

Paolo Tripodi, *Rwanda 1994: A Failure of Leadership and a Preventable Genocide*.

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One may approach Paolo Tripodi's *Rwanda 1994: A Failure of Leadership and a Preventable Genocide* under three interwoven themes—the compelling characteristics of the killings in Rwanda, the historical contexts, as well as the global order upon which the vilified officials of the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) operated between 1993 and 1994. The first chapter recalled how present-day Rwanda and Burundi were under German East Africa, from the 1890s to the end of World War I, when Belgium assumed imperial control. Eventually, independence came in 1962, but not with an end to hostile ethnic sensibilities. The work introduced a unique military perspective on an incident that wounded humanity in immeasurable ways. Tripodi decentered the role of the Rwandan Government in the success of the genocide, shifting attention to a constellation of peacekeepers saddled with the responsibility of preventing the crisis, which targeted members of the Tutsi minority group and their moderate Hutu counterparts.

The effectively organized story of the genocide opened with touching insights about Venuste Karasira and Angelique Numukobwa—two survivors of the heinous project. The author designated 6 April 1994 as “The Longest Day,” a turning point in the Tutsi-Hutu war that was rooted in the 1959 Social Revolution orchestrated by the Gregoire Kayibanda-led Party of the Hutu Emancipation Movement. Tripodi mentioned the extermination of several thousand Tutsi, at that point, with more than 100,000 fleeing to settle in neighboring Uganda, Burundi, Zaire, and Tanzania (21). The violence in Kigali was thus rekindled following the controversial plane crash that killed at least two moderate Hutu presidents—Rwanda's Juvenal Habyarimana and Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi. With the seat of government in disarray, under Prime Minister Madame Agathe Uwilingiyimana, the collapse of the Arusha Accords (signed on 4 August 1993) was also imminent; this was the Peace Agreement that failed to unify the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and the Rwandan Armed Forces (RAF).

Tripodi insisted that leadership determined the failure of the UN forces to prevent the genocide in Rwanda. His interrogative approach focused on the ‘uncertain, hesitant, and extremely confused’ actions and inactions of the leaders of UNAMIR, which arrived in Kigali on 19 August 1993. The major argument implicated the UN's peacekeeping mandate as having paradoxically supported the spread of genocidal killings in the troubled nation. Tripodi strongly believed that UNAMIR's leaders such as Canadian Army brigadier general, Romeo Dallaire, his deputy commander, General Henry Kami Anyidoho from Ghana,

and Colonel Luc Marchal—their Belgian counterpart who served as Sector Commander for Kigali—all displayed a dangerous lack of “the propensity to understand the complexities of making timely decisions,” which affected the deployment of limited resources “in the most effective way” (300). The first identified mistake of the Belgian paratroopers occurred on 11 April 1994 when their patrol trucks carelessly departed the UN military post (*Ecole Technique Officielle*, ETO), paving the way for the Hutu extremists to penetrate the camp and slaughter defenseless refugees (4). As early as 12 May 1994, no fewer than 250,000 people had been massacred. On 7 April alone, at Camp Kigali, Lieutenant Thierry Lotin and 9 other Belgian paratroopers were murdered after they misguidedly surrendered weapons to negotiate with the Rwandan Presidential Guards (288). Echoing Alain Destexhe, a former Senator in Belgium and member of the Belgian Senate Investigation Committee on Rwanda, Tripodi regretted that the massacre of the 10 peacekeeping soldiers was particularly *inexcusable*, and a remarkable result of Dallaire and Marchal’s obsession with the rules of engagement, thereby failing to properly appreciate the situations.

The general incompetence of the peacekeepers in Rwanda was assessed considering the criticality of the aftermath of the Cold War. Tripodi cited that the UN, as authorized under Chapter VI of its Charter, had deployed by the mid-1990s, a total of 20 missions, with the number of peacemakers leapfrogging from 11,000 in the late 1980s, to 70,000 going forward (76). Yet, back home in New York, and not unlike many other peacemaking efforts, the UNAMIR was fraught with administrative setbacks that stifled meaningful progress. As a matter of fact, a key merit of *Rwanda 1994* might be that the book “acknowledges ... critical studies and keeps the failure of the international community in the background while taking a tactical focus with the objective to investigate whether the UN mission ... could have actually stopped the genocide” (7). Tripodi seemed to have intentionally framed his thesis antithetical to Major Brent Beardsley’s ultimate claim that the mission could not prevent the Rwandan genocide, not due to any failure in command on the part of the men on the ground, but overwhelmingly because of “the lack of will and means provided to the mission by the international community” (285). Tripodi admitted that the leadership of the UNAMIR might have comprised people of ‘phenomenal moral and physical courage,’ but a greater proactive use of force could have contributed to their direct saving of much more than just 40,000 Rwandans. On page 28 of *Guns over Kigali* (1999) as cited, General H.K. Anyidoho had rendered an explanation to the perceived weakness of the UN troops in Rwanda. He claimed, as his superior, Dallaire, would, that UNAMIR commanders could not have acted against Chapter VI of the Charter of the UN, “which did not allow the use of force unless in self-defence or in defence of UN troops or installations.” But

Tripodi rejected the excuses, asserting that Anyidoho's pedantic interpretation clearly revealed: "the absence of an understanding of a proper application of a military approach to guard duty" (290). In the Forward, Lieutenant General Rodolfo Sganga, quoting his 'extremely' formative military experience and a 'strong' tactical understanding of unconventional environments, corroborated that "leadership is the main and central component for units to perform well" (ix-x). In other words, it was the frailty of UNAMIR's leaders to motivate their team and initiate sound choices that culminated in the death of over 800,000 Rwandans (284). Mahmood Mamdani, who would visit Rwanda in July 1995, expressed the chilling reality of collections of "artifacts of political violence," which existed in the form of skulls and assorted bones just from the Ntarama neighborhood.¹

In all, the Rwandan genocide remains a familiar topic of broad public interest. However, additional guidance may be necessary for laypersons to understand the technical description of military compositions and the alleged tactical dereliction of mission leaders. Although some of the identified mistakes were real, Tripodi's thesis of "A Failure of Leadership and a Preventable Genocide" appears to be outcome-biased, especially in the spontaneous context of April 1994. The unanticipated assassination of President Habyarimana, the most powerful figure in Rwanda, alongside several key military personnel, might have created a terrorizing impression of a strategically equipped, hard-to-crack Devil. Hence, the largely incoherent UNAMIR troops could not have *swiftly* subdued such killings as those done by *hardcore* militias, whose cult of antiquity sprang from the German/Belgian divide-and-rule strategy of racializing existing social structures for imperial gratification.

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¹ Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), 3.