

The BBC and the West need to clean up their act on Rwanda

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An October BBC documentary titled 'Rwanda's Untold Story' represents and repeats most of the flaws and misreadings in the Western narrative on post-genocide Rwanda

The famed and ostensibly high-minded BBC recently lent its prestige to Rwanda genocide denial and to a group plausibly alleged to be engaged in terrorist attacks to subvert the post-genocide Rwanda order. This fiasco should be corrected by strong action by the BBC as well as the UK and other Western governments. The West should expose and oppose rather than foster and condone violent external threats to Rwanda.

Many Western observers believe passionately that democracy and human rights are not well served by the way President Paul Kagame's Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) has governed post-genocide Rwanda, and that a more Western interpretation of international norms on these issues would do better. It is legitimate for these critics to make their case, and when they do so with due diligence and respect for factual evidence it can be to Rwanda's benefit.

However, it is not legitimate to seek to discredit Mr. Kagame and the RPF

by misrepresenting the history of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, or by misrepresenting Rwandan "opposition groups" as benign when they are not. The BBC has done both these things, in a way which is sadly typical in Western discourse about Rwanda, and dangerous for peace, democracy and human rights in Rwanda and its region.

The BBC's Oct. 1 film "Rwanda's Untold Story" strengthens the unrepentant and still active remnants of the Rwandan Hutu Power movement which carried out the 1994 genocide against the Rwanda Tutsi, by recycling the main themes of the movement's longstanding genocide denial campaign. For details, see the Oct. 12 protest to the BBC from 47 prominent observers of Rwanda (as well as this author) led by Linda Melvern, and separate statements by Andrew Wallis, Alain Gauthier, Philippe Brewaeys, James Smith and Francois Sudan. The BBC has yet to admit any wrongdoing.

Equally grave, the BBC film also strengthens the Hutu Power movement's newest ally, the émigré Rwanda National Congress (RNC). It gave two RNC leaders (Kayumba Nyamwasa and Theogene Rudasingwa) a friendly platform to advance their cause, and effectively endorsed them as bravely

dissident truth-tellers. In doing this, the BBC chose to stay silent about a considerable amount of credible evidence that the RNC aims to seize power by violently overthrowing the Rwandan government, by means that include targeting civilians in terrorist grenade attacks and targeting Rwandan leaders for assassination.

This looks like disinformation rather than accurate and unbiased reporting. It calls for an internal BBC inquiry, and for UK government review as well. It should also alert the international community that it is long past due to investigate and take appropriate action against groups identified by the Rwandan government as supporting or engaging in the violent subversion of Rwanda's post-genocide order.

Publicly available evidence about the RNC is outlined below.

The RNC was formed in December 2010 in Washington DC by General Kayumba Nyamwasa, Colonel Patrick Karegeya, Theogene Rudasingwa, and Gerald Gahima (Mr. Karegeya's January 2014 murder in South Africa remains unsolved). These four men were senior military and political leaders of the RPF until they fled Rwanda between 2004 and 2010, and as such played important roles in creating the post-genocide order they now want to see overthrown. They claim they fled Rwanda to escape persecution for legitimate policy dissent. There does not appear to be any evidence of this beyond their own claims. The Rwandan government has long asserted they fled to avoid being held accountable for corrupt activities. This goes unmentioned in the BBC's film. But this is only its least egregious silence about the RNC.

Four declarations

Since 2010, RNC leaders have publicly declared war against Kagame and the Rwandan government, in scarcely veiled terms. Here are four such declarations, as reported in non-Rwandan media:

The Observer (Uganda), 2 August 2010, "Interview: Exiled Rwandan colonel calls for war on Kagame," quotes Karegeya as saying: "A dictator can never step down, they are brought down. It's only Rwandans who can stand up now and fight for their freedom. Kagame will have his breaking point and I think it will be very soon. There is no one who will come to save Rwandans from the dictatorship of Kagame and there is no time to fold hands. They should stand up to him and say look; we are tired, you have to go. Obviously some will lose their lives in the process but those who will die will have lost life for a worthy cause, and I'm prepared to support Rwandans who want to fight the dictatorship of Paul Kagame."

