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CONSPIRACY TO MURDER THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE

LINDA MELVERN

"An epic and shaming story of culpability and missed opportunities ... in the finest traditions of investigative journalism."

JOHN PILGER



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Every effort was made in DPKO to find transport for a rescue mission. Kofi Annan faxed forty-four member states, those with known spare military capacity, to ask for vehicles for the troops available for Rwanda. By 10 June Ghana, Senegal, Ethiopia, Zambia and Nigeria had all offered troops.⁶³ There were two replies to the request for equipment. The US offered 50 APCs in storage in Turkey, from their vast unused Cold War stocks. For these they would charge a lease-hold rate of US \$4 million and an additional US \$6 million to cover the cost of transport. The vehicles arrived after the genocide was over and they were stripped of machine guns, radio, tools, spare parts and training manuals. Major-General Dallaire described them as tons of rusting metal.⁶⁴ The UK offered fifty trucks in return for a sizeable amount of money. They were fit only to be museum relics, Dallaire said. The British quietly withdrew the request for money, he said, and some vehicles did arrive but one at a time they broke down.⁶⁵

Every day of delay in providing equipment meant that more people were massacred or simply died from not being re-supplied in their hiding places. Dallaire's last cable in May read: "This situation is a disgrace that the force commander will express to all to hear ... the killings will most certainly continue, with several hundreds of thousands of people in advanced stages of malnutrition."⁶⁶

The first official acknowledgement of genocide finally came in a report to the Security Council on 31 May. It was based on the information provided by Iqbal Riza and Maurice Baril, the Secretary-General's military adviser who had completed a visit to Rwanda between 22–27 May. There was little doubt about their findings. There had been large-scale killing of one ethnic group.

The report determined that an immediate priority was to relieve the suffering and to secure assemblies of civilians still in peril. There were plans that had been drawn up by UNAMIR. There should be urgent and decisive action. The report noted how the "the international community appears paralysed". And then, in the penultimate paragraph, were the following words: "We all must recognise that ... we have failed in our response to the agony of Rwanda, and thus have acquiesced in the continued loss of human lives."

There would be a review of the whole system, Boutros Boutros-Ghali promised.⁶⁷

Moves towards exile

The RPF advance continued and for the interim government and the Rwandan military the situation became desperate. There was an emergency meeting of the Rwandan army high command on 5 June in Kigali. The interim prime minister attended, with the minister of defence, Augustin Bizimana, and the minister of the interior, Edouard Karemera.

One suggestion was to do away with civil authority altogether and replace all the prefects and the bourgmestres with military officers, but there were not enough officers left. The RPF had targeted the officer corps and some units had no officers at all. They would have to use the 450 candidate officers in the École Supérieure Militaire.

The country was now under a Security Council embargo on weapons, imposed in resolution 918. "We saw defeat coming even at the beginning", said Kambanda. There was so much desertion in the army that a need was identified for military prisons for the "re-education" of undisciplined soldiers. Six hundred new recruits were being trained but this would hardly compensate the losses. An increasing number of families of soldiers were escaping to Gisenyi.

Kambanda said he first considered exile at the end of June just after he had visited his home commune to arrange to have his family evacuated to the Ivory Coast, via Kinshasa. His brother, who was married to a Tutsi, told him that at first her family had sheltered with him but he had eventually asked them to leave. Kambanda said his brother had no choice. "He did not want them to die in his house ... he did not want to have to see them die." Kambanda's mother and the Tutsi wife had fled together, with the help of Kambanda, who ensured them a military escort.

Kambanda said that it was only when he got home to Butare that he thought about everything that had happened. At first the hunt for Tutsi had been through the roadblocks, then there was an attempt to eliminate them in their homes and now there was a hunt for those who had escaped, some of whom were sheltering with Hutu. There was a campaign to ensure that the whole hill "was clean". His brother had been told to take part in it. He told Kambanda that 20,000 people were sheltering in a local seminary armed only with stones and their attackers had machetes. When soldiers arrived all the refugees were killed.

