

“Vive La Cooperation Franco-Rwandaise”

Even as the number of victims of genocide mounted, some French officials pursued the goal of assuring the heirs of Habyarimana the predominant political role in Rwanda. In so doing they weakened the impact of weak and tardy efforts to halt the slaughter and strengthened the resolve of the genocidal government. The French had hoped to use the U.N. peacekeepers to protect the Rwandan government against the RPF, but this strategy collapsed with the renewal of combat and the withdrawal of UNAMIR into passivity. President Mitterrand and some of the military closest to him were not prepared to accept the prospect of a RPF victory. General Christian Quesnot, head of the president's own military staff, and General Jean-Pierre Huchon, who had been part of Mitterrand's military staff until he became head of the French military assistance program in mid-1993, apparently shared and shaped Mitterrand's analysis of the Rwandan situation.⁵⁵ Mitterrand, military officers with links to Rwanda, and many political leaders as well, had assimilated the doctrine of the *rubanda nyamwinshi* propagated by Hutu Power advocates. Like them, they unquestioningly equated the ethnic majority to the political majority. Whether they chose to speak of Hutu representing 80 percent of the Rwandan population or of Tutsi comprising 15 per cent of the total (the missing 5 percent was never mentioned), they never doubted that Hutu had the right to dominate political life. That the minority was supported by their Anglo-Saxon rivals only reinforced their loyalty to the Hutu.⁵⁶ With the resumption of combat, some high-ranking military officers held even more strongly to their belief that the RPF were “Black Khmers” and some privately challenged the Arusha Accords. One told a researcher, “Arusha is Munich,” referring to the classic case of appeasement of the Nazis that preceded World War II.⁵⁷ Soldiers used terms like “Tutsiland” and “Hutu country” in private correspondence and even in official orders.⁵⁸ For policymakers and soldiers trapped in this ethnic analysis of the situation, Habyarimana had been the quintessential representative of the majority people. With his death, they saw the circle of those identified with him as the only leaders likely to succeed in withstanding the RPF threat.

“Getting Your Hands Dirty”

The Rwandan politicians who formed the interim government on April 8 realized the importance of French support and kept French Ambassador Jean-Michel Marlaud well informed of their progress toward taking control. He found the new government acceptable even though it was composed exclusively of Hutu Power supporters and even though it had refused his suggestion to make Faustin Twagiramungu, designated prime minister by the Arusha Accords, head of the government instead of Kambanda.⁵⁹ The day after its installation, the interim government sent its foreign minister to ask Marlaud for French troops to “contain the situation.”⁶⁰

French soldiers were supposed to have left Rwanda in December 1993 under the terms of the Arusha Accords. Only twenty-four remained officially after this date, as part of a military training program for the army general staff, the National Police and other units. But according to Michel Roussin, then Minister of Cooperation, forty to seventy soldiers were actually in Rwanda in early April.⁶¹ Within minutes after the plane was shot down, French soldiers were at the site of the crash, although UNAMIR soldiers were prevented by Rwandan troops from approaching it. The next morning, four French soldiers stood guard outside the Habyarimana's home while members of the Presidential Guard escorted visitors in and out.⁶² Early on April 9, French soldiers secured the airport for the arriving evacuation force, working in close cooperation with Rwandan army troops, and they served as intermediary between the Rwandan soldiers and the Belgian evacuation force, then regarded as hostile by the Rwandans.⁶³

The deputy defense attaché at the French embassy, Lt. Col. Jean-Jacques Maurin, was in charge of the troops because the defense attaché was out of the country. Maurin, who had served as adviser to the general staff since 1992, was well-acquainted with Rwandan military leaders and presumably well-placed to influence them. According to Ambassador Marlaud, he and Maurin tried on the afternoon of April 7 to persuade Bagosora to “take control of the situation,” ignoring the fact that he was already in control of the violence.⁶⁴ Otherwise there has been no account of the role played by these French advisers during the first days of the crisis, when the officers whom they had been training were ordering their troops to slaughter civilians. Nor has there been an explanation of the duties of the two French soldiers slain by the RPF, along with the wife of one of them, on April 8. They were supposedly found in possession of communications equipment. Some officers in Belgian military intelligence believed that the French had tapped the phone system in Kigali.⁶⁵

