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ANNALS OF DIPLOMACY

THE GENOCIDE FAX

The United Nations was warned about Rwanda. Did anyone care?

BY PHILIP GOUREVITCH

"We were surprised," a Rwandan diplomat told me after the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, announced that he would be visiting Rwanda this week. "Many people in my country are not happy with Mr. Annan. He was the head of U.N. peacekeeping when U.N. peacekeepers allowed a genocide in Rwanda. But let him come, and he can hear about it directly." In fact, Annan's staff say, the Secretary-General plans to acknowledge the United Nations' sorry record in Rwanda, in the hope of establishing his credibility there. The Rwandan diplomat wondered whether Annan would also answer some questions. "There is the affair of the fax—the famous fax," he said. "Many people have heard of it, and everyone would like to know more."

The famous fax is dated January 11, 1994—three months before the state-sponsored genocide, in which members of the Hutu majority massacred at least eight hundred thousand people from the Tutsi minority and also tens of thousands of Hutus who opposed the genocidal regime. The fax, headed "Request for Protection for Informant," was sent by Major General Roméo Dallaire, the U.N. force commander in Rwanda, to peacekeeping headquarters in New York, and it reported in startling detail the preparations that were under way to carry out precisely such an extermination campaign.

Dallaire's informant was a former member of the security staff of President Juvénal Habyarimana, Rwanda's Hutu dictator. At the time of the fax, the informant was being paid about a thousand dollars a month—a king's wage in Rwanda—by Habyarimana's political party to compile lists of Tutsis and to train the militiamen known as the *interahamwe* ("those who attack together") to kill them.

Dallaire, a Québécois, wrote as he speaks, in a clipped military English, and his telegraphic prose underscored the ur-

gency of his message. The peace that his U.N. blue helmets were in Rwanda to keep was a fiction. Throughout the early nineties, government-sponsored massacres of Tutsis had become a regular occurrence, and Habyarimana's political and military cronies, whose ideology was known simply as Hutu Power, wanted them to continue. Their plan, according to Dallaire's informant, was once again to "provoke a civil war," and, as part of that plan, Belgian troops, who formed the backbone of the U.N. force, "were to be provoked and if Belgian soldiers resorted to force a number of them were to be killed and thus guarantee Belgian withdrawal from Rwanda." In the meantime, Dallaire's informant had been "ordered to register all Tutsi in Kigali," and Dallaire wrote, "He suspects it is for their extermination. Example he gave was that in twenty minutes his personnel could kill up to a thousand Tutsis."

As it happened, everything Dallaire's informant told him came true three months later. "He believes the President does not have full control over all elements of his old party/faction," Dallaire wrote, and, sure enough, on April 6, 1994, Habyarimana was assassinated—a move that created a pretext for the most radical elements of Hutu Power to seize control of the state and implement their program. The next morning, Rwandan troops captured, tortured, murdered, and mutilated ten Belgian blue helmets, whereupon Belgium—Rwanda's former colonial ruler—called the rest of its force home, triggering the collapse of the U.N. mission. During the hundred days that followed Habyarimana's death, an average of more than five Tutsis were murdered every minute in Rwanda, and it became clear that Dallaire's informant had not exaggerated the industrial killing capacity of the *interahamwe*.

Why had Dallaire's source told him so much? Because, Dallaire wrote, "he disagrees with anti-Tutsi extermination." The informant had offered to as-

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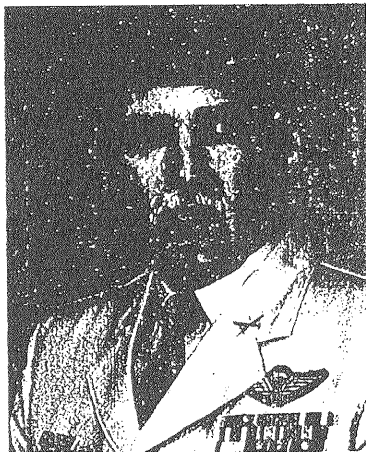
sist the U.N. force in raiding *interahamwe* weapons caches, and all he asked in return was U.N. protection for himself, his wife, and their four children. Dallaire was eager to act. He announced his intention to raid an arms cache within thirty-six hours, and he recommended that his superiors in New York help the informant be "evacuated out of Rwanda."

DALLAIRE'S fax was, of course, a confidential document, and it remained secret until November of 1995, when it was described in the *London Observer*. A copy of the fax was then published in Belgium, where the news that the United Nations had known for months of Hutu Power's intention to massacre Belgian troops caused a furor.

