DISASTER AND INTERVENTION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: LEARNING FROM RWANDA

Steven Metz

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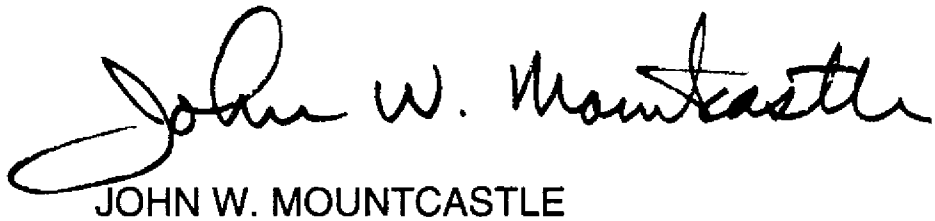
FOREWORD

Rwanda's horrific civil war suggests that human disasters requiring outside intervention will remain common in Sub-Saharan Africa. The American people want a prompt and effective response to human disasters when the United States becomes involved. The Army is taking steps to enhance its demonstrated effectiveness at such operations.

In this study, Steven Metz examines the policy and strategy implications of violence-induced human disasters in Sub-Saharan Africa with special emphasis on Rwanda. The author argues that our senior military leaders, policymakers and strategists must better understand the African security environment. He also warns that to avoid overtaxing the military, U.S. objectives in African disaster relief must be limited. This combination of limited policy goals and operational efficiency will allow the U.S. military to serve public demands at a minimal cost to its other efforts.

The Strategic Studies Institute is pleased to offer this study as part of the ongoing effort to improve American capabilities in the complex array of operations other than war we face in the post-Cold War security environment.



JOHN W. MOUNTCASTLE
Colonel, U.S. Army
Director, Strategic Studies Institute

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

STEVEN METZ is Associate Research Professor of National Security Affairs at the Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College. His specialties are transregional security issues and military operations other than war. Dr. Metz has taught at the Air War College, the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, and several universities. He has served as a consultant on U.S. policy in Africa to political organizations and campaigns, and testified before the Senate Africa Subcommittee. Dr. Metz has written on world politics, military strategy, and national security policy for many journals including *African Affairs* and the *Journal of Modern African Studies*. His most recent SSI studies are *The Revolution in Military Affairs and Conflict Short of War* and *America in the Third World: Strategic Alternatives and Military Implications.* He holds a B.A. and M.A. in international studies from the University of South Carolina, and a Ph.D. in political science from the Johns Hopkins University.

SUMMARY

Human disasters born of armed conflict will continue to plague Sub-Saharan Africa. When the American people demand engagement, the U.S. military, especially the Army/Air Force team, responds effectively and efficiently when local order has collapsed or when local authorities resist relief efforts. The better that Army planners and leaders understand the nature of African conflict and the better they've prepared before such conflicts occur, the greater the likelihood the Army can fulfill the public's expectations at minimum cost to other efforts.

Why Rwanda Happened.

Human disasters in Sub-Saharan Africa are characterized by widespread famine and disease, and often by large refugee movements which overwhelm precarious systems of public health and provision. They are almost always the direct or indirect result of organized violence combined with economic stagnation and disintegration, population pressure, ecological decay, and regional conflict. Some are deliberately engineered by a regime or local authorities to punish opponents, derail a separatist movement, or undercut support for an insurgency. Others are accidental, occurring when authority collapses.

Because of its combination of a history of primal violence, intra-elite struggle, a weak economy, proximity to conflict-ridden neighbors, and a lack of outside interest, Rwanda was especially vulnerable to human disaster. In many ways, the crisis of 1994 was the inevitable result of 50 years of misrule, repression, and violence.

Strategic Concepts.

When the United States joins a disaster relief operation in Sub-Saharan Africa, our objectives must be limited. The U.S. military's long-term objective should be only to establish or reestablish civilian control that meets minimum standards of

human rights. The limits of our interests and the extent of our global commitments simply will not allow sustained, expensive engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa. The key to increasing efficiency and effectiveness in disaster intervention is establishing and refining concepts and procedures. At the highest level, the United States must make a number of key strategic decisions before engaging in disaster intervention:

- When to intervene;
- Force mix and authority relationships; and,
- Exit strategy.

The specific contribution of the Army will depend, in part, on whether a disaster is controlled or uncontrolled.

Conclusions.

