

# **Explaining the Ultimate Escalation in Rwanda: How and Why Tutsi Rebels Provoked a Retaliatory Genocide**

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In most cases of mass killing since World War II – unlike the Holocaust – the victim group has triggered its own demise by violently challenging the authority of the state (Fein, 1990; Harff & Gurr, 1988; Kuperman, 2002). The Holocaust paradigm is so dominant, however, that the field of genocide studies has focused almost exclusively on explaining the actions of the perpetrators of genocide, leaving aside the actions, strategy, and potential responsibility of victim groups and third parties. To start rectifying this bias, it is useful to reexamine the early 1990s role of the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) rebels, who with the support of the international community threatened Rwanda's Hutu regime to such an extent that it retaliated with genocide. This exploration is not intended to excuse or justify the genocide in any way, but merely to understand more fully its causes. Until scholars and policymakers appreciate how genocide may stem from the strategic interaction of ethnic groups and the international community, there will be less chance of preventing such tragedies.

## Overview

Rwanda's 1994 genocide was a retaliation by the state's Hutu regime to a violent challenge from the Tutsi rebels, who invaded from Uganda in 1990 and fought for over three years to seize effective control of Rwanda. From the start, the rebels expected their invasion to trigger a violent backlash against Tutsi civilians in Rwanda. Subsequently, as the war dragged on, the rebels received increasing threats and indications that, if they did not relent, Rwanda's Tutsi civilians would be targets of a massive retaliatory killing campaign. Nevertheless, the RPF persisted in its military offensive and demands for political power, refusing to make compromises with the Hutu government that might have averted massive retaliation. When the rebels finally were poised to seize control of the country, the Hutu regime retaliated by killing more than three-quarters of Rwanda's domestic Tutsi population in barely three months. Ironically, the Tutsi rebels then defeated the Hutu government but gained control of a country whose Tutsi population had been devastated.

The existing literature on the Tutsi rebels is deficient in several respects (Kamukama, 1993; Otunnu, 1999a, 1999b; Prunier, 1993, 1998; Reed, 1996; Watson, 1991). It tends merely to list possible explanations for the invasion, rather than testing their validity. It reports as fact what actually is misinformation or disinformation put out by the rebels or their enemies during the conflict in their respective attempts to garner international support. It neglects to explore the role, if any, of the rebels' expectations about the costs of their violent challenge, including their expectations of forthcoming international intervention. Perhaps most important, it focuses almost exclusively on the rebels' initial invasion, failing to explore their later actions on the battlefield and in peace negotiations that ultimately provoked the genocidal retaliation (an exception is Jones, 2001). These subsequent actions include: launching military offensives in 1991 and 1992; refusing to compromise during peace negotiations in 1992 and 1993; breaking a cease-fire and launching an offensive in early 1993, which antagonized even their allies within Rwanda; refusing to renegotiate the terms of an existing peace agreement in late 1993 despite increasing signs that such refusal would lead to massive retaliation against Tutsi civilians; refusing to accept cease-fire offers during the first two weeks of the

genocide; and pursuing a war plan during the genocide that gave greater priority to military victory than to protecting Tutsi civilians.

This study relies on interviews with former senior Tutsi rebels who now are more willing to speak frankly than they were during the war or its immediate aftermath. These RPF officials, many of whom assumed senior government posts after the war as noted below, include the following: its founding coordinator and later constitutional commission chairman (Tito Rutaremara); its vice-chairman at the time of the invasion and later electoral commission president (Protais Musoni); its director of external affairs and top peace negotiator during the war and later foreign minister (Patrick Mazimaka); its deputy peace negotiator and later chief of cabinet (Theogene Rudasingwa); its top delegate to peace talks in 1991 and director of war operations during the genocide and later chief of army operations (Karenzi Karake); its top delegate to the first peace talks in 1990 and later deputy police commissioner (Dennis Karera); its head of finance from its founding through the genocide and later prefect of the capital area (Aloysie Inyumba); its representative in Washington during the war and later foreign minister (Charles Murigande); the personal physician and right-hand-man of its leader Paul Kagame and later national security advisor (Emmanuel Ndahiro); a member of its executive committee and later minister of information (Wilson Rutaysire, AKA “Shaban”); and a top rebel and later senior official in the ministry of defense (who wishes to remain anonymous). For additional perspective, I interviewed a senior moderate Hutu officer in the Rwandan army during the genocide (who wishes to remain anonymous).

The Tutsi rebels made their major decisions in a highly institutionalized manner, which included extensive debate and, when there was not consensus, subsequent voting by the RPF membership. Perhaps for this reason, the retrospective accounts of the officials interviewed for this study are highly consistent with each other, yielding robust evidence on the causes of those decisions. All quotes and historical accounts in this study come from my interviews, except where otherwise noted.

There are four potential explanations for the RPF pursuing a violent challenge that provoked such tragic consequences. One possibility is that the Tutsi rebels did so irrationally, without thinking of expected consequences. A second is that they did contemplate consequences, but their expectations did not include retaliation against civilians. A third is that the RPF expected violence against Tutsi civilians regardless of whether it challenged the Hutu regime, and so perceived little extra risk from doing so. The final possibility is that the rebels expected their challenge to provoke genocidal retaliation but viewed this as an acceptable cost of achieving their goal of attaining power in Rwanda. The evidence detailed in this study supports only the last explanation.

## **Historical Background**

In colonial and pre-colonial times, Rwandan politics were dominated by the Tutsi, 17 percent of the population just prior to independence. Virtually all the rest of the population was Hutu, and less than one percent were aboriginal Twa. During the transition to independence starting in 1959, however, the Tutsi were abandoned by their

Belgian colonial sponsors, and the Hutu seized control, mobilizing around the idea of throwing off hundreds of years of Tutsi oppression. The new Hutu rulers targeted former Tutsi officials and their supporters for retaliation, compelling several thousand Tutsi to flee the country.

The first Tutsi refugees left Rwanda in 1959 for neighboring Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zaire. Starting in 1961, some of these Tutsi refugees calling themselves *inyenzi* (or “cockroaches,” to signify their persistence) attempted to return to power in Rwanda – and to reinstall the Tutsi *mwami*, or king – by launching attacks from bases in Uganda and Burundi. Rwanda's hard-line Hutu nationalist government retaliated by escalating oppression of, and attacks against, Tutsi within the country. The most successful of the *inyenzi* attacks occurred in 1963 – when Tutsi from Burundi came within ten miles of the Rwandan capital, Kigali – but this also triggered the most intense outburst of reprisal killing against Tutsi in Rwanda. Ultimately, the government's tactics, though horrific, proved effective in reducing the incidence of *inyenzi* attacks, which ended in 1967. Overall, from 1959 to 1967, some 20,000 Tutsi were killed and another 200,000 Tutsi – half their population in Rwanda at the time – were driven from the country as refugees. As a result, the Tutsi percentage of Rwanda's population dropped from 17 to 9 percent.

After the *inyenzi* invasions, the remaining Tutsi population of Rwanda was spared any major outburst of violence for over two decades. There was one minor occurrence in 1973, an attempt by the failing regime of Rwanda's first President to win popular Hutu support by scapegoating the Tutsi. But this quickly was truncated by the overthrow of the regime in July 1973 by a Hutu army officer from northwestern Rwanda, Juvenal Habyarimana.

After Habyarimana seized power, Hutu from his northwestern region came to dominate Rwanda, engendering resentment from both Tutsi and other Hutu. The Tutsi also were subjected to quotas for education and other government benefits, in proportion to their percentage of the population, as part of an affirmative action program on behalf of the historically deprived Hutu. Moreover, Habyarimana blocked the return of Tutsi refugees, whom he apparently viewed as a potential threat to his power. However, in the absence of any further attempted invasions by Tutsi refugees, the Tutsi in Rwanda were spared any organized violence for 17 years.

