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Humanity Betrayed
The Clinton Administration's Failure to Intervene in the Rwandan Genocide

Julianna Rak
U.S. Foreign Relations
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We are reminded of the capacity in people everywhere...to slip into pure evil. We cannot abolish that capacity, but we must never accept it...We did not act quickly enough after the killing began. We did not immediately call these crimes by their rightful name: genocide...It is not an African phenomenon and must never be viewed as such...We must have global vigilance. And never again must we be shy in the face of the evidence.¹

In March 1998, United States President William J. Clinton traveled to Rwanda as part of an extended trip to Africa aimed to demonstrate a renewed promise of “peace and prosperity” and illustrate a positive image of Africa to the American people.² Standing on the tarmac at the Kigali airport, Clinton addressed the people of Rwanda with a heavy heart. His speech was an apology to an entire nation for the lack of vigilance by the United States, and the entirety of the international community, to stop the genocide that had occurred there in 1994. Throughout his speech, Clinton recognized the faults of his administration stating, “we did not immediately call these crimes by their rightful name: genocide.”³ While recognizing his administration’s mistakes, Clinton also highlighted a way forward with new hope after the tragedy. He said, “we cannot change the past. But we can and must do everything in our power to help you build a future without fear, and full of hope.”⁴ Clinton acknowledged the mistakes of his administration when all key policymakers ignored the multiple warning signs that genocide would ensue. Ultimately, the United States pursued a policy of non-intervention, and this decision led to devastating repercussions for the entirety of the international community. Clinton’s apology speech was due to the blatant and intentional actions pursued by the United States to stand by while humanity suffered. One must ask, if there were clear signs of genocide presented to the administration, why were actions not taken sooner?

¹ William J. Clinton, “Text of Clinton’s Rwanda Speech,” *CBS News* (March 25, 1998), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/text-of-clintons-rwanda-speech/>.

² Peter Rosenblum, “Irrational Exuberance: The Clinton Administration in Africa,” *Current History* 100 (May 2002), 195.

³ Clinton, “Text of Clinton’s Rwanda Speech.”

⁴ *Ibid.*

Despite concrete evidence of the violence in Rwanda, the United States passively stood by while hundreds of thousands of ethnic Tutsi residents were brutally slaughtered by ethnic Hutus. The factors that led to this foreign policy decision are important to consider in order to understand the underlying incentives presented by the United States not to step forward when humanity needed strength the most. The core argument presented by Clinton himself, and other policymakers, was that intervention in Rwanda did not align with U.S. political or economic interests. There were no clear incentives for the United States to intervene in Rwanda, and therefore when the genocide occurred, the United States did not see any clear benefits to the cost of American lives and money required by a military intervention. Another factor that influenced the Clinton administration's foreign policy of non-intervention was the United States past involvement in world conflicts. The United States was recently involved in a humanitarian intervention in Somalia which resulted in humiliation for the administration. The failure in Somalia acted as a strong deterrent for the administration to get involved in another African conflict. Instead, the Clinton administration brushed the violence aside. The United States also failed to comply with international obligations to intervene under the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. However, in the months to come it became clear that the killings perpetrated by the Hutu was a planned and systemic attack against the ethnic Tutsi community.

The foreign policy decision of non-intervention changed the perception of the United States on the international stage. It was clear that under the Clinton administration, when a call for help was made, the strong economic and military world power turned away while thousands were murdered because intervention did not fit into U.S. foreign policy objectives. This begs the question of why Clinton traveled to Rwanda four years after the genocide, and four years after he

neglected to make the easy call to save lives. In the years after Clinton left office, in interview after interview, he admitted that his lack of direct action led to the loss of thousands of more lives. Despite knowledge of the genocide, Clinton and his advisors ignored the signs of genocide because of the lack of clear U.S. economic and political interests in Rwanda, the recent downfall in Somalia, and wariness of international obligations which led the United States to pursue a policy of non-intervention in the Rwandan genocide.

