
Missing the Story: The Media and the Rwandan Genocide

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In the course of a few terrible months in 1994, one million people were killed in Rwanda. It was slaughter on a scale not seen since the Nazi extermination programme. The killing rate in Rwanda was five times that achieved by the Nazis. Such a crime requires motives, means and opportunity. The motive of those responsible for the genocide was to continue to monopolize power and seek a 'final solution' to the political opposition. The means was the mobilization of militia and use of the civil administration to encourage people to take part. Both methods of mass killing had already been tried successfully in Rwanda and were well documented in human rights reports.¹

The opportunity for genocide was provided by a conjunction of circumstances, allowing the hardliners to confuse the international community for long enough to be able to perpetrate the crime with extraordinarily little international response. These circumstances, contrived or fortuitous, included the almost immediate withdrawal of international groups when the killing began, the resumption of a civil war and an inaccurate portrayal of the killing by the international press as 'tribal violence'. It is the initial inaccurate reporting of the genocide by the Western press that is the subject of this essay. There is no doubt that the events in Rwanda in April 1994 took the British and the American media by surprise, but the message that the violence in Rwanda was the result of ancient tribal hatreds was quite simply wrong. The use of this cliché dominated the early reports on the genocide. The basic inference was that the killing represented uncontrollable tribal savagery about which nothing could be done. One British newspaper reported without question the view of a Western diplomat in the capital, Kigali, who told a journalist how 'various clans were murdering others'. Rwanda was described as a failed state. There was chaos and anarchy.² In reality a planned annihilation was taking place. This was not a sudden

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eruption of long-simmering hatreds. Genocide does not take place in a context of anarchy. What was happening was the deliberate slaughter of Hutu moderates and all the Tutsi, in carefully planned and clinically carried out massacres. There were daily deliveries of weapons to the roadblocks. There were dustcarts touring the capital into which prisoners who had been seconded to 'clean' the streets threw bodies. There were no sealed trains or secluded camps in Rwanda. The genocide took place in broad daylight and was broadcast on the radio. The vast majority of victims in Rwanda, it has since been ascertained, died in the first six weeks of genocide, in large-scale and organized massacres.³

The first large-scale massacre to be discovered by UN peacekeepers was at a parish called Gikondo in the heart of the capital city Kigali, and a stronghold of the Hutu Power faction. It was Saturday 9 April. A few weeks before, in March, a Major Podevijn had reported to the headquarters of the UN mission in Rwanda that weapons had been distributed to the members of the Interahamwe in Gikondo. On this particular Saturday the UN peacekeepers were answering a desperate call from two Polish military observers living in Gikondo. Setting out for the parish that day were two Polish Majors, Stefan Stec and Maric Pazik. They were experienced peacekeepers and they had served in the UN mission to Cambodia. With them went Major Brent Beardsley. Beardsley was the staff officer of the Force Commander, Major General Romeo Dallaire. The peacekeepers travelled to Gikondo in the one working Czech-made armoured personnel carrier (APC) with a three-man Bangladeshi crew. They were warned that the APC could break down at any moment. The APC had slowly made its way through the streets. A group of people had screamed at them to stop. They drove on. None of them spoke as they passed bodies that were littering the streets. The climb up the hill at Gikondo was laborious for the road was steep and there were deep ruts made by torrential downpours. At the top of the hill was a Catholic mission, a Pallotine order, which was operated by Polish priests and nuns, and set in terraced gardens surrounded by eucalyptus trees. It was a large mission, self-contained and dominated by a brick church. When they reached the church the peacekeepers had left the Bangladeshi crew with the APC, and walked into the garden. It was there they found the bodies. Whole families had been killed together, each person hacked to death with machetes. There were terrible wounds to the genitalia. Some people were not dead. There was a three-month-old baby, the mother raped and the baby killed with a terrible wound.

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There were children, some with their legs or feet cut off, and their throats cut. Most of the victims had bled to death. Stec had returned to the APC. He wanted to get his camcorder to film it. There must be proof. They found the Polish UN observers huddled together in the church. Military observers (MILOBS) consisted of commissioned officers from the rank of captain to Lt.-Colonel, who were deployed around the country to monitor and ensure that all parties followed the peace agreement.