The Tutsi refugees, lacking the means or organization to force their way home, instead did their best to make lives in their new lands. At the same time, they retained their Rwandan language and culture and dreamed of eventually returning home. In some states such as Tanzania and Burundi, the refugees were relatively welcome, while in others such as Zaire and Uganda, they were objects of intermittent discrimination and abuse.

Of the four neighboring African states, Uganda was the site of the best and worst times for the Rwandan Tutsi refugees, because they became entangled in intra-Ugandan power struggles. Initially, Uganda was quite welcoming to the refugees in the

expectation that their stay would be short. Local political leaders such as Milton Obote supported legal protections for the Rwanda refugees even prior to Uganda's 1961 independence. However, Ugandan resentment soon built against the Rwandan Tutsi for at least three reasons: the refugee camps were being used as rear bases and recruitment areas for *inyenzi* attacks into Rwanda; the refugees received special benefits from the United Nations, creating jealousy and resentment among some Ugandans; and the Tutsi allied themselves with a culturally-related Ugandan ethnic group, the Hima, who were resented locally as elitists. Eventually, during an economic slump in the late 1960s, President Obote turned against the refugees and announced a policy banning them from employment. However, the policy never was implemented fully because of a successful coup by Idi Amin in 1971. Obote retreated to the bush and launched a protracted rebel campaign against Amin, eventually teaming with another rebel leader, Yoweri Museveni (Kamukama, 1993, p. 33; Otunnu, 1999a, pp. 6-15; Watson, 1991, pp. 9-10).

Amin's tenure turned out to be a mixed blessing for the refugees. Initially, he reduced oppression of the Tutsi in Uganda. In 1972, however, he suddenly began persecuting them as part of his blanket retaliation against all Rwandans for Kigali's backing of Obote's rebel force – even though the Tutsi refugees shared Amin's hatred of the Rwandan regime. After Habyarimana's 1973 coup, Amin again reversed course and cozied up to the Tutsi refugees, recruiting some to join his infamously brutal army and security forces. However, when Amin's leadership faltered in the late-1970s, he reversed himself yet again and turned on the Tutsi, blaming them and other refugees as scapegoats for Uganda's ills. Despite this final split, many Ugandans continued to associate the Tutsi with Amin's brutal security forces, so that when he was overthrown in 1979, Ugandans attacked the Tutsi refugees in revenge (Prunier, 1998, p. 122; Watson, 1991, pp. 9-10).

Amin was overthrown by a combination of Tanzanian troops and Ugandan rebels, including Museveni and Obote. An interim Ugandan government was established in 1979, and Museveni served as defense minister, but in late 1980 he lost in disputed presidential elections to Obote. Two months later, in February 1981, Museveni returned to the bush and formed the guerrilla Popular Resistance Army, aiming to conquer Kampala by force again. Obote, back in power, resumed persecution of the Tutsi, including large-scale attacks in October 1982 that entailed killing, rapes, maimings, and destruction of homes, and led to the displacement of tens of thousands of Tutsi refugees. A subsequent wave of attacks in December 1983 displaced another 20,000 of the Rwandans in Uganda. In the face of such oppression, an increasing number of Tutsi began to join Museveni's rebel movement, now called the National Resistance Army (NRA), thereby giving Obote further reason to persecute the remaining bulk of refugees.

In 1986, however, Museveni's rebels overthrew Obote, ushering in a renaissance for the Tutsi refugees. They were rewarded for their rebel role with key posts in government, business, and the army – highly unusual power and prestige for refugees. The Tutsi revival was tempered only by the resentment of others who asked why the refugees were acquiring more power and wealth than "real" Ugandans (Kamukama,

1993, pp. 40-42; Otunnu, 1999a, pp. 17-21; Prunier, 1998, pp. 126-27; Watson, 1991, p. 10).

## Origins of the RPF

The temporary spurt of anti-Tutsi violence that followed Amin's fall also gave rise to a slow resurgence of political organizing among the Tutsi refugees in Uganda. In 1979, they formed the Rwanda Refugee Welfare Foundation, to assist refugees who had been attacked. Later that year, the renamed Rwanda Alliance for National Unity (RANU) expanded its agenda to include eventual return to Rwanda, but remained clandestine in the face of Ugandan hostility. The new organization rejected two main tenets of the earlier rebel movement – violence and restoration of the Tutsi monarchy – and had an affinity for Marxist ideology. In 1982, most members of RANU fled to Kenya, where they remained for four years. By 1983, the clandestine RANU still had only about 100 members (see also, Reed, 1996, p. 484; Misser, 1995, p. 154).

RANU also had ties to Museveni through a Tutsi refugee named Fred Rwigyema, who had been one of the first to join Museveni's anti-Amin rebel group (going to Mozambique for training in 1976), and who also joined RANU in 1979. When Museveni returned to guerrilla warfare in 1981, two of the 26 rebels who initially joined him were the Tutsi refugees Rwigyema and Paul Kagame (Kamukama, 1993, pp. 39-40; Watson, 1991, pp. 10-11; Watson, 1992, p. 54). Some Tutsi refugees joined them spontaneously from Uganda's refugee camps, while others, starting in 1983, were sent from Kenya to Uganda by the nominally pacifist RANU to obtain military expertise for a potential forcible return to Rwanda. By 1985, when Museveni began actively recruiting in Uganda's refugee camps, many more Tutsi refugees were active in his rebel force than in RANU (see also, Otunnu, 1999a, p. 16).

By the time of RANU's 1985 annual congress in Kenya, some members had grown openly frustrated with the empty promises of European states to facilitate their peaceful return to Rwanda. They wanted to mobilize at the grassroots and create a military option. Habyarimana's 1986 formal ban on the return of refugees to Rwanda further galvanized this militant faction (see also, Reyntjens, 1994, p. 26).

The capture of Kampala by the NRA in 1986 paved the way for development of such a military option by the Tutsi refugees. At the time of the NRA's victory, approximately 3,000 of Museveni's 14,000 rebels were Rwandan Tutsi (Prunier, 1993, p. 125). The defeat of Obote allowed RANU to move back to Uganda to associate more regularly with Tutsi in the NRA that now was Uganda's national army. However, Rwigyema warned RANU not to organize openly within the army, because it could call into question the loyalty of the Tutsi troops to Museveni and Uganda.

In June 1987, RANU abandoned its quasi-Marxist ideology and embraced secretly a last-resort “zed option” – the use of military force, if necessary, to return to Rwanda (see also, Misser, 1995, p. 154; Prunier, 1993, pp. 126, 128; Reed, 1996, p. 485). To mark the change, in December 1987, the organization renamed itself the Rwandan

Patriotic Front. Its new big-tent philosophy and military option attracted more Rwandan refugees – including Kagame, who had refused to join its precursor – thereby effecting a merger between the Tutsi political activists of RANU and the Tutsi warriors of the NRA (see also, Misser, 1995, pp. 43-44, 51, 156).

In addition, the RPF dramatically expanded its global political network. Tutsi in the diaspora soon provided most of the rebels' funding, which totaled approximately \$1 million annually during the first years of the war (see also, Shoumatoff, 1992, p. 50; Watson, 1992, p. 52). But the organization's leadership remained dominated by refugees from Uganda who had roots in RANU, the NRA, or both.

## **Invasion**

By 1988, it had become an open secret in Uganda and Rwanda that Tutsi members of the Ugandan army were considering an invasion of Rwanda, partly because eager, younger Tutsi soldiers sometimes said so during unguarded moments.<sup>1</sup> However, the RPF leadership had yet to make the final decision for invasion, and its senior military officials within the Ugandan army were extremely circumspect, hiding their membership in the rebel organization and avoiding any open planning or discussion of the invasion (Misser, 1995, p. 47). Amongst other concerns, they were afraid of being dismissed from the army prematurely, which would deny them access to weapons for the invasion.