The Rwandan Genocide

The circumstances that led to the massacre of about 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu in Rwanda had colonial origins.⁵ The exclusion of specific ethnic communities from political participation and the ethnic division between Hutu and Tutsi were the most prominent causes of the conflict.⁶ The history of the ethnic division in Rwanda dates back to European imperial rule in Africa. Germany colonized Rwanda as part of its larger German East African Empire, and ruled the nation until the end of World War I when Belgium gained Germany's African colonies under a League of Nations mandate.⁷ Both imperial rulers favored the Tutsi minority over the Hutu majority in all aspects of social and political life. The suppression of the rights of the Hutu majority resulted in a polarizing division between Hutu and Tutsi communities. This division was encouraged by imperial rulership, and over time led to deep rooted sentiments of hatred between the two ethnic groups in Rwanda that lasted throughout post-colonial era and into the modern age.

These differences, rooted in a history of discrimination, came to head on the evening of April 6, 1994 when a plane carrying Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana and Burundi

⁵ Festus Ugboaja Ohaegbulam, *U.S. Policy in Postcolonial Africa: Four Case Studies in Conflict Resolution*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 195.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

President Cyprien Ntaryamira was shot down while descending into the Kigali International Airport. The U.S. Ambassador David Rawson and his wife heard the explosion from their residence in the city.⁸ The killing of the Rwandan President marked the beginning of a military coup led by the Hutu and sparked the violence that would quickly escalate to genocide. The main victims of the genocide were men, women, and children from the minority Tutsi ethnic group. Also murdered were many members of the majority Hutu ethnic group who opposed the new regime.⁹

After the plane crash, information regarding the stability of the country was rapidly transferred from the ground in Rwanda by both U.S. diplomats and ambassadors back to Washington, D.C. The reality of the death of President Habyarimana was a shock to many in Washington and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Prudence Bushnell was especially concerned about the probable outbreak of mass killing in Rwanda.¹⁰ Bushnell wrote in a memo to Secretary of State Warren Christopher that “if, as it appears, both Presidents have been killed, there is a strong likelihood that widespread violence could break out in either or both countries.”¹¹ Many frantic messages, similar to the one by Bushnell, expressed concern about the instability in Rwanda and that the violence could lead to genocide. However, with constant messages pouring in, Washington was frazzled with information and lacked a clear strategy forward.¹²

⁸ Jared Cohen, *One Hundred Days of Silence: American and the Rwanda Genocide* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 37.

⁹ John H. F. Shattuck, *Freedom on Fire: Human Rights Wars and America's Response* (New Delhi: Viva Books Private Limited, 2005), 163.

¹⁰ Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 330.

¹¹ Prudence Bushnell, “Death of Rwandan and Burundi Presidents in Plane Crash Outside Kigali,” U.S. Department of State (April 6, 1994), <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB53/rw040694.pdf>.

¹² Power, *A Problem from Hell*, 330.

The National Security Council African Affairs Office consistently sent information providing updates about what was happening on the ground. On April 7, 1994, Donald K. Steinberg wrote, “The situation in Rwanda continues to deteriorate. There was open fighting in the streets of Kigali; cannons and gunfire can be heard regularly.”¹³ In less than twenty-four hours after the plane went down, the U.S. National Security Council received direct information defining the violence as “primarily inter-ethnic.”¹⁴ The reality of the conflict eventually led the U.S. State Department to authorize “an ordered departure of all American personnel from Kigali.”¹⁵ The decision for the immediate withdrawal of all American personnel from Rwanda confirmed the administration’s fear for American lives. However, the eventual removal of peacekeeping forces further demonstrated that the United States intended to pursue a policy of non-intervention despite the overwhelming evidence and concern of the killings in Rwanda and an ultimate disregard for human life.

On April 12, 1994, the United Nations Security Council voted to pull out peacekeepers from Rwanda.¹⁶ This decision came after long and antagonizing debates between the fifteen members of the Security Council. These meetings were meant to be behind closed doors where the representatives of each country could keep their political agenda hidden from public scrutiny. However, as the conflict ensued, the Security Council met even more consistently deliberating how to handle the quickly deteriorating situation.¹⁷ With the decision to pull out the U.N. peacekeepers from Rwanda, the international community allowed circumstances of genocide to

¹³ Donald K. Steinberg, “Update on Rwanda/Burundi (1:30 pm),” National Security Council (7 April 1994), <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/36587>, 40.