Dallaire had labelled his fax "most immediate," addressed it to his superior in peacekeeping—Major General Maurice Baril, a fellow-Québécois—and signed off in French: "*Peux ce que veux. Allons-y.*" ("Where there's a will there's a way. Let's go.") Reports soon appeared in the Belgian press explaining that the response from U.N. headquarters had been: Let's not. Dallaire, the reports said, had been expressly instructed to refrain from taking

any direct preventive action. But the document containing these instructions failed to surface, and its author remained unidentified, so it was impossible to determine how high in the U.N. hierarchy Dallaire's fax had gone. Had it reached the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Kofi Annan? The Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali? The Security Council?

With Annan's elevation to the office of Secretary-General last year, the questions only intensified, causing Annan's spokesman, Fred Eckhard, to complain, "We're taking a bum rap on this." But somebody with access to U.N. files disagreed with Eckhard, and one day my fax machine rang and a copy of the missing



OUTGOING CODE FABLE

DATE: 11 JANUARY 1994

HIR 47

TO: BARIL\OPKO\UNATIONS NEW YORK	FROM: DALLAIRE\ONAHIR\KIGALI
FAX NO: MOST IMMEDIATE-CODE CABLE-212-963-9952 INMARSAT:	FAX NO: 011-250-84273
SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR PROTECTION FOR INFORMANT	
ATTN: MGEN BARIL	ROOM NO. 2052
TOTAL NUMBER OF TRANSMITTED PAGES INCLUDING THIS ONE: 2	

1. FORCE COMMANDER PUT IN CONTACT WITH INFORMANT BY VERY VERY IMPORTANT GOVERNMENT POLITICIAN. INFORMANT IS A TOP LEVEL TRAINER IN THE CADRE OF INTERHAMWE-ARMED MILITIA OF RWAND.
2. HE INFORMED US HE WAS IN CHARGE OF LAST SATURDAYS DEMONSTRATIONS WHICH AIMS WERE TO TARGET DEPUTIES OF OPPOSITION PARTIES COMING TO CEREMONIES AND BELGIAN SOLDIERS. THEY HOPED TO PROVOKE THE RPF BN TO ENGAGE (BEING FIRED UPON) THE DEMONSTRATORS AND PROVOKE A CIVIL WAR. OPZUTIES WERE TO BE ASSASSINATED UPON ENTRY OR EXIT FROM PARLIAMENT. BELGIAN TROOPS WERE TO BE PROVKED AND IF BELGIANS SOLDIERS RESORTED TO FORCE A NUMBER OF THEM WERE TO BE KILLED AND THUS GUARANTEE BELGIAN WITHDRAWAL FROM RWANDA

This week, Secretary-General Kofi Annan travels to Rwanda, where people are asking who saw a fax sent by Canadian General Roméo Dallaire (top) in 1994, detailing the Hutu government's plans for genocide.



response to Dallaire spun into my office. It bore the same date as Dallaire's fax, it was also labelled "most immediate," and its subject was "Contacts with Informant." It had been sent under the name of Kofi Annan, bearing the signature of Iqbal Riza, who was Annan's deputy in the peacekeeping office and is now his chief of staff.

"New York," as U.N. people call headquarters, told Dallaire that the "operation contemplated" in his fax—and the extension of protection to the informant—could not be allowed under the Rwanda peacekeeping mandate imposed by the Security Council. Instead, Dallaire was instructed that if he was "convinced that

the information provided by informant is absolutely reliable" he should share it with President Habyarimana, and inform him that the activities of the *interahamwe* "represent a clear threat to the peace process" and a "clear violation" of the "Kigali weapons-secure area." Dallaire was also told to share his information with the Ambassadors to Rwanda from Belgium, France, and the United States—the primary foreign sponsors of Rwanda's so-called peace process.

Never mind that Dallaire's informant had explicitly described

the plans to exterminate Tutsis and assassinate Belgians as emanating from Habyarimana's court: the mandate said that peace-treaty violations should be reported to the President, and New York advised Dallaire, "You should assume that he"—Habyarimana—"is not aware of these activities, but insist that he must immediately look into the situation."

Dallaire did as he was told, and—but for the genocide—that might have been the end of the matter. Not surprisingly, Dallaire's informant stopped informing, and last year, when the Belgian Senate established a commission to sort out the circumstances under which some of its soldiers had been slaughtered while on duty for the U.N., Kofi Annan refused to allow



"What the hell do you want? You know this is my busiest day, Mother!"