Many historical accounts claim that Ugandan President Museveni supported the Tutsi invasion of Rwanda, based on the fact that he did not prevent it and that he later permitted the rebels to use Uganda as a rear base and conduit for military supplies during the civil war (Otunnu, 1999b, pp. 44-45; Watson, 1991, p. 17). In reality, Museveni did want the Tutsi refugees to return to Rwanda, because they were becoming a domestic political liability. However, he wanted them to do so peacefully because he worried that Uganda would lose foreign aid if it appeared to sponsor a foreign invasion. At the same time, it was too risky for him to try to prevent an invasion by arresting Tutsi soldiers, because they could have reacted with a coup or civil war in Uganda.

Instead, Museveni tried to use the threat of an impending Tutsi invasion to coerce Rwandan President Habyarimana to accept the peaceful return of Tutsi refugees. Accordingly, Museveni approached Habyarimana as early as 1988, urging him to legalize the return of refugees in order to avert the impending invasion. In February 1988, a joint Uganda-Rwanda ministerial commission was established to address the refugee issue, but it initially made little progress, apparently due to Habyarimana's resistance (see also, Kamukama, 1993, p. 43).

Museveni's efforts also were opposed by the RPF, which did not want the refugee issue to be resolved in isolation. Although RANU's original goal had been refugee return, the RPF had a broader political agenda, which included removal of Habyarimana and implementation of political reform in Rwanda to provide the returning Tutsi a significant share of political power.<sup>2</sup> Museveni urged his two senior Tutsi military officers, Rwigyema and Kagame, to meet with Habyarimana in secret, but they refused to

do so (Watson, 1991, p. 14). The RPF leadership believed there was little point in meeting Habyarimana at all prior to an invasion, because they were convinced he never would grant significant political concessions until threatened by military overthrow.

Habyarimana took several steps to avert the invasion. First he ordered his intelligence service to infiltrate both the NRA and RPF in order to sabotage, or at least acquire intelligence to defend against, a Tutsi invasion. Second, he agreed jointly with Uganda to seek UN assistance on two initiatives to facilitate repatriation of Tutsi refugees – a survey of their wishes in the Ugandan camps, scheduled for October 1990, and a visit to Rwanda by refugee leaders to draw up lists of proposed returnees, scheduled for November 1990. Third, he legalized opposition political activities in Rwanda. With these steps, Habyarimana attempted both to undermine Tutsi refugee support for an invasion and to assuage international pressure for domestic political liberalization.

By invading in October 1990, the rebels preempted Habyarimana's refugee initiatives before their sincerity could be tested. Publicly, the RPF disparaged his initiatives as inadequate because they offered return only to refugees in Uganda, without addressing the needs of Tutsi refugees in other states whom the RPF also represented. However, even if Habyarimana had agreed to take back all Tutsi refugees, RPF officials say privately in retrospect that they still would have launched the invasion – unless Habyarimana also had offered to give them a significant share of political power. While a few old-line RANU pacifists were willing to forego invasion in return for repatriation, they were but a small minority in a revamped refugee organization that had much greater ambitions (see also, Kamukama, 1993 p. 43; Prunier, 1993, p. 130; Reed, 1996, p. 486; Watson, 1991, p. 13). Indeed, the RPF reportedly assassinated some Tutsi moderates who entertained such compromises (Kakwenzire & Kamukama, 1999, p. 89).<sup>3</sup>

The RPF planning for the invasion was deliberate – taking nearly three years from the founding of the group – and was inhibited by the need to organize in secrecy within the Ugandan army. Rwigyema knew that the RPF and NRA had been infiltrated by Habyarimana. Accordingly, only a small, “special planning group” of Tutsi officers within the NRA was permitted to know in advance the timing and plan of the invasion. Other Tutsi officers and enlisted soldiers knew something was being planned, but received only one day’s notice of the actual invasion (see also, Misser, 1995, p. 66; Prunier, 1993, pp. 129-30).<sup>4</sup>

Rwigyema believed he needed about 1,000 troops to succeed, but was concerned that Museveni would stop him. His plan, after crossing into northeast Rwanda, was to move south by foot about 20 miles to attack a lightly guarded Rwandan army barracks at Gabiro that would provide weapons and ammunition for his troops. He planned then to move about 20 miles west into the hills of Byumba province, which he believed would provide a secure base for a protracted guerrilla struggle, analogous to those he had carried out successfully with Museveni in Uganda. Rwigyema believed that if his forces could reach Byumba, “not even God can move us from there” (see also, Misser, 1995, p. 21).

Nearly all previous accounts of the invasion have claimed that the RPF anticipated a rapid collapse of the Rwandan army that would enable a quick capture of Kigali. However, these accounts appear to be erroneous, and may be based on incorrect inferences from the course of the actual invasion or interviews with junior officials who lacked access to pre-invasion planning. Rwigyema and other senior rebel officials anticipated a protracted struggle against a more numerous and better equipped Rwandan army. The RPF expected to have about 1,000 rebels on foot with small weapons facing the 5,000-strong Rwandan army that was outfitted with armored vehicles and helicopters. In addition, the rebels expected that foreign powers, including Belgium, France, and Zaire, probably would intervene to support the army, and they discussed this prospect explicitly prior to the invasion. Anticipating that France could not be dissuaded from intervening, Rwigyema directed his external affairs chief – at the start of the invasion – to plead with Zaire and Belgium not to intervene.<sup>5</sup>

The rebels' preparations provide further evidence that they anticipated a protracted struggle, and help explain the three-year delay between the founding of the RPF and its invasion. The RPF prepared food stores and follow-on invasion routes in Zaire, Tanzania, and Burundi. This included planting crops in neighboring states and preparing dried beef for an extended campaign.<sup>6</sup>

The formal RPF decision to invade was made around July 1990, approximately the same time Rwandan President Habyarimana proposed his initiatives for the peaceful repatriation of Uganda's Tutsi refugees (see also, Watson, 1991, p. 13; Misser, 1995, p. 55). At the end of September, the RPF gave the order for Tutsi soldiers in the Ugandan army to desert their posts and head south. Rwigyema, now retired from the army, met the troops and told onlookers he was taking them to celebrations for Uganda's independence day on October 9. To lend credibility to the cover story, the soldiers left behind most of their heavy military equipment—further indication that Museveni did not support the initial invasion. On October 1, 1990, Rwigyema led the troops across the border into Rwanda. He had worried about not getting even the requisite 1,000 troops, but was met by about 4,000 Tutsi soldiers (including 120 officers), and another 3,000 Tutsi civilians who joined spontaneously upon hearing that the long-awaited return to Rwanda finally was being launched (see also, Prunier, 1993, p. 131-32; Reed, 1996, p. 487-88; Watson, 1991, pp. 2, 14; Watson, 1992, p. 54). As detailed below, this unexpected outpouring proved a decidedly mixed blessing.

Even as the invasion began, Museveni apparently hoped it could be truncated and used as leverage to achieve the peaceful return of refugees to Rwanda. At the time, both he and Habyarimana were in New York at a UN conference (Otunnu, 1999b, p. 42). Museveni got word first, by phone. Though he had feared such an eventuality, he was irate that his longtime friends and military deputies, Rwigyema and Kagame, hid it from him. In retrospect, Museveni says he was "taken by surprise by the speed and the size of the desertions," which implies he was not surprised that the Tutsi ultimately would opt for a military return to Rwanda, as he had been warning Habyarimana for two years. After learning of the invasion, Museveni alerted Habyarimana and offered to stop the Tutsi if the Rwandan president would negotiate with them on their demands, including

refugee return. Habyarimana initially agreed, so Museveni sent orders to stop any further defections or border crossings. By October 5, Ugandan troops had established seventeen roadblocks, capturing some 500 Tutsi soldiers and 200 civilians. As Habyarimana was returning home, however, he made a stopover in Brussels, where he publicly accused Museveni of having sponsored the invasion. Museveni, feeling betrayed by the Rwandan president, reversed his order and released the detained Tutsi on October 6, although only after confiscating some of their Ugandan army equipment (see also, Misser, 1995, p. 21; Watson, 1991, p. 14).<sup>7</sup>

### RPF Rejects Compromise Despite Mounting Retaliation

The war did not go as planned for the rebels. Their commander, Rwigyema, was killed on the second day. Unable to organize into units in Uganda because of the need for secrecy, they now faced the impossible task of trying to organize four times the expected number of rebels, in addition to 3,000 civilians, in the middle of a war, without a leader. As a result, the invasion initially was unwieldy, disorganized, and logically challenged (see also, Prunier, 1993, p. 131).