¹⁴ Donald K. Steinberg, “Update on Kigali,” National Security Council (8 April 1994), <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/36587>, 47.

¹⁵ Donald K. Steinberg, “Update on Rwanda (8:00 pm),” National Security Council (7 April 1994), <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/36587>, 41.

¹⁶ Linda R. Melvern, “The Security Council: Behind the Scenes in the Rwandan Genocide,” In *Genocide, War Crimes and the West: History and Complicity*, edited by Adam Jones, 260-263, (London: Zed Books, 2013), 260.

¹⁷ Ibid.

continue. The discussions within the Security Council were more concerned with ending the civil war through negotiation between the two factions rather than focusing on a plan for intervention to halt the mass killings.¹⁸ This decision left a limited number of 250 peacekeeping forces in Rwanda with the order not to use force against the Hutu forces and no aid was in sight.¹⁹ Thus, the removal of U.N. peacekeepers demonstrated that the United States would continue to push for an international response of non-intervention in Rwanda, which tragically resulted in the death of hundreds of thousands of innocent people.

The Factors of Non-Intervention

The consequences of the Rwandan genocide shocked the world. The number of men, women, and children slaughtered from April to June in 1994 caused the international community to refocus on their role in the world when responding to humanitarian crises.²⁰ For reasons associated with the policy of non-intervention, the international community stood by and did nothing to prevent the genocide. At the onset of the violence, U. N. peacekeepers in Rwanda made consistent efforts to contain the violence perpetrated by the Hutu. However, despite these constant efforts, the U.N. Security Council, with pressure from the United States, rejected all further requests for assistance. It was not until well after the gravity of the genocide was revealed to the international community that the United States finally took small actions to prevent any further killings.²¹ The key motivations that led the United States to pursue a policy of non-intervention were the lack of U.S. interests in the region, the fallout from the 1993 humanitarian intervention in Somalia, and the deliberate disregard of international obligations.

¹⁸ Melvern, "The Security Council: Behind the Scenes in the Rwandan Genocide," 261.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Howard Ball, *Prosecuting War Crimes and Genocide: The Twentieth-Century Experience*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 155-156.

²¹ Ibid., 170.

In the post-World War II era, the United States began to pursue foreign policy relations with African nations. Past policy decisions in the region affected the Clinton administration's policy of non-intervention in the Rwandan genocide. After the war, many African countries experienced periods of transformation as many nations gained independence from European colonial powers.²² This process of decolonization was marked by increased violence as factions within African nations fought for governmental control. This instability further contributed to the inability of African nations to create new states and establish effective systems of government.²³ After the period of decolonization, U.S. foreign policy objectives in Africa were heavily influenced through a Cold War lens. The policy of containment was especially prevalent in order to subdue communist parties in African nations.²⁴ During the Cold War, the United States supported many movements in African countries that were opposed to communist influences.²⁵ The United States aimed to maintain the status quo around the world from Soviet threats in order to preserve American national security interests abroad.²⁶ In a Cold War lens, both the United States and the Soviet Union saw the instability in Africa as a chance to utilize their global power and influence to put a friendly government in power.²⁷

Throughout the 1980s, African nations experienced continuous periods of change marked by civil conflicts. For example, apartheid in South Africa and the war of succession in Angola, presented new challenges for African nations and the international community.²⁸ These regional conflicts for economic and political power throughout Africa influenced neighboring countries

²² Ohaegbulam. *U.S. Policy in Postcolonial Africa*, 51.

²³ *Ibid.*, 52.

²⁴ Cohen, *One Hundred Days of Silence*, 18.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁶ Ohaegbulam. *U.S. Policy in Postcolonial Africa*, 52.

²⁷ Cohen, *One Hundred Days of Silence*, 17.

