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Rwanda: In Search of a Settlement

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TO: AF - Mr. Cohen

FROM: INR - N. Shaw Smith, Acting **NSS**

SUBJECT: Rwanda: In Search of a Settlement

The key obstacle to a settlement of Rwanda's war with the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) is the Kigali government itself, according to academic specialists who spoke at a March 12 INR conference. The government's authoritarianism, corruption, ethnic and regional favoritism, and unsound economic policies have produced mounting internal unrest (both Hutu-Tutsi and intra-Hutu) that the RPF seeks to exploit. President Habyarimana resists democratization that could facilitate national reconciliation. Power-sharing democracy that gives Hutu and Tutsi their fair proportion of political and economic resources should be the centerpiece of a political settlement.

* * *

INR's March 12 conference brought together three academic specialists--Rene Lemarchand (University of Florida), Alison Des Forges (SUNY, Buffalo), and Catherine Newbury (University of North Carolina)--and two USG specialists--Warren Weinstein of USAID and FSO David Rawson. Other participants were from AID, USIA, DOD, the Intelligence Community, and several private voluntary organizations. Summarized below are some of the ideas and themes that emerged from the discussion.

The regime's record: pluses... Habyarimana took power in a coup in 1973 to end the corruption and ethnic/regional favoritism of the Kayibanda regime. He and his single party, the Mouvement Revolutionnaire National pour le Developpement (MRND), did well for 15 years in promoting stability and economic growth. Rwanda was hailed by international donors as one of the few African development success stories.

...and minuses. Since 1988, Habyarimana increasingly has been criticized at home and abroad. He has practiced his own brand of regional favoritism; most government resources have gone to his native north (under his predecessor, most went to the center/south). He has ignored the corruption of his inner circle of advisers. He has presided over an overcentralized government that exercises tight control, appointing and removing officials down to the local level.

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raping, and murdering civilians. The army also is riven by internal tensions, reflecting north-south and intra-north divisions, that have surfaced in mutinies.

The war zone in northern Rwanda resembles a classic guerrilla situation; fighters live off the land and melt into the bush. The war could spread to other border areas. Tensions in eastern Zaire could lead to Tutsi exiles there joining with Tutsis elsewhere to bring down the Habyarimana regime. One speaker envisaged a Somali-style collapse of central authority, but other speakers disputed this, asserting that Rwandans have a strong sense of national culture and national unity.

Elements of a solution. One possible solution would be the creation of a political system in which both groups win, i.e. power-sharing democracy. This would involve proportionality for each group in the government and military and in the allocation of public funds. The Tutsi would receive 10-15 percent of legislative seats (via an electoral system of proportional representation), cabinet positions, higher civil service positions, and higher military ranks.

A new constitution should support political and economic decentralization, including the establishment of elected local governments. Such decentralization would give autonomy to Tutsi who are concentrated in certain southern areas (with the remainder in Kigali.) Decentralization also could help defuse tensions over government economic policy that exist throughout the rural areas. The largely Hutu countryside has been labeled "a tinderbox" that could derail the overall democratization effort.

Some scholars believed that proportional representation based on communal group was not essential or desirable. Many Tutsi resist any sort of communal categorization. They believe that they can do well if the playing field is level. But the myth of Tutsi superiority still imbues Rwandan culture, and most Hutu worry that a level playing field will produce a new Tutsi political supremacy.

Power-sharing formulas could protect the majority as well as minorities. In Malaysia's power-sharing system, for example, Malays have certain guarantees vis-a-vis the minority Chinese and Indians. Over time, education and intermarriage may alleviate the Tutsi-Hutu problem, but constitutional arrangements that explicitly define minority and majority rights probably are required during a transitional period.

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