For several days, the French considered meeting the request of the interim government for military assistance. According to a commission of the French National Assembly that investigated the Rwandan tragedy, the evacuation operation had a “strictly humanitarian purpose” but “could have developed into something other than a simple humanitarian operation.”⁶⁶ They mention that the force came equipped with Milan missiles and that a group of thirty-five men, at least one of them an intelligence expert, remained in Rwanda under Maurin’s orders even after the embassy had been closed and all the foreigners and other French soldiers had been evacuated. The contingent left behind was ordered to gather information on the local situation, propose appropriate action, and guide air support operations. As the commission notes, it is difficult to imagine for whom the air support might be destined if not the Rwandan army.⁶⁷

The relative weakness of the government troops and the rapid advance of the RPF must have discouraged decision makers in Paris from attempting yet one more rescue of the Rwandan army. The French had also consulted with at least the U.S. and Belgium about some form of intervention, as mentioned above, and had found them unwilling to participate. According to official records, the last of the French troops was withdrawn on April 14.

Some soldiers long committed to supporting Rwandan colleagues regretted this decision. Col. Jean Balch, one of that group, commented:

...it would have taken very little (a few French military advisers) to reverse the situation. June 1992 and February 1993 [when French aid had halted the RPF] could perfectly well have been “replayed” in April 1994.⁶⁸

Unwilling to provide military aid, the French provided discreet but vital political support to the interim government, at the U.N., in diplomatic exchanges with other governments, and through public statements.⁶⁹ They argued, as did the Kigali authorities, that the massacres were a virtually inevitable response to RPF military advances.⁷⁰ They often refused to acknowledge the role of Rwandan authorities in directing the genocide; as late as June 22, French military officers spoke of the need to help authorities reestablish control over the killers.⁷¹ At other times, they admitted the responsibility of the interim government, but sought to minimize it by depicting the genocide as part of a particularly vicious “tribal war” with abuses on both sides.⁷² In an interview with representatives of Human Rights Watch and the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues, Mitterrand’s chief adviser on Africa, Bruno Delaye, conceded that the “Hutu” had done terrible things, but he insisted that it was because they were fighting for their lives. It was regrettable, but that was the way Africans were.⁷³ On May 16, then Foreign Minister Alain Juppé became one of the first important statesmen to use the term “genocide” in referring to Rwanda, but in mid-June he wrote about “genocides,” suggesting both sides were engaged in the crime.⁷⁴

Using the pretext of keeping contact with all parties to the conflict, Juppé and Delaye welcomed to Paris the delegation of the interim foreign minister, Jérôme Bicomumpaka, and CDR head

Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza. Although a French government spokesman described the visit as unofficial, the two were received at the French Presidency and at the Office of the Prime Minister. At the time, Human Rights Watch questioned a French representative in Washington about the meetings and was told that French officials had used the occasion to press for an end to the massacres.⁷⁵ In Paris, Delaye answered a similar question from Daniel Jacoby, then President of FIDH, by saying that it was better to talk to them than not to.⁷⁶ Challenged subsequently about the wisdom of meeting with representatives of a government engaged in genocide, Delaye stated that he had received 400 assassins and 2,000 drug traffickers in his office. “You cannot deal with Africa,” he asserted, “without getting your hands dirty.”⁷⁷ During the 1998 inquiry at the National Assembly, Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine, who was secretary-general at the French Presidency in 1994, was asked why France had accorded legitimacy to the genocidal government. He responded that:

It was not a question of legitimacy or illegitimacy, which is based in a democratic way of thinking not appropriate in the context of the period.... France does not select and does not judge some as more than legitimate than others. It saw that there was a terrible conflict which it watched with consternation since its purpose had been for years...to prevent that conflict. Hence its desire to negotiate a cease-fire, which required continuing a dialogue with all the parties.⁷⁸ In fact, as shown above, other governments also continued discussions with the interim authorities but found more private ways to do so. If French officials chose such a highly visible way to maintain contact with the genocidal government, they did so fully aware of the political message being sent. It made genocide seem respectable in Paris, an encouragement to its supporters in Rwanda and a lever for the interim government to use in securing entry in other capitals abroad.