The peacekeepers in the UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) had come to Rwanda to monitor a peace agreement, the Arusha Accords, signed in 1993, ending a civil war between the mainly Tutsi rebels, the Rwandan Patriotic Front and the Hutu dictatorship that had ruled Rwanda for 20 years. The Arusha Accords provided for radical change, for political, military and constitutional reform. Rwanda was to have a broad-based transitional government until a democratically elected government was installed. The RPF and the Rwandan army would integrate; there would be disarmament and demobilization. Some 900,000 Tutsi refugees, expelled in the anti-Tutsi pogroms that had taken place since 1959, were to be allowed home. At first the job of the UN peacekeepers had seemed unambiguous: this was classic UN peacekeeping with the soldiers acting as a buffer between two former enemies. The peacekeepers observe, and they mediate. But it was not so simple. By April 1994 the peace agreement had stalled. There were delays in its implementation and the peacekeeping force was too weak to make any difference.

The UN military observers in Gikondo were part of a team of officers from 16 different countries under the command of Colonel Tikoca from Fiji, and supported by Operations Officer Lt.-Colonel Somalia Iliya from Nigeria. It was the Polish observers who reported that the Interahamwe militia had carried out the killing in Gikondo under the direction of the Presidential Guard. On Saturday morning, 9 April, at about 9 am the priests had organized a mass, and around 500 people, sheltering in the compound, turned up at the church. While they were holding the mass there were the sounds of shooting and grenades. There was a commotion. Then two Presidential Guards and two gendarmes burst into the church, followed by Interahamwe. The Interahamwe wore their distinctive clothing, the Kitenge, their multi-coloured pants and tunics. After the massacre was over the priests had tried to gather together the wounded in the porch. The priests said that

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the Rwandan army had cordoned off the parish. They said some of their parishioners did the killing. When the president's plane went down (Wednesday 6 April) there had been shooting all night long. The next day Tutsi had fled to the church for safety and some people were so afraid that they hid beneath floors, in cupboards or in the rafters. Another witness to the massacre recalled: 'The militia began slashing away ... they were hacking at the arms, legs, genitals, breasts, faces and necks.' There was total panic. Some people were dragged outside and beaten to death. The killing lasted about two hours and then the killers had walked slowly among the bodies and looted them or finished off the wounded. One of the Polish military observers had watched the local police entering the buildings in the compound, followed by militia armed with machetes and clubs. One of the militia had what looked like a Kalashnikov. The Polish observer had seen militia climb over the fence and said he had tried to contact UNAMIR headquarters but the radio channels were jammed. He helped the wounded and had noticed how ears and mouths were slashed, clothes had been pulled off and the genitals of men and women mutilated. He took photographs. There was a pile of identification cards with the ethnic designation of Tutsi, burned in an attempt to eradicate all evidence that these people had existed. The next day the Interahamwe came back. They discovered that the survivors were hiding in a small chapel. When they failed to break down the door, the militia poured petrol in through the windows of the chapel followed by hand grenades.⁴

In the next three months massacres like this became commonplace. But at Gikondo there was film and proof. The Polish peacekeepers thought that Gikondo should alert the world, for they recognized what was happening as genocide.

Two days after the attack on the church in Gikondo, the story of what had happened there appeared in a French newspaper, *Liberation*, written by journalist Jean-Philippe Ceppi. Ceppi described seeing mutilated bodies, the men with their penises cut, and the women their breasts. Only a dozen people had survived the massacre and they were not expected to live. In the roads around Gikondo, and all over Kigali, there were murders taking place. Everywhere there were sounds of screams and gunfire. Presidential Guards toured the city in armoured personnel carriers, carrying lists of victims. The Interahamwe battered down doors, chasing Tutsi from house to house, and room to room. Nowhere was safe for Tutsi, not even the hospitals, where Rwandan soldiers were

rampaging through the wards looking for them. So many bodies were delivered to the city morgue that they had to be stacked outside.⁵