The disaster in Rwanda supports several long-standing ideas important to American policymakers and strategists:

- Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa is multidimensional;
- In African politics, personalities are vital;
- In areas of limited direct or tangible national interests, the United States is unlikely to preempt a conflict or intervene to stop a war;
- The United States needs to help develop better multinational mechanisms to respond to African disaster before crises happen;
- For the U.S. military, there is no substitute for experience at disaster relief in Sub-Saharan Africa;
- The Army/Air Force team will bear the brunt of future disaster relief efforts in Sub-Saharan Africa;
- While EUCOM will bear the major responsibility for planning African disaster relief, the Army and Air Force staffs should be more directly involved;

- Disaster relief strains Army Active Component combat support and combat service support resources;
- Disaster relief should not be considered a primary Army mission.

Army commanders might consider humanitarian relief in Sub-Saharan Africa a distraction from their principal warfighting mission, but they will probably be called on to perform these kinds of operations in the future.

DISASTER AND INTERVENTION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: LEARNING FROM RWANDA

Introduction.

By now, Americans might appear numb to African violence and the suffering of innocents that always follows, but the horror of Rwanda was so extensive, so intense that it moved all but the coldest observer. The timing of the crisis was particularly troubling. Coming immediately on the heels of a war-induced disaster in Somalia, Rwanda suggests a pattern or trend, hinting ominously that similar crises might occur elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa and again require a U.S. or multinational response. As we attempt to ease the suffering of Rwandans, then, we must also seek the wider strategic implications of their experience. Perhaps from their pain we can draw the insight to mitigate future disasters.

Several things are already clear. The American response to this new breed of African disasters must break with the frequent clumsiness of our past policy and be based on an understanding of their peculiar historic, economic, social, and political context. And, any assessment of the proper U.S. response must be placed within the wider framework of our emerging post-Cold War national security strategy. What we do in Africa will affect our image, credibility, and moral standing around the world. It will also help shape public attitudes toward the appropriate extent of American involvement in the Third World. The glare of global attention has made Rwanda an important if unintended component of evolving U.S. policy in the Third World, a test case of sorts. If the United States cannot find a way to respond effectively and efficiently to African disasters, the hand of isolationists will be strengthened. We can rebound from one Somalia, but probably not from two. Much, then, is at stake–the symbolic importance of Rwanda with its wider strategic implications may outweigh its immediate significance. By looking closely at Rwanda, the United States,

particularly the U.S. military, can begin to develop the means and the wisdom to make maximum use of our scarce resources when the next African disaster explodes.

Why Rwanda Happened.

Human disasters are characterized by widespread famine, disease, and, often, by large refugee movements which overwhelm precarious systems of public health and food distribution. They are almost always the direct or indirect result of organized violence, usually primal conflict (based on ethnicity, tribalism, religion, clan, caste, clique, or race) and the absence of nonviolent means for ameliorating it. Combined with economic stagnation and disintegration, population pressure, ecological decay, and regional conflict, these factors form the foundation of human disaster. It then takes only a spark to begin the crisis.

From the perspective of U.S. policy and strategy, one of the most important elements of a human disaster is the extent to which it is *controlled*. Control can be thought of as a continuum. At one end are human disasters deliberately engineered by a regime or local authorities to punish opponents, derail a separatist movement, or undercut support for an insurgency. "Assaults on the food supply," as David Keen writes, "have become a key military strategy in Africa's civil wars."[1] This is not unique to Africa: Stalin and Mao used famine as a tool of internal security as did the U.S. Army in its campaigns against the Navaho and Apache. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the most controlled human disasters were probably Nigeria's war against Biafran separatists in the 1960s, the "pacification" campaign against Tigrean insurgents and Eritrean separatists by Mengistu's regime in Ethiopia, and Sudan's counter-insurgency campaign in the southern part of that country. At the other end of the continuum are disasters that are either accidental, occurring when authority collapses, or, like many wildfires in the American West, deliberately started but uncontrollable. Rwanda is an example of a disaster intentionally begun during a political struggle which quickly ran out of control.