**Figure 1**  
**Map of Rwanda**



Habyarimana responded to the invasion by launching both a military counter-attack and a crackdown on civilians – Tutsi and opposition Hutu – who were accused of supporting the rebels. Within three days, he had detained 10-15,000 domestic opponents, eventually imprisoning an estimated 8-13,000 (Des Forges, et al., 1999, p. 49; Prunier, 1993, p. 135). Zaire quickly deployed armored units to Rwanda that helped blunt the initial rebel offensive (but then were asked to leave within two weeks for engaging in looting). Belgian troops arrived to evacuate foreign nationals, and then withdrew within two months. France deployed troops that bolstered the resolve of the Rwandan army, helped organize its counter-attack, and assisted in operations such as targeting artillery. The French continued this military support for the next three years, deploying reinforcements whenever necessary (see also, Prunier, 1993, p. 134; Reed, 1996, p. 489; Reyntjens, 1994, pp. 93, 99-103).

The RPF made an initial advance southward, but after Zairean armored units cut off their rear, the rebels diverged from Rwigyema's original target of heading northwest for cover in the hills of Byumba. Instead, the rebels proceeded south and west through open savanna, where they were vulnerable to the better equipped, more mobile Rwandan army supported by the Zaireans and French. In a decisive battle on October 23, the Rwandan army killed 300 rebels, including two of their top three remaining commanders (see also, Prunier, 1993, p. 133).<sup>8</sup>

That left only Paul Kagame, who was in the United States at the time of the invasion. Museveni had sent Kagame, the Ugandan army's chief of intelligence, for training at the U.S. army's Fort Leavenworth, possibly in an unsuccessful attempt to forestall an RPF invasion of Rwanda. Kagame returned to the region on October 14, 1990, replaced the late Rwigyema as military commander of the RPF, and belatedly began to establish a rebel command structure (Prunier, 1993, p. 131; Misser, 1995, p. 60).

Rwanda's populace had varying reactions to the RPF invasion. Elite Hutu political opponents of Habyarimana welcomed the military pressure on him to share power, even forming an uneasy alliance with the rebels. By contrast, most Rwandans – Hutu and Tutsi – resented the RPF for perpetrating violence and provoking government retaliation against them. For example, in November 1990, the Rwandan army responded to the invasion in northeast Rwanda by killing an estimated 500-1000 civilians of the Bahima ethnicity, closely related to the Tutsi. Then, in December 1990, as Kagame led the bulk of the rebels back to Uganda, his forces massacred approximately 50 Rwandan civilians in the northern Byumba town of Kivuye. Reaching the border, the rebels took refuge in the Virunga mountains, where they faced harsh winter conditions that killed some rebels and compelled others to desert back to Uganda. Still, the respite gave Kagame and his remaining rebels time to regroup, slip into Uganda for supplies, and prepare their next offensive. To demonstrate that they were not defeated, the rebels staged a daring raid on January 23, 1991, into Habyarimana's stronghold of northwestern Rwanda, attacking a prison and freeing its inmates. However, the attack also provoked retaliatory massacres against several hundred Tutsi civilians in Ruhengeri and neighboring Gisenyi (see also, Des Forges, et al., 1999, p. 50; Reed, 1996, pp. 488-90; Reyntjens, pp. 93-95; Watson, 1991, pp. 14-16; Watson, 1992, p. 55).

From early 1991 through the spring of 1992, Habyarimana made additional concessions on democratization and refugees to satisfy international demands and undercut support for the rebels. For example, on February 19, 1991, he signed the Dar-Es Salaam declaration on the right of refugee return. In March, his government negotiated a cease-fire with the rebels. In July, Habyarimana offered Rwandan passports to Tutsi refugees abroad, and he legalized opposition political parties. In August, he commenced broader negotiations with the rebels in Arusha, Tanzania, and asked for U.S. mediation. Later in 1991, Habyarimana made a small gesture toward pluralization by adding an opposition member to his government. More significantly, in April 1992, he installed a multi-party government comprising 10 ministers of his own party and 9 from the opposition, though he still retained effective control (Kamukama, 1993, pp. 61-62; Reed, 1996, p. 492; Reyntjens, 1994, pp. 104, 110, 202).

The rebels were not appeased by these concessions. In 1991, while participating in peace negotiations, they also streamlined their military logistics and trained new recruits (Misser, 1995, p. 62). Soon after, in March 1992, they launched a mobile engagement in Rwanda's northeast, performing markedly better than they had in 1990. In contrast to their initial invasion, the rebels now benefited from good logistics and communications, well-designed plans, and a year of training in units – proving able to confront the Rwandan army. The following month, they launched another offensive into Ruhengeri. Then, in June 1992, they attacked the northern province of Byumba. France deployed an additional 150 troops to bolster the Rwandan army, but the rebels managed to occupy the north of the province – the first substantial territory they had been able to control in Rwanda during nearly two years of war. The RPF finally had the foothold in Rwanda that Rwigyema originally had intended. The new rebel zone also facilitated military training and recruitment of Tutsi from within and outside Rwanda.

However, by again resorting to military force, the RPF also raised questions in the minds of its few Hutu allies in Rwanda about its true intentions. Until then, the Hutu opposition had appreciated the RPF's existence because it helped them extract power-sharing concessions from Habyarimana. In the wake of the new offensive, however, the opposition Hutu worried that the rebels intended to conquer the country for themselves.<sup>9</sup> On July 1, 1992, the leading opposition Hutu party, the MDR, criticized the rebel offensive, saying it "shows a duplicity within the RPF that calls into question its good faith and sincerity" (see also, Kamukama, 1993, pp. 66-68; Reyntjens, 1994, p. 204).

In response to the rebel offensives, and at the urging of U.S. and Ugandan representatives, Habyarimana agreed to intensify the seriousness of the negotiations at Arusha on July 10, 1992. After three days, he reached a cease-fire with the rebels, creating a demilitarized zone between the opposing forces to be monitored by 50 foreign military observers. Habyarimana also conceded in principle to the rebels' demands on rule of law, democratization, power-sharing, and creation of a unified military, although without specifying the crucial details (Kamukama, 1993, pp. 67-68; Reed, 1996, p. 492). Unsatisfied, the rebels aimed to increase their military threat against Habyarimana to coerce further concessions from him. According to two senior rebels, the RPF used the

next six months to politically indoctrinate new recruits, conduct military training, and enhance ties to the Hutu opposition.

Then, at the start of 1993, the RPF launched one of the most controversial and consequential aspects of its tragic challenge. On February 8, 1993, the rebels broke a seven-month cease-fire and rapidly captured a large swath of northern Rwanda, including portions of the hardline Hutu stronghold of Ruhengeri. Within two weeks, the rebels doubled the territory under their control and approached within 20 miles of the capital, Kigali, appearing poised to capture it. In the course of the operation, the rebels also killed many Hutu civilians. The government characterized these as massacres, while the rebels claimed that the victims mainly were collateral damage, killed when the rebels retaliated against Hutu troops and militias who were attacking from within civilian areas (Misser, 1995, pp. 68-69). The RPF offensive also provoked retaliatory killing of Tutsi in Ruhengeri on March 5, 1993, and displaced an estimated one million Rwandans, or approximately one-eighth of the country's entire population. The government claimed that the civilians had fled in terror of the approaching Tutsi rebels. The RPF claimed – in an effort to fend off international criticism – that the Rwandan army itself had ethnically cleansed the civilians as it retreated, to prevent them coming under control of the rebels.