The French daily *Le Monde* also carried a story about Gikondo, published on Tuesday 12 April by journalist Jean Helene.⁶ Helene described how the victims of the killing in Kigali were mostly Tutsi. According to the Chief Delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Philippe Gaillard, who had organized vehicles and delegates to go help the wounded of Gikondo, in the city of Kigali an estimated 10,000 people had already been murdered. Jean Helene speculated that by the time the RPF reached Kigali all the Tutsi would be dead. But in the Ceppi article in *Liberation* the word 'genocide' was used. Ceppi wrote that the RPF was advancing on Kigali, and according to some reports was only 15 km from the capital. 'But by the time they arrive', Ceppi speculated, 'a genocide of the Tutsi would already have taken place'. Ceppi told me recently that when he got to Kigali on 8 April, over land from Burundi, everyone was using the word genocide. He had met Gaillard, who told him that a genocide of the Tutsi had just begun. Ceppi's story in *Liberation* on 11 April, as far as can be ascertained, was the first mention of the word genocide in relation to what was happening. On that day in Britain a broadsheet published a report from Rwanda about the evacuation of a French woman's poodle as a 'veteran of African conflict', and the first paragraph described the evacuation taking place of foreigners from Rwanda. The headline ran: 'Foreigners flee bloody horrors of Rwanda', and the story explained that there was bloodletting between the majority Hutu and minority Tutsi groups.⁷

The word 'genocide' disappears from news reports after the mention in *Liberation*, and for the next few weeks a fog of misinformation shrouded what was happening. Roger Winter, the director of the US Committee for Refugees, who had known the problems of Rwanda since 1983, had just returned from Rwanda when the genocide started and he became quite desperate to change the perception in the press that this was tribal warfare. He wrote an article in order to explain how the violence in Rwanda was political in nature, and that what was happening was a plot by an extremist clique to cling to power. This clique was using ethnicity to achieve its aims. Winter's article was rejected by most American papers, including the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. It was eventually published in the *Toronto Globe and Mail* on 14 April. The next day in the *New York Times* there was an article describing Rwanda as small, poor and globally insignificant. Rwanda, the

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newspaper explained, was in an ‘uncontrollable spasm of lawlessness and terror’. No member of the UN with an army strong enough to make a difference was willing to risk the lives of its troops for this ‘failed central African nation-state with a centuries-old history of tribal warfare and deep distrust of outside intervention’. The newspaper explained that the American strategy was to keep expectations as low as possible. The headline on the story ran: ‘For West, Rwanda is not worth the political candle.’⁸

In the first days of the genocide the Force Commander of UNAMIR, Maj.-General Roméo Dallaire from Canada, had thought that what was going on was a power grab by extremists, a military coup with the intention of eliminating all opposing politicians and ruining forever the possibility of reconciliation. But it soon became clear to him what the situation was. On 8 April Dallaire cabled UN headquarters in New York with his first detailed assessment of the situation. In this cable Dallaire described a campaign of terror that was well planned and organized. There must be no doubt, he told New York, that without the presence of UNAMIR the situation would be much worse. Dallaire wanted reinforcements. He wanted to take action to try to stop the bloodshed and he believed that with a minimum reinforcement of some 5,000 armed and trained troops a signal could be sent to those who were organizing the bloodshed. A show of force by the UN would intimidate the gangs of militia. Protected sites could be set up for civilians. Only a lack of means prevented him taking action. Dallaire argued that reinforcements could stop the terror spreading. Dallaire later explained that there was a window of opportunity when the political leaders of the genocide were susceptible to international influence. But there seemed little chance of any reinforcements. At the UN Secretariat in New York the focus was either on the evacuation of expats or the possibility of obtaining a ceasefire in the renewed civil war. In the Security Council there were similar concerns. On 12 April in a secret and informal meeting of the Council the British and American governments made it clear that the best course of action was to pull out all but a token force of the UN peacekeepers from Rwanda.