At the end of June, and for the first time in his life, Kambanda travelled north, to the Gishwati Forest, where President Habyarimana owned a farm. He found the president's brother-in-law, Protais Zigiranyirazo, there and he invited Kambanda to his home. Zigiranyirazo's mother was seriously ill and when she died some days later Kambanda felt an obligation to help with the funeral arrangements. Zigiranyirazo was shocked at the low turn-out at the funeral. Government ministers and some local dignitaries did not attend the service. Zigiranyirazo complained. Some of the ministers owed their jobs to him, he told Kambanda. Kambanda thought that Zigiranyirazo had asked him to his home to show how family members, President Habyarimana's in-laws, were a power in the land.

A fundraiser was held at the end of June at the Hôtel Méridien in Gisenyi. Several interim government ministers were there, and the military was represented by Colonel Anatole Nsengiyumva. The MRND Secretary-General Joseph Nzirorera was also present. They said they would use the money raised to purchase weapons and ammunition for their campaign in the Bisesero hills where Kambanda said the Tutsi continued to resist. Weapons were eventually acquired, said Kambanda, coming into Rwanda through Goma, and were received by Joseph Nzirorera. Colonel Nsengiyumva requisitioned brewery lorries to transport the weapons at night.

"Opération Turquoise"

On 10 June, Dallaire flew to Nairobi to meet major humanitarian groups and diplomats. He gave a detailed briefing about the military situation and the genocide, and outlined his plan to provide support for the protection of Rwandans in danger. In a press conference he told international journalists that they had dropped the ball. They were allowing "fence-sitting politicians off the hook for the Rwandan genocide".⁶⁸ He needed troops right now.

Then to Dallaire's astonishment (a few days later), he was told that the French government had decided to launch its own military operation for Rwanda. The French had announced they were to secure humanitarian areas and protect the displaced people. The idea had received the enthusiastic endorsement of Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who made no reference to Dallaire or to what his mission was doing.⁶⁹ Dallaire's anger spilled over in a cable sent to headquarters on 20 June: "One wonders how

the UN and the international community has permitted itself to get into such a situation in the first place, as an early and determined effort to get troops and resources here on the ground under UNAMIR's mandate could have avoided all this and already saved so many lives ...".⁷⁰

Dallaire believed that the interim government, the RGF, Boutros-Ghali and France had all connived behind his back to secure this French intervention.⁷¹ Even the RPF was better informed than he was, their two representatives in Europe having been briefed on the plan before Dallaire heard about it.⁷²

Dallaire thought that the French, who had declared their operation humanitarian, were simply using a humanitarian cloak to secure an intervention which would enable the RGF to hold onto a sliver of the country. They really wanted to split Rwanda in two, one part Tutsi and the other Hutu, he believed. If they were genuinely concerned about the humanitarian aspects they could have reinforced UNAMIR.

When news of the French intervention was announced over RTLM the troops at Camp Kigali went mad with joy for they believed that the French were coming to save them.⁷³ Jean Kambanda thought that the intervention would create a common front along the western frontier of the country to protect three prefectures – Cyangugu, Gikongoro and Kibuye – from the ongoing RPF onslaught. He was right.

The announcement of the French intervention seriously undermined UNAMIR's rescue units. Dallaire would now have to send home his French-speaking African officers who would be at risk from possible RPF hostility. These soldiers had been remarkable, responsible for saving so many lives, the team leaders on dozens of escorts, rescue and reconnaissance. They were described by Dallaire as "dynamic, courageous, determined". Duly, they were evacuated, and Dallaire was close to capitulating.

The French operation included everything UNAMIR needed. There were more than 2,500 elite soldiers from the French Foreign Legion, paratroopers, marines and special forces, all equipped with state-of-the-art weaponry, communications, one hundred armoured vehicles, heavy mortars, helicopters, and even jet aircraft. There was an armada of cargo aircraft.

What was achieved by "Opération Turquoise", as the French intervention was called, was in fact nothing less than a resurgence in the genocide. The peacekeepers were told by militia leaders that there was no point in resuming transfers of orphans and the displaced.⁷⁴