Regardless of the precise details, the Tutsi rebel offensive intensified Hutu concerns – including among the RPF's erstwhile allies in the domestic opposition – that the rebels were intent on conquering the country and restoring Tutsi hegemony. France deployed 150 troops to reinforce the Rwandan army on February 9, 1993 and another 250 troops on February 20. Confronted by this French military intervention and political condemnation from the Hutu opposition and the international community, the RPF halted its offensive and, on March 19, 1993, pulled back from two-thirds of the territory it had captured, including the strategic road linking Kigali and Ruhengeri (Jones, 1999, p. 1411 Kamukama, 1993, pp. 53, 55, 70-71; Prunier, 1993, pp. 137-38).

The RPF justifies its offensive on grounds that Habyarimana was refusing to make concessions at Arusha while continuing to orchestrate periodic massacres of Tutsi civilians (Misser, 1995, p. 143; Reyntjens, 1994, p. 205). Indeed, only weeks earlier, Habyarimana's representative at the peace talks, Col. Theoneste Bagosora, had left in anger, announcing he was going home "to prepare the apocalypse" (African Rights, 1995, p. 86; Gillet, 1998; Nevill, 1997).<sup>10</sup> Soon after, from January 22-31, 1993, Hutu forces killed some 300 Tutsi in northern Rwanda, which brought the toll of such massacres since the start of war to around 2,000 (Jones, 1999, p. 141). The RPF says it perceived that Habyarimana was attacking domestic Tutsi civilians in an effort to coerce concessions from the rebel group at the negotiating table, and that it had to demonstrate to him that this was not an acceptable tactic. However, the rebels apparently intended more than just to send signals and had invoked their long-standing "zed option." If their offensive had not provoked French military intervention and international political condemnation, they were ready to conquer the country. As one senior rebel puts it, "We could have won, but the international community wouldn't let us. France would aid the army and the international community would criticize us."

The February 1993 RPF offensive was a short-run success but a long-run disaster. The rebels succeeded in showing Habyarimana that they could overrun his army if he refused to concede to their demands, and so were able to coerce further concessions from him in the following months at Arusha. However, the offensive also enabled Habyarimana to unite the Rwandan Hutu political class against the rebels and their domestic Tutsi “accomplices.” The Hutu opposition felt betrayed, as it made clear during a February 1993 meeting with RPF representatives in Burundi. Faustin Twagiramungu, the moderate Hutu leader of the MDR opposition party, criticized the RPF for displacing a million Hutu and accused it of being no better than Habyarimana’s party – interested in total control rather than sharing of power. The rebels defended their actions by saying that they had to do something to stop the regime’s repeated massacres of civilian Tutsi. The RPF resented the fact that the opposition Hutu politicians were more critical of the rebel military offensive than of the original massacres of Tutsi that triggered it. As Patrick Mazimaka puts it, “They felt that 1,000 Tutsi could die, but why must the war restart?” The RPF and the Hutu opposition nominally maintained their alliance of convenience for several more months, to retain a common front in making demands at Arusha, but mutual trust had been destroyed.

Following the RPF’s dramatic display of strength, and spurred by renewed pressure from the international community, Habyarimana soon conceded to virtually all of the rebels’ remaining demands at Arusha. He agreed to the return of refugees and internally displaced persons, the transformation of his office of president into a largely symbolic office, a transitional government prior to democratic elections, and a small UN peacekeeping force to facilitate security during the transition. But peace talks bogged down over two power-sharing issues: which parties would be represented in a transitional government before new elections, and how would the rebel and government troops be integrated into a combined army? Habyarimana and his Hutu cronies from northwestern Rwanda feared that, if the Tutsi rebels and their allies within the Rwandan opposition were allowed to dominate the transition government and army, the outcome would be essentially a negotiated coup. Under this scenario, the Hutu elite feared they would at best lose the privileges of rule, and at worst suffer deadly retribution for their violence against Tutsi during the war and their years of corruption and favoritism.

International pressure mounted on Habyarimana to share power. Sanctions were applied or threatened by the international community, including French officials who warned the Rwandan president that they would soon withdraw their troops, which he correctly viewed as his only protection against the rebels. In August 1993, seeing little other choice, he finally caved in on the two power-sharing provisions and signed the comprehensive Arusha accords. The RPF and its allied domestic opposition parties were to be given the majority of seats in the interim cabinet and legislature preceding elections. Moreover, the rebels were to be granted their requested 50 percent of the officer positions (and 40 percent of the enlisted ranks) in the combined army, rather than the 15 percent that Habyarimana originally proposed. In light of the superiority of the rebels on a man-for-man basis by this time, the military integration protocol was tantamount to a negotiated surrender of the Hutu army to the Tutsi rebels.

The profound distress within Rwanda's army and government engendered by this concession was widely known. According to one account, "An American participant observed at the time that the division of the army as it stood would never be accepted by hard-line factions in the army" (Jones, 1999, pp. 142-43). The U.S. assistant Secretary of State for Africa during most of the war says the "RPF demands concerning the future of the military were guaranteed to push the regime into a state of total paranoia" (Cohen, 1998, pp. 14-15). Yet, Habyarimana conceded to these demands because the international community made clear that otherwise it would remove its support, which would leave him at the mercy of the rebels. As the RPF's Rutaremara observes, "He had to [concede] because of the international observers who provided aid."

The rebels argue that they too made multiple concessions. For example, they accepted the Hutu regime's demand for a dual-command structure in the combined army. They agreed that refugees would not necessarily return to their home regions within Rwanda due to concerns about overpopulation. They accepted a complex transitional power-sharing arrangement rather than absolute control. They conceded to a UN peacekeeping force, even though they preferred an all-African force to reduce French influence. And they agreed to accept a 60-40 split in the enlisted ranks of the combined army, rather than the 50-50 split they sought and which they received for the officer corps. However, these were marginal concessions and did not impinge on the RPF's unceasing demand that Habyarimana hand over to them effective political and military control of Rwanda. Indeed, even the rebels admit that Habyarimana made the lion's share of the concessions. They attribute this to three factors: the rebels' unrelenting military pressure; the international community's threat to cut off aid to Habyarimana; and the internal Hutu opposition, which Habyarimana had to appease to retain ethnic support, and which was unarmed and therefore favored a negotiated outcome rather than military victory by either side.

Habyarimana's cronies felt betrayed and terrified. They immediately set out to undermine the implementation of the accords, working in conjunction with the president. Although Habyarimana's motivation and intent at the time still remain somewhat clouded, he clearly was walking a political tightrope. He apparently perceived that it would be political suicide – if not literal suicide – either to refuse to sign the accords or actually to implement them. If he refused to sign, the international community including France had threatened to suspend economic and military assistance, which would leave his regime at the mercy of the rebels. But if he actually started implementing the accords, he risked being killed either by the entrenched Hutu elite, which sought to block implementation in order to preserve its power and physical security, or by the Tutsi rebel elite, which would take over key positions in the army and government, whence they could seek revenge for past offenses. Thus, he pursued a third, middle path: signing the accords but doing everything possible to avoid implementing them as originally intended.