The issue of reinforcements was not discussed in any depth in the press, although there was a reference to it in an editorial in the *New York Times* on 23 April on the need to consider whether a mobile quick-response force under UN aegis was necessary to deal with such calamities. The editorial began with the words: ‘What looks very much

like genocide has been taking place in Rwanda ... The world has few ways of responding effectively when violence within a nation leads to massacres and the breakdown of civil order.' The Security Council had thrown in the bloodied towel when it decided unanimously to cut back the blue helmets. The editorial ended that without a rapid reaction force 'the world has little choice but to stand aside and hope for the best'.⁹

There remains to this day a lack of interest in the circumstances of the genocide. In the US there have been no Congressional hearings into the decision-making process within the US government. In Britain both the press and Parliament have failed to question the policies of the British government of John Major towards Rwanda. Britain is after all a permanent member of the Security Council with a special responsibility for UN policy. While the former President Bill Clinton later apologized for the international community's failure over Rwanda, the British government, a bystander to genocide, has yet to recognize its own role. Britain had voted for a peacekeeping mission for Rwanda in October 1993. Was there no subsequent monitoring of what was taking place in Rwanda? What did Britain know of the unfolding of the genocide? What was Britain's role in the decision-making in the Security Council?

The meetings held by the Security Council to discuss what to do about the peacekeeping mission and the crisis in Rwanda took place behind closed doors. Twenty years ago, when most Council meetings were held in public, it would have been possible to hear the options discussed, but nowadays most debates take place in a side room where the deals are concluded which make up 'UN policy'. This means that the policies of each member government are hidden from public scrutiny. Throughout the genocide the Security Council was in almost constant secret session, meeting sometimes twice daily and long into the night. These meetings would usually have remained secret forever were it not for the leak to me from within the Council of a remarkable 155-page document containing an account of them. This invaluable primary source gives a unique view of the Council's secret world, and without it an account of the international failure over Rwanda would be incomplete.¹⁰ This document exposes some unpleasant truths – not the least of which is the fact that Dallaire's military estimate to try to prevent the spread of organized killings of civilians was not even put to the Council for discussion in the first crucial weeks. Just five days after the genocide began the British raised the issue of reinforcements, but then only to dismiss the idea. Sir David Hannay, the UK's ambassador to the

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UN, had put forward four options. The first option was to reinforce the troops. But this, Hannay warned, could be a repetition of Somalia. Peacekeeping was not appropriate for civil war, for situations where there was no peace to keep and where fighting factions were unwilling to co-operate. Inadequate effort was worse than no effort at all. Second, UNAMIR could pull out completely but the negative signal that this would send to public opinion would be damaging. Third, the troops could stay on, although Hannay did query what they could effectively do for there was no evidence that UNAMIR was in any position to protect civilians. The fourth and last idea was to pull most of the peacekeepers out, leaving behind 'some elements'. Although this might initially attract public criticism, it seemed to be the safest course. There were no press reports about these choices. Whatever official briefing information that comes out of any closed-door session of the Council is censored, a culture of secrecy nowadays taken for granted.

In April 1994 the Council did not address the question of genocide in Rwanda until three weeks after it had begun. By this time the evidence was leaking from Rwanda with hundreds of bodies clogging the Kagera River flowing out of the country. The aid charity Oxfam had already determined that genocide was under way and on 28 April had issued a press release with the headline, 'Oxfam fears genocide is happening in Rwanda'. There was a flicker of interest in the press, but not a lot, for another story was now grabbing the headlines. Thousands of people were pouring out of Rwanda into Tanzania, the fastest exodus the world had ever seen. In Oxford the press officer for Oxfam, John Magrath, noted the huge numbers of journalists in South Africa covering elections for a new multi-racial parliament. Magrath dryly recorded in his diary: 'The South African elections were over and all the crews were diverted to Tanzania – the refugees became the story, not the genocide.' While the genocide took place in Rwanda, the number of reporters never rose above a maximum of 15. In South Africa, in early May, there had been 2,500 accredited press.

