

The Benevolent Dictatorship in Rwanda: Negative Government, Positive Outcomes?

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ABSTRACT

While Rwanda does lack some of the basic freedoms and civil rights that are considered essential to a nation, particularly by Western democratic powers, today it “works,” largely as a result of President Paul Kagame’s benevolent dictatorship, especially as seen through the lens of those things which are most essential for stability, security, and development in a post-conflict setting. This article evaluates benevolent dictatorships as possible solutions for governance in post-conflict environments for US policy makers. It also proposes ways the US can prevent or mitigate the effects of a civil war. It finishes by stressing that, despite some curbs on civil and personal liberties, Rwanda is much better off than many other countries in Africa, and that the limits to personal liberties, while unfortunate, are a small price to pay for the security and stability Rwandans otherwise enjoy.

KEY WORDS: benevolent dictatorship, dictatorships, autocracies, post-conflict governance

INTRODUCTION

By almost any indicator, Africa has the largest collection of countries with the lowest scores on international indices of stability, security, economic development, life expectancy, birth rates, and many others. According to the Foreign Policy’s 2011 Failed States Index, 19 of the 30 worst ranked countries in the world are in Sub-Saharan Africa. The 2010 Human Development Index (HDI), published by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), shows 34 African nations (of the 48 total) in the bottom 41 countries of the world. According to the 2011 CIA World Factbook, 30 of the 35 highest HIV prevalence rates in the world are in Sub-Saharan Africa. The list goes on and on.

However, despite the dozens of countries ranking near the bottom, some African countries stand out for their high rankings – not only compared to their continental neighbors, but also in relation to other countries in the world. Botswana’s score in the “Corruption Perception Index 2011” is better than Italy or Poland, and almost as high as Spain or Portugal. Lesotho has a female literacy rate of 95%, higher than many countries in Central and South America (CIA 2011). But aside from quantifiable evidence, some countries just “feel” different.

From 2010 to 2011, I lived in Morocco, working at the US Embassy as an Active Duty US Army officer. I traveled throughout Sub-Saharan Africa while in training to become a Foreign Area Officer (FAO), and had the opportunity to visit 15 countries in the region, including Rwanda in January 2011. For a first-time visitor to Kigali, there is a stark difference when compared with other African countries such as Sierra Leone, Lesotho, or even neighboring ones such as Uganda. The streets are cleaner, houses are painted and

yards tended, and there are fewer of the 10-foot, broken-glass-topped security walls so emblematic of Sub-Saharan Africa. There are still street hawkers, to be sure; the difference was that in Kigali, instead of selling air fresheners for cars, they were selling copies of *The Economist*. Less anecdotally, the government in Kigali has overseen some of Africa’s most impressive growth since the end of the Rwandan genocide in 1994. This is especially impressive considering two factors: First, the turmoil and ethnic strife that were in place when the Paul Kagame regime took power after the 4-year civil war and 1994 genocide, in which some 800,000 to 1,000,000 people, mostly Tutsis and moderate Hutus, were murdered in the span of around 100 days. Second, the domestic turmoil and regional conflicts that seem to plague other African nations. As reported in *The Economist* (2010a), “Its GDP has doubled, albeit to a tiny \$5 billion, since 2005. Most Rwandans have medical insurance. Tax revenue may rise by 12% this year and GDP is expected to go up by 6%.” Foreign aid as a percentage of GDP has dropped from nearly 100% in 1994 to 50% today, and President Kagame wants to see it fall to 30% by 2017. Some of the foreign aid given after the end of the genocide is no doubt tied to Western guilt over their lack of intervention. But it is important to remember that foreign aid did provide an economic springboard for the government in Kigali to jumpstart the economy, while ensuring that foreign aid was viewed as only a temporary fix and not a long-term solution.

If Rwanda is indeed functional, and this condition is considered desirable for a nation (especially in a post-conflict setting as horrific as it was after the civil war and genocide that resulted in several million killed, wounded, maimed, and displaced), several questions need to be addressed. The most

important one, and the one that this article seeks to answer, is: Does Rwanda indeed “work”, and has the regime of Paul Kagame provided stability and security for Rwandans, while improving their welfare, since 1994? Compared with most other African countries, Rwanda appears to be more stable, secure, and prosperous, but is this really the case? Are these true indicators of recovery and success, so atypical in post-conflict settings in general, and in African nations in particular? Or are these simply window dressing, masking residual feelings of animosity that could flare up and shatter an illusion that the administration in Kigali has carefully built? Finally, how could knowing more about a perceived benevolent dictator allow the US government to prevent the occurrence of, or mitigate the tragedies associated with, a civil war, if there are indicators that the ends (a stable nation, decreased violence, and improved welfare) will justify the means (the conduct of the war, the potential for limited civil freedoms, and possible human rights abuses)?

