

France Intervened In Rwanda To Curb Anglo-Saxon Axis - Rwanda

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WHAT was Operation Turquoise, the French military intervention in Rwanda, all about? Was it to end the massacres of Tutsis and moderate Hutus? An attempt to bring some calm to the bloodlust that gripped the country and allow humanitarian workers to relieve a traumatised population? Or one nation's brave attempt to establish a bridgehead for multinational intervention by the United Nations while bureaucrats dithered and argued in New York?

The answer, now that the French troops have left, is none of the above. France intervened in Rwanda for France.

The French have one obsession with regard to Africa the spread of the English language. General Jacques Lanxade, France's chief of general staff, calls it the "Anglo-Saxon Conspiracy".

One French theory is that the British and Americans are colluding with

President Museveni of Uganda to establish an anglophone hegemony over Central Africa including the strategically insignificant states of Rwanda and Burundi. According to senior French special forces commanders such as Colonel Didier Thibaut, who led paracommandos into Rwanda in June, and his colleague, Marin Gillier, from the marine commandos, the victorious Rwandan Patriotic Front the Tutsi and anglophone-dominated rebels was trained by the British. "That's why they are so good," said M Gillier as his troops dug in for what they thought would be a battle with the RPF in Gikongoro, two days after the Patriotic Front took the capital, Kigali.

The French troops arrived long after the worst of the massacres. While some commanders saw their main role as protecting Tutsis, others were convinced they were going to war against the RPF.

M Gillier's first operation, he thought, was against "RPF infiltrators" near Kibuye. With the help of the media, he was put right and was able to save 1,500 Tutsis who were hiding amid the corpses of their relatives from nearby Hutu militiamen.

There have been temporary beneficial side-effects from Operation Turquoise. It stalled the exodus of people fleeing the RPF from the southwest into unstable Zaire and Burundi; and it did establish a little security for aid workers to feed people who included those who had been involved in the slaughter. The main aim, however, was to stop the advance of the rebels until Paris could catch its breath and swap sides. Between April and June at the height of the killings and contrary to a United Nations arms embargo on Rwanda French officials colluded with the Zaireans in Goma to ship more than 100 tonnes of mainly French weapons to the crumbling Rwandan government, which had organised the massacres. According to diplomatic sources, the French secret service was behind an attempt to recruit 100 Western mercenaries and send them via Burundi to help to block the rebel advances in Butare, Rwanda's second city. France had backed the former regime against the RPF since their invasion from Ugan-

da in 1990. But when it became clear that the RPF would not only take on the French, but were going to win the entire country, the "safe zone" became a bargaining chip. The deal was this: the French would be allowed to stay for a while in their corner of the country, thereby restoring France's dented credibility in Rwanda, while the RPF would advance no further. The rebels, meanwhile, would concentrate their forces in the northwest, and the French would leave that region. Good relations between the RPF and Paris became the order of the day, and the French have maintained their finger in Rwanda's pie.

The result of that deal was that the RPF swept through to the border with Zaire and 1.2m Hutus fled to Goma, where they continue to die in their thousands.

Now, after doing nothing to arrest those responsible for the massacres, although the personalities are well known, the French have abandoned the "safe zone".

Their replacements, Ghanaian and Ethiopians in UN blue helmets, have been unable to win the confidence of the Hutus who see no reason why they should not be made to pay for their atrocities, and are struggling to get into Zaire.