On the day after Oxfam produced its press release, 29 April, there was a long discussion about Rwanda in the Security Council. The President of the Council, the New Zealand ambassador Colin Keating, who had been given a briefing on the slaughter by *Médecins sans Frontières*, had proposed a Presidential Statement to recognize that genocide was under way in Rwanda. Keating believed that if the Security Council was to admit that this was genocide, then under the terms of the

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1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, those states on the Council who had signed the convention were legally bound to act.¹¹ The ambassador for the Czech Republic, Karel Kovanda, had already confronted the Council with the fact of genocide at an informal meeting a day earlier, telling ambassadors that it was scandalous that so far 80 per cent of Council efforts had been spent discussing withdrawing the peacekeepers, and 20 per cent trying to get a ceasefire in the civil war. He told them: 'It was rather like wanting Hitler to reach a ceasefire with the Jews.' What was happening in Rwanda was genocide, conducted by the interim Hutu regime, he said. Yet the council had totally avoided the question of mass killing. There were objections to Kovanda's outburst and afterwards Kovanda says that British and American diplomats quietly told him on no account was he to use such inflammatory language outside the council. It was not helpful.

What Keating proposed in his Presidential Statement was to give the killing in Rwanda its rightful name – genocide. The statement included the paragraph: '...the horrors of Rwanda's killing fields has few precedents in the recent history of the world. The Security Council reaffirms that the systematic killing of any ethnic group, with intent to destroy it in whole or in part constitutes an act of genocide as defined by relevant provisions of international law ... the council further points out that an important body of international law exists that deals with perpetrators of genocide.' The draft warned the 'interim government of its responsibility for immediately reining in and disciplining those responsible for the brutality'. There were objections. Hannay did not want the word 'genocide' to appear in the Presidential Statement, and he argued that were the statement to be used in an official UN document, then the council would become a 'laughing stock'. To name this genocide and not to act on it would be ridiculous. Nor did America want the word used, and China argued against it. The Rwandan ambassador said that the civilian deaths were the result of civil war and he was ably supported in this by the French-influenced ally, Djibouti. The debate went round in circles. Keating, whose term as President of the Council would end the following day, tried the somewhat desperate measure of threatening a draft resolution, tabled in his national capacity. This would require a vote, and a vote was always taken in public. This would expose the positions of each country to public scrutiny. Only after this threat was a compromise reached. Thanks to the drafting ability of the British,

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known for resolutions with mind-numbing ambiguity, a watered-down statement was issued, and while the statement quoted directly from the Genocide Convention, it did not use the word genocide. 'The Security Council condemns all the breaches of international humanitarian law in Rwanda, particularly those perpetrated against the civilian population, and recalls that persons who instigate or participate in such acts are individually responsible. The Security Council recalls that the killing of members of an ethnic group with the intention of destroying such a group in whole or in part constitutes a crime punishable by international law.' The statement recognized that the massacres were systematic, although it did not identify the targets. It read: 'attacks on defenceless civilians have occurred throughout the country, especially in areas under the control of members of supporters of the armed forces of the "interim government" of Rwanda.' To satisfy French insistence that massacres had also been conducted by the RPF, the statement went on: 'The Security Council demands that the interim government of Rwanda and the Rwandese Patriotic Front take effective measures to prevent any attacks on civilians in areas under their control.' The statement appealed to all states to refrain from providing arms or any military assistance to the two sides in Rwanda and reiterated the call for a ceasefire. It provided that the Secretary General 'investigate serious violations of human rights law'. The statement was finally voted at 1.15 am on Saturday 30 April. 'We ended April exhausted but hopeful that the first few weeks of May would bring action to reinforce UNAMIR with a real force capable of doing what Dallaire had been urging', Keating said.

In an interview some years later, in December 1998, in a BBC Radio Four interview Hannay talked specifically about the genocide convention in relation to Rwanda: '...nobody ever started to say who will actually do the intervening and how will it be done'.¹² In an interview with me in December 1999 Hannay pointed out that the Council could not conjure up troops and although he believes that Dallaire did a fantastic job, Hannay remains deeply sceptical of Dallaire's belief that 5,500 troops could have prevented much of the slaughter. In any case, to have mounted an enforcement mission with so few troops was totally against American military doctrine. Hannay explained that the British were 'extremely unsighted' over Rwanda. There was no British embassy there. There were no British interests. Rwanda was a long way down the list of priorities and the telegrams about Rwanda, received from British embassies in Brussels, Paris and Washington were not treated as high