According to former minister of cooperation, Bernard Debré, Mitterrand at first remained “very attached to former President Habyarimana and his family, and to everything that was part of the old regime.”⁷⁹ This attachment took the concrete form of a gift of some U.S.\$40,000 to Madame Habyarimana at the time of her arrival in France, a sum that was designated as “urgent assistance for Rwandan refugees” and was taken from the budget of the Ministry of Cooperation.⁸⁰ This grant provoked such anger among staff of the ministry that information about it was leaked to the press. Ministry staff also formally and unanimously demanded that “money budgeted by the Ministry of Cooperation for Rwanda be used for humanitarian assistance for the people of the country” and deplored the French refusal to evacuate Rwandan employees, some of whom had worked with the French for many years.⁸¹

French authorities occasionally used their influence to protect people, as when they intervened at the Hotel Mille Collines. Just after the mid-May incident, an official at the foreign ministry remarked to a reporter that the success of the initiative “shows to what extent Paris can still influence events.”⁸² But when asked to use their power to produce a more general change in the policies of the interim government, French officials often professed having no means to do so. Two weeks after the first incident, Delaye told representatives of Médecins sans Frontières that he could not exert influence on Rwandan authorities because he could not get them on the telephone.⁸³ When asked to comment four years later on whether pressure from Paris had brought about change in the policies of the genocidal government, a high-ranking French official familiar with the Rwandan dossier replied, “What pressure? There was no pressure.”⁸⁴

Aid to the Rwandan Armed Forces

Official deliveries of arms by the French government to other governments are regulated by well-defined rules, but in the case of Rwanda—as in many others—the rules were rarely followed. According to the National Assembly investigative commission, thirty-one of thirty-six deliveries of weapons to Rwanda during the years 1990 to 1994 were made “without

following the rules.”⁸⁵ According to the commission, there were no legal and official deliveries of arms after April 8, 1994, a position reiterated by an official from the Ministry of Defense. But the commission left open the possibility of other kinds of deliveries linked to France, saying specifically that its report did not “exhaust the reality of the subject.”⁸⁶ Speaking privately, various military officers and officials in the ministries of cooperation and defense indicated that deliveries of weapons by French actors—perhaps unofficially, illegally, or transacted outside France—took place while the genocide was going on.⁸⁷ Bernard Debré reported his impression that France might have supplied arms for some time after the start of the genocide. He stated that he asked Mitterrand about this and the French president replied, “Do you think that the world woke up on April 7 saying today the genocide is beginning?”⁸⁸

According to a U.N. military observer, one of the three French planes that delivered the troops of the evacuation mission also brought cases of ammunition for mortars. French officials had informed UNAMIR that the first planes bringing troops of the evacuation force would land at 6 a.m. on April 9 but they actually arrived more than two hours early. Rwandan soldiers, correctly informed of the arrival time, had removed the trucks blocking the runway to allow the plane to land. The ammunition was unloaded from the plane and taken away by Rwandan army vehicles.⁸⁹

Research done by the Arms Division of Human Rights Watch established that the French government or French companies operating under government license delivered arms to the Rwandan forces five times in May and June through the town of Goma, just across the border from Gisenyi, in Zaire.⁹⁰ The first of these shipments may have taken place before May 17, when the Security Council imposed an embargo on the supply of arms to the interim government, but it was still done in disregard of its April 30 appeal “to refrain from providing arms or any military assistance” to the parties to the conflict. On one of the dates in question, May 25, a plane from Malta landed at Goma with a single passenger, T. Bagosora, in addition to its cargo.⁹¹

