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Shameful Dawdling on Rwanda

One can stipulate that the U.S. has no vital interests or historical ties in Rwanda that might justify sending troops to this tormented central African country. That said, the Clinton Administration chose an awful time to delay logistical aid to U.N. peacekeepers, and a worse time to apply a semantic sponge to crimes against humanity.

Just the other day, President Clinton was in France summoning the memories of a just war against a genocidal foe. Meantime the appalling butchery continues in Rwanda, where rebel militias last week slaughtered three Catholic bishops; the worth of a cease-fire agreement announced yesterday remains to be tested. Yet a paralyzed Pentagon quibbles over nickels and dimes instead of rushing U.S. armored vehicles to the first elements of a projected force of 5,500 U.N. peacekeepers.

The bill to the U.N. for this logistical aid is \$9.5 million, with delivery costs reckoned at about \$6 million; the U.N. is also being charged a leasing fee of \$375,000 for the 50 M-113 armored personnel carriers. Defense officials insist that the vehicles

cannot be flown from Frankfurt to Entebbe in Uganda until the lease agreement is concluded by the U.N. The green-eyeshade brigade is doubtless right, but this is not a routine arms transaction; it is a response to a humanitarian disaster. Blame for not slashing through this red tape rests with the White House and the National Security Council.

This haggling over leasing arrangements is being perpetrated by the U.N.'s leading deadbeat; the U.S. owes nearly \$2 billion in treaty-mandated dues and assessments. What adds a truly dismaying flavor to this miserable affair is the Administration's simultaneous admonition to its officials to avoid describing the massacres in Rwanda as genocide. Instead, spokesmen have been instructed to say that "acts of genocide may have occurred."

This dainty euphemism flies in the face of daily reports of ethnic killings that can only be called genocidal. What really seems to worry the Clinton team is that talk of genocide may increase clamor for doing more to stop it, especially since the U.S. is a party to the Genocide Convention.