The Guardian, July 30, 2012, "Exiled Rwandan general attacks Paul Kagame as 'dictator'," quotes Mr. Nyamwasa as saying, "We are hoping for an uprising in Rwanda. In that case, he'll be gone within three months. He's a coward; he'll run. Don't be surprised if we extract him from a pipe like the Libyans did with Muammar Gaddafi"

New York Times, Jan. 2, 2014, "Body of Former Rwandan Spymaster Is Found in Johannesburg Hotel," quotes Karegeya as saying, in 2010, "There cannot be any change through election but through violent means."

AlJazeera, April 7, 2014, "Q&A: Rwanda's controversial history" quotes

Nyamwasa as saying, “As we commemorate (20) years after the genocide, we need to be honest and say we did not have true justice and democracy back then and (that) we still don’t have it. Just like we rose up (back) then, the time will come that everyone Kagame forced into exile will come together and will go back to Rwanda and take down his government. History will repeat itself.”

These are threatening statements. Their import is amplified by the content of the RNC’s founding 2010 manifesto, entitled *Rwanda Briefing*. The two RNC leaders interviewed at length in the BBC film are among its four self-declared authors.

It bears noting that while their 2010 manifesto is virulently hostile to Mr. Kagame, it does not accuse him of shooting down Rwandan President Habyarimana’s plane in 1994 and thereby “provoking” the genocide, as they do in the BBC’s film. Mr. Rudasingwa, who first accused Kagame of this act in 2011, was questioned by French investigating judge Marc Trevidic in 2012. The only “evidence” Rudasingwa gave was his own assertion that Kagame had claimed responsibility to him in a one-on-one conversation in late 1994 (see *Jeune Afrique*).

Rudasingwa has not explained why he kept quiet about this alleged admission for 17 years, of which seven are in emigration. Nor has the BBC explained why its film does not mention the forensic investigation carried out by Judge Trevidic, which points to Rwandan Hutu genocidaires as the culprits in the assassination of Mr. Habyarimana.

Rwanda briefing?

Rwanda Briefing presents a ridiculous but sinister caricature of the Rwandan government as a bloodthirsty, violently repressive, criminal, discriminatory, corrupt, and developmentally incompetent regime which crushes a desperately suffering population. It calls Kagame the worst dictator in African history. It claims repeatedly that Kagame’s government is the worst Rwanda has ever had, i.e. worse than the racist and proto-genocidal Kayibanda and Habyarimana governments of 1962-94 and worse even than the “interim government” which carried out the genocide in 1994.

Rwanda Briefing begs the question of why its authors served Kagame’s Rwandan Patriotic Front as long as they did. More importantly, it does everything but state explicitly that the supposed evils of the Rwandan government constitute ample justification for violent anti-government action.

The authors take a subtler approach to promoting the recourse to violence, perhaps to protect their refugee status in South Africa and the United States. Throughout their manifesto, they repeatedly warn of looming violence and even a renewed genocide against the Tutsi. These warnings are reminiscent of Hutu Power propaganda in the buildup to the 1994 genocide, and can readily be interpreted as threats.

Although nothing, even the absurdly negative portrait they draw of Rwanda’s post-genocide government and society, could justify a renewed genocide, the authors preemptively hold Kagame responsible for it, and not its prospective perpetrators.

Here is one example:

“By closing off the opportunity for political participation and dismissing calls for a peaceful, negotiated settlement of the Rwanda conflict, President Kagame has created conditions which make violent conflict inevitable in the future. In particular, the exclusion of the Hutu in any meaningful power-sharing perpetuates perceptions of victimization, which in turn fuels violence. Deprived of the opportunity for political participation on an equal footing, the Hutu community in particular, and other opponents of the regime in general, may, in years to come, fall prey to the fresh incitement to liberate themselves from Kagame’s dictatorship and presumed Tutsi domination by resorting to sectarian violence. More particularly, by refusing to make compromises to open up the political space and to agree to at least share power, the ruling party once again risks not only losing power by force, but also exposes all Tutsi to the risk of violence, even violence of genocidal proportions, at some indeterminate future time.” (*Rwanda Briefing*, p. 35)

Warning of a new genocide and putting the onus on the victims has been a standard theme in Hutu Power propaganda since the 1994 genocide. So too is the *Rwanda Briefing*’s proposed solution for Rwanda, which is for “inclusive and unconditional” negotiation with self-selected émigré Rwandan Hutu opposition leaders (i.e. from the terrorist Democratic Front for the Liberation of Rwanda or FDLR based in eastern Congo, which is led by remnants of the military leadership that spearheaded the 1994 genocide, and other émigré remnants and sympathizers of the genocidal regime of 1994) to establish Hutu majority rule with

some sort of guarantee of Tutsi minority rights.