Lt. Col. Cyprien Kayumba spent twenty-seven days in Paris in an effort to speed the supply of arms and ammunition to the Rwandan army. During that time, he was reportedly a regular visitor to the office of French military cooperation, where he frequently saw its head, General Huchon.⁹² Just two days after the visit of Barayagwiza and Bicomumpaka to French officials, Kayumba submitted a large order for arms to SOFREMAS, Société Française d’Exploitation de Matériels et Systèmes d’Armement, an enterprise controlled by the French state that serves as intermediary between French arms manufacturers or dealers and countries seeking arms. According to correspondence later recovered from the archives of the Rwandan Ministry of Defense, SOFREMAS wrote Kayumba on May 5 at his Paris address, stating that they were prepared to ship U.S.\$8 million worth of ammunition of South African manufacture as soon as they received a payment of 30 percent of the price and the necessary EUC/Zaire. EUC stands for End User Certificate, the formal attestation by a government that the arms purchased were for its own use and not for resale or transshipment elsewhere. This document was to be provided by Zaire in a clear attempt to hide the real purchaser of the arms, which would have been shipped to Goma, not to Kigali. Although the arms embargo had not yet been voted by the Security Council, SOFREMAS knew it would be embarrassing to be discovered supplying arms to Rwanda during a period when a genocide was being executed.

On May 5, the day that SOFREMAS confirmed its deal with Kayumba, the French cabinet decided that all authorizations for the export of arms to Rwanda would be suspended and that no new authorisations would be accorded. This decision confirmed a provisional suspension that had been in effect since April 8.⁹³ The director of SOFREMAS, Germaine Guell, states that the U.S.\$8 million order was cancelled by SOFREMAS once the arms embargo went into effect and that company made no further shipments to Rwanda after May 17.⁹⁴ This carefully worded statement, like those of the government ministers, did not exclude deliveries to Zaire.

In fact, Guell explicitly conceded that “it is possible and even probable that Mobutu’s government agreed to have Goma serve as a conduit for material meant for Rwanda.” He admitted that his company had been asked to deliver arms in this way—the mention of the End User Certificate in the document cited above proves that they had actually agreed to this arrangement—but he declares that they did not do so. He hastened to add that the practice of deliveries through Zaire must have ended quickly. He remarked, “It would take a pretty unscrupulous government to deliver materiel to Zaire that it knew would end up in Rwanda.”⁹⁵ Admiral Jacques Lanxade, chief of staff of the French army, discounted any impact of French-delivered arms on the genocide. In a radio interview on June 29, 1994 he said, “We cannot be reproached with having armed the killers. In any case, all those massacres were committed with sticks and machetes.”⁹⁶ Lanxade was wrong about the importance of the use of firearms in the genocide, as data above shows. But even apart from any direct link between arms delivered by French actors and those used in massacring civilians, providing weapons desperately needed by the Rwandan armed forces in its war against the RPF strengthened a government engaged in genocide.

Lt. Col. Ephrem Rwabalinda of the Rwandan army came to Paris to press for more extensive aid than just arms. He reported on his four-day mission to the headquarters of French military assistance in a May 16 letter to the Rwandan minister of defense and chief of staff of the army.⁹⁷ On May 9, Rwabalinda had the first of a series of meetings with General Huchon. He requested French political support in the international community, French soldiers to be sent to Rwanda—at least some instructors who could “help out” under a military assistance program, and what he called the “indirect use of foreign soldiers, regular or irregular” (i.e., mercenaries). He also cited several “urgent needs”: at least 2,000 rounds of 105mm ammunition and ammunition for individual arms, even if this had to be delivered indirectly through neighboring friendly countries.

By Rwabalinda’s account, Huchon told him that a secure telephone to permit encoded conversations between himself and General Bizimungu had already been sent from Paris and was awaiting shipment from Ostend. The French had also sent seventeen small radio sets to facilitate communications between various units and Kigali. Huchon reportedly stressed that it was urgent to locate a usable airfield where landings could be made “in complete security.” They agreed that Kamembe, in the southwestern town of Cyangugu, was the most likely site, provided that the runway was repaired and that “spies were driven away” from the airport. When Rwabalinda pushed for more immediate aid, Huchon is said to have stated very clearly that “French soldiers had their hands and feet tied” and could not intervene to help the Rwandan army and interim government because of the bad press they had been getting. Unless something were done, Huchon reportedly stressed, Rwandan military and leaders will be “held responsible for the massacres committed in Rwanda.” They must prove the legitimacy of their war “to turn international opinion back in favor of Rwanda in order to be able to resume bilateral aid.” According to Rwabalinda, Huchon said that in the meantime the French military cooperation service “is preparing measures to save us.”