In the fall of 1993, Habyarimana obstructed implementation of the Arusha accords by coopting virtually all of the Hutu opposition parties into his "Hutu Power" alliance against the Tutsi. He did so by spawning Hutu Power wings within each party that quickly became more popular than their moderate rivals (except in one case). This

effort was facilitated greatly by the coincidental assassination in October 1993 of neighboring Burundi's first elected Hutu president by Tutsi soldiers and the subsequent massacre of thousands of Hutu civilians. Based on these killings, and the RPF's military offensive earlier that year, Habyarimana could make a credible case that the Tutsi represented an existential threat to the survival of Rwanda's Hutu. Once the opposition parties were dominated by their Hutu Power wings, he insisted to the rebels that these hardliners – rather than the minority moderate wings allied with the RPF – should appoint the parties' representatives to the transitional government, which would enable him to retain effective control of the government. He also demanded that the transitional government be broadened to include the extremist Hutu CDR party. Meanwhile, the Rwandan media began to report, and the rebels became aware of, strong signs that extremist Hutu were preparing to greatly escalate their campaign of retaliation against civilian Tutsi. UN peacekeepers arrived in late 1993 to replace French forces, as called for in the peace accords, but this switch only exacerbated the paranoia of the governing Hutu elite, which felt it was losing its last line of defense.

At the same time, extreme elements within the ruling Hutu clique prepared their own "final solution" to retain power and block what they perceived as a Tutsi attempt to re-conquer Rwanda after thirty-five years of Hutu emancipation. These Hutu extremists apparently believed that by preparing to kill all of the Tutsi civilians in Rwanda they could prevent the country from being conquered by the rebels. Accordingly, they imported thousands of guns and grenades and hundreds of thousands of machetes, and transformed political party youth wings into fully fledged armed militias. To foment Hutu fear and anti-Tutsi hatred they also created a new private radio station as an alternative to the existing, somewhat more moderate government channel. They apparently also established a clandestine network of extremists within the army to take charge when the time came. When the Tutsi rebels became aware of these activities in early 1994, they responded by training in earnest for the resumption of war, which only fed Hutu anxieties. This crescendo of fear was exacerbated still further in February 1994 by a wave of mutual political assassinations.

By early 1994, the rebels had two choices. They could finally make concessions in their demands for power – for example, by letting the now dominant Hutu Power wings pick the opposition parties' representatives in the transitional government – in the hope of averting massive retaliatory violence against Tutsi civilians. Or the rebels could maintain their hard line and prepare a final military offensive to conquer Rwanda. They chose the latter.

In preparation for war, the rebels also attempted to arm and train their political allies within Rwanda to defend themselves against expected retaliation. This was a belated and major expansion of the RPF's longstanding, and largely unsuccessful, efforts to bolster its domestic allies. After Habyarimana created his *Interahamwe* militia in 1992, the rebels encouraged opposition parties to form their own militias, which some did. The RPF also offered to arm and train them in its northern occupied zone, but most refused because they either did not trust the rebels or feared reprisal from Habyarimana. The RPF redoubled these efforts in early 1994. For example, Rutaremara says he met

four times with the Christian Democratic party “to persuade them that there would be great violence and that they needed counter-training.”<sup>11</sup> Ironically, most of the opposition militias eventually were coopted into the Hutu Power movement, so that during the genocide they participated in the killing of Tutsi.

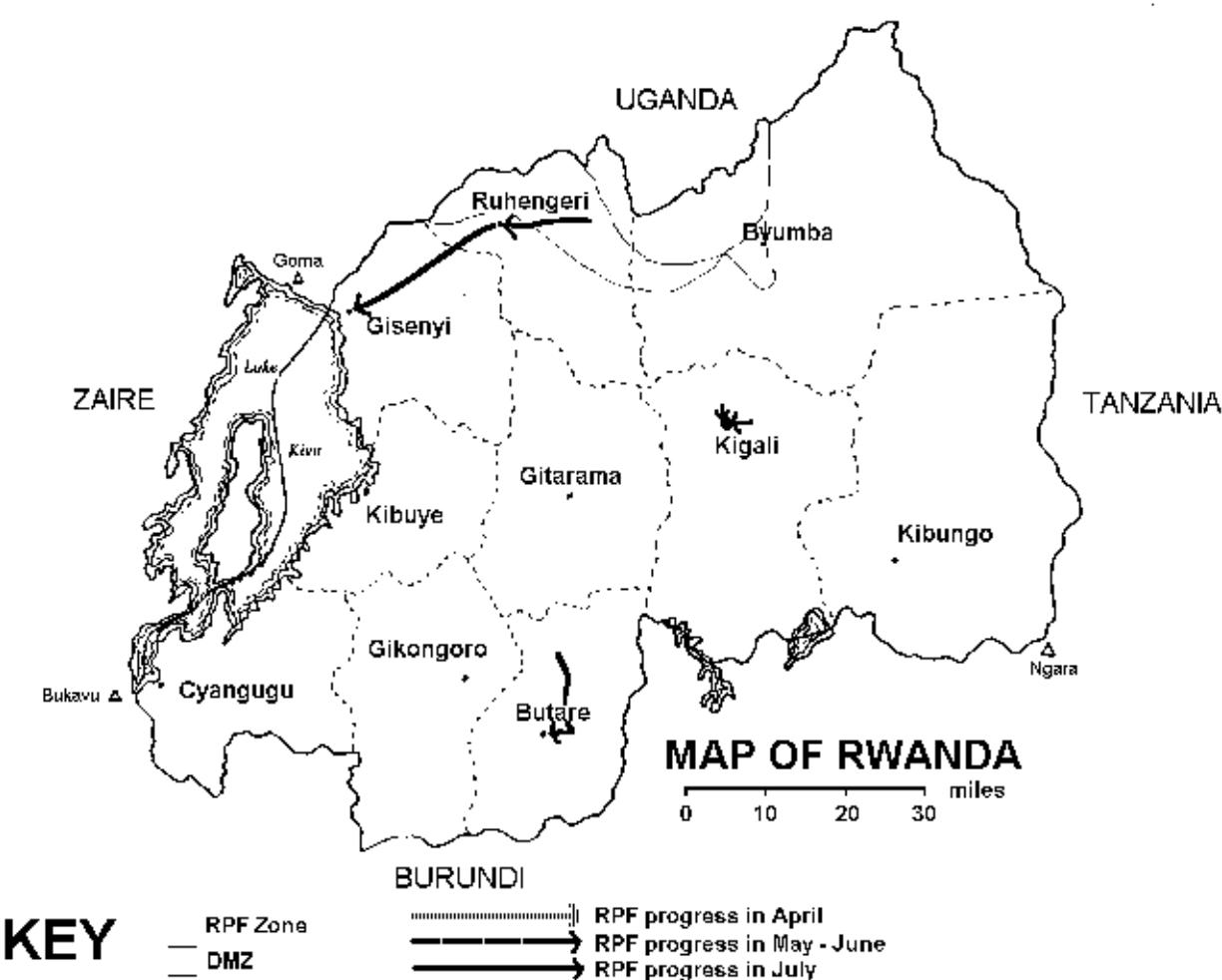
In February 1994, the RPF also started arming and training separate Tutsi “self-defense forces” within Rwanda to defend against the expected retaliatory massacres. When the genocide started, the program was a few months away from fruition, so that most Tutsi in Rwanda still were defenseless. In the first two months of 1994, some RPF officials also proposed publicly exhorting the “expected targets” of retaliation in Rwanda – that is, all Tutsi – to flee the country. However, the rebels worried this could cost them international support by suggesting they intended to violate the cease-fire. Moreover, it would stigmatize the Tutsi in Rwanda as fifth-columnists, reinforcing the worst accusations of the Hutu extremists. Instead, the RPF decided to communicate discreetly to certain groups of domestic Tutsi that they should flee Rwanda. According to rebel officials, most such Tutsi refused to leave on the grounds that they expected the UN peacekeepers to protect them if violence broke out.