²⁸ Ohaegbulam, *U.S. Policy in Postcolonial Africa*, 193.

which in turn led to longer periods of instability.²⁹ In Rwanda, the United States developed diplomatic relations rather than direct economic or political policies; shying away from the Cold War policy of containment. As a land-locked country, Rwanda was not of great interest to the United States, especially in terms of economic relations. There were no major ports, oil, or other rich minerals the United States could exploit for their own economic gain. Because of these factors, and the lack of a communist threat in Rwanda, U.S. relations with the small country never developed beyond financial support to promote development and friendly diplomatic relations.³⁰

The United States did not promote strong foreign policy relationships with Rwanda or express clear incentives to become involved in the domestic politics of the small African country. Therefore, when the violence in Rwanda began, the main priority of the United States was to quickly remove all American personnel and walk away. In a speech delivered at the U.S. Naval Academy Commencement, President Clinton further reiterated the policy objective of non-intervention stating:

We cannot solve every such outburst of civil strife...simply by sending in our forces. We cannot turn away from them, but our interests are not sufficiently at stake in so many of them to justify a commitment of our folks. Nonetheless, as the world's greatest power, we have an obligation to lead, and at times, when our interests and our values are sufficiently at stake, to act.³¹

Clinton recognized the responsibility of the United States as the leading world power after the Cold War. And, as the world's greatest power, the United States had an obligation to lead and

²⁹ Ohaegbulam, *U.S. Policy in Postcolonial Africa*, 193.

³⁰ Cohen, *One Hundred Days of Silence*, 18.

³¹ William J. Clinton, "Naval Academy Commencement Speech," 25 May 1994, Annapolis, Maryland, United States, C-SPAN, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?57239-1/naval-academy-commencement-speech&start=3979>, 43:50-44:18.

demonstrate to the entirety of the international community that intervention was required when humanity cried out for help.

However, Clinton pushed the political opinion that U.S. foreign policy was driven by the protection and preservation of American interests and values abroad. As mentioned above, historically the United States did not have economic or political interests in Rwanda. Therefore, when the genocide began in April 1994 the United States ignored the violence because a commitment of U.S. troops to Rwanda did not align with American interests and values. An article published in the *New York Times* further reiterated this point stating, “without oil or other resources as a rationale, the case for military intervention would have to be based on whether ending the killing is worth the cost in American lives and dollars.”³² In the eyes of Clinton and his administration, the moral obligation to save lives was secondary to their own political agenda abroad.

The American media criticized the policy of non-intervention pursued by the Clinton administration in response to the Rwandan genocide. In an article published in the *Washington Post*, Charles Krauthammer wrote “Rwandans are black, African, foreign” evoking the argument of otherness.³³ Krauthammer argued that Clinton and his advisors ignored the signs of genocide because Rwandans were “foreign” to Americans. In the eyes of the administration and the American public, the violence in Rwanda was seen outside the scope their own lives, interests, and values. Additionally, Krauthammer argued that the way that the situation in Rwanda was presented by the administration symbolized that the United States pursued non-intervention because of the concept of “otherness.” Krauthammer argued that the Clinton administration

³² Douglas Jehl, "U.S. Aides Avoid Labeling Horror: Officials Told to Avoid Calling Rwanda Killings 'Genocide'," *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Jun 10, 1994.

³³ Charles Krauthammer, "Stop the Genocide in Rwanda," *The Washington Post (1974-Current File)*, May 27, 1994.

supported an intervention from African nations rather than Western countries stating, “the best answer is a regional force drawn from African countries.”³⁴ He claimed that the United States believed the conflict was a problem in the region of Africa, therefore those nations who “have already volunteered troops for Rwanda peacekeeping” should be the ones to step in to stop the slaughter.³⁵

The United States involvement in Somalia in 1993 was another element that influenced the policy of non-intervention in Rwanda. Prior to Clinton’s election to office, Somalia experienced years of instability which led to the collapse of the Somali state in January 1991.³⁶ This resulted in the rise of insurgency movements and violent conflicts between various clans for power. Between August 1991 and January 1992, lawlessness, looting, and factional fighting spread throughout Somalia. The absence of governmental capacity led to instability and a lack of law and order throughout the country.³⁷ The growing anarchy in Somalia was coupled with the growing threat of starvation. Warlords of the fighting clans stole humanitarian food aid and traded it for weapons to fight the ongoing civil war. While some U.S. policymakers argued the crisis in Somalia was “a food problem, not a security problem,” the Clinton administration decided to intervene on humanitarian grounds.³⁸

