

## Executive Summary

Using the techniques of critical policy analysis, this report examines the effectiveness of early warning and conflict management of the Rwanda conflict. The study begins with the refugee problem prior to 1990 and ends with the genocide of 500 – 800,000 persons, mainly belonging to the minority Tutsi community, in the second quarter of 1994. Security issues related to the subsequent formation of refugee camps are also examined.

Once the civil war broke out in 1990, increasingly there were warnings, supported by evidence, that large-scale civilian massacres might occur. Nevertheless, virtually no-one anticipated genocide on the scale that took place. Preparations to deal with the contingency of massive violence that targeted civilians were inadequate.

By failing to deal with the festering refugee problem prior to 1990, both the Rwandese and the Ugandan governments set the stage for future conflict. The build-up of tension leading to the 1990 invasion by the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) was inadequately monitored. Once the civil war started, however, it triggered an intense and effective diplomatic process that eventually secured a peace agreement. The process was initiated and led by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the regional states, particularly Tanzania, and received considerable international attention and support. The United Nations assumed formal responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the consequent Arusha Accords, but failed to make adequate use of the OAU and local African states in this regard. As a consequence, there was a disjuncture between the mediation and implementation phase, which contributed to undermining the Accords. Throughout, insufficient attention was paid to the warnings from human rights organizations and other sources that extremist forces linked to the regime were progressively organizing and arming themselves to derail the peace process and massacre the minority group.

The UN force mandated to oversee the implementation of the peace agreement (UNAMIR) was structured and financed to satisfy a cost-conscious United States increasingly unwilling to support UN peacekeeping. The force was inadequately supported and slowly deployed, despite warnings that speed was essential to maintain the momentum of the peace process. The operation had no flexibility to respond to changing circumstances such as those caused by the crisis in neighboring Burundi in October 1993. Unequivocal warnings reached the United Nations in January 1994 regarding a planned coup, an assault on the UN forces to drive them out, provocations to resume the civil war, and even detailed plans for genocide. The cable was placed in a separate Black File, designed to draw attention to its content, and circulated to several departments in the UN Secretariat. However, senior officials in the Secretariat questioned the validity of the information and made no contingency plans for worse-case scenarios. Similar intelligence failures were evident on the state level, particularly in France and Belgium, both of which had a considerable capacity for overt and covert information gathering in Rwanda at the time. Generally, the UN Secretariat interpreted UNAMIR's mandate and terms of engagement narrowly, and on several occasions denied the Force Commander permission to search and seize arms caches. When developments in early 1994 further eroded the peace accords, the

Secretary-General and the Security Council threatened to withdraw the UN force, hence strengthening the hands of the extremists.  
(End p 9)

When the crisis came to a head on 6 April, there was an absence of leadership at UN headquarters in New York. The Secretary-General misread the nature of the conflict. The killing of 10 Belgians created a political surge in the Security Council to withdraw, although this was not recommended by UNAMIR's Force Commander or African countries contributing troops.

Once the direction and magnitude of the genocide became undeniable, the UN reversed itself and accepted an obligation to protect civilians. However, the realization of this peacekeeping mission (UNAMIR II) was hampered by the unwillingness of key Council members to pay for or provide troops, and to match African troops with equipment in an expeditious manner. The force was deployed only after the genocide and the civil war had ended. The French *Operation Turquoise* was deployed with great speed and efficiency, but the political decision to intervene was only taken two and a half months after the genocide commenced and when the civil war was almost over. The intervention stemmed the mass outflows of refugees in the south-west, but in some respects was compromised by France's close relations with the former regime.