Although most African states were artificial creations of European colonialism, Rwanda (like Burundi) was an established kingdom for several centuries before being absorbed by German East Africa in 1899.[2] Because of its geographic isolation, limited economic value and minimal strategic importance, the Germans and, after 1916, the Belgians, used "indirect rule" in Rwanda, leaving much administration to existing institutions and individuals (see Figure 1). This meant that the traditional domination of the Tutsi, which made up about 14 percent of the Rwandan people, over the Hutus–85 percent of the population–continued and

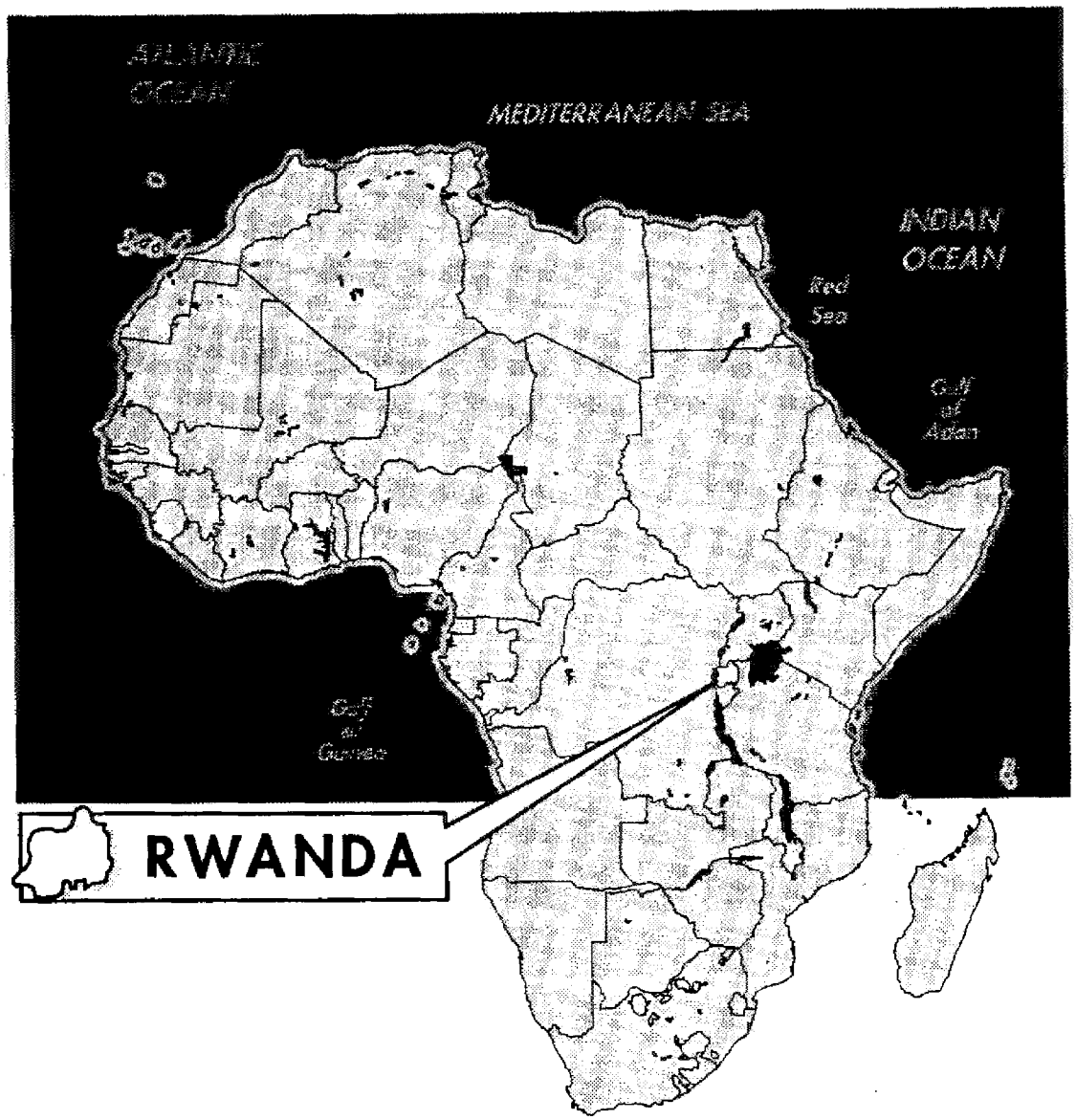


Figure 1.

was in some ways even reinforced, particularly when Tutsis served as overseers of Hutu forced laborers on colonial development projects. But even though traditional authority persisted at the local level, the Belgians modernized the national political, legal, and administrative systems. By changing the educational system to include Hutus, the Belgians also created a Hutu elite which would later lead that group's efforts to transcend its historic subordination.