During the first months of 1994, the RPF also prepared a final military offensive to conquer the country. First, it withdrew its top political officials from Kigali, where they had been deployed in December 1993 along with a rebel battalion to prepare for installation of the transitional government under the Arusha accords (See also, Misser, 1995, pp. 77-78). Next, it infiltrated additional rebels to the capital, increasing the battalion’s strength from 600 to about 800. Third, it ordered rebels in the northern zone, who had been training lightly in preparation for integrating with the Rwandan army, to switch to a “war-footing,” to be prepared to “react quickly,” and to train for “urban warfare” – indicating they soon would be fighting to capture the capital. Fourth, the RPF developed a war plan, under which the reinforced battalion in Kigali would pin down most Rwandan army troops, leaving the rest of the country to be captured by a separate rebel offensive. The plan was risky because the rebel battalion headquarters in Kigali was ringed by five Rwandan army battalions and several additional army companies around the city, but the RPF was cautiously optimistic about its prospects. As a senior rebel recalls, “We thought we could defend ourselves as the FAR [Rwandan army] came to us [in Kigali]. It would leave them vulnerable to our main thrust from the north, but still we were scared. It was guts.”

Then, on April 6, 1994, as President Habyarimana was flying back to Rwanda from a conference in Tanzania, he was killed when his private plane was shot down by surface-to-air missiles during approach to Kigali. Hutu extremists quickly blamed the Tutsi rebels for the attack and seized effective control of the government. Within hours, they began assassinating opposition politicians and commenced the genocide of Tutsi. In the first two weeks alone, they killed approximately 200,000 Tutsi. Despite this, the RPF clung to its strategy: refusing to compromise its demands for political power, while accepting retaliation against Tutsi civilians as the price of achieving that goal, even as the price climbed much higher than expected.

This RPF calculus was reflected both in the rebels' battle plan and their initial refusal to test government cease-fire offers. Primarily, the battle plan was designed to conquer the country, rather than to protect Tutsi civilians from retaliatory violence. Had the rebels placed higher priority on protecting Tutsi civilians, they would have raced quickly to the country's southwest where most domestic Tutsi, some 86 percent, lived in the six prefectures of Kigali, Butare, Gitarama, Gikongoro, Cyangugu, and Kibuye (Kuperman, 2001, p. 121). However, the rebels feared casualties if they tried to penetrate the line between the Rwandan army's two strongholds in Kigali and Ruhengeri. Instead, the rebels initially moved east, where "the campaign was easier because the terrain was flatter" and few army troops stood in the way, intending to envelop the capital clockwise. The rebels swept through the eastern half of Rwanda in about two months, on foot, bypassing army units ensconced on strategic high ground. This unorthodox strategy succeeded because the dispersed army units in the east eventually ran out of logistics and apparently lacked the nerve to confront the rebels directly. However, the rebels' circuitous route did have a major cost: by the time they reached the southwest in June 1994, most of the Tutsi there already had been killed.

**Figure 2**  
**RPF Offensive: April-July 1994**



Interestingly, the RPF initially had ordered one unit of rebels to proceed immediately to the southwest but then worried they could be outflanked by the Rwandan army and so recalled them. This incident illustrates how the RPF gave higher priority to military effectiveness than protecting Tutsi civilians. The RPF defends its decision to pursue an eastern route on grounds that the best way to save Tutsi civilians was to defeat the Rwandan army that “provided the psychological and physical environment for the killers.” However, the rebels almost certainly could have saved many more Tutsi, albeit at higher military cost, if they had pursued a southwestern offensive.

During the first two and a half weeks of genocide, the rebels also repeatedly rejected cease-fire offers from the government. Then, in late April 1994, they realized the genocide was being carried out so quickly that most Tutsi would be killed before the rebels could conquer the country. At this point, the rebels apparently decided that the expected cost in retaliatory violence had risen so high – total annihilation of Rwanda’s Tutsi population – that it was no longer acceptable as the price of achieving their goal. Accordingly, on April 23, the RPF belatedly offered to accept the cease-fire that the army moderates had proposed 10 days earlier (Richburg, 1994). Patrick Mazimaka says the rebel offer was made in the hope that, “if we accepted a cease-fire, the Rwandan army might stop the killings because they knew they were going to lose otherwise. . . . The army could help us in areas where we couldn’t get to quickly enough.” Although such a concession might have had a chance of working earlier when the moderate Hutu officer Marcel Gatsinzi still was army chief of staff, once he was purged on April 17 the ruling extremists appeared intent on finishing what they had started. The genocide continued until the RPF captured most of the country (and French-led peacekeepers secured the rest) in July, by which time an estimated 500,000 Tutsi – nearly 80 percent of their pre-war domestic population – had been killed.

### **Explaining the RPF’s Tragic Challenge**

Of the four putative explanations for the RPF’s tragic challenge presented at the beginning of this study, the evidence supports the last – that the Tutsi rebels expected their challenge to provoke genocidal retaliation but viewed this as an acceptable cost of achieving their goal of attaining power in Rwanda. Even prior to the invasion, the rebel leadership expected Habyarimana’s “knee-jerk reaction” would be retaliation against Tutsi civilians in Rwanda, concedes Patrick Mazimaka. Likewise, Charles Murigande admits, “reprisals were expected.” After the initial invasion, it also became clear that Rwanda’s Hutu government would respond to any further rebel offensives or intransigence by launching massacres against Tutsi civilians. Wilson Rutaysire acknowledges, “Every time there was a deadlock in the [peace] talks, there would be massacres.” Alison Des Forges (1999, pp. 87-88) of Human Rights Watch observes that all five major outbursts of anti-Tutsi violence from 1990-93 were launched “in reaction to challenges that threatened Habyarimana’s control,” as summarized in Figure 3.<sup>12</sup>

**Figure 3**  
**RPF Challenges to Hutu Regime Provoke Retaliatory Massacres**

Challenge to Regime		Months til Retaliation	Retaliatory Massacre	
Date	Type		Date	Location (geographic region)
Oct-90	Invasion	0	Oct-90	Mutara (NE) and Kibilira (NW)
Jan-91	Attack on Ruhengeri	0	Jan/Feb-91	Ruhengeri (NW)
Jan-92	Demands for power-sharing	2	Mar-92	Kibilira (NW) and Bugesera (S)
Aug-92	First Arusha Protocol	0	Aug-92	Kibuye (W)
Jan-93	Later Arusha Protocol	0	Jan-93	Gisenyi (NW), Kibilira (NW) and Kibuye (W)

Sources: Des Forges, 1999, pp. 87-88; Reyntjens, 1994, pp. 184-88.

However, the RPF persistently underestimated the eventual toll of retaliation. At the time of their invasion, the rebels expected “maybe five- to ten thousand” reprisal killings, according to Rutaysire. By late 1993, the Tutsi rebels grew to expect tens of thousands of retaliatory deaths if they persisted in their challenge, but the eventual “scale took us unawares,” he says. Rudasingwa concurs that, “we knew the mass killings would occur,” but were surprised by “the speed and the viciousness.” Tito Rutaremara says the rebels explicitly rejected such forecasts: “The French were warning us of this eventuality. But we took it as blackmail. We didn’t expect the final extent.” Nevertheless, given that the RPF from the start did expect its challenge to provoke thousands of retaliatory civilian killings, this challenge cannot be explained by failure to anticipate such a reaction.

Nor can the challenge be explained by a rebel expectation that Tutsi were bound to suffer even if they eschewed violence themselves. Within Rwanda, prior to the invasion, Tutsi were not even suffering discrimination relative to most Hutu, let alone violence. In secondary schools, they “remained over-represented” (Uvin, 1997, p. 101). Likewise, in the mid-ranks of the public sector, “Tutsi remained represented beyond the 9 percent they were theoretically allocated. Moreover, in other sectors of society – commerce and enterprise, NGOs, and development projects – they were present beyond that proportion” (Uvin, 1998, p. 35; see also, Erny, 1994, p. 83).

In Uganda, likewise, the Tutsi had faced no significant discrimination or violence for several years prior to the invasion. Indeed, the late 1980s represented a high-water mark for Tutsi in Uganda, given their military role, ties to Museveni, and economic advancement. The majority of Tutsi in Uganda had left the refugee camps and integrated into the larger society. The remainder, mostly elderly, lived in refugee settlements that were “solid and permanent – more village than refugee camp” (Watson, 1991, pp. 6-8). Admittedly, other ethnic groups in Uganda, including the dominant Baganda, resented the Tutsi in the late 1980s, but this was precisely because the Tutsi enjoyed economic success and support from the president.

