Exile, Reform, and the Rise of the Rwandan Patriotic Front

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IN July 1994, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and its armed wing, the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA), entered Kigali after routing the former régime and putting an end to months of genocide in which upwards of 500,000 had lost their lives. By August, another one to two million had fled from Rwanda. All in all, nearly half of the population had been killed, displaced inside the country, or was in exile.

While these events attracted widespread international attention, very little is known about the evolution, political strategy, or policy agenda of the movement which forms the cornerstone of the Government of National Unity in Rwanda, now celebrating its second year in power. While the first public act of the RPF was an armed invasion from Uganda in 1990, its political history long pre-dates its military activities and both grew out of the nearly 40-year exile which many RPF supporters spent in Eastern and Central Africa, Europe, and North America. Moreover, while often categorised as a Tutsi movement, the RPF has a consistent history of seeking to broaden its base beyond a single ethnic or ideological group.

The case of the RPF sheds light upon the intersection between the politics of exile and of reform. The politicisation and mobilisation of those in exile occurs in response to changes not only at the international level but also within their host country and from where they fled. While governments may well agree to political reforms which are intended to broaden the space for a domestic opposition that can be out-maneuvred or controlled, they may not feel so certain about their ability to manipulate opponents in exile who enjoy sources of support

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1 Both are also known by their French names, the Front patriotique rwandais-Inkotanyi, and the Armée patriotique rwandais.

2 For analyses of the RPF, see James Bennett, 'Zur Geschichte und Politik der Rwandishen Patriotischen Front', in Hildegard Schurings (ed.), Ein Volk verlässt sein Land: Krieg und Völkermord in Ruanda (Cologne, 1994), pp. 168–79, and Gérard Prunier, 'Éléments pour une histoire du Front patriotique rwandais', in Politique africaine (Paris), 51, October 1993, pp. 121–38.
well beyond official control. Thus, governments often seek to exclude externally-based organisations from the process of political reform, and may try to use such changes to undermine their opponents. Under such circumstances, the activists concerned may feel forced to gain entry to the local political arena through some combination of force and the construction of alliances with domestic movements, while also forging tactical alliances with external groups to strengthen their hand *vis-à-vis* the régime in power.

The Rwandan tragedy also sheds light on the darker side of reform. If changes are enthusiastically supported by the donor community and by international and domestic non-governmental organisations alike, the ruling régime may feel forced to act, rather than be left out of the process. Moreover, political and economic reforms, by their very nature, challenge the interests of those whose power rests upon their exclusive control of the state and of markets. As such, they should be expected to oppose reform with all the resources they can mobilise. While African states are notoriously weak, such groups possess adequate resources to wreak havoc in society. Alternatively, those who feel that they are losing control over the apparatus of government and administration may create extra-state structures through which to maintain power. If the supporters of reform do not have—or are not willing to mobilise—the resources needed to counter those of their opponents, the outcome is likely to be extremely hazardous.

These are sobering lessons for the RPF and Rwanda, which has a higher percentage of its population living in exile than any other country in Africa. To avoid a repeat of its own history, the RPF must be willing to devise ways to attract refugees back home and to permit their participation in public affairs, while holding those who committed atrocities accountable for their actions. The implications are also sobering for Africa, where the largest number of refugees in the world could combine in very volatile ways in order to influence the reform of political systems in which control of the state, and thus of public resources, is critical to the accumulation of material wealth.

**Decolonisation and Early Refugee Politics in Rwanda**

The first community of Rwandan refugees emerged as a result of decolonisation. In the late 1950s, supporters of the ruling Tutsi aristocracy, organised in the *Union nationale rwandaise* (UNR), lost their position and their wealth to the members of the Hutu nationalist movement, the *Parti du mouvement de l'émancipation Hutu* (Parmehutu).
In the process, tens of thousands of Tutsi were killed and many more inhabitants were displaced. By the time that the UN recognised Rwanda's independence in 1962, somewhere between 40 and 70 per cent of the entire Tutsi population was thought to have fled the country.

Political movements during their first decade in exile reflected the divisions within the refugee camps and were splintered, representing a variety of ideological viewpoints, albeit nearly always linked to the personal following of a single leader. Some sought to pursue an armed struggle and sent a few supporters to the East for training, while others, known as the Inyenzi or cockroaches, sought a more immediate solution. Between 1961 and 1966 they undertook as many as ten known raids into Rwanda, the most successful of which came within 20 kilometres of Kigali. In response, 10,000 Tutsi were attacked by Hutu gangs, and those political leaders who had elected to stay within the country were killed. The net result was not so much to weaken the régime as to increase the flow of refugees to the diaspora.

During the late 1960s, two new groups emerged which, for the first time, sought to create broad based alliances for political reform. The Association générale des étudiantes rwandaise, designed to bridge sectarian divisions between those studying in Europe, had its headquarters in Bonn, with branches in Moscow, Paris, and Brussels, and its members sought to complete their degrees and to return home with their newfound patterns of co-operation. The driving forces behind this association were the social divisions which had begun to emerge during Rwanda's history only to become entrenched during its process of decolonisation and embodied in the régime headed by Grégoire Kayibanda, Rwanda's first President.

The 1973 coup pre-empted the development of this movement, because Juvenal Habyarimana initially espoused the rhetoric of reform and moral revolution, and rejected the politics of ethnicity. As such, many in the refugee community hoped to return to take up the challenge. This created more divisions within the diaspora, particularly as the policies that the new President pursued further limited Tutsi social mobility and eventually led to another wave of migrants out of Rwanda.

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3 See René Lemarchand, Rwanda and Burundi (London and New York, 1970), especially chs. 4, 5, and 6.

4 Catherine Watson, Exile from Rwanda: background to an invasion (Washington, DC, 1991), p. 5.

5 Interview, Kigali, August 1994.

6 Dixon Kamukama, Rwanda Conflict: its roots and regional implications (Kampala, 1993), p. 32.
In spite of nearly ten years of independence under a Hutu régime, the Tutsi continued to hold prominent positions in education, the civil service, and the economy. To reverse this, and to open new avenues for patronage, Habyarimana imposed a system whereby access to education and state employment was allocated according to region and ethnicity. As many as 60 per cent of these posts were allocated to the President's home, the north, as against the remainder to Kayibanda's home, the south. Within each region, allocations were made according to Rwanda's official ethnic composition which identified the Hutu as 90 per cent of the population, the Tutsi as nine per cent, and the Twa as one per cent. Thus, in the south, the Tutsi could receive no more than four per cent of places in schools or posts in the civil service, and in the north, six per cent. With the state playing the predominant rôle in the economy, such restrictions severely limited the social mobility of the Tutsi. Those who stayed in Rwanda often went into business. Those who left were often better educated than those who had fled a decade earlier, and were deeply distrusted by the existing exile community. This stemmed from a variety of suspicions as to why the new arrivals had decided to stay while others had left 15 years earlier, and because the former had chosen to leave when the older refugees had hoped to return.