There is no evidence that the people of Rwanda want to go down this path.

Hutu power coalition

After issuing this manifesto, the RNC entered into a formal and open alliance with the leading émigré Hutu Power political coalition, which is called the Unified Democratic Forces (FDU) and is concentrated in Western Europe, with branches in North America and Africa.

The FDU coalition’s core party, the Republican Rally for Democracy in Rwanda (RDR), was established in spring 1995 in eastern Congo (then Zaire) by the fugitive military leaders of the 1994 genocide, to replace the “interim government” which had just carried out the genocide.

Several of the RDR’s founding leaders have since been convicted of genocide by the UN’s International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, and several of its current leaders are the subjects of Interpol warrants based on Rwandan genocide charges.

UN experts have documented supportive links between the FDU and the FDLR.

The President of both the FDU and the RDR, Victoire Ingabire, has been convicted in open Rwandan court on charges of genocide denial as well as subversion related to her ties with the FDLR and her plans to create an armed group of her own.

The ideology and goals of the FDU, like those of the FDLR, demonstrate continued loyalty to the Hutu Power coalition which perpetrated the 1994

genocide. Of itself, the RNC's alliance with the FDU demonstrates a complete lack of scruples. But there is more.

The RNC is reported, largely in Rwandan and other African media but also in several UN reports on the Congo, to have its own ties to the FDLR and allied armed groups in Congo. These reported ties include meetings with FDLR leaders in eastern Congo, Tanzania and South Africa, and, as documented by UN experts, a significant volume of telephone communication between the RNC and FDLR as well as the provision of money and communication equipment to an FDLR faction by an RNC coalition partner, General Emmanuel Habyarimana, resident in Switzerland.

Finally, the Rwandan government has since 2010 named the RNC as a leading organizer, along with the FDLR, of the recurrent grenade attacks in different parts of Rwanda which have killed and maimed scores of Rwandan civilians, as well as two recent assassination plots aimed at the present Rwandan leadership.

In a January 27, 2014 interview with the weekly *Jeune Afrique*, Kagame said this of the RNC leaders:

“They have declared themselves enemies of the state... for them, the only means to achieve their goals is armed violence... And they have put this in practice by sponsoring terror campaigns, the throwing of grenades in public places here in Rwanda that have caused deaths and tens of wounded... We have a whole series of credible and concordant information from our intelligence services, from opposition people who have come back to us, and from the interrogation transcripts of those we have arrested for trial... We

know, and Western as well as certain African intelligence services know – even if, curiously, they do nothing about it – that in these vengeful circles there are also plans to physically eliminate Rwandan leaders.” (author's translation.)

Rwandan authorities have made some of this information public, including the names and testimonies of three former FDLR officers who defected back to Rwanda and named the RNC as a fomenter of armed action against Rwanda (Col. Amri Bizimana, Major Damascene Rugamba, and Lt. Col. Abraham Sam Bisengimana), and of another who was arrested as an infiltrator and pleaded guilty to terrorism charges (Colonel Ndererimana Norbert, aka Gaheza, the beneficiary of the support from Gen. Habyarimana cited above).

Plot on Kagame by bodyguard

A former Kagame bodyguard, Lt. Joel Mutabazi, was convicted and sentenced to life in jail in a public trial by a Rwandan military court in October, on terrorism and murder charges relating to fatal grenade attacks and plotting to kill Kagame.

The court, and Rwandan and Ugandan press reports based on the testimony of Mr. Mutabazi and his several accomplices and on ‘informed sources,’ present details of the role of the RNC in instigating and financing their activities.

The ongoing trial of Kizito Mihigo (who has pleaded guilty) and three accomplices for conspiring to carry out terrorist attacks and assassinations of

Rwanda leaders is also producing evidence of RNC involvement.