grade. In April 1994 a lot of time and resources were being channelled into the problems of Bosnia, and in trying to disarm Iraq. The staff at the British mission in New York was overstretched. Hannay says the information coming from the Secretariat was insufficient; he complained about the inadequate briefings available to the Security Council. Secretary-General Dr Boutros Boutros-Ghali controlled the flow of information to the Council, Hannay said, allowing only those officials with his permission to brief ambassadors. In all the discussions held about Rwanda before the genocide began the focus had been on how to implement the Arusha Accords. 'Events proved', said Hannay, 'we were looking in the wrong direction, and that the Secretariat was telling us to look in that direction'. He had seen none of the Force Commander's cables from Rwanda because the Council was not meant to be involved in the day-to-day running of peacekeeping missions. Even so, Hannay is convinced that there was nothing the UN could have done to prevent the genocide in Rwanda, not with a Hutu-led government intent on it. Even had the Security Council recognized the killing as genocide it would not have saved any lives. Hannay said that he was not a lawyer and was therefore not in a position to decide whether or not what was happening was genocide. 'We knew a lot of Tutsi were being killed by a lot of Hutu', he said.

Another glimpse into British government thinking is afforded in a letter sent in July 1995 by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), to an international enquiry. In this letter, written a year after the genocide ended, the FCO said it did not accept the term genocide. The FCO was inclined to regard a discussion of whether or not the massacres constituted genocide as 'sterile'. The Foreign Office approach was characterized from the outset by a determination to play the matter down, and, for a body that once regarded Africa as its area of special interest, an almost deliberate ignorance. For instance, on 9 May in the House of Commons, and in response to a question about Rwanda, Parliament was told: 'more than 200,000 may have perished in the recent fighting in Rwanda.' This was an extraordinary statement. The estimated death toll had reached 500,000 victims, whole families killed in organized massacres taking place nowhere near the renewed civil war.

The lack of Parliamentary scrutiny over British policy is evidenced in the fact that a debate on Rwanda was not held until 24 May 1994 – some six weeks after the genocide began – when Tony Worthington, MP (Lab. Clydebank and Milngavie) expressed shock that so little attention had

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been paid to Rwanda. Worthington had told an almost empty house at 11 pm: 'It is inconceivable that an atrocity in which half a million white people had died would not have been extensively debated in the House.' Worthington said that the press had a terrible tendency to dismiss the events as tribalism. 'Genocide is certainly involved', Worthington told the House. Britain was a signatory to the Genocide Convention. 'Has there ever been a clearer example of genocide?' he asked. The Labour Party had waited until May before putting pressure on the government to act, and only then because Oxfam telephoned the office of David Clark, Shadow Secretary of State for Defence. Clark called for the UN and the OAU to organize an immediate deployment of forces to try to end the mass killing of civilians and appealed to Malcolm Rifkind, the Secretary of State for Defence, so that the 'advice and expertise that our armed forces possess could be made available to the UN'. On 23 May Rifkind wrote back to say that troops for Rwanda would 'probably come from regional forces in Africa'. The UK, wrote Rifkind, 'has not been asked to provide any personnel for the operation'. It was an extraordinary sentence for Rifkind to write. Only a few days earlier Britain had voted in the Security Council to authorize more troops for Rwanda and at the time officials in the Secretariat were making desperate efforts to find soldiers. This was repeated in the House of Commons on 14 June when, in a written answer, Douglas Hogg claimed that the UK government had not been asked to contribute troops to the UN peacekeeping operation in Rwanda. In fact, the head of the UN's peacekeeping department, Kofi Annan, said that every UN member government with spare military capacity had received a fax with a list of urgently needed troops and equipment.