Events in 1972–3 also pre-empted the emergence of a second group, nick-named the Imburamajo, or 'lost ones', composed of peasants, school teachers, and traders, who argued that the right of return be separated from the restoration of the monarchy. Although they had the potential to acquire an extensive following amongst monarchists and anti-monarchists alike, events in Uganda ended their hopes. In 1972, General Idi Amin overthrew President Milton Obote and subsequently developed a close relationship with the former Rwandan King, Umwami Kigeri. When forces loyal to Obote attempted to invade Uganda, Kigeri convinced Amin that as a threat to the monarchy, the Imburamajo were also a threat to his régime. As such, the latter crushed this new movement before it could acquire a broad base.

THE RWANDAN ALLIANCE FOR NATIONAL UNITY

By the mid-1970s, the leading political organisations within the refugee community had become inert and no pan-Rwandese movement had emerged. In addition, because Habyarimana's policy towards
refugees was that Rwanda was ‘full up’, and that those who had fled should make their permanent homes elsewhere, they had also been excluded from any international fora. Moreover, the prospects of imminent return seemed increasingly distant, the struggle for personal survival increased, and the governments of host countries permitted refugees less and less room for political organisation.

The principal strategy which refugees used to deal with their status was to attempt to become a part of their host societies. In Uganda, the chaos which surrounded the rise and fall of Amin’s régime, as well as the return of Obote, diverted attention from the refugees, while those in camps in Tanzania had initially resisted permanent resettlement on smallholder agricultural plots. By 1980 ‘mass euphoria’ surrounded the various naturalisation ceremonies which accompanied Tanzania’s announced willingness to bestow citizenship upon Rwandan refugees in the country. Similarly, those in Burundi were able to acquire official documents which permitted them access to education and employment, though these were obtained through ‘informal channels’.

By the mid-1980s, the strategy of blending into host societies began to collapse, and the realities of statelessness again became the dominant theme in the diaspora. In spite of Tanzania’s official policy, obtaining citizenship there proved to be virtually impossible because of ‘implementational ineptitude’. Moreover, the laws passed in 1973 and 1974 prohibited illegal residents and refugees from working in state and parastatal sectors, just as Tanzania’s brand of socialism was eliminating the private sector. In Zaïre, government policy was to define all Rwandans – including the Bafumbira who lived outside Rwanda because of the colonial partition – as foreigners, thereby depriving them of political rights and heightening ethnic tensions. Subsequent decisions to use local Tutsi mwami or ‘princelings’ as local administrators stimulated anti-Tutsi feelings. Following the overthrow of Amin and the beginning of what has become known as the Obote II régime, Rwandans living in Uganda were blamed for supporting Amin, and Obote sought to fan anti-Rwandese sentiments as a way of building support for himself. In the process, their lands and cattle were

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7 République rwandaise, Présidence de la république, Commission spéciale sur les problèmes des émigrés rwandais, Le Rwanda et le problème de ses réfugiés : contexte historique, analyse, et voies de solution (Kigali, May 1990).
8 Charles P. Gasarasi, ‘The Mass Naturalization and Further Integration of Rwandese Refugees in Tanzania: process, problems and prospects’, in Journal of Refugee Studies (Oxford), 3, 2, 1990, pp. 90-5.
9 Ibid. p. 88.
10 Ibid. p. 96.
11 Catherine Watson, ‘War and Waiting’, in Africa Report (New York), 37, 6, 1992, p. 53.
often confiscated, and many were summarily dismissed from public employment.\textsuperscript{12}

It was in these circumstances of an increasingly uncertain life in exile that the Rwandan Alliance for National Unity (Ranu) was organised with a clear leftist ideology, which called for the abolition of the monarchy and the replacement of capitalism through the creation of a socialist state in Rwanda.\textsuperscript{13} Because of its controversial policies, Ranu’s leaders, who were based in Nairobi, decided to take the movement underground. Their strategy involved working through cultural organisations which would foster a sense of nationalism within the diaspora and attract a wide range of participants from which potential activists could be recruited, some of whom joined the groups set up by Ranu to study the political history of Rwanda.

In addition to its cultural work, Ranu also established international contacts. It distributed papers at various gatherings and conferences, even if unable to gain official entry, and took the opportunity to develop close ties with other organisations which found themselves in a similar situation, such as the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front, albeit not the Sudanese People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) because of a perception that its struggle was sectarian. At the governmental level, Ranu made contacts with Libya and Eastern bloc countries despite great difficulties: apart from the fact that their embassies were closely monitored by Kenyan secret police in Nairobi, many Rwandan leaders in Europe did not have travel documents. In spite of its accomplishments, Ranu’s branches in Central and Eastern Africa, as well as those in Europe and North America, existed more on paper than in reality, not least since they had been unable to attract more than a small intellectual following.

\textbf{UGANDA AND THE RISE OF THE RWANDAN PATRIOTIC FRONT}

Meanwhile, a guerrilla war had been started in Uganda against the Obote II régime by the National Resistance Movement (NRM), among whose founders were two Rwandans, Fred Rwigyema and Paul Kagame, both active in Ranu. As attacks against the Rwandan

\textsuperscript{12} Jason W. Clay, \textit{The Eviction of Banyaruanda: the story behind the refugee crisis in Southwest Uganda} (Cambridge, MA, n.d.), and Kamukama, op. cit. pp. 36–41.

\textsuperscript{13} The information that follows is based upon confidential interviews conducted in Kigali with former members of the Rwandan Alliance for National Unity (Ranu) in August 1994 and July 1995.
community in Uganda escalated, more and more members of the diaspora joined the NRM and its military wing, the National Resistance Army (NRA), which recruited anyone who was willing to fight, regardless of nationality. In the process, a large cadre of Rwandan exiles received first-hand experience in guerrilla warfare.