However, the United States led intervention in Somalia resulted in humiliation and widespread political turmoil for the administration. The first steps of intervention by the United States consisted of airlifting food aid into the country. This form of humanitarian aid marked the beginning of U.S. leadership in Somalia. Nevertheless, the future decision to intervene with force

³⁴ Charles Krauthammer, "Stop the Genocide in Rwanda," *The Washington Post (1974-Current File)*, May 27, 1994.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Herman J. Cohen, *Intervening in Africa: Superpower Peacemaking in a Troubled Continent*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2001), 204.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 205.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 206.

only heightened frustrations in the region.³⁹ In October 1993, eighteen U.S. soldiers were killed in Somalia during a military operation known as Black Hawk Down. The loss of U.S. service members in Somalia resulted in domestic political tensions and attacks by Congress against the Clinton administration and the United Nations.⁴⁰ The fallout from Somalia caused the United States to reevaluate their response to humanitarian crises around the world. Historical memory from the debacle in Somalia influenced the foreign policy decisions of the administration in response to the genocide in Rwanda. Instead of realizing their moral obligation to intervene, the Clinton administration feared another domestic retaliation. The negative consequences of the humanitarian mission in Somalia loomed over the administration and resulted in the weariness presented by the United States to get involved in another crisis in Africa.

International law declares that the international community has the responsibility to intervene to preserve peace and security. The international community recognized their obligation to intervene in Somalia but ignored the responsibility to stop the genocide in Rwanda. The term genocide was defined by Raphael Lemkin and later codified by the United Nations 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide as:

Any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; [and] forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.⁴¹

The 1948 Genocide Convention symbolized the international community's commitment to prevent and punish genocide committed after the Holocaust. This international obligation

³⁹ Cohen, *Intervening in Africa*, 207.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁴¹ Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, December 9, 1948.

established a firm understanding that “the Contracting Parties confirm that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international law which they undertake to prevent and to punish.”⁴² In 1988, the United States ratified the 1948 Genocide Convention therefore binding themselves to abide by this vital international obligation.

However, during the first three weeks of the genocide in Rwanda, the Clinton administration’s most prominent policymakers neglected to use the term genocide when addressing the violence in Rwanda. A discussion paper from the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Middle East/African Region stated, “Be Careful...Genocide finding could commit USG [U.S. Government] to actually ‘do something.’”⁴³ The call to “be careful” when referencing the killings in Rwanda clearly demonstrated to other State Department officials that U.S. foreign policy decisions did not include intervention. Additionally, the administration gave U.S. spokesmen specific directions not to say the word genocide because, in the case that the violence was in fact genocide, the United States government would be obligated to “do something.” Further, an article in the *New York Times* echoed similar sentiments writing that “the Clinton administration has instructed its spokesmen not to describe the deaths there as genocide.”⁴⁴ The article added that “the State Department and the National Security Council have drafted guidance instructing spokesmen to say merely that “acts of genocide may have occurred.”⁴⁵ The deliberate choice not say the g-word ensured that the administration stayed clear of any obligations on moral grounds and under the terms of 1948 Genocide Convention.⁴⁶

⁴² Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, December 9, 1948.

⁴³ Discussion Paper, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Middle East/Africa Region, Department of Defense, (May 1, 1994).

⁴⁴ Douglas Jehl, "U.S. Aides Avoid Labeling Horror: Officials Told to Avoid Calling Rwanda Killings 'Genocide'," *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Jun 10, 1994.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ohaegbulam, *U.S. Policy in Postcolonial Africa*, 211.