In July 1994 Britain's Minister for Overseas Development, Baroness Lynda Chalker, visited Kigali. She met Dallaire and she asked him what he needed. Dallaire had showed Chalker his list of basic requirements, which by then had been faxed around the world. 'I gave her my shopping list', he remembered. 'I was up to my knees in bodies by then.' Britain had previously promised Dallaire 50 4-ton four-wheel-drive trucks, but they had not materialized. On a BBC 2 *Newsnight* programme about Rwanda, Baroness Chalker later blamed Dallaire's lack of resources on 'the UN' which, she explained, ought to 'get its procurement right'. No one challenged this remark. Only after the genocide was over, and in response to another massive flight of people from Rwanda, this time into Zaire, did Britain become more generous. Chalker called the refugeee

tragedy the most ghastly in living memory, a replay of the Middle Ages, and on 28 July Britain offered military assistance in the form of 600 personnel from the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, (REME) to repair the large number of unroadworthy vehicles which belonged to Dallaire's mission, a field ambulance and a field squadron of Royal Engineers to repair roads and drill wells. Dallaire's only offers during the genocide, as a matter of record, were 50 trucks from Britain, a promise from Italy of one C130 aircraft plus crew, and six water trucks, a signals squadron plus aircraft from Canada, from the US 50 armoured personnel carriers, leasehold, and from Japan, US\$3 million towards the cost of equipment. Nothing materialized.

In the years since the genocide, the shortage of accurate media coverage has been placed high on the list of reasons for Western inaction. One international report concluded that the Western media's failure to adequately report that genocide was taking place, and thereby generate public pressure for something to be done to stop it, had contributed to international indifference and inaction, and possibly to the crime itself. Although the coverage had been handicapped by danger on the ground, the press, in generally characterizing the genocide as tribal anarchy, was fundamentally irresponsible.¹³ It was left to non-governmental organizations, – most notably Oxfam and Amnesty International – to lead a call for something to be done in Rwanda, to draw attention in those first crucial weeks to what was really happening. In a letter to the *Guardian* on 16 April 1994 Stewart Willis, the Overseas Director of Oxfam, had pleaded for the UN to immediately reinforce its peacekeepers in Rwanda: 'It is outrageous and despicable that at the same time as the UN Security Council is acting with vigour to protect civilians in Gorazde, French and Belgian troops have to look away while people are hacked to death.'¹⁴ At the time the Serb bombing of the safe area of Gorazde was grabbing the headlines. On 20 April Jeri Laber, Executive Director, Human Rights Watch-Helsinki, wrote to the *New York Times* that the UN should find a means to protect the innocent. To describe ancient hatreds in Rwanda was deplorable, faulty and dangerous.¹⁵ Another letter asked: 'One has to wonder why the atrocities in Bosnia receive the widespread attention they do while the massacres of tens of thousands in an African country is met with a collective denial of responsibility and a hasty retreat.' It was from William F. Schulz, executive director of Amnesty International, to the *Washington Post* on 1 May 1994.¹⁶

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With no outcry about genocide in the press, no choices were given and no risks were taken. At the very least the genocide should have been condemned in the strongest possible terms by the press. Those responsible for the genocide, and their names were known, should have been publicly denounced. Even the story of Dallaire and the gallant contingent of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) under chief delegate Philippe Gaillard remained unreported. Indeed, there was later criticism of UNAMIR. One American journalist, Philip Gourevitch, wrote how in the summer of 1994 UN troops had killed dogs feeding off the corpses. Gourevitch noted: 'After months during which Rwandans had been left to wonder whether the UN troops knew how to shoot, because they never used their excellent weapons to stop the extermination of civilians, it turned out that the peacekeepers were very good shots.'¹⁷

While some 470 volunteer peacekeepers stayed on in Rwanda, the UN failed even to resupply them; at the same time the ICRC had managed to get tons of medical equipment into Rwanda. When Dr James Orbinski of *Medecins sans Frontieres* arrived in Kigali in June 1994 he was shocked at the state of the peacekeepers, astonished that they were obliged to limit their rescue attempts for lack of petrol. Orbinski said of their commander: 'His tenacity and sheer drive to maximise the impact of UNAMIR was extraordinary.'