When massive numbers of refugees, retreating government forces, and the assumed perpetrators of the genocide crossed into Zaire and Tanzania in April-July 1994, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) warned the UN in New York about the attendant security problems. The Secretariat took the unprecedented step of examining the issue in a peacekeeping context, but the Security Council provided no support. The problem fell back into the hands of UNHCR, which resorted to a novel and reasonably effective solution to police the refugee camps. The arrangement did not and could not deal with the broader security threats posed by the existence of militarized communities in exile, and these were left to fester. The large concentrations of internally displaced persons in south-west Rwanda presented a domestic version of similar problems. These came to a head in the operation when the Kibeho camp was closed in April 1995 with a large loss of life. Nevertheless, the efforts and planning that went into the coordination of UN agencies, NGOs and the Rwandese government were clearly steps in the right direction.

The report attempts to explain why the signals that were sent were not attended to or not translated into effective conflict management.

Failures of early warning are attributable to many factors. To briefly summarize:

- As a universal membership organization, the UN is poorly suited to collect and flag information about human rights violations and certainly genocide in member states;
- Failure in both the UN system and the NGO community to link human rights reports to dynamic analyses of social conflict;

- An internal predisposition on the part of a number of the key actors to deny the possibility of genocide because facing the consequences might have required them to alter their courses of action;
- The mesmerization with the success of Arusha and the failure of Somalia, which together cast long shadows and distorted an objective analysis of Rwanda;
- The vast quantity of noise from other crises that preoccupied world leaders;
- The confusion between genocide as a legal term referring primarily to an intent, and the popular association of genocide with massive murder in the order of hundreds of thousands;
- Finally, the general desensitization that has emerged to mass slaughters, and the incredulity that a massive genocide might actually occur.

The media, with some exceptions, played an irresponsible role in their reporting on Rwanda. The overall failure of the media to report accurately and adequately on a crime against humanity significantly contributed to international disinterest in the genocide, and hence to the inadequate response.

Conflict management, however, is a function of capacity, interest and commitment as well as information. In the Rwanda case, the relevant actors knew at a critical stage that the situation was unstable and dangerous. Yet the sustained and careful attention so necessary to successful conflict man-  
(end p 10)

agement was lacking. Admittedly, some individual or collective actors did the most with the least under difficult or adverse circumstances. Human rights NGOs monitored the situation throughout. Tanzania struggled to turn the Arusha process into effective preventive diplomacy. UNAMIR I tried to function proactively despite tight reins prior to 6 April, and many remaining units – along with ICRC – bravely sought to save civilians once the killings started. This could not compensate, however, for the overall failure of the international community to prevent, mitigate or stop the genocide. When the crisis struck, and it later became clear that a massive genocide was unfolding, there was still no effective international action.

In one sense, this inaction can be seen as a propensity of states to be guided by narrow self-interest rather than moral obligations to uphold international norms of justice. However, this propensity has historically varied over time and place. In this case, it was allowed significant play because of a structural mismatch between responsibilities of institutions and interests in the contemporary world.

Revitalized by the end of the Cold War, the United Nations in the 1990s rapidly expanded its peace-keeping operations. Rwanda was added to the list in October 1993. The framework for peacekeeping, however, was set by the distribution of power in the Security Council, which represented the world as it was half a century ago. Except for France, the major powers on the Council were uninterested in a small Central African country that was marginal to their economic or political concerns, and

peripheral to international strategic rivalries. By their power of veto and finances, the Permanent Five controlled the peacekeeping and enforcement operations of the UN. The only state with a demonstrated ability to energize the Council in a crisis – the United States – was haunted by the memories of Somalia and determined not to get involved in another African conflict. Washington was also preoccupied with crises elsewhere, especially in Bosnia and Haiti. Hence, a principal lesson from the Rwanda conflict is that in a world of multiple crises, even major disasters in a seemingly peripheral state may fall victim to neglect.

As the major Western states were uninterested in Rwanda, and the regional states were unable or unwilling to maintain a sustained presence, France was left to define a large part of the policy field. The result was to magnify the consequences – negative as well as positive – of unilateralism.

The consequence of these cumulative fault lines in the international system was a genocide of immense proportions.

The report ends with a number of suggested recommendations that follow from the analysis and are consistent with the principles of humanitarian realism.

(End p 11)