As the killing continued, the U.S. State Department faced increased pressure to label the violence as genocide.⁴⁷ The evidence that genocide had in fact occurred was astounding. Reports of bodies floating down the river and the body count in the hundreds of thousands proved to many officials that what they feared was in fact true. In a memorandum to the Secretary of State, Warren Christopher approved that “Department officials [were] to state publicly that “acts of genocide have occurred” in Rwanda.”⁴⁸ The change in word choice by the Secretary of State demonstrated to reporters and the American public that the mass slaughter was more than crimes against humanity. However, the phrase “acts of genocide” still protected the United States from their obligation to intervene under international law.⁴⁹ Also, by using the phrase “acts of genocide” the United States saw an opportunity to preserve credibility with the American public and influential human rights organizations.⁵⁰ However, Christopher still restricted the use and application of the g-word declaring that the “delegation is not authorized to agree to the characterization of any specific incident as genocide or agree to any formulation that indicates that all killings in Rwanda are genocide.”⁵¹ The loosened restrictions demonstrated a slight change in policy dynamics, but the deliberate decision to avoid the term genocide continued to ensure that the United States would not have to fulfill their legal obligation to intervene. Further, this policy decision to avoid the term genocide was also economically and politically self-serving for the United States.

President Clinton himself was also guilty of straying away from the term genocide. On August 1, 1994 President Clinton wrote to the Speaker of the House regarding the deployment of

⁴⁷ Cohen, *One Hundred Days of Silence*, 138.

⁴⁸ George E. Moose, John Shattuck, Douglas J. Bennet, and Conrad K. Harper, “Has Genocide Occurred in Rwanda?” U.S. Department of State (May 20, 1994).

⁴⁹ Cohen, *One Hundred Days of Silence*, 139.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Moose, Shattuck, Bennet, and Harper, “Has Genocide Occurred in Rwanda?” U.S. Department of State (May 20, 1994).

U.S. armed forces to Rwanda. The decision to send any troops to Rwanda was not made until four months after the genocide began in early April 1994. The decision to send troops was long awaited by the peacekeepers in Rwanda, but ultimately the small acts of intervention were too little too late. Moreover, in his correspondence to the Speaker of the House, Clinton minimized the situation in Rwanda calling the atrocity a “humanitarian crisis,” rather than genocide.⁵² Again, the administration neglected to respond with strength and leadership towards the conflict in Rwanda. Instead, Clinton purposely ignored the signs and did not call the violence genocide which in turn resulted in the death of innocent people and his own humiliation for not facing the evidence right in front of him.

Therefore, international obligations to prevent genocide became significantly problematic as the United States continued to pursue a policy of non-intervention. The international obligation to intervene outlined in the 1948 Genocide Convention threatened the United States. In order to pursue a policy of non-intervention, the administration purposely prohibited the use of the term genocide in all press releases and public speeches. Instead of using the g-word, the administration instead stated that “acts of genocide” were happening in Rwanda. This specific decision not to use the word genocide to describe the violence occurring in Rwanda demonstrated the United States would not recognize their international obligation to intervene under the 1948 Genocide Convention. If the Clinton administration declared the violence in Rwanda as genocide it would spark an international response and the United States was not prepared to respond. The responsibility to intervene was at play and the administration did not want to be bound by international legal obligations. Thus, the Clinton administration did not

⁵² William J. Clinton, *Deployment of U.S. Armed Forces to Rwanda*, Communication from the President, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, H. Doc. 103-288 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1994), https://congressional.proquest.com/congressional/docview/t49.d48.14242_h.doc.288?accountid=7103.

make a statement directly calling the violence in Rwanda a genocide and continued to pursue the policy of non-intervention.

Conclusion

Looking back on the Rwandan genocide, it is not hard to imagine how the United States could have acted differently. As the violence escalated after the plane crash on the evening of April 6, 1994, the United States could have completed requests from the U.N. peacekeepers to send troops. Once the killing of thousands of Rwandans began, President Clinton could have committed U.S. troops to Rwanda. The White House senior officials could have publicly denounced the killings. The United States could have encouraged the United Nations Security Council to condemn the slaughter and commit to prosecute those perpetrating the genocide. However, none of these actions took place. When the slaughter began, the United States did nothing.

The genocide in Rwanda marked a turning point in the role of the United States on the world stage. The United States under the leadership of President Clinton did not fill the role of world leader, but instead took a backseat approach to foreign policy. When violence erupted, the Clinton administration ignored clear signs of genocide and failed to publicly define the violence by its true name: genocide. Ultimately, the administration pursued a policy of non-intervention in Rwanda due to the lack of U.S. economic and political interests, the downfall in Somalia a year prior, and the wariness to fulfill international legal obligations under the 1948 Genocide Convention.