General Dallaire to testify. In a letter to the Belgian government, Annan explained that past and present U.N. officials were protected by diplomatic immunity, and he did not see how waiving that immunity was "in the interest of the Organization."

THE issue here is a lack of judgment and historical memory," Alain Destexhe, a Belgian senator, who has written several books about the international response to the Rwandan genocide, told me recently. "I would like to know if ever before, in the years since 1945, the U.N. has received a fax or a cable announcing an extermination. Look at that word: 'extermination'—registering Tutsis, killing a thousand Tutsis in twenty minutes. You should be alarmed by that. You should think of the Jews. I really don't understand it. President Clinton is obliged to justify himself for fund-raising phone calls from the White House and alleged sexual harassment, and we're talking about a million people killed, so I think the U.N. should be accountable. How can anyone sensibly think of reporting the crimes of the President of Rwanda to the President of

Rwanda and pretend that he has dealt with this matter responsibly? How could such a fax not be passed on immediately to the Security Council and all the member states? How can we be left to wonder whether even the Secretary-General"—Boutros-Ghali—"saw it?"

Last year, I read Dallaire's fax to one of Boutros-Ghali's closest aides, who said that he had never heard of it before. "It's astonishing," he said, "an amazing document, incredibly dramatic. I never heard of anything like that, and I find it incredible to imagine that it could not reach the Secretary-General. This is all at a level of drama that I don't remember experiencing except once or twice in the last five years at the U.N. It's just incredible that a fax like that could come in and not be noticed."

In fact, by 1996 Boutros-Ghali was at least aware of Dallaire's fax, because he referred to it, in an introduction to a volume on Rwanda, saying, "Such situations and alarming reports from the field, though considered with the utmost seriousness by United Nations officials, are not uncommon within the context of peace-keeping operations."

When I read Boutros-Ghali's words to Destexhe, I could almost hear him shuddering over the phone from Brussels. "Not uncommon?" he said. "Extermination? No no no." Last week, I asked Iqbal Riza, Annan's deputy, whether Boutros-Ghali would have seen the correspondence. "He should have," Riza said, adding that according to "standard practice every code cable or every fax of this nature will be copied to the Secretary-General's office" and then sorted by "a staff that decides what paper goes to him."

Boutros-Ghali's aide told me that he was certain "Boutros didn't see the actual document," but that it was likely he had "heard the essence of it, in summary." Riza said, "That's credible." During that period, daily cable traffic was "a stack about a foot high," Riza explained, and Dallaire's fax "was not a report on a serious incident, where there were casualties, or something like that," but "something that was forecast." If the forecast had come true "a week later or something," Riza said, then "I think they would have said, 'Yes, there is this fax, and this is what happened.'"

THE fact that Kofi Annan's name is printed atop the reply to Dallaire's fax suggests that he was its author, or at least the one ultimately responsible for its contents. But Riza, whose signature appears on the response to Dallaire's fax, claims that that wasn't the case. At the time, he said, the United Nations was overseeing seventeen peacekeeping missions, and "there was no way that one person could look after them all." So duties in New York were divided, and Riza found himself in charge of Rwanda. "I was responsible," he said, adding, "This is not to say that Mr. Annan was oblivious of what was going on. No. Part of my responsibility was to keep him informed and, in fact, to ask for guidance when I felt that was necessary. So he would have seen this paper, maybe, you know, whenever he had time—two or three days later, when he went through his copies. So that takes care of that question."

In hindsight, Riza told me, "you can see all this very clearly—when you are sitting with your papers before you, with your music on, or whatever, and you can say, 'Ah, look, there's this.' When it's happening in the heat of the moment, it's something else." He described the Dallaire fax as just one piece of an ongoing

daily communication. "We get hyperbole in many reports," he said, adding that, in the months that followed, "incidents continued, but there was no sign to corroborate" Dallaire's warning.

Riza reminded me that the Belgian, French, and United States Embassies in Rwanda had been advised of Dallaire's information. "If those governments, especially the Belgians, had serious fears about what was going to happen, do you think they would have kept quiet?" he asked. "They would have battered down our doors." On the other hand, Riza stressed that the caution with which the Rwanda peacekeeping mandate was interpreted had to be understood in the context of the moment—and the context was "the shadow of Somalia."