While the driving force behind Ranu’s transformation was clearly Rwandan, the influence of the NRM in Uganda cannot be underestimated. With little more than what they perceived as a just cause and a clear goal, a young, poorly trained and equipped army defeated an internationally recognised and supported régime whose military forces were far superior to its own. The significance of the victory of the NRM was clear: if Ugandans could unite to defeat their government, why could Rwandans not do the same? In order to integrate those cadres who possessed ready experience in fighting a protracted guerrilla war, as well as others, the 1985 Ranu Congress empowered its political bureau to form a task force, under the direction of Tito Rutaremara, to develop a strategy to guide the movement’s expansion.\(^\text{14}\)

Upon his return to Kenya in 1987, Rutaremara travelled to Uganda to meet with cadres in the NRA, accompanied by Ranu’s secretary-general, Morove Protazi. In the past, the movement had attempted to work through Rwandans who had attained positions of status in the diaspora. That strategy had proved unsuccessful, in part because active involvement by such individuals would have risked the very socio-economic status which they had worked so hard to achieve. Thus, Ranu sent Rwandan university students directly to the refugee camps in Central and Eastern Africa to initiate contacts and gather information which was reported back in November to the task force, which thereafter drafted three documents: a revised political programme known as the Eight Point Plan, new Operational Guidelines, and a Personal Code of Conduct. All of these were adopted in December 1987 by Ranu’s Congress, which then decided that the movement’s name should be changed to the Rwandan Patriotic Front.

The goal of the Eight Point Plan was to present a clear, simple message which could be understood by even those with little or no education, and around which Rwandans could unite in a common cause. While Ranu’s anti-monarchical stance and leftist rhetoric might have been appealing to the intellectual community, it alienated many potential followers, including those who still wanted the King to return.

\(^\text{14}\) Tito Rutaremara was then living in France, where lack of funding, travel documents, and the pending completion of his thesis explains why he did not return to Kenya until 1987.
In addition, because the practical implications of "socialism" had never been spelt out, many Rwandans – the overwhelming majority of whom were staunch Christians – equated it with atheism. Hence the need to establish a minimalist agenda which would be acceptable to the broadest range of supporters possible. The central themes were democracy, national unity, and the right of return of refugees, while nepotism and corruption would be replaced with the rule of law and due process. Similarly, the Eight Point Plan called for a progressive foreign policy, an end to the system which caused refugees, and a self-sustaining economy. The specifics of how these goals would be translated into practical public policies were side-stepped to maintain unity.

While the diaspora stretched from Canada to Burundi, Ranu had centralised decision-making in the hands of an executive committee in Nairobi. As an underground organisation whose members were often strapped for funds themselves, such a set-up prevented branches from being effective. To remedy this, new structures were established in which branches were given autonomy to undertake any activities within the context of the Eight Point Plan. Leaders were to be selected through democratic elections from the cell to the branch, and up to the region. Ranu's Congress was to include the chairmen of all the regions, as well as representatives of the professions and other interest groups, and would appoint the executive committee and the commissions. When the Congress was not in session, key decisions would be taken by the political bureau, which included the executive committee, the regional chairmen, and, following the onset of the war, members of the high command. Finally, the Personal Code established clear guidelines for the behaviour of RPF members and leaders.

THE PPF RE-ENTERS RWANDA

By 1990, pressures emanating from both Uganda and Rwanda forced the RPF to act. Inside Rwanda, the ranks of the opposition had grown rapidly in response to human rights abuses, and non-governmental organisations were agitating for more accountability and openness in the conduct of the affairs of state. These demands struck a resonant chord with international donors, upon whom the régime had become increasingly dependent – particularly as the price of coffee, Rwanda's very valuable export, had collapsed – and in September, Habyarimana established the Commission nationale de synthèse which was charged with proposing recommendations for a new democratic
national charter. Meanwhile, Rwanda had begun to re-think its policy towards refugees, because after having established in 1988 a joint commission with Uganda, many felt that given a free choice, most Rwandans in that country would choose to stay there rather than to return, and thus that the refugee problem could be resolved 'with minimal actual repatriation'. By legalising political activities domestically and softening its stand on the right of return for refugees, the régime in Kigali was taking a major initiative on the two central demands of the RPF, without their participation.

In Uganda, because of the difficulty in identifying exactly who were Rwandans and who were Ugandans of Rwandan descent, the military rôle which each played was unclear. Although the NRA had established a plan to identify and demobilise non-Ugandans from its ranks as early as 1986, a further 1,000–2,000 Rwandans were recruited after supporters of Obote had invaded northern Uganda. Indeed, critics began to characterise the NRA as an army of foreigners under the command of foreigners, and some went so far as to say that Yoweri Museveni himself was a Rwandan. In order to safeguard the sovereignty and national security of Uganda, this group argued that the Rwandan members of the NRA needed to be removed. By 1990, the war in the north had subsided and plans for a general demobilisation were underway again. At the same time, Rwigyema was removed from his command post, and RPF leaders began to fear that security agents from the régime in Rwanda were infiltrating the NRA. Facing the prospects of political marginalisation in Rwanda, as well as increased restraints on their activities in Uganda, the RPF felt it had to act quickly.

The opportunity came in October 1990 when the Presidents of both Uganda and Rwanda were in the United States attending a UN summit. This meant, or so it has been claimed, that Museveni would be able to distance himself from any RPA activities until it was too late to stop them, while in Habyarimana's absence, the régime in Rwanda would also find it more difficult to respond effectively. Be that as it may, on the night of 30 September, the eve of Uganda's national day, approximately 4,000 Rwandan members of the NRA withdrew from their barracks in absolute secrecy, and began to march south towards the border. By the time they reached Rwanda, their ranks were

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15 Watson, op. cit. 1991, p. 13.
16 Ibid.
17 Following the invasion, Habyarimana quickly returned from New York, while Museveni remained abroad, in effect giving the RPA more latitude to act.
estimated to have grown to as many as 10,000.\textsuperscript{18} They took very little ammunition for their light arms both because they lacked the ability to transport this, and so as not to undermine the principal explanation for their movements – namely, preparations for celebrations surrounding Uganda’s national day.\textsuperscript{19} Led by Rwigyema, the former deputy commander of the NRA, the large convoys of troops moving south aroused few, if any, suspicions.\textsuperscript{20}