For the record, let us note that RNC leaders insist they do not cooperate with the FDLR and have nothing to do with terrorist attacks against Rwanda; they charge that it is the Rwandan government itself which has been conducting grenade attacks against its own people.

Given the evidence above, there is nothing implausible about the Rwandan government's indictment of the RNC.

Meanwhile, Rwandan authorities have yet to present their knowledge of the RNC's role in a comprehensive, detailed, transparent and verifiable public document that might be compelling enough to overcome Western indifference (no Western government or human rights group has expressed concern).

There are several possible explanations as to why. The least likely is that Rwandan authorities lack the hard evidence to sustain such a document. More likely explanations include a scarcity of human resources with the appropriate security clearances for such a task; a reluctance to compromise the sources and methods used to uncover and counteract ongoing RNC activities; and perhaps a fortress mentality that makes Rwandan decision-makers feel that the sordid details are none of an unsympathetic outside world's business.

I believe that Rwanda should do more to make its case. But the information publicly available now about the RNC is certainly enough to warrant urgent Western concern, investigation, and action.

The BBC's film is completely silent on all of the above.

British government should examine the BBC

The public needs to know why the BBC gave an uncritical platform to both denial of the Rwanda genocide and to an alleged terrorist group. The BBC needs to make amends, and to provide a transparent account of the film's origin and how it came to be uncritically adopted by the BBC. The British government itself should examine and take a stand on what the BBC has done.

The BBC's journalistic fiasco should also serve as a wake-up call to governments in North America, Western Europe and Africa that profess support for peace, stability, prosperity and democracy in Rwanda and its region. On both moral and foreign policy grounds, they should investigate and take appropriate action against émigré Rwandan groups which are charged with actively supporting or launching terrorist acts to promote the violent overthrow of the Rwandan government.

The FDLR and several of its leaders are under UN sanctions. But only Germany has put FDLR leaders on trial and criminalized membership in the FDLR. No government outside Rwanda has signaled that it is investigating the FDU and the RNC, much less preparing any action against them.

These are small émigré groups which operate both openly and underground. Some of their leaders and supporters are genocide fugitives who should be extradited to Rwanda for trial. Judging from their websites, they are top-heavy with ambitious and often very unsavory political opera-

tives in constant competition for leadership roles, riven by mutual distrust and chronic internal rifts, and devoid of honesty in their vision of and for Rwanda. They appear to be united largely by hatred of Rwanda's post-genocide leadership and the hope that the chaos of its overthrow would open the way to impunity, revenge, personal power, and, no doubt for some, the resumed slaughter of Rwandan Tutsi. They would probably not exist today absent the life support system they have enjoyed from de facto Western allies.

It would obviously be wiser and more ethical to address the threat represented by these groups now, rather than attempt to deal with the aftermath of whatever success they might achieve.

Meanwhile, the prospects for such action seem slim.

Efforts to delegitimize

Western critics of Rwanda often complain that Western governments have been prejudiced in favor of post-genocide Rwanda and the Kagame government because they feel guilty for not having stopped the genocide in 1994.

It seems more apt to say that guilt has had the opposite effect. "They resent us for what they did to us" is a common insight among victims of injustice and persecution.

And indeed, since its failure to prevent or stop the genocide – and despite recognizing the genocide and the West's failure therein, as well as giving considerable financial aid to Rwanda – the Western establishment has been either indifferent to, or actively com-

plicit in, the ongoing efforts of the émigré Rwanda opposition to delegitimize and subvert the post-genocide Rwanda order.

This began in the immediate aftermath of the genocide, when the West helped the genocide perpetrators regroup, rearm and take root in "refugee camps" in eastern Congo, provided far more aid to these camps than to devastated Rwanda itself, and stood by as the perpetrators began to attack Rwanda.

It continued in 2003 and 2010, when the West pressed Rwanda to allow political parties linked to the genocide to compete in Rwandan elections.

It goes on today. The West is still procrastinating on repeated commitments to eradicate the FDLR in eastern Congo. This foot dragging stands in contrast to how quickly the West committed MONUSCO (the UN peacekeeping force in Congo) to war in 2012, in support of the Congolese government's determination, which reflected and reinforced a visible degree of racism against Congolese Tutsi, to eradicate the one armed group in eastern Congo, the so-called M23, that constituted a buffer against FDLR infiltration into Rwanda.