The decision to pursue a policy of non-intervention resulted in detrimental consequences for the people of Rwanda and the Clinton administration. In terms of international law, the Rwandan genocide demonstrated that the 1948 Genocide Convention does not, in practice,

protect innocent groups of people. Further, it is the political will of powerful countries that determines the fate of the 'helpless.' The Rwandan genocide marked a shift in U.S. foreign policy towards non-intervention in world conflicts. Instead of exhibiting strength and international leadership, President Clinton found himself in a position of weakness, standing on the tarmac in Kigali, apologizing for his own grave mistakes.

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Library Research “Thing”
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Research Narrative

In 1994, over 800,000 ethnic Tutsi and moderate Hutu were brutally slaughtered by ethnic Hutu in Rwanda. This international atrocity challenged the United States’ foreign policy response to humanitarian crises in the post-Cold War era. As the world’s leading superpower, the United States, under the leadership of the Clinton Administration, faced a choice to intervene on moral grounds or pursue foreign policy based solely on American interests overseas. In a speech at the Naval Academy commencement, President Clinton stated, “as the world’s greatest power, we have an obligation to lead, and at times, when our interests and our values are sufficiently at stake, to act.”¹ Despite knowledge of the ethnic tensions and increased threats of violence in Rwanda, the Clinton Administration pursued a policy of non-intervention. My research paper examined the various factors that influenced how the United States prioritized political and economic interests over moral obligations when electing not to intervene in response to the genocide in Rwanda.

There were many steps that went into my overall research process. In the early stages of the process, I visited Special Collections with my class for Dr. Turek’s course on U.S. Foreign Relations. While at Special Collections, the class organized into pairs and we sorted through primary sources available to us in the library collections. The visit to Special Collections allowed me to see how many primary sources were directly available to me through the library resources, ask specific questions about the research process, and begin preliminary research on my own paper topic. After the class visit to Special Collections, I began the bulk of my individual research for this project. At the beginning of the research process, I knew that I wanted to focus on foreign policy events during the Clinton Administration. As a political science and history double major, I aimed to combine both my studies of international criminal law and human rights with U.S. history.

Once I solidified my research topic, I began to find primary and secondary sources for my annotated bibliography. I began my research process by talking over my paper topic with Dr.

¹ William J. Clinton, “Naval Academy Commencement Speech,” 25 May 1994, Annapolis, Maryland, United States, C-SPAN, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?57239-1/naval-academy-commencement-speech&start=3979>, 43:50-44:18.

Turek during office hours. I was given a number to books and articles to build from as the base of my research. From there I utilized many of the library resources to help guide my research process. I relied on the LibGuide created for the U.S. Foreign Relations course to access various databases to find secondary and primary sources. I used JSTOR to find secondary sources on the history of U.S. foreign policy in Africa. I also used key terms, such as Rwanda, genocide, and U.S. foreign policy, to search for specific articles related to my research topic. Another helpful secondary source I found through the library was a Frontline documentary highlighting the events of the Rwandan genocide titled “The Ghosts of Rwanda.” Further, I used Interlibrary Loan to gain access to a few books on the Rwandan genocide that were not directly available to me at the library.

Next, while searching for primary sources, I utilized ProQuest Congressional; a database I was able to access through the library. Through this database I found declassified government documents. In order to find sources related to my research topic, I used the advanced search function to narrow down my search results by date and using specific key terms. This database was incredible useful to me because I was able to search through Congressional profiles, Hearings, Committee reports, and other high-level government documents. I also found primary sources on the Clinton Presidential Library website. Through the Presidential Library’s online platform, I accessed numerous declassified documents from the Clinton Administration. Some of these documents were from top White House officials who briefed the President on the events leading up to the Rwandan genocide. After completing the annotated bibliography, I wrote my first draft of my research paper. Once receiving comments from Dr. Turek on my rough draft, I then continued to edit my paper and then submitted the final draft of my research paper.