The success of the withdrawal stemmed from the fact that within the NRA a parallel command structure, headed by Rwigyema, existed in the form of the Rwandan Patriotic Army – code-named ‘\textit{Inkotanyi},’ a Kinyarwanda word meaning tough fighters.\textsuperscript{21} As a clandestine structure within a military organisation which was known for its disciplined chain of command, the RPA utilised the cell structure of the RPF in which few knew more than a handful of other members. Because of the confusion over who was Rwandan and who was Ugandan, members of the NRA recall awakening on the morning of 1 October, only to find that large numbers of their ranks, most of whom were thought to have been Ugandans, had seemingly vanished overnight. Indeed, Kagame, the RPA’s eventual commander, stated that the RPF had ‘underestimated [its] ability to spread the word without it leaking’.\textsuperscript{22}

Because of the tight discipline within the NRA, Museveni was blamed for complicity in the withdrawal and/or for not having control over his army.\textsuperscript{23} Fearing that Ugandan soldiers would be ordered to pursue their ‘deserters’ southwards, the RPA decided to enter Rwanda at the first possible opportunity, which was at Kagitumba. The result was a large-scale invasion into a territory characterised by savannah, which was not hospitable to guerrilla warfare.

During its initial three-week offensive, the RPA moved more than 100 km into Rwanda and captured Gabiro, one of the régime’s largest military depots, as well as a second city, Nyagatare. Indeed, the \textit{Forces}

\textsuperscript{18} This figure is given by Cherry Gertzel, ‘Uganda’s Continuing Search for Peace’, in \textit{Current History} (Philadelphia), 89, 547, 1990, p. 207, and by Filip Reyntjens, ‘Rwanda: recent history’, in \textit{Africa South of the Sahara}, 1994 (London, 1994), p. 698. Watson, loc. cit. 1992, p. 54, suggests that the original 4,000 soldiers were accompanied by 3,000 civilians when they crossed the border.

\textsuperscript{19} Interviews, Kigali, July 1995.

\textsuperscript{20} Justice Muhanguzi, \textit{The War in Rwanda: the inside story} (Mbarara, Uganda, 1992), p. 1.

\textsuperscript{21} See Filip Reyntjens, \textit{L’Afrique des grands lacs en crise: Rwanda, Burundi, 1988–1994} (Paris, 1994), p. 91, fn. 7. ‘\textit{Inkotanyi}’ was also the name of the elite fighters in the ancient Rwandan monarchy, though it is unclear that the RPA was aware of the historical reference.

\textsuperscript{22} Watson, loc. cit. 1992, p. 54.

\textsuperscript{23} For a discussion of the rôle of Uganda in the invasion, see Alan I. Zarembo, ‘Explaining the 1990 Invasion of Rwanda: domestic pressures or foreign policy interests?’, Senior Honors thesis, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH, 1992, especially pp. 20–6.
The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) was only able to repel the invasion after receiving extensive reinforcements from Belgium, France, and Zaire. In the process, however, the RPA’s three top commanders, including Rwigyema, were killed... either in battle, as most maintain or, as others have argued, as the outcome of disagreements over whether to pursue a protracted guerrilla war, which was the policy of the RPA, or a more orthodox strategy which focused upon occupying territory. Their deaths meant that the movement had to be reorganised.

In order to demonstrate the RPF’s national as opposed to ethnic base, a Hutu was named President, Alexis Kanyarengwe. This former Minister of Internal Affairs had helped orchestrate the 1973 coup d’état against Kayibanda, but had subsequently fled from Rwanda after allegations that he was plotting to topple Habyarimana. Although Kagame, a leading figure in the RPA and the NRA, who was studying in the United States, was recalled to replace Rwigyema, by the time of his arrival the FAR had taken the offensive. Plagued by desertions, the RPA quickly shifted strategy to ‘mobile warfare’ and pursued a ‘diffused withdrawal’ out of the territories that it had occupied and into the northeast and northwest.

In spite of what some have characterised as a military defeat, RPA commanders who participated in the initial foray into Rwanda argue that it was a success on two fronts. First, by capturing the depot at Gabiro, the RPA was able to acquire the stock of weapons and supplies which they had been unable to bring from Uganda and cache inside Rwanda in the traditional guerrilla fashion. Secondly, by invading the country and occupying key targets quickly, the RPF was able to attract international attention and to establish itself as a viable force in Rwandan politics. In November 1990, one of the first payoffs of this strategy occurred when domestic pressures in Belgium, supported by RPF branches there, forced that country not only to withdraw its military support from Kigali, but also to seek to broker a negotiated settlement. Such a move marked one of the RPF’s first steps towards inclusion in the Rwandan political arena.

Habyarimana refused to have high-level contacts with the RPF following its initial invasion and perceived defeat, and sought to maintain its isolation by continuing to act unilaterally. His régime continued with reform, but in such a way that the process could be controlled by the Mouvement révolutionnaire national pour le développement.

24 The troops from Zaire were quickly withdrawn because of their lack of discipline and accusations that they spent more time looting shops and stealing from the people than fighting the RPF.

25 Muhanguzi, op. cit. p. 19.
(MRND), and that the outcome would not challenge the power of the ruling party and its allies. Moreover, efforts were made to pre-empt the re-emergence of the RPF by permitting opposition groups — though not armed movements — to operate domestically, and by according refugees the right of return.\textsuperscript{26} The RPF responded by rebuilding its military prowess in order to force its way back into Rwanda’s domestic politics and, ultimately, to win concessions at the negotiating table.