In other neighboring states, most Rwandan Tutsi refugees also were safe and secure. The largest group of refugees, about a quarter-million, lived in Burundi, where they had been treated well for decades by that state’s Tutsi-dominated government. Burundi and Tanzania even had offered citizenship to the refugees. Zaire was probably

the least secure environment for Tutsi refugees in the late 1980s, but they still enjoyed a good relationship with the president, Mobutu Sese Seko, who hired elite Rwandan Tutsi as political administrators. As in Uganda, the Tutsi in Zaire were resented by some of the local populace but were not subject to significant discrimination or threat of violence (Reed, 1996, p. 483; Watson, 1992, p. 53). Even after the initial invasion, the rebels had the option of returning to relative safety in Uganda. Indeed, some rebels did return when the invasion initially fared poorly, and they and the other estimated 200,000 Tutsi refugees<sup>13</sup> in Uganda remained secure throughout the Rwandan civil war.

For most of the war, the rebels also expected that they could mitigate violent retaliation against Tutsi within Rwanda by themselves eschewing military escalation and/or scaling back demands for political power. For example, as late as March 1993, the rebels voluntarily withdrew from a large swath of territory captured the previous month because in return, “We had confidence that Habyarimana would listen to the international community and maybe even step aside. We thought that in the worst case, the international community would establish safe areas.” The rebels also might have averted genocide by relenting on their demand for de facto control of the combined army, perhaps the final straw for the Hutu extremists.

Even after the rebels and the international community compelled Habyarimana to sign the Arusha accords in August 1993, the RPF still potentially could have averted massive retaliation by making concessions during their implementation. For example, had the rebels acquiesced to a transitional government that included ministers from the dominant Hutu Power wings of the opposition parties – thereby permitting Habyarimana to retain political control – the clique around the president might have been sufficiently mollified to forego genocide. Of course, it is also possible that by this point the Hutu extremists were committed to genocide because they perceived the Tutsi rebels as irrevocably intent on total victory.

Until at least the previous year, however, the RPF did expect it could avert genocidal retaliation by making concessions, yet refused to do so because it viewed such retaliation as an acceptable cost of attaining power in Rwanda. “You always have to balance the pros and cons,” says Tito Rutaremara, who acknowledges that, “We knew if we fought, people would suffer” and there would be “civilian atrocities.” A rebel spokesman justifies this decision matter-of-factly: “One can’t make an omelet without breaking some eggs” (Overdulve, 1997, p. 74).

The RPF’s tolerance for retaliatory killing also may be explained by a schism within the Rwandan Tutsi that stemmed from the prolonged refugee experience. By 1990, many refugees who had spent up to three decades in Uganda felt little kinship for those in Rwanda who faced retaliation. Indeed, some Tutsi in the diaspora suspected that those who had been permitted to remain in Rwanda must have collaborated with the extremist Hutu regime (Erny, 1994, pp. 137-38, 147; Prunier, 1993, p. 136; Reed, 1996, p. 482). From the opposite perspective, many Tutsi in Rwanda bitterly opposed the rebels on grounds the diaspora Tutsi were willing to fight to the last domestic Tutsi (Overdulve, 1997, p. 74). Realistically, the RPF did value its Tutsi brethren in Rwanda,

if nothing else as likely ethnic political supporters following the war. However, the intra-Tutsi schism may help explain why the RPF had such a high tolerance for retaliatory killing.

## **Conclusion**

A revised history of the Rwandan Patriotic Front reveals how and why these Tutsi refugee rebels, by pursuing an armed challenge against Rwanda's Hutu regime, provoked a retaliatory genocide against the state's Tutsi populace. These findings help explain the genocide, but do not justify or excuse it. Nor can they resolve debates about the legitimacy of the RPF's goals or its resort to military force. However, the findings do suggest that the genocide was foreseeable – and avoidable if the RPF had been willing to compromise either its aspirations or means of pursuing them. The evidence also demonstrates that the international community, by supporting the rebels' intransigence, inadvertently helped trigger the genocidal backlash. Scholars and policymakers would be advised to heed these lessons as they attempt to avert genocide in other cases.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, as early as 1987, when the U.S. National Security Council's new senior director for Africa, Herman Cohen (1998, p. 5), traveled to Africa, "President Habyarimana told me of his suspicions that Tutsi youth in the Ugandan army were plotting to invade their ancestral homeland."

<sup>2</sup> This was a mainstream RPF position, not merely that of the radicals as reported by Prunier (1993, p. 130).

<sup>3</sup> Watson (1991, p. 13) also reports that when Kagame was head of intelligence for the Ugandan army, "He is alleged to have used its resources to intimidate dissenters within the RPF . . . as well as refugees who did not favor an armed return or who had relations with the Rwandese state. Some were imprisoned."

<sup>4</sup> This secret, patient approach led a group of 26 younger, more aggressive Tutsi soldiers to attempt to jump-start the invasion prematurely by crossing into Rwanda's Akagera national park in January 1989, hoping it would compel others to join them. Instead, Rwigyema crossed the border and retrieved the men. The actual invasion was not launched for another 21 months.

<sup>5</sup> Details on the Rwandan army's equipment in 1994 can be found in Kuperman (2001, p. 41).

<sup>6</sup> In April 1990, six months prior to the invasion, Protais Musoni was directed to arrange production of crops for the troops. He obtained land to grow maize in Tanzania, organized transport across Lake Victoria, and arranged two water crossings of the Akagera River into Rwanda that would enable resupplying the rebels after they invaded. The RPF also arranged a network to provide meat for its fighters, and shortly before the invasion slaughtered 1,200 cattle to prepare dried meat for the war (see also, Otunnu, 1999b, p. 41).

<sup>7</sup> Kagame says that his agreeing to go for training in the United States prior to the invasion was a diversion to make Ugandan authorities believe that the suspected invasion was not imminent. He says he and other Tutsi officers already had been interrogated several times about a suspected plot but had been found innocent. He also says Museveni "was surprised by the timing of the attack. . . . He was very bitter. He was extremely unhappy. There is no doubt about this" (Misser, 1995, pp. 54, 65-66).

<sup>8</sup> A widespread account, that the top three rebel leaders had died from rebel infighting rather than hostile fire, apparently was a false rumor spread by the Habyarimana regime to undercut the morale and recruiting efforts of the Tutsi rebels (Misser, 1995, pp. 55-59, 61, 63).

<sup>9</sup> Cohen (1998, p. 9) indicates that the opposition parties already had been skeptical of the RPF as early as May 1992, when he visited Rwanda. "The different opposition parties were refreshingly multi-ethnic, with Tutsi intellectuals holding important positions. Nevertheless, everyone placed the RPF in a separate category. . . . [M]any of the Hutu opposition also regarded the RPF as a throwback to the old days of Tutsi feudalism. For them, the RPF was less a force for democratization and more a threat of a return to traditional minority rule."

<sup>10</sup> There are several versions of this account, with some claiming the statement was made in Arusha and others in Kigali. The date varies from December 1992 to February 1993. It is possible that Bagosora repeated several versions of the threat at different times and places.

<sup>11</sup> Protais Musoni says the RPF also helped train other militias, including the Social Democrats' *Akambozi* militia.

<sup>12</sup>The last two rounds of massacres targeted not only Tutsi, but their allies in the moderate Hutu opposition. The intermittent massacres ended after a March 1993 UN report publicized them, but apparently only because the extremists then turned to planning their final solution.

<sup>13</sup> Reyntjens (1993, p. 139) says 82,000, but Watson (1991, p. 6) clarifies that such lower figures count only the minority of refugees who lived in camps, excluding the majority who "self-settled" elsewhere in Uganda.