The Tutsi-Hutu conflict was not a typical African struggle. Unlike, for instance, Angola where divisions were essentially tribal or Somalia where clans were the most important political units, the Tutsi-Hutu distinction was based on caste or class.[3] Both belong to the Banyarwanda tribe and speak Kinyarwanda. In the historic Kingdom of Rwanda, the royal family, nobles, army commanders, most chiefs, and people who kept cattle were Tutsis; some chiefs, soldiers, and people who grew crops were Hutus.[4] In fact, it was possible to move from Tutsi to Hutu or the reverse as a family's economic situation declined or improved. Many Rwandan intellectuals blame Belgian colonial policy for transforming class distinctions into more intractable ethnic ones.[5] "We were taught in school that the Tutsis, Hutus, and Twa were separate tribes," according to a refugee Tutsi, "but these were tribes that were invented in Europe."[6]

In 1959, Hutu discontent exploded in outright rebellion. The Belgians, who sympathized with the Hutus in part because they considered the Tutsi elite pro-communist, restored order, but increased the pace of democratization and decolonization.[7] This, of course, benefitted the more numerous Hutus at the expense of the Tutsis. Rwanda attained independence in July 1962 firmly under Hutu control. In the violence that followed, a number of attacks were launched by guerrilla bands of the Tutsi-dominated *Union Nationale Rwandaise* (UNAR). The response was repression and outright massacre of Tutsis. This led to a large migration with most refugees fleeing to neighboring Uganda and Zaire. By 1964, between 40 and 70 percent of Rwanda's Tutsis were refugees, but few abandoned hope of an eventual return to their homeland.[8]

With Tutsi opposition crushed, conflict erupted within the Hutu elite as northerners resisted what they perceived as unfair

economic advantages given southerners by the government.[9] This intra-Hutu squabble exacerbated Hutu-Tutsi conflict as both groups attempted to portray the other as Tutsi-influenced. In 1973, regional events ignited violence as the massacre of Hutus by the Tutsi-dominated army of Burundi sparked further massacres of Tutsis within Rwanda. During the ensuing disorder, Army Chief of Staff Juvénal Habyarimana seized control. Habyarimana was a charismatic young officer from a landowning family in northern Rwanda. Defense minister at the age of 28, he was powerful and bold.[10] He immediately instigated reforms, most importantly a degree of Hutu-Tutsi reconciliation. For the next fifteen years, Rwanda under Habyarimana was relatively calm and competently administered.

In 1989 a series of crises shattered this stability. A combination of soil degradation, population pressure, crop disease, and a precipitous decline in world prices for coffee–Rwanda's major source of export earnings–led to economic crisis.[11] Famine spread and required substantial outside relief. Coupled with seemingly endless government scandals, this destroyed Rwanda's precarious political balance. On October 1, 1990, a military force of between 7,000 and 10,000 representing the exiled, Tutsi-dominated Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) entered from Uganda.[12] Although its senior leaders had not seen Rwanda since they were babies and most of the rank and file had never set foot there, they had long dreamed of a return to their homeland. Many had accumulated military experience and political support during the Ugandan conflict of the 1980s.[13] In fact, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni–himself a Tutsi from an earlier migration–had seized power in 1986 with the help of about 2,000 guerrillas recruited from the Tutsi refugees in his country.[14] Many held important leadership positions in his army.

While decades of resentment among the refugees formed the foundation of rebel support, the immediate precipitants of the invasion seemed to be stabilization of the situation inside Uganda (thus freeing many RPF forces from duties there), and, echoing the Bay of Pigs, the belief by RPF leaders that

discontent with the Habyarimana regime would generate public support for the rebels once they entered Rwanda.[15] With the help of troops from Zaire, the Rwandan government was able to hold off the invasion and the course of battle quickly turned against the rebels. The RPF's charismatic leader, Fred Rwigyema, was killed by a sniper on the first day of the campaign.[16] After near-defeat, the RPF shifted to guerrilla operations from bases in the Virunga volcano chain. Under the direction of Major Paul Kagame–often described as a military genius–they soon controlled a strip of Rwandan territory along the Ugandan border. By late 1991, the military balance favored the rebels. Mediation efforts by the other states of the region failed to end the conflict so, to undercut support for the RPF, Habyarimana implemented further political reforms and shuffled government ministries. Despite a simultaneous crack down on opponents of the regime, the reforms gave Hutu hardliners the impression that Habyarimana was "soft" on the RPF. Among their responses was the formation of armed militias–a step that amplified the later violence.[17]