**Reconstructing the Liberation Movement**

In order to rebuild morale and to re-establish itself in the public eye, the RPF needed to regroup and demonstrate that it had not been defeated and ‘chased back into Uganda’, as claimed by the Rwandan régime.\textsuperscript{27} Thus, the RPF re-assembled in the Vumba mountains, along the northwestern border with Uganda, which provided natural protection for guerrilla fighters, as well as mountain gorillas. By locating themselves in this region, the RPF effectively crushed the tourist industry which had emerged as one of Rwanda’s principal foreign-exchange earners. Its next move was to attack Ruhengeri in the north, near the heart of Habyarimana’s political base, in January 1991. While the RPF’s control of this town was brief, it demonstrated not only its own strength, but the vulnerability of the régime in Kigali, not least by occupying the government prison in Ruhengeri long enough to free nearly all of Rwanda’s political prisoners, many of whom subsequently joined the RPF.\textsuperscript{28}

By operating from areas deep inside the Vumba mountains, where borders are not always clearly demarcated, the RPA may sometimes have moved out of Rwanda. While Uganda denied claims that the movement was using its territory as a rear base, this was certainly the accusation made by the Habyarimana régime,\textsuperscript{29} which in retaliation began to shell Ugandan villages, driving more than 60,000 people from

\textsuperscript{26} ‘The Dar es Salaam Declaration on the Refugee Problem’, signed 19 February 1991, Annex III, in Kamukama, op. cit. pp. 77–9. Rwanda was joined by Zaire, Tanzania, Burundi, and Uganda. The Organisation of African Unity and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees sent observers.

\textsuperscript{27} Because political leaders of the RPF were active in the RPA and vice versa, distinguishing the two became increasingly difficult. Here, RPF refers to the activities of the RPA as well.

\textsuperscript{28} Among the more prominent prisoners who joined the RPF when freed were Commandants Ruseruka, Muvunanyambo, and Thibandeeba, and Major Theomista Linzide.

\textsuperscript{29} Government of Rwanda, ‘Information on the Involvement of Uganda in the Aggression Against Rwanda’, undated, n.p. This document accused Uganda of helping to plan the invasion, train and arm the combatants, and of providing backup reinforcements by increasing the country’s military presence along the Rwandan border prior to each RPF incursion.
their homes. While officially pursuing a negotiated settlement concerning border security, Uganda is also thought to have returned fire which may well have protected RPF strongholds. More importantly, Museveni turned a blind eye to transit activities inside his own country. Following its re-emergence, funds began to flow into the coffers of the RPA, which enabled it to purchase a considerable quantity of weapons, undoubtedly transferred to the front via Uganda.

The RPF built upon its momentum by continuing its attacks in the Ruhengeri préfecture as the new constitution was being presented to the MRND in April 1992. In June, the RPA briefly occupied Byumba, and by September reportedly controlled approximately 1,800 km² of land, and had ‘an undeniable military advantage over the government’. With its success, morale soared and recruits of all ages poured into the RPA. By way of contrast, although the FAR grew from 5,000 in 1990 to 40,000 in 1992, most had little or no training. Moreover, these troops were not fighting out of conviction, but as professionals who were paid. When they feared that their future was threatened by the prospect of a negotiated settlement, some members of the FAR sought to collect advance wages through other means – namely, by mutinying in Gisenyi and Ruhengeri, and looting the shops. In the face of renewed RPF attacks in and around Byumba, the FAR is reported to have withdrawn virtually without a fight, abandoning the northern territories to the RPF.

The RPF’s unconventional guerrilla strategy was accompanied by the large-scale flight of the peasantry, rather than their politicisation. This put additional strains on the Rwandan régime which was largely unable to care for the needs of those internally displaced. By October 1992, they numbered 350,000 but trebled following the RPF’s February 1993 offensive. The financial implications of this were tremendous, not least by robbing the fields of a labour force which was generally responsible for producing the bulk of Rwanda’s cash crops at the very time that military expenditures, and the costs of caring for displaced people, were increasing dramatically. Moreover, with the war located in the north, Rwanda’s least expensive routes to the sea were blocked.

30 Africa Research Bulletin: political, social, and cultural series (Oxford), January 1992, p. 10406.
31 Rwanda and Uganda signed a security pact in August 1992, in which both agreed to cooperate in maintaining security along their common border. Ibid. August 1992, p. 10673.
32 Africa Confidential (London), 33, 20, 9 October 1992, p. 7.
33 Watson, loc. cit. 1992, p. 55.
34 Africa Research Bulletin, June 1992, p. 10621.
35 Watson, Ibid.
36 Africa Confidential, 33, 20, 9 October 1992, p. 7.
Towards the Arusha Accords

By early 1992, Habyarimana was unable to maintain his diplomatic strategy of refusing direct contact with the RPF, which was gaining the upper hand militarily. Less than one month after forming a coalition government with the MRND in April, Boniface Ngulinzira, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and a member of the Mouvement démocratique républicain (MRD), reversed Habyarimana’s policy by meeting high-level representatives from the RPF in Uganda. Additional talks were scheduled for June in Paris, and later continued in Arusha.

At the same time, the Rwandan régime mounted a major military offensive in the northwest. While such moves often coincide with the onset of negotiations, the RPF’s spokesman in Belgium argued that they reflected divisions between Habyarimana and his allies, who through their control of the security apparatus sought an armed solution to the conflict, and the former opposition parties, who wished to enhance their own position through negotiations led by the Foreign Ministry.

On 12 July 1992, in the presence of observers from Uganda, the United States, France, Belgium, Zaire, Burundi, and the Organisation of African Unity, the RPF and the Government of Rwanda signed a peace agreement scheduled to take effect one week later. In addition to a cease-fire, this called for ending the provision of munitions to both sides, for freeing all prisoners of war, and for the withdrawal of foreign troops – except those from countries with which Rwanda maintained bilateral security agreements, namely France – and the creation of a unified national army. As regards political issues, both sides agreed to the rule of law, democracy, pluralism, and respect for human rights – though the specifics of each were not enumerated – and to a system of power-sharing after the formation of an enlarged transitional government. The agreement was to be monitored by a 50-man OAU Military Observers Group – composed of soldiers from Nigeria, Mali, Zimbabwe, Egypt, and Senegal, as well as representatives from each of the contending parties – which would operate from a neutral military

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37 This offensive was supported by France, which sent troops to the north to protect ‘French and other foreign nationals’, according to a spokesman for the Foreign Ministry. *Africa Research Bulletin*, June 1992, p. 10628.
38 Ibid. May 1992, p. 10589.
39 ‘Accord de cessez-le-feu de N’Sele entre le Gouvernement de la République rwandaise et le Front patriotique rwandais, tel qu’amendé à Gbadolite le 16 septembre 1991 et à Arusha le 12 juillet 1992’, in *Journal officiel de la République rwandaise* (Kigali), 32, 16, August 1993, pp. 1271–8. All of the agreements between the RPF and the Government of Rwanda became known as the Arusha Accords, and were published in the August 1993 edition of the *Journal Officiel*. 
zone. Both sides agreed that all details should be finalised by October, so that the key decisions taken could be implemented by January 1993.

