

# Suppressed report raises question of US role in Rwandan civil war

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The *Toronto National Post* has revealed new facts concerning the 1994 genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda, indicating possible US involvement in precipitating the civil war.

The paper has obtained documents dated August 1, 1997 submitted to an investigation commissioned by then-United Nations Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali into the shooting down of Rwandan President Habyarimana's plane on April 6, 1994. This was a key event in triggering the Hutu massacre of minority Tutsi people in which up to 1 million men, women and children were slaughtered with indescribable barbarity.

The investigation took place between April 1996 and May 1997, and the report was submitted confidentially to top UN officials. Three Rwandan informants revealed to the UN that they were part of an elite assassination squad, working under the direction of Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) leader Paul Kagame. (The RPF were then fighting to overthrow the Hutu regime that carried out the genocide. After defeating the Hutu government forces in 1994 they took power, and Kagame is now vice-president.)

It was this elite squad which, "with the assistance of a foreign government", fired the missiles bringing down Habyarimana's plane. The president of Burundi and General Deogratias Nsabimana, chief of staff of the Rwandan army, were also killed in the attack.

The report states that when the informants told Judge Louise Arbour, then chief UN war crimes prosecutor, that two of their number were prepared to testify at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) to bring the assassins to court, she was "at first very positive". Within the space of two weeks, however, Arbour had changed her mind. She advised that an investigation of the plane's shooting down was not within the mandate of the ICTR. The report states that "she waited until the investigation appeared to be on the brink of a breakthrough before she shut it down". This happened before "the identity of the foreign government could be uncovered".

The *Toronto National Post* does not name the foreign government, but points out that during the inquiry into the Rwandan genocide held by the French government "evidence emerged that the missiles used in the attack had been confiscated in Iraq by the American military during the Persian

Gulf war". The newspaper also states that the US was "the only one of three major players in the peace process that has not held a comprehensive inquiry into the mass deaths". The other two countries involved—Belgium and France—held inquiries in 1997 and 1998 respectively.

In April 1994 Rwanda was in the midst of an acute economic crisis and had been embroiled in four years of war with the RPF. The Rwandan government, backed by the army and semi-official murder squads, the Interahamwe militias, ordered all those belonging to the majority Hutu ethnic group to murder the entire Tutsi minority, along with those Hutus who would not collaborate.

This was not the culmination of some ancient tribal feud. Tutsis and Hutus were set against each other first under Belgian colonial rule, and then under French domination.

The pro-Hutu regime came under French influence from the mid-1970s, when Rwanda joined the Francophone African countries. France armed the Hutu government and French military personnel were active in Rwanda from 1990 onwards in the conflict with the RPF. French troops were fully involved in Rwanda in the period before and during the genocide, and France continued to supply arms to the Hutu regime as the slaughter unfolded.

The genocide was planned for years in advance, and executed by tens of thousands with ruthless precision. Meetings addressed by town councillors ideologically prepared the massacre. Lists of Tutsis and Hutus who opposed the regime were drawn up and roadblocks were set up. Government-controlled newspapers and radio equated all Tutsis with the rebel movement, the predominantly Tutsi RPF, and constantly reminded the Hutus of the oppression they had suffered under the Belgium-backed regime before independence.

The Belgian inquiry revealed that the build-up to the genocide was known by all the Western powers involved. The Belgian authorities knew of the plans as early as 1992 and had passed on the information to France and other countries. The UN inquiry, which published its findings December last year, revealed that UN officials as well as ambassadors to Rwanda from Belgium, France and the US certainly knew of preparations for the massacre by the beginning of 1994.

The origins of the RPF were in Uganda, where they fought

alongside the US-backed rebel army of (now President) Museveni, ousting the dictator Milton Obote in 1986. Kagame himself was given military training in the US, as were leading RPF cadres when they were part of the Ugandan army.