During 1993, dozens of peacekeepers died in Somalia. In the two most spectacular incidents, twenty-three Pakistanis serving with the U.N. and eighteen American soldiers serving under their own command were killed. The American deaths occurred in October, and Riza said, "If we had gone to the Security Council three months after Somalia, I can assure you no government would have said, 'Yes, here are our boys for an offensive operation in Rwanda.'" How could he be so sure? Because, one of his aides told me, even in April of 1994, when the body count in Rwanda was leaping from the tens of thousands to the hundreds of thousands, the Security Council did not see fit to act. And another U.N. staffer said, "You do understand, I hope, that when we are talking about Rwanda and we speak of member states, we are speaking in particular about Washington."

It was true that the Clinton Administration had lost its appetite for peacekeeping operations after Somalia. In the wake of that debacle, the White House produced a document called Presidential Decision Directive 25, which amounted to a checklist of reasons to avoid involvement in U.N. peacekeeping missions. It hardly mattered that no American troops were involved in Rwanda; when the genocide began, the Administration's policy was that the U.N. should get out of Rwanda completely, and the original force of two thousand five hundred men was reduced to an ineffectual squad of two hundred and seventy. Dallaire begged for reinforcements, and his pleas were seconded by Boutros-Ghali, but, as the

dead piled up in Rwanda, the United States successfully obstructed the Security Council from heeding their call.

"We—the international community—should have been more active in the early stages of the atrocities in Rwanda," Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said last December on a visit to Africa, setting the stage for President Clinton's more forceful apology, this spring in Kigali. In the same spirit, Annan's staff are fond of saying, "The whole world failed Rwanda." Annan himself recently told the French newspaper *Libération*, "I remember saying at the time, 'If a genocide does not push us to intervene, what can make us budge?'" It was a good question. Once the current round of mea culpas is over, we will still be left to wonder whether the genocide might have been thwarted before it had begun.

ON May 2, 1994, when the extermination of Tutsis was at its peak in Rwanda, Kofi Annan travelled to Washington to address a Senate hearing on U.N. peacekeeping operations. In the course of his testimony, he said, "Under our rules of engagement, they"—peacekeepers—"have the right to defend themselves, and we define self-defense in a manner that includes preemptive military action to remove those armed elements who are preventing you from doing your work. And yet our commanders in the field, whether in Somalia and Bosnia, have been very reticent about using force."

In the light of Dallaire's fax, Annan's failure to mention Rwanda is striking. After all, Dallaire hadn't asked for the permission that Annan denied him, to take preemptive action against the Hutu Power arsenals; he simply announced his plan to raid weapons caches. Dallaire has said that he considered such action to be entirely consistent with his rules of engagement, and he has repeatedly stated that with five thousand well-equipped men he could have saved hundreds of thousands of lives in Rwanda.

Last September, Dallaire went on Canadian television and said of his tour in Rwanda, "I'm fully responsible for the decisions of the ten Belgian soldiers

dying, of others dying, of several of my soldiers being injured and falling sick because we ran out of medical supplies, of fifty-six Red Cross people being killed, of two million people being displaced and made refugees, and about a million Rwandans being killed—because the mission failed, and I consider myself intimately involved with that responsibility." But Dallaire resisted "passing the buck" to the U.N. system. Instead, he passed it on to the member states of the Security Council and the General Assembly. If, in the face of a genocide, governments fear placing their soldiers at risk, "then don't send soldiers, send Boy Scouts," he said.

"I haven't even started my real mourning of the apathy and the absolute detachment of the international community—particularly the Western world—from the plight of Rwandans," Dallaire went on. "Because, fundamentally, to be very candid and soldierly, who the hell cared about Rwanda? . . . We know the genocide of the Second World War because the whole outfit was involved. . . . Who really comprehends that more people were killed, injured, and displaced in three and a half months in Rwanda than in the whole of the Yugoslavian campaign, in which we poured sixty thousand troops and more. The whole of the Western world is there—we're pouring billions in there, and we're still in there trying to solve the problem. Who is really trying to solve the Rwandan problem? Who is grieving Rwanda and really living it and living with the consequences? I mean, there are hundreds of Rwandans whom I knew personally, whom I found slaughtered with their families complete—and bodies up to here—villages totally wiped out. . . . And we made all that information available daily and the international community kept watching."

Dallaire was in uniform as he faced the camera; his graying hair was closely cropped; he held his square jaw firmly outthrust; his chest was dappled with decorations. He said, "The root of it is: What does the international community really want the U.N. to do?" He said, "The U.N. simply wasn't given the tools." And he said, "We did not want to take on the Rwandan Armed Forces and the *interahamwe*."

Listening to Dallaire, I wondered, What would happen if a fax like his were to arrive at U.N. headquarters today? ♦



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