Rwabalinda reported that Huchon returned several times to this point—that the “French government would not put up with accusations of helping a government condemned by international opinion if that government did not do what was necessary to defend itself. The media war is urgent and all subsequent operations depend on it.” Huchon is said to have promised that the “urgent needs” Rwabalinda described would be evaluated in a “detailed and concrete” way once the secret telephone contact were established between him and Bizimungu. Rwabalinda forwarded to his superiors the suggestion that a government spokesman who was up to the demands of the job be sent to Paris immediately. He reported that he had done his part to launch the media campaign by delivering some articles to one of his Rwandan colleagues

there. Rwabalinda concluded his report with the suggestion that a visit “at high political” level would be a good idea to push for the desired assistance.

Assuming Rwabalinda reported the meeting accurately, Huchon and his aides were more concerned about the public perception of the killing than about the killing itself. The condition for important renewed French assistance was not to end the genocide but to make it more presentable in the international press.⁹⁸

Some otherwise unidentified French generals did their part to improve the image of the interim government by depicting it as the victim of outside aggression. In early May—just about the same time when Rwabalinda was meeting with Huchon—they approached journalist Renaud Girard with private information about the presence of Ugandan battalions backing the RPF in its offensive on Kigali. Girard checked the “information” and found it to be false.⁹⁹

The message about the need to improve the Rwandan image was also delivered in Rwanda. Two days after Rwabalinda wrote his report, RTLM told its listeners, “please, no more cadavers on the roads.”

[Footnotes]

55 Assemblée Nationale, Mission d’information commune, *Enquête*, Tome III, Auditions, Volume I, pp. 127, 347. Callamard, “French Policy in Rwanda,” p. 22.

56 Assemblée Nationale, Mission d’information commune, *Enquête*, Tome III, Auditions, Volume I, pp. 208, 210, 341, 344; Chrétien et al., *Rwanda, Les médias*, p. 281.

57 Callamard, “French Policy in Rwanda,” pp. 16, 24.

58 Assemblée Nationale, Mission d’information commune, *Enquête*, Tome II, Annexes, pp. 239, 279, 387.

59 Reyntjens, *Rwanda, Trois jours*, p. 89.

60 Chris McGreal, Notes of interview with Jean Kambanda, Bukavu, August, 1994.

61 Patrick de Saint-Exupéry, “France-Rwanda: des mensonges d’Etat, *Le Figaro*, April 2, 1998.

62 Brussels, Détachement Judiciaire, Auditorat Militaire, P.V. no. 1013, June 22, 1994.

63 Assemblée Nationale, Mission d’information commune, *Enquête*, Tome I, Rapport, pp. 257, 259.

64 Assemblée Nationale, Mission d’information commune, *Enquête*, Tome III, Auditions, Volume I, p. 296.

65 Stephen Smith, “6 avril 1994: deux missiles abattent l’avion du président Habyarimana;” Commission d’enquête, *Rapport*, p. 335-36.

66 Assemblée Nationale, Mission d’information commune, *Enquête sur la tragédie rwandaise (1990-1994)*, Tome I, Rapport, p. 262.

67 Ibid., p. 264.

68 Ibid., p. 263.

69 Human Rights Watch/FIDH interview, New York, May 15, 1996.

70 Assemblée Nationale, Mission d’information commune, *Enquête*, Tome III, Auditions, Volume I, p. 119.

71 Assemblée Nationale, Mission d’information commune, *Enquête*, Tome II, Annexes, p. 387.

72 Réponse du Ministre des Affaires étrangères, M. Alain Juppé à une question orale à l’Assemblée nationale. 28 avril 1994.

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73 Human Rights Watch/FIDH interview, Paris, July 4, 1994.