While diplomats and politicians were arguing that nothing could be done, these people were doing all they could to try to ease the suffering of the Rwandan people. Gaillard estimated that during the three months of genocide the ICRC looked after 9,000 injured people and a further 100,000 people were saved because of the work of ICRC delegates elsewhere in the country. In Kigali there had been 1,200 surgical operations and hundreds more treated from the back of ambulances. At the end of the genocide there were 2,500 people in the ICRC hospital compound in Kigali. Gaillard told me that this was 'no more than a drop of humanity in an ocean of blood'. It was the most extraordinary humanitarian operation since World War II, and my book told for the first time the amazing story of these people.

The international community could have publicly condemned the interim government in Rwanda for flagrantly failing to fulfil its obligations under international law, notably the Convention on Genocide, which it signed in 1975. Countries should have severed diplomatic ties with Rwanda and expelled Rwandan ambassadors.

Anyone who tried to represent a government that was presiding over genocide – in fact was perpetrating it – should have been refused a placed anywhere in the civilized world. Instead there was silence. For three months the British and US administrations played down the crisis and tried to impede effective intervention by UN forces. There was even reluctance to take the slightest action, such as jamming the hate radio, which could have saved lives. The lack of action over Rwanda should be the defining scandal of the presidency of Bill Clinton. Yet in the slew of articles on the Clinton years that followed Clinton's departure from power, there was barely a mention of the genocide. In the *Observer* of 7 January 2001 only Christopher Hitchens, one of several journalists interviewed about the Clinton legacy, mentioned how Clinton had 'vetoed the rescue of Rwanda'.¹⁸

If the media forget this story then it is the media that has failed. Why this pitiful lack of coverage in this great Age of Information? The lack of adequate reporting of the genocide in Rwanda raises some serious questions and most of them have yet to be adequately addressed. It is an unpalatable fact, but this story has a tragic contemporary resonance for the scars and the consequences of the genocide, and largely unreported, are with us today.

NOTES

1. Report by Mr B.W. Ndiaye, Special Rapporteur, on his mission to Rwanda from 8–17 April 1993. (E/CN.4/1994/7/add 1) 11 Aug. 1993. International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH), *Report of the International Commission of Investigation of Human Rights Violations in Rwanda since 1 Oct 1990, 7–21 Jan. 1993*.
2. Lindsey Hilsum, 'Rwandan PM Killed as Troops Wreak Carnage', 8 April 1994.
3. Human Rights Watch/Federation Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme, *Leave None to Tell the Story, Genocide in Rwanda, 1999*.
4. Linda Melvern, *A People Betrayed. The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide* (London: Zed Books, 2000).
5. Jean-Philippe Ceppi, 'Kigali livre a la fureur des tueurs Hutus', *Liberation*, 11 April 1994.
6. Jean Helene, 'Le Rwanda feet a sang', *Le Monde*, 12 April 1994.
7. Lindsey Hilsum, 'Foreigners Flee Bloody Horrors of Rwanda', *The Guardian*, 11 April 1994.
8. Elaine Sciolino, 'For West, Rwanda is Not Worth the Political Candle', *New York Times*, 15 April 1994.
9. 'Cold Choice in Rwanda', *The New York Times*, 23 April 1994.
10. Melvern, *A People Betrayed*, Chapter 14.
11. In April 1994 the non-permanent members of the Security Council were: Argentina, Brazil, Czech Republic, Djibouti, New Zealand, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Rwanda, Spain. All but three of these states – Djibouti, Nigeria and Oman – had signed the Genocide Convention.
12. Misha Glenny, 'War Radio', *BBC Radio 4*, 10 Dec. 1998.
13. Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, *The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from the Rwandan Experience* (Copenhagen: March 1966), ch. 2, p.36.

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14. Stewart Wallis, 'Looking the other way in Rwanda', *The Guardian*, Letters to the Editor, 16 April 1994.
15. Jeri Laber, 'Don't Write Off Rwandan Violence as Ethnic', *New York Times*, Letters to the Editor, 20 April 1994.
16. William F. Schulz, 'US Leadership in Rwanda's Crisis', *Washington Post*, Letters to the Editor, 1 May 1994.
17. Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow we Will be Killed with Our Families* (London: Picador, 1998), p.148.
18. 'The Clinton Years', *The Observer*, 7 Jan. 2001.