The first round of negotiations ended with agreement on a protocol which called for the establishment of the rule of law and recognised its fundamental rôle in maintaining not only democracy and human rights, but also national unity, a concept that explicitly rejected religious and ethnic discrimination, and included a commitment to ending the refugee problem. This accord was critical since both the RPF and the internal opposition argued that the Habyarimana régime was characterised by nepotism and regionalism at best, and at worst, by the illegal activities of the President’s closest advisors – known as the Akazu – who seemed to operate with impunity. By agreeing to this protocol, the RPF and the opposition adopted measures through which corrupt members of the President’s inner circle could be ‘brought to book’.

Acceptance of the rule of law was clearly not in the interests of the Akazu and their clients. As such, Habyarimana proposed a transition period during which Rwanda would be governed by an executive Ministerial Council headed by himself. Such a move would have ensured that those who opposed negotiations, and had the most to lose from them, would have controlled the short transition and administered the elections which Habyarimana proposed for April 1993. Not surprisingly, this strategy was rejected by all those who felt that by uniting they could prevent the MRND from emerging as the largest single party and achieve a fresh mandate. Some no doubt hoped, while others feared, the early elections would demonstrate that the bulk of the RPF’s power came from the barrel of a gun, rather than the ballot in the box.

In order to strengthen their own position vis-à-vis the MRND during the transition, the internal opposition, which lead the negotiating team in Arusha, agreed to RPF proposals regarding that period. These called for the creation of an enlarged Transitional Government, with executive power transferred from the President to a Ministerial Council. Five cabinet posts were to be allocated to both the RPF and the MRND, with the former getting the Ministry of the Interior and the

40 'Protocole d’accord entre le Gouvernement de la République rwandaise et le Front patriotique rwandaise relatif à l’état de droit', in ibid. pp. 1279-85.
41 'Protocole d’accord entre le Gouvernement de la République rwandaise et le Front patriotique rwandais sur le partage du pouvoir dans le cadre d’un Gouvernement de transition à base élargie', Articles 1–46, signed in Arusha, 30 October 1992, in ibid. pp. 1286–1309. The Protocol also outlined the broad policies which the Transitional Government was to pursue, as well as the creation of specialised commissions and the rights of the judiciary.
latter the Ministry of Defence. The MRD would receive four, including the Premiership and the Foreign Ministry, with the rest going to other internal opposition parties. Each party would be represented in the Ministerial Council, where decisions would be made by consensus, thereby giving each party a veto. Under such a plan, Habyarimana was to retain his post as President, but would effectively be reduced to the position of a figurehead. Negotiations ultimately stalled over the creation of a neutral military zone, and the composition and distribution of command posts in a united national armed forces.

In February 1993, attacks on the civilian Tutsi population began again in northern Rwanda. These and others were attributed by an international commission to a ‘circle of around 20 people’ in Habyarimana’s entourage who ‘organise massacres, clashes with the opposition, and assassinations’,42 and their identification implicated the President himself. The RPF termed these attacks genocide and mounted a military offensive, which quickly doubled the area under its control, and advanced to within 30 kilometres of Kigali. Unwilling to march on the capital, and faced with French troops which the OAU said were fighting alongside government forces, the RPA agreed to withdraw to its earlier positions, while its newly acquired territories became a neutral zone, monitored by OAU troops.

By the end of March, both sides had returned to Arusha, and on 3 August 1993 they agreed that the new national army would be voluntary, open to all regardless of ethnicity or language – thereby protecting the English and Kiswahili-speaking members of the RPA – and based upon ability, with soldiers not being permitted to be affiliated with any political party.43 Most importantly, 50 per cent of the command posts, and 40 per cent of the regular forces would be drawn from the RPA. In addition, the Presidential Guard was to be abolished, thereby greatly reducing Habyarimana’s ability to control security.

**FROM NEGOTIATION TO GENOCIDE**

While the Arusha Accords reflected the interests of the internal opposition and the RPF, they would almost certainly have proved to be disastrous for the President and the Akazu, who stripped of their power would have been held accountable for their past actions by a

42 *Africa Research Bulletin*, March 1993, p. 10938.

43 *Protocole d’accord entre le Gouvernement de la République rwandaise et le Front patriotique rwandais sur l’intégration des forces armées de deux parties*, signed in Arusha, 3 August 1993, in *Journal Officiel*, pp. 1341–1440.
hostile government and an independent judiciary. In order to block the implementation of a political order which he and his allies could not accept, Habyarimana refused to sign the agreements and set about politically dividing the opposition. In addition, he helped to create groups which opposed negotiations altogether – namely, the Coalition pour la défense de la république (CDR) – and their affiliated armed youth wings or militias, which became known as the Interhamwe, those who fight together.

Because the 1991 protocol between the MRND and the opposition had called for the Prime Minister to be provided by the MRD, Habyarimana appointed Mrs Agathe Uwilingiyimana. This move helped to foster an ongoing crisis within the MRD, because some rejected the President's right to dismiss the former Prime Minister, who had become one of his leading critics. Habyarimana was then able to split each of the parties in the coalition – except the Parti socialiste rwandais (PSR) – between those who supported the Arusha process and those who were willing to accept offers of immediate access to power and resources. With the internal opposition divided, the President signed the Arusha Accords in an environment in which forming the stipulated transitional institutions was exceedingly difficult.

The RPF sought to broaden its domestic base by building upon the contacts which had been developed with the pro-Arusha internal opposition parties. RPF leaders argued that Habyarimana was preparing to expand his armed assault upon his opponents, but to their dismay the parties refused to send some of their cadres to the RPF zones for safety. While they might not have rejected the thesis that Habyarimana was planning to increase his attacks upon civilians, it seems clear that even the pro-Arusha opposition parties felt safe because they believed violence would be linked to ethnicity, as in the past – thus impacting the RPF – rather than following the political lines which had only recently become more clearly demarcated.44

Concurrently, with the recognition of RPF-controlled zones, the movement reversed its wartime policy of displacing individuals and sought to attract them back. To do this, members entered the displaced camps and worked directly with the residents, despite protests by Habyarimana to the International Committee of the Red Cross and the UNHCR. However, most of those returning to RPF territory came from the diaspora.