At the end of 1992 the RPF had "fought to a position of near invincibility."[18] Further military successes by the rebels in 1993 (including the near-capture of Kigali, the capital) led to negotiations between the government and RPF. The outcome was the Arusha Accords which sought to end the war, demobilize both sides, move the nation toward multiparty democracy, and reintegrate the Tutsi refugees back into Rwandan life.[19] The Organization of African Unity (OAU) provided troops to monitor the cease-fire, a step which the Clinton administration hoped would be "a model for future OAU involvement in conflict resolution."[20] Despite the apparent promise, the accords were bitterly opposed by Hutu hardliners, and all the parties squabbled and maneuvered for political power in a transitional government.[21] Hatred was the stock-in-trade of these machinations. Hutu hardliners felt that the RPF had received concessions out of proportion to the 14 percent of the population that it represented, further fanning rumors that the Habyarimana government was Tutsi-influenced. Killing was encouraged by many political leaders while many military deserters turned to banditry, further strengthening the power of the armed militias.[22] This

atmosphere of instability, violence, recrimination, paranoia, and accusation was to prove incendiary.

On April 6, 1994, a plane carrying Habyarimana and the president of Burundi crashed. Although the exact cause has not been determined, the aircraft was probably downed by a shoulder-fired antiaircraft missile fired from Kigali.[23] While Hutu dissidents opposed to Habyarimana's reform and reconciliation process seem to be the most likely culprits, proving guilt quickly became almost irrelevant. The assassination unleashed an immediate and apparently well-planned wave of killing led by government forces and Hutu militias.[24] Both Tutsis and moderate Hutus were victims. In reality, this was only an escalation of sporadic attacks on Tutsis begun after the 1990 invasion.[25] However much the instigation of the violence was deliberate and controlled, it quickly disintegrated into genocidal anarchy as semiorganized militias and even bands of neighbors killed with any available weapon.

A 2,500 member United Nations peacekeeping force was in Rwanda when the violence erupted, but, even if it had been asked to halt the killing, it was not authorized to use force. Without hope of quick outside intervention, the RPF launched an offensive to stop the massacres. Progress was slow, however, and by the third week of the crisis, estimates of the victims were in the hundreds of thousands. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali asked for an additional 5,500 peacekeepers but the Security Council did not approve the new force until May 17. By then, aid officials in Rwanda estimated that half a million had died.[26] From around the world, promises of assistance were prompt; delivery was not. Delayed by a dispute over repayment, 50 armored personnel carriers from the United States were not sent until mid-July. When they did arrive, they were unpainted and without radios or machine guns, further delaying their use.[27] In June, a French military force established a safe zone in southwestern Rwanda, but did not attempt to disarm the Hutu militias and allowed government forces free movement in the area (see Figure 2).[28] With a degree of confusion matching anything shown by the United States in Somalia, the French initially stated that they had drawn "a line in the sand" against advancing rebel forces and

