

# Macron in Rwanda: French imperialism covers past crimes to prepare new ones

Will Morrow  
31 May 2021

On Thursday, French president Emmanuel Macron delivered a carefully prepared keynote speech in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda, to address the role of France in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. The genocide, carried out by a regime backed by France, saw the extermination of between 800,000 and one million people, mainly from the country's Tutsi ethnic minority.

Macron spoke alongside his Rwandan counterpart Paul Kagame. His trip to Kigali was part of an effort to strengthen French interests and diplomatic relations in Rwanda, under conditions of a growing struggle for influence in the region. Kagame and Macron announced that a French ambassador to the country would be named for the first time since 2006, when diplomatic relations completely broke down between the two countries, after a French judge had ordered the arrest of Kagame and other leading Rwandan government officials.

Macron's speech was a cynical attempt at historical obfuscation and falsification. On the one hand, he was compelled, given the mass of evidence of French backing to the government that carried out the genocide, to acknowledge that France "has a role, a history and political responsibility toward Rwanda" and had remained "in fact on the side of a genocidal regime." He referred to an "overwhelming responsibility" of France in the genocide.

However, he falsely presented this as being the unintended consequence of French efforts to prevent civil war in the country, and a failure to appreciate the warnings of international observers as to what was taking place in time. According to this absurd presentation, the French intelligence agencies were simply unaware of what was already being documented by international human rights observers.

"In wanting to prevent a regional conflict or a civil war, France remained in fact on the side of a genocidal regime," Macron claimed. "Ignoring the warnings of the

most lucid observers, France bore an overwhelming responsibility for the downward spiral which led to the worst, even as it sought to prevent it," he said.

France was therefore "not complicit," Macron declared. He argued that this was so simply because French soldiers did not actively carry out any sectarian massacres. Macron therefore chose not to make any formal apology on behalf of the French state in the genocide. His presentation was essentially the same as that of former right-wing Republican President Nicolas Sarkozy, the first French president to visit Kigali since 1994. Sarkozy referred to "grave errors" and "a form of blindness" by French authorities which had "absolutely dramatic" consequences.

Macron's speech was immediately hailed by almost the entire French political establishment. Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his Unsubmissive France deputy Bastien Lachaud wrote that they "share the formulation of the French president... Admitting the responsibility of the French government at the time of Rwanda is a very important thing. Drawing the lessons for the future of our relations in Africa is another that is just as important." In an open appeal to anti-African neo-colonial racism, Marine Le Pen, the leader of the far-right National Rally, criticized Macron for being excessively apologetic.

Mélenchon's reference to "our [future] relations in Africa" points to the real motivation for Macron's speech. French imperialism has been involved in a decade of escalating wars and interventions across Africa as part of a scramble for influence and control over the resource-rich and geostrategically important region.

This included the 2011 war in Libya that overthrew Moammar Gaddafi, and the 2013 invasion of Mali and the Sahel. Mali neighbours critical uranium supplies used for French energy production, and is located near one of the largest gold supplies in the world. France and Germany in particular are now escalating their interventions

throughout Africa, particularly fearful over the growth of Chinese influence in the region.

The lie that France was not complicit in the Rwandan genocide is critical to the French ruling class, because its exposure discredits the fraudulent arguments that French imperialist operations across Africa are “humanitarian” interventions aimed at protecting the local population.

The Rwandan genocide was one of the great imperialist crimes of the 20th century. Its origins lay in the struggles among the colonial powers to carve up and subvert Africa. Beginning with its control over the country in 1916, Belgium used what were previously largely historical social groupings, the Hutu and Tutsi, to divide and control the population, elevating the Tutsi minority into power. With the growth of its influence in the country from the 1960s onwards after Rwanda’s official independence, France continued to back the largely Hutu government.

France provided military and economic support to the Rwandan government, including the deployment of French troops, arms, and training to the Rwandan army, including in the immediate lead-up to the genocide. In the period of 1990-1994, there were already mass arrests, torture and executions of predominately Tutsi opponents by the Rwandan army.

In their 2020 book, *The French state and the genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda*, Raphaël Doridant and François Graner document the ethnic killings that were already taking place beginning in 1990, under the government of Juvénal Habyarimana. Sections of the military and regime were already calling publicly for the liquidation of the entire Tutsi population. A team of international human rights observers produced a report in January 1993 pointing to the large-scale ethnically targeted killings taking place.

Throughout this period, French Socialist Party President François Mitterrand maintained and escalated its backing for Habyarimana and its military intervention in the country. French officers were attached to Rwandan army units. Following Habyarimana’s assassination, which was the starting point for the genocide, France launched a new military intervention, providing safe passage out of the country, including to many perpetrators of the genocide.

France was determined to maintain its backing for the Rwandan regime against the Rwandan People’s Front (RPF), a largely Tutsi armed group led at the time by Paul Kagame. Kagame was trained in the United States, and the RPF was stationed in neighbouring Uganda, a key US ally, which permitted the RPF to operate from its territory

as it waged a civil war for control of Rwanda. Quite directly, the Rwandan genocide was the product of the imperialist struggle between France and the United States over influence within the region, which France regarded as critical for the maintenance of French control in Africa.

Even today, many participants in the genocide continue to reside peacefully in France. Victims’ associations have provided the names of 30 perpetrators but have been stonewalled by French authorities. Last year, one of the main financiers of the genocide, Félicien Kabuga, was arrested in the Asnières-sur-Seine suburbs around Paris, where he had apparently been able to live peacefully for decades.

Following his speech on Thursday, Macron evaded questions from journalists as to whether he would now more vigorously pursue the arrest of participants in the genocide who live in France. Clearly there is no interest in the French political establishment for public trials of former French allies about their role in the genocide.

The Rwandan genocide is an exposure, at the same time, of the criminal pro-imperialist character of the official “left” of France. François Mitterrand, the head of the Socialist Party government, which was complicit in the slaughter, was supported by the entire “left” in France, including Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who was a protégé of Mitterrand. The genocide is a sharp warning of the horrific crimes that French imperialism is capable in the pursuit of its predatory interests. Macron’s speech in Kigali was above all aimed at preparing for new and even more catastrophic interventions by French imperialism to defend its interests, and crimes on an even greater scale.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**