44 This and the following paragraphs are based upon interviews with members of the RPF's Political Bureau, Kigali, July 1995.
When the RPF invaded Rwanda in 1990 it had 36 cells inside the country, with nine in Kigali and others in Kigongi, Butare, Gitarama, and Byumba, albeit so clandestine that out of the 8,000–10,000 arrested that year only three were members. Thereafter the RPF decided that instead of expanding its own structures it would change tactics by facilitating the progress of recruits to the front and working through sympathetic legal organisations. Two years later, however, following the régime’s recognition of the RPF, cells emerged once again, and by August 1993 the number in Kigali alone had grown to 146, though they continued to work through associations which were more open, including those concerned with human rights. Another activity was the creation of political schools, although some have speculated that it was suspicions concerning these which made the internal opposition reluctant to send their young leaders to the RPF zones.

Thus, by the time the Arusha Accords were signed in August 1993, the RPF was strengthening the core of its still fragile domestic base. The movement’s presence in Kigali expanded rapidly in December, when a contingent of 600 soldiers from the RPA entered the city to protect the five RPF officials designated to serve in the Transitional Government. While a UN peacekeeping force of 2,500 had arrived the previous month, Habyarimana continued to oversee the build-up of militias affiliated with those parties which opposed the agreements that had been signed in Arusha, and to block the formation of transitional institutions. By March 1994, the President faced growing international pressure to live up to the Accords, but following a meeting in Tanzania, where he pledged to implement them, he and the President of Burundi were killed when their plane was shot down near Kigali.

Immediately following Habyarimana’s death, those parties which opposed the Accords mobilised extra-state organisations through which they implemented a brutal genocide to eliminate supporters of the Arusha process. Because the opposition parties had operated legally, those Hutu who had backed the Arusha process were well known, as were their places of residence. Within hours of Habyarimana’s death, road-blocks had been put in place and these reform-minded Hutu – virtually all the members of the internal opposition with whom the RPF had worked closely – were killed. Utilising an extensive propaganda mechanism based in the ‘private’ radio station popularly known as Radio Mille Collines, Rwanda’s new rulers called upon all Hutu to defend themselves by attacking their Tutsi neighbours, who were characterised as potential, if not actual supporters of the advancing RPF, which was said to be seeking retribution for the 1959 revolution. Where Rwandans were unwilling to turn on their neighbours, the
Interhamwe militias and the local administrators known as Burgomasters, who had been appointed by the President, were there to force their hands. Even given the absence of cultural or physical distinctions between many Hutu and Tutsi, identity was never in question – in no small part because the national identification cards clearly denoted ethnicity.45

In spite of the regional and international attention which had been focused upon Rwanda, the new régime faced few obstacles in implementing its genocide. The mandate for the UN peacekeepers limited their use of force to self-defence, and thus they did nothing to stop the régime. Moreover, because the killings represented the collapse of the Arusha Accords, the UN declared there was no peace to keep, and decreased its military presence in Rwanda to less than 300.46 By the end of May, an estimated half million Rwandans had been killed, the overwhelming majority of whom were Tutsi.

To stop the slaughter, the RPA advanced on Kigali, chasing the newly formed régime to Zaïre. In the process, an additional one to two million people were displaced both internally and externally. In a last-minute intervention known as ‘Operation Turquoise’, which some argue was designed to prevent an outright victory by the RPF, the French occupied the southern third of Rwanda and provided a safe zone for refugees.

**THE RPF AND THE POLITICS OF TRANSITION**

After the RPF had entered Kigali on 1 July 1994 its leaders announced that they would abide by the terms of the Arusha Accords, modified in light of the recent genocide, and their amendments were endorsed and accepted by what was left of the internal opposition. It was agreed that the allocation of ministries between the various parties would be maintained, though those posts earmarked for the MRND were reallocated to the RPF, and Kagame – the commander of the RPA – became the Minister of Defence and assumed the newly created post of Vice-President. Within one week after entering the capital by force, the RPF had established the broad-based coalition government

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45 For a detailed examination of the genocide itself, see Africa Rights, *Rwanda: death, despair, and defiance* (London, 1995). Also, Alain Destexhe, *Rwanda and Genocide in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1995), and Gerard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: a history of genocide* (London, 1995).

46 For a review of the international response to events in Rwanda, see the five-volume study published by the Steering Committee of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, entitled *The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: lessons from Rwanda*, edited by David Millwood (Copenhagen, 1996).
called for at Arusha. This received widespread recognition, although only Uganda and Libya sent official delegations to the inauguration of President Pasteur Bizimungu.

The RPF was faced with the task of governing Rwanda when both the state and society had collapsed. Not only had the leading members of the internal opposition been killed, but so had virtually all skilled Rwandans who had not fled. The members of the former régime had looted and sabotaged much of the economy as they left, while the preceding four years of civil war had already brought the informal and peasant sectors to a standstill, as well as commercial agriculture. With no tax base, the only revenue the RPF Government initially had at its disposal was that provided by its supporters in the diaspora, and although a coalition, every act was undertaken with RPF personnel using RPF funds. It should be noted that the situation started to improve during 1995 as the rehabilitation of the economy proceeded.

Creating separate identities for the state, the movement, and the government is critical if Rwanda is to live up to the principles that had been agreed at Arusha, albeit very difficult given the historical development of the RPF.

The Arusha Accords established a civil service accountable to ministers, an independent judiciary, and a national army whose members are prohibited from being affiliated with any party, and which is accountable for its actions. While the RPF maintained virtually no civilian administrative structures, nearly all the skilled manpower now available in Rwanda has come from the exiled community which gave birth to the movement. By fusing its military and political wings, the RPF successfully avoided the internal fissures which plagued similar organisations elsewhere in Africa. By developing a clear political line within the military, the RPF was able to sustain its morale, and to impose strict internal discipline. Thus, separating the military and the state from the party has proved to be difficult at best.