From the late 1980s on, the RPF began making military incursions into Rwanda. Unable to defeat them, the Hutu regime under Habyarimana was pressured by the French to reach a power-sharing agreement with the RPF, the Arusha Agreement, signed in August 1993. It included provisions for the return of Tutsi refugees, a transitional government incorporating the RPF and the presence of a UN peacekeeping force in Rwanda. Habyarimana was returning from ongoing talks in Arusha when his plane was shot down.

All eyewitness accounts say the shooting of the president's plane triggered the government's decision to mount its genocidal assault. The plane fell in flames into the grounds of the presidential palace at 8:30 a.m. By 9:15 the roadblocks were manned and the rounding-up and slaughter had begun.

There followed a full-scale invasion of Rwanda by the RPF. When it was clear that the RPF were gaining the upper hand, the French organised a military invasion known as Operation Turquoise under the auspices of the UN, in order to provide a safe passage out of Rwanda for the leaders of the Hutu regime.

According to the report obtained by the *Toronto National Post*, the informants gave extensive details to the UN regarding the RPF elite network they belonged to and how their assignments were communicated. They showed the investigators three sites where they say they planted rocket launchers, two of which fired the SAMs (surface to air missiles) that hit Habyarimana's plane.

The report adds that the informants "provided accurate descriptions of the operation together with names, ranks and roles of each soldier involved. They also advised that they can produce hard copy documents of the operation." The informants' evidence was rated as probably true but untested.

There have been several conflicting accounts of who brought down Habyarimana's plane. At the time of the French inquiry, *Le Figaro* reported that information received from two retired French officers said that the missiles involved had been captured by French troops from Iraq. Belgian academic Filip Reyntjens confirmed this, but said they were fired by the RPF. Bernard Debre, a minister in the French Balladur government in 1994, stated that the missiles were captured from Iraq, but by the US. He said that they were supplied to the RPF via Uganda.

In France, academics alleged that French mercenaries fired the missiles, working for the clique around Habyarimana's wife and brothers. It was certainly true that the "akuzu", as they were called, were unhappy at the prospect of sharing power and wealth with the RPF leadership. With the influx of thousands upon thousands of Tutsis returning to their homeland the privileges that were granted to Hutus would have soon disappeared, and along with them Madame Habyarimana's base of support. In this context, it is conceivable that the extremists

in the Hutu regime could hatch a plan whereby the president would be assassinated, blaming the deed on the RPF and launching the massacre.

The *Toronto National Post*'s evidence would appear, however, to back Debre's version of events. The UN report states that the informants told them that the RPF were moved to act in this way because the power sharing talks were proceeding too slowly. It would also point to a much deeper involvement of the US in the Rwandan events than was previously known. It certainly coincided with US efforts in Central Africa to scupper the Arusha Agreement, setting the scene for the military defeat of the French-backed Hutu government and the installation of a pro-American regime.

The UN report issued last December was an apology for criticisms launched by, among others, Major Romeo Dallaire, the leader of the UN peacekeeping force in Rwanda in 1994. Dallaire revealed that Kofi Annan, then head of peacekeeping, had ignored his warnings about the impending genocide and pulled out most of the UN forces.

The report did not investigate the role of any member country, maintaining the fiction that the UN is somehow independent and separate from the US and other Western governments, even though the complicity of France in the genocide is public knowledge. The report put the inaction of the UN down to mismanagement, underfunding and lack of commitment.

In fact, there never was any intention to use UN troops to prevent the genocide. Massacres on a smaller scale had occurred in Rwanda over the previous period, as well as in neighbouring Burundi, without any action being taken. The UN was only employed to broker a deal between the Hutu regime and the RPF and to resolve the conflicting agendas of France and the US in the area. When this proved impossible, they were pulled out.

As the material in the *Toronto National Post* makes clear, in the years since 1994 the UN has been involved in a major cover-up, suppressing a key investigation that could have shed light on the role of the US in Rwanda. It also shows the role of the ICTR, set up by the UN in 1995 to "bring the guilty to justice", in preventing the truth about the genocide being known.



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