.S. investment in the peace process gave rise to a wishful tendency to see peace “around the corner.” Rawson remembers,

We were naive policy optimists, I suppose. The fact that negotiations can’t work is almost not one of the options open to people who care about peace. We were looking for the hopeful signs, not the dark signs. In fact, we were looking away from the dark signs. One of the things I learned and should have already known is that once you launch a process, it takes on its own momentum. I had said, “Let’s try this, and then if it doesn’t work, we can back away.” But bureaucracies don’t allow that. Once the Washington side buys into a process, it gets pursued, almost blindly.

Even after the Hutu government began exterminating the country’s Tutsi in April 1994, U.S. diplomats focused most of their efforts on “re-establishing a cease-fire” and “getting Arusha back on track.” In order to do so, U.S. and UN officials often threatened to pull out UN peacekeepers as punishment for bad behavior or failure to implement Arusha’s terms. The trouble with this approach, which Western officials adopted in Bosnia as well, was that extremists who believed in ethnic purity wanted to see nothing more than a UN withdrawal. As one senior U.S. official remembers, “The first response to trouble is, ‘Let’s yank the peacekeepers.’ But that is like believing that when children are misbehaving the proper response is, ‘Let’s send the babysitter home,’ so the house gets burned down.”

The second problematic feature of U.S. diplomacy before and during the genocide was a tendency toward blindness bred by familiarity: The few people in Washington who were paying attention to Rwanda before Habyarimana’s plane was shot down were those who had been tracking Rwanda for some time and had thus come to expect a certain level of ethnic violence from the region. And because the U.S. government had tolerated the deaths of some 50,000 civilians in Burundi in October 1993, these officials also knew that Washington would not get exercised over substantial bloodshed. When the massacres began in April, some U.S. regional specialists initially suspected that Rwanda was undergoing “another flare-up” that would involve another “acceptable” (if tragic) round of ethnic murder.

Rawson had read up on genocide before his posting to Rwanda, surveying what had become a relatively extensive scholarly literature on its causes. But although he expected internecine killing, he did not anticipate the scale at which it occurred. “Nothing in Rwandan culture or history could
have led a person to that forecast,” he says. “Most of us thought that if a war broke out, it would be quick, that these poor people didn’t have the resources, the means, to fight a sophisticated war. I couldn’t have known that they would do each other in with the most economic means.” Assistant Secretary Moose agrees: “We were psychologically and imaginatively too limited.”

Dallaire, for one, quickly saw that withdrawal threats only encouraged the militants. They knew that if they pushed harder, disrupted longer, they could get rid of the UN peacekeepers who were implementing the agreement they hoped to sabotage. UN withdrawal was a carrot, not a stick. But as the Canadian officer resisted the political approach of his colleagues, he was scolded and scoffed. “The general attitude,” remembers Beardsley, “was, ‘Shut up. You’re a soldier. Let the experts handle this.’”

But within weeks the “experts” had vanished, and Dallaire was on his own.

Recognition

Crimes Against Humanity

In the first days after the checkpoints were hoisted and the massacres began on April 6, 1994, Dallaire maintained his contacts with Colonel Bagosora and other Rwandan army officials. But these men, the ringleaders of the slaughter, assured Dallaire and foreign diplomats that they were committed to stopping the killing and continuing the peace process. They even appealed to Dallaire for help in brokering a cease-fire. They claimed, as had Talat and Milosevic, that they needed time to rein in the “uncontrolled elements.”

Initially, although Dallaire was aghast at the killings, he believed that the Hutu gunmen and militia were only pursuing their “political enemies.” In the first few days, moderate Hutu and leading Tutsi politicians had been the main targets of attack. As in Cambodia, this gave rise to the notion that the killings were narrowly tailored reprisals rather than harbingers of a broadly ambitious genocide. Ordinary people, Dallaire and others hoped, would be left alone.

Dallaire and other foreign observers passed through two phases of recognition. The first involved coming to grips with the occurrence not only of a conventional war but of massive crimes against humanity. All Tutsi were targets. The second involved understanding that what was taking place was genocide.

The first wave of recognition swept through UN headquarters—and was relayed back to Western capitals—very quickly. Two days after the plane crash, on April 8, Dallaire sent a cable to New York indicating that ethnicity was one of the dimensions behind the killing. The telegram detailed the political killings, which then included not only ten Belgian peacekeepers and Prime Minister Uwilingiyimana, but also the chairman of the Liberal Party, the minister of labor, the minister of agriculture, and dozens of others. It refuted the impression (and the claim by the Hutu authorities) that the violence was uncontrolled. Dallaire described instead a “very well-planned, organized, deliberate and conducted campaign of terror initiated principally by the Presidential Guard”; he urged that UN forces make protecting government leaders their “major task.”

Dallaire still considered the killings mainly as political adjuncts to a civil war and his own role as broker of a cease-fire.

The following day, though, Dallaire’s thinking shifted. Beardsley, Dallaire’s executive assistant, got a frantic call by radio from a pair of Polish UN military observers who were at a church run by Polish missionaries across town. “Come get us,” the UN officials said. “They are massacring people here.” Beardsley got permission from Dallaire to take a Bangladeshi armored personnel carrier through the front lines. He passed about twenty roadblocks and reached the church.

When we arrived, I looked at the school across the street, and there were children, I don’t know how many, forty, sixty, eighty children stacked up outside who had all been chopped up with machetes. Some of their mothers had heard them screaming and had come running, and the militia had killed them, too. We got out of the vehicle and entered the church. There we found 150 people, dead mostly, though some were still groaning, who had been attacked the night before. The Polish priests told us it had been incredibly well organized. The Rwandan army had cleared out the area, the gendarmerie had rounded up all the Tutsi, and the militia had hacked them to death.

Beardsley left a first-aid kit and his ration of water for the wounded. He promised to come back later in the evening with help. But by the time he