Western governments have delegated critical parts of Western policy toward Rwanda and its region to France, which has the lead on UN Security Council resolutions about Congo and Rwanda as well as long-standing control over UN peacekeeping operations in the Congo as well as key positions within MONUSCO.

This is tremendously irresponsible, and shameful, given that the French government still refuses to confront its own complicity in the 1994 genocide (the current head of UN peacekeeping,

Hervé Ladsous, played a role in this complicity).

The US government for its part appears to have handed over key elements of its Rwanda policy-making to Human Rights Watch, despite the growing dishonesty and perversity of this NGO's advocacy on Rwandan issues over the past decade (see this author's March 2013 study, *The Travesty of Human Rights Watch on Rwanda*).

More generally, disinformation from the Hutu Power movement continues to pollute Western discourse, long after it should have been buried. We still hear that Kagame shot down Habyarimana's plane and thus 'provoked' the genocide in 1994, or that the RPF is morally equivalent to or worse than the genocidal regime it defeated, or that the RPF committed genocide against the Hutu, or that Victoire Ingabire is a legitimate "opposition leader" who was unjustly prosecuted, or that Rwanda has designs on Congolese territory, or that Rwanda developmental achievements are a hollow sham or discriminate against the Hutu, or that Rwanda is a 'volcano about to erupt.'

These have become zombie lies, apparently impervious to hard facts and reason.

From the start, denial of the genocide against the Rwandan Tutsi has been a critical component of efforts to delegitimize Kagame and the RPF.

With its recent "documentary," the BBC has now, in effect, joined that campaign.

Comfort can be taken from the fact that this step by the BBC can still be viewed, albeit optimistically, as an embarrassing exception to Western gestures of probity about the 1994 genocide. Such probity is expressed each

year in April as Western leaders commemorate the genocide. It was also expressed by the UN Security Council in April 2014 in a strong unanimous resolution which reaffirmed the historical truth about the genocide and its victims. The resolution condemned any denial of the genocide, urged an end to impunity for genocide fugitives around the world, recognized the genocidal nature of the FDLR in eastern Congo, and stressed the importance of neutralizing the FDLR.

Comfort too can be taken in the protests against the BBC from a number of Western observers, as expressed in the collective letter and statements cited above.

But overall, the Western establishment seems willing to give the BBC a pass. The US ambassador in Kigali has defended the BBC's right to air its film, on freedom of speech grounds. The US and other Western governments, legislative bodies, human rights and conflict resolution groups, institutions opposed to genocide denial, churches and faith-based NGOs, other prestigious media, and many in academia have remained silent on the iniquity of the BBC film's content.

The West is also silent about the threat to Rwanda from the FDLR, FDU and RNC, the support given these groups from Congo, South Africa and Tanzania, and the persecution of persons identified as Tutsi in Congo and Tanzania.

And the West is silent as well (except for a determined cohort of French intellectuals) about the French government's continuing refusal to deal with its complicity in the genocide in 1994 and thereafter, or to end its apparent sympathy for the FDLR and the

safe haven it gives to many notorious Rwanda genocide fugitives.

All this silence is eloquent.

Instead of Rwanda-bashing

It would be quite easy for the BBC and for Western governments (except, alas, for France) to oppose rather than condone the security threat to Rwanda from the FDU, RNC and FDLR.

The only real obstacle to this lies in the current Western mindset, which seems to be more receptive to Rwanda-bashing than to solidarity with Rwandan security concerns. Western discourse about Rwanda has a strong element of callousness, arrogance, hypocrisy, and irrational hostility to a highly effective and popular African government intent on overcoming both a poisonous colonial legacy

and a still recent genocide. Thus, the BBC's film and the overall failure of the Western establishment to condemn it.

Absent a sea change in the way Western authorities talk and act about Rwandan issues, Rwanda will have to be self-reliant in dealing with hostile propaganda and subversive threats from extremist émigré Rwandan groups. Rwandan leaders say they can do it, and their confidence is not unjustified. But disinformation is corrosive, and terrorism is a potentially devastating weapon.

Rwanda, of all places, should not have to deal with these threats alone. It is urgent that the Western establishment be induced to finally clean up its act regarding this country.

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