74 Alain Juppé, "Intervenir au Rwanda," *Libération*, June 16, 1994; Mitterrand also would use the plural "genocides" in a speech in November 1994. François Mitterrand, "Discours de Monsieur François Mitterrand," Biarritz, 8 November 1994, p.4

75 Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, p. 277; Alain Girma, French Embassy, Washington, D.C. to Holly Burkhalter, Human Rights Watch, April 28, 1994.

76 Eric Gillet, "Le Génocide Devant La Justice," *Les Temps Modernes*, July-August, 1995, no. 583, p. 241, n. 33.

77 Patrick de Saint-Exupéry, "France-Rwanda: un génocide sans importance..." *Le Figaro*, January 12, 1998.

78 Assemblée Nationale, Mission d'information commune, *Enquête*, Tome III, Auditions, Volume I, p. 210.

79 Quoted on Radio France Internationale, November 18, 1994.

80 Alain Frilet and Sylvie Coma, "Paris, terre d'asile de luxe pour dignitaires hutus."

81 Guichaoua, *Les crises politiques*, pp. 718-19.

82 Alain Frilet, "La France prise au piège de ses accords," *Liberation*, 18 mai 1994.

83 Jean-Hervé Bradol and Anne Guibert, "Le temps des assassins et l'espace humanitaire, Rwanda, Kivu, 1994-1997," *Herodote*, Nos. 86-87, 1997, p.123

84 Human Rights Watch/FIDH interview, Paris, November 12, 1998.

85 Assemblée Nationale, Mission d'information commune, *Enquête*, Tome I, Rapport, p. 172.

86 Ibid., p. 168; Human Rights Watch/FIDH interview, Paris, November 12, 1998.

87 Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, p. 278; Callamard, "French Policy in Rwanda," p. 38, n. 7; Patrick Saint-Exupéry, "France-Rwanda: Des Silences d'Etat," *Le Figaro*, January 14, 1998.

88 Assemblée Nationale, Mission d'information commune, *Enquête*, Tome III, Auditions, Volume 1, p. 414.

89 Jean de la Guérvrière, "Un Officier Belge Maintient Ses Déclarations sur l'Attitude de la France lors du Génocide Rwandais," *Le Monde*, July 23, 1995. The commander of the operation admitted that he had requisitioned Rwandan army vehicles but denied that his men had delivered ammunition for mortars. He did not mention the possibility that they might have delivered another kind of ammunition. Assemblée Nationale, Mission d'information commune, *Enquête*, Tome II, Annexes, pp 356-7.

90 Human Rights Watch, "Rwanda/Zaire: Rearming with Impunity," pp. 6-8.

91 The government of Malta has been unable to provide clarification of this case. United Nations, Letter Dated 22 January 1998 from the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/1998/63, January 26, 1998.

92 Callamard, "French Policy in Rwanda," pp. 22, 36.

93 Assemblée Nationale, Mission d'information commune, *Enquête*, Tome III, Annexes, volume I, p. 100.

94 Patrick de Saint-Exupéry, "France-Rwanda: le temps de l'hypocrisie," *Le Figaro*, January 15, 1998.

95 Bernard Duraud, "Rwanda: deux documents mettent la France en accusation," and Bruno Peuchamiel, "La réponse des sociétés mises en cause," *L'Humanité*, November 20, 1996.

96 Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, p. 278.

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97 Lt. Col. Ephrem Rwabalinda to Minister of Defense and Chief of Staff, Rwandan Army, May 16, 1994. Subsequent quotations about this meeting with Huchon are all from this document.

98 Human Rights Watch/FIDH sought a meeting with General Huchon to discuss this letter, but were unable to arrange one. Rwabalinda's account is confirmed by a Rwandan military source and, in regard to the sending of the secure telephone, by a letter from Huchon to the Mission d'Information. Human Rights Watch/FIDH interview, Brussels, November 8, 1998; Assemblée Nationale, Mission d'information commune, *Enquête*, Tome II, Annexes, p 574. Although the commission apparently had a copy of the Rwabalinda letter, it did not publish it among the documents made public at the time of its report.

99 Renaud Girard, "Rwanda: Les Faux Pas de la France," *Le Figaro*, May 19, 1994.