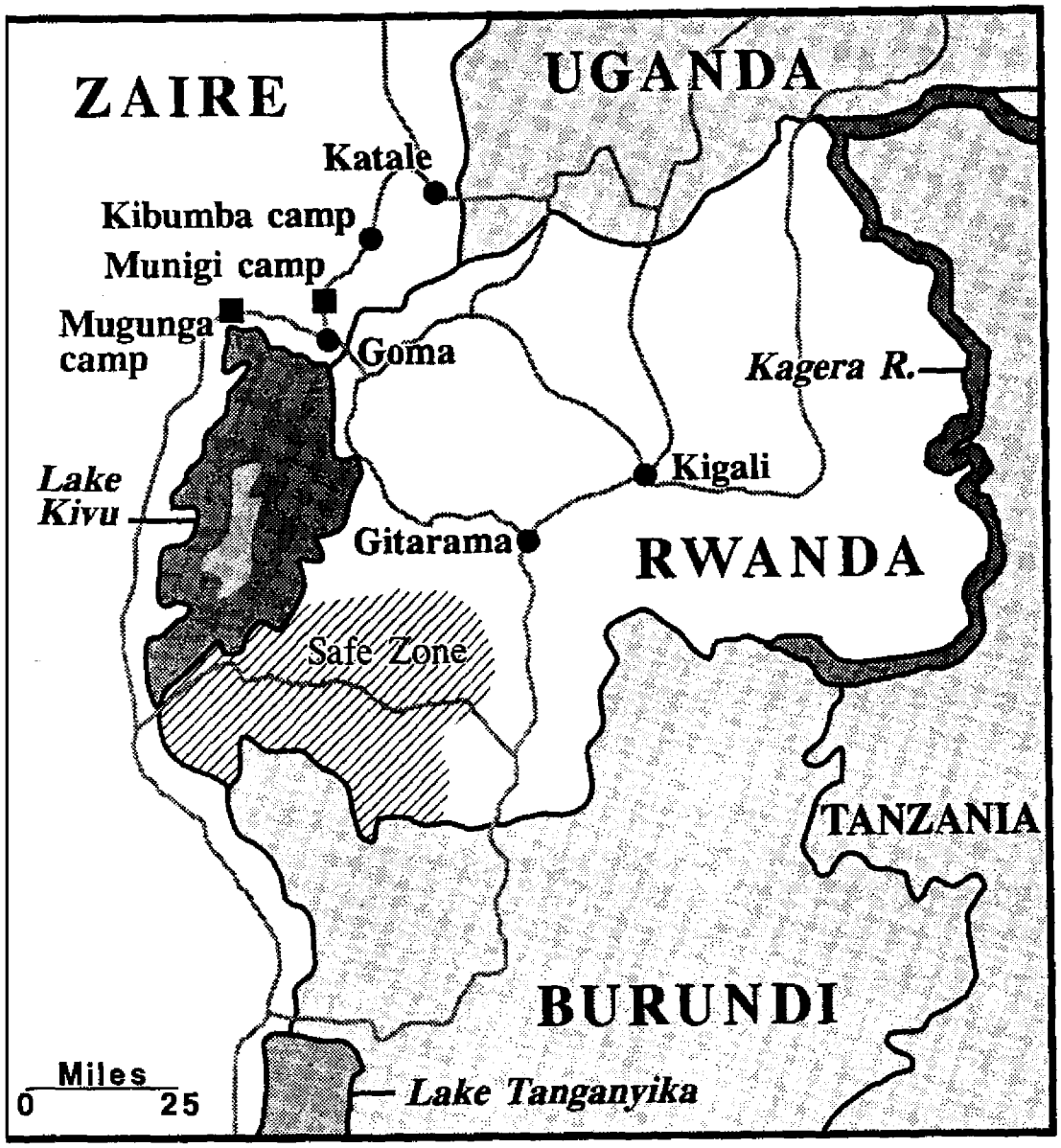


Figure 2.

then backed off, called their mission a success, and asked for a U.N. force to relieve them.[29] Ignoring the French, the RPF seized Kigali and the last government strongholds, and established a government of national unity with a moderate Hutu as president.[30]

For Rwanda, though, the end of the war did not stop the suffering. In one of the most rapid and largest exoduses in human history, more than a million Hutus, fearing Tutsi retribution for the killings of April, May, and June, fled to Tanzania and Zaire. Under appalling conditions in mass refugee camps, thousands died from cholera, dysentery, and

exhaustion. In late July, an international relief effort including contingents of the U.S. military began to come to grips with the immediate crisis, but the long-term question of what to do with the refugees and how (or whether) to encourage them to return home remained.[31] While the RPF's human rights record did not reach the horrific depths of the Hutu militias', it planned to prosecute former government officials and militia leaders on charges of genocide and murder.[32] Facing what they saw as a choice between death by disease in the camps or death by Tutsi forces in Rwanda, most refugees sat, waited, and sometimes died.

Strategic Considerations.

Rwanda will not be the last disaster that requires U.S. military intervention. Many African states have the requisite combination of primal conflict, an absence of nonviolent means for ameliorating it, intense intra-elite political struggles, and fragile systems for public health and provision. Many are buffeted by economic stagnation and disintegration, political corruption, population pressure, ecological decay, and regional conflict. And, as the ability of the United States, the United Nations, and nongovernmental relief organizations to respond to human disasters improves and conditions in Sub-Saharan Africa worsen, life in refugee camps will become more attractive to the beleaguered people of Africa. It is one of the enduring ironies of life that demands rise in proportion to competence. The United States will soon find that the better we become at disaster relief, the more we will be asked to do.

Simply ignoring calls for help is neither ethical nor politically feasible. Although not all African disasters draw the attention of the American people, when they do, the public demands a quick and effective reaction. Only the U.S. military has the full range of resources, training, and experience to react rapidly to geographically isolated disasters when local order and authority collapse. This is especially true of specialized capabilities in logistics, transportation, and intelligence. Many nations can provide infantry, but none can match the wide and integrated capabilities of the United States. Whether due to politics or resource limitations, African states cannot confront