Such a situation poses new difficulties for a broad-based government in which most members of the armed forces have some kind of affiliation, past and/or present, with the predominant party. A UNHCR-commissioned study reported in September 1994 that the

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47 See Wm. Cyrus Reed, ‘The Rwandan Patriotic Front: the development of politics and the politics of development in Rwanda’, in Issue (Atlanta), 23, 2, 1995, pp. 48-53.
48 Republic of Rwanda, Round Table Conference: mid-term review, 6-7 July 1995 (Kigali, 1995), pp. 8-9.
49 Interviews, Fonction publique, Kigali, July 1995.
50 The RPA has assumed the rôle of a national army, and has reportedly accepted 4,000 ex-members of FAR. But the overwhelming bulk of both the command and the rank-and-file remain affiliated with the RPF. Moreover, because virtually all members of the RPF had military experience, many of those taking senior posts in the civil service are former members of the RPA.
RPA had killed thousands of Hutu civilians, a finding which led the organisation to suspend its resettlement activities.\footnote{‘UN Report Prompts Agency to Stop Urging Rwandan Refugees to Go Home’, in The New York Times, 28 September 1995, p. A4.} Such ‘excesses’ were attributed by the RPA to young soldiers who had joined late in the war and lacked the disciplined training which others had received, particularly those who had served in the NRA. When these ‘boys’ and ‘girls’ returned to their home villages after the war, only to discover that their entire families had been massacred, it was they who took revenge, at least so it was argued. In any case, by stopping the genocide, the RPA takes credit for having saved far more lives than its soldiers may have taken.

Lack of what many thought was an appropriate official response to the activities of the RPA led to tensions between the RPF and its coalition partners which reached a head in August 1995. Rwanda’s Hutu Prime Minister was sacked, along with several of his colleagues, for criticising the RPA for alleged excesses, and for failing to prevent the usurpation of civilian authority by the army.\footnote{Chris McGreal, ‘Rwanda Sacks its Hutu Prime Minister’, in The Guardian Weekly (London), 3 September 1995.} With a strong base in the south, the MRD was thought to have been the largest component of the internal opposition prior to the genocide. Faustin Twagiramungu’s standing in that party and in the south, both untested, will determine the extent to which his departure creates a major block to the RPF’s strategy of widening its political base.

The central theme behind the Eight Point Plan, and later the Arusha Accords, was to draft a minimal political agenda around which broad coalitions could be created. As discussions now focus upon substantive matters, representatives of the RPF appointed to parliament argue that they are pursuing the same strategy – namely, adopting those policies around which all those who support the Government can rally.

While this approach helped the RPF to create a coherent political community out of the diaspora and to forge an alliance with the internal opposition, such a strategy faces several major challenges. First, the largest group unrepresented in the current coalition is that which supported the former regime, participated in the formal economic sector of the state, and fled when the RPF entered Kigali. While many of these individuals are undoubtedly guilty of crimes against humanity, the majority are not,\footnote{Of the one to two million refugees outside of the country, even the RPF estimates the number of guilty to be less than 50,000. Others put the figure much lower.} and until those who are
innocent can be persuaded that it is safe for them to return, Rwanda will not have a truly broad-based system of government and administration. Above all, there simply are not enough doctors, nurses, teachers, lawyers, and judges. Designing new public services and building coalitions to support them is a time-consuming task which comes at precisely the moment when speed and clarity of purpose by both the RPF and the Government are essential.

While the RPF deserves high marks for its pragmatic approach to the revival of the economy, the process of political reconstruction remains vague, particularly as regards the ties needed between the state and society. Partisan activities are prohibited, as is the creation of new parties. Only those already participating in the coalition are permitted to work at the local level, and then only on behalf of the Government. But the domestic political base upon which the latter rests is untested: apart from the genocide in which many members of the internal opposition were killed, the largest party to the Arusha Accords, the MRND, has not joined the ruling coalition, and is not likely to do so. Given its image as a movement born in exile amongst a minority community, and based upon military power, the RPF will undoubtedly remain hesitant to permit national elections until it has gained popular support by pursuing effective public policies.

The RPF's pragmatic focus upon the 'business of government' is reminiscent of the strategy pursued by its mentor, Uganda's ruling National Resistance Movement, which has brought an unprecedented period of stability and economic growth. But the NRM was not born in exile, and came to power with a substantial popular following, particularly in those areas where it had pursued a traditional guerrilla campaign which placed politicisation before military activity. The RPF will need to reach out beyond its core constituency and to distinguish itself from other parties in order to create a mass base—a task made all the more difficult given its commitment to the maintenance of a broad-based coalition government, and the prohibition of political activities inside the country.\footnote{For a more detailed discussion of the challenges faced by the RPF, see Reed, loc. cit.}

The ongoing drama in Rwanda has often overshadowed important lessons for the rest of Africa, not least the impact of exile upon domestic politics. Governments which systematically drive out large segments of
their populations and/or prevent their return, set in motion a process of politicisation over which they have little control. Since domestic controversies quickly spread beyond the geographical boundaries of the state to include those areas which have accepted large numbers of refugees, the politics of such communities becomes intertwined with the politics of their host governments. Consequently, the process of conflict resolution is complicated by the impact of regional and even wider factors.

The internationalisation of conflict resolution brings with it a host of opportunities and obstacles. For example, external donors are likely to encounter opposition by pressuring governments to pursue policies to which they are not fully committed. When these include simultaneous economic and political liberalisation, including the re-entry of former exiled leaders, those groups whose social status is secured primarily through political patronage and controlled markets may well view the process as a 'zero sum game' in which they are the most likely losers. As such, they should be expected to fight the reform process with all the means at their disposal – including the creation of institutions designed to usurp the authority of the state itself.

In the case of Rwanda, the strategy which the ruling interests used to oppose reform initially was to attempt to control it and later to procrastinate. When further delays became impossible, the only option which those in power had for preserving their own position and their lives was to eliminate any and all who favoured reform – namely, by pursuing a policy of genocide through the CDR and the Interhamwe. Unfortunately, the defeats which the MRND-controlled military faced on the battlefield, and which Akazu interests faced at the negotiating table, camouflaged the ability of Hutu extremists to construct extra-state structures through which they would be able to seek to maintain their hold.

While the risks of reform should not be avoided, those who promote such policies need to be cognisant of the ramifications of their actions and of the potential of their opponents. To be successful, the supporters of the process must be prepared to intervene to circumvent the activities of those who oppose reforms, particularly when they control virtually the whole state, or at least important segments. While the international community eventually decided to pressure Rwanda to negotiate, it was only the RPF which was willing to intervene when the country's rulers chose genocide over reform. This is a dangerous lesson for both those who oppose and those who support the process of political and economic reform in Africa.