

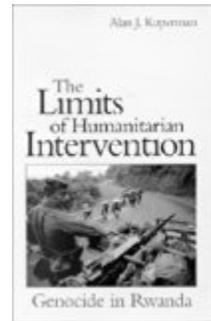
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Alan J. Kuperman. *The Limits of Humanitarian Intervention: Genocide in Rwanda*. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001. xii + 162 pp. \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8157-0085-2; \$42.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8157-0086-9.

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Humanitarian Intervention and the Case of Rwanda

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The Limits of Humanitarian Intervention by Alan J. Kuperman is a valuable addition to the on-going inquiry into the circumstances of the genocide in Rwanda when in 1994, while hundreds of thousands of people were being killed in a planned, public, and political campaign, the world looked the other way.

Although Alan J. Kuperman's book covers many important aspects of this tragic event, his most significant contribution to our knowledge concerns the timing of events and the critical moment when the United States and particularly President Bill Clinton became aware that genocide was taking place. Quite clearly Kuperman has sources within American intelligence circles and his fourth chapter, "When Did We Know?" is riveting. What appears from his account is the fact that from the very outset the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) had unique sources of information about what was going on; the information obtained by this agency was quite enough to prove that a genocide was happening. Within twenty-four hours of the Rwandan president's assassination on April 6, the event that triggered the genocide, the DIA had obtained satellite photos and communication intercepts from Rwanda. The intended purpose of this intelligence was to discover how best to protect the more than two hundred U.S. nationals present in Rwanda and to prepare an assessment of the level of threat towards them. These communication intercepts revealed that Rwandan

officials in Kigali were sending orders to their counterparts in outlying areas of the country to kill Tutsi. Within forty-eight to seventy-two hours the DIA had intercepted replies from local officials indicating that they had accomplished their assigned missions. At the same time, satellite photos also confirmed the existence of several specific massacre sites inside and outside the capital city Kigali. From then on the DIA prepared maps and regularly updated them indicating the location of the massacres. One can only hope that this invaluable information has been made available to prosecution lawyers at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in Arusha, Tanzania.

In spite of this abundant evidence of genocide, Kuperman is convinced that President Bill Clinton learned much later that genocide was involved, probably not until April 20, some two weeks after it started. Kuperman's explanation for this is an overload of information, a welter of telegrams and cables with officials in Washington receiving as many as a thousand separate intelligence reports on Rwanda per day from the media, aid agencies, foreign embassies, the United Nations, and other U.S. intelligence agencies.

This failure to recognize that genocide was under way is used to bolster the book's main conclusion that nothing realistically could have been done to have prevented the genocide. Kuperman explains: "by my calculations, three-quarters of the Tutsi victims would have died even

if the West had launched a maximum intervention immediately upon learning that a nationwide genocide was being attempted” (p. viii).

Kuperman is not without his detractors. His claims that the genocide happened much faster, the West learned of it much later, and the requisite intervention would have been much slower than previously claimed are not universally acknowledged. His view is at odds with that of the Force Commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR), Major-General Romeo Dallaire of Canada, who still believes today that a force of 5,500 adequately trained and mechanized soldiers could have saved hundreds of thousands of lives.[1]

Kuperman’s view is at odds with the expert panel of military experts assembled by the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict. This panel reported that a force with air support, logistics, and communications would have prevented the slaughter of half a million people and that the window of opportunity had been between April 7 and 21 while the political leaders of the violence were still susceptible to international influence and that this would have forestalled the spread of the genocide to the south. An intervention would have altered the political calculations of the genocide conspirators.

These are essentially arguments for military experts but as an investigative journalist I take issue with one of Kuperman’s central arguments about the speed of the genocide. Although it is widely acknowledged that the majority of victims died in the first five weeks, there is limited evidence on its speed and it is unclear how fast the genocide occurred.

It is hard to understand why it took officials two weeks to realize that a genocide was under way given the detailed and descriptive warnings that a genocide was planned in the weeks beforehand. Rwandan society was racist and state terror against the Tutsi had existed for years. “Genocide,” one of the U.N. peacekeepers told me, “hung in the air.” Three days after it began the fact of genocide was quite clearly recognized by the Chief Delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Philippe Gaillard. Yet it took another twenty days for the Security Council of the U.N. to acknowledge it.

By May, one month into the slaughter, many thousands of Tutsi were imprisoned in stadiums, schools, and churches. The locations of these camps were known, the information given to the United Nations by delegates

from the ICRC, with estimated numbers of those held prisoner. It may have been possible to post peacekeepers at these sites for it is worth remembering that in the locations where there was either an ICRC or a U.N. presence there was a reluctance to kill the prisoners.[2] Even a minimum deployment would surely have sent a clear signal to the “interim government” and to their killers that their time was up. Kuperman acknowledges this fact in his chapter, “Lessons” (p. 111). “The case of Rwanda”, he writes, “underscores that lighter intervention options, which avoid combat areas and focus mainly on stopping violence against civilians, could save many lives if pursued seriously and expeditiously.”

All the issues about the various possible interventions in Rwanda should continue to be debated at length for as time goes by more information will become available. What is needed now is a thorough study of Dallaire’s cables written to the U.N. headquarters from Rwanda’s capital, Kigali, in May, in which he laid out in detail what he considered to be a feasible intervention. We need to see these arguments and those that Dallaire made to counteract a proposal put forward by the Pentagon that “safe areas” be established on Rwanda’s borders.

At the very least the genocide should have been condemned internationally and in the strongest possible terms. Those responsible were known and should have been named. All countries should have severed diplomatic ties with Rwanda—particularly the United States—and expelled Rwandan ambassadors. The Rwandan ambassador in the Security Council should have been expelled. Anyone who was trying to represent a government presiding over genocide—and in fact perpetrating it—should have no place in the civilized world. Instead of this the world did nothing at all to help the Rwandan moderates to face down the extremists—nothing at all. Kuperman’s work helps to increase our knowledge about why this happened. Only by revealing the failures, both individual and operational, can there be any hope that this century will break with the dismal record of the last.

Notes

[1]. Colonel Scott R Feil. “Preventing Genocide: How the Use of Force Might Have Succeeded in Rwanda” (New York: Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, 1997).

[2]. Interviews of ICRC delegates, Medecins Sans Frontieres staff, U.N. peacekeepers, 1995-2001.

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