This article concludes that the “benevolent dictatorship” of Paul Kagame has provided a positive framework for post-civil war governance in Sub-Saharan Africa, even if it is not truly benevolent. While there are definite shortcomings when it comes to human rights and civil liberties, it is Kagame’s focusing on the essentials of security, stability, and overall welfare that have allowed Rwanda to make the undeniable gains that it has. Finally, I explain how the US government supporting one side in a conflict, despite potential civil and human rights abuses, can possibly prevent a civil war, or at least limit the tragedies associated with it.

SO WHAT? THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A POSITIVE AND/OR NEGATIVE FINDING

The significance of a positive finding, that Rwanda does work because of a benevolent dictatorship, could have implications for US policy towards new regimes coming into power post-conflict. For the purposes of this article, I define a “benevolent dictator” as a ruler who does not necessarily follow democratic principles, but who uses his absolute power altruistically, to better the lives of his citizens and improve their existence; it is similar to the idea of “Enlightened Absolutism,” first put forth in the late 19th century by German historians (Ingao 1986). For a benevolent dictatorship to work, the ruler must truly act in the best interests of the citizens of that country, even if they do not put themselves in a position to remove him from power should he fail. Some examples of this benevolent behavior include declaring that a certain amount of taxes will be collected for welfare betterment, that a certain amount of GDP will be spent on health or education, and that certain behaviors, statements, or actions are illegal. Generally, these actions are ones that would either not come before a committee or panel for discussion because of their

perceived insignificance (i.e., prohibiting plastic grocery bags throughout a country), or would take a long time to debate and would end up being passed in a different form than they were proposed. A benevolent dictator, acting in the best interests of his people, will not put his ideas up for debate, but will instead simply declare them. Of course, we must be wary of any kind of dictator, as Lord Acton was right when he said, “Absolute power corrupts absolutely” (Morrell 1992). But a benevolent dictatorship may be “the best of what’s around” after a conflict.

There are a plethora of counterarguments to the idea of a “benevolent dictator,” the most obvious being that someone cannot truly be benevolent if they are a dictator. But if such a leader does exist, Washington should be willing to support him if that government reduces violence, reestablishes order and security, and creates improved conditions on the ground – even if civil rights and other liberties are more limited than in a true democracy. This is in stark contrast to US policy in the past, which seems to have supported the person able to sell himself as “most democratic,” despite a track record of decidedly un-democratic leadership after taking power.

The impact of a negative finding, that Rwanda does not work and that all progress to date is simply a façade for Western donors and investors, could have a greatly damaging impact on future post-conflict reconstruction efforts as investors and donors who thought they had “finally found a good one” might be soured on the prospect of later involvement. Unfortunately, if African nations are not able to secure assistance from Western sources, they may have no choice but to turn to others, like China, for funding. Chinese investment, already high in Africa and never without ulterior motives, could allow Beijing even greater influence in this resource rich and strategic region.

WEAKNESSES: RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

There are aspects of the Rwanda question that this article does not seek to address, but that would indisputably contribute to a better understanding of the dynamic there. For one thing, it does not seek to analyze Rwanda’s actions outside its own borders: It is possible, even probable, that in the wake of Kagame taking power, the mass emigration of Hutus—guilty and innocent alike—allowed Rwanda to succeed by exporting problems and problem citizens, and that there is still ethnic tension (Burgess 2011). The ongoing conflict along the Rwanda-Congo border alone would appear to support this. Similarly, I do not address Kagame’s impact on the region, or pretend that it has been as positive as it has been domestically, as there is ample evidence that Kagame’s deployment of Rwandan troops to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) make him responsible for some of the same brutality as Rwanda’s own *Interahamwe* (although clearly not the

same scale). A United Nations report released in 2006 documented “over 600 major crimes including mass rape, targeted killings of civilians and other crimes against humanity from 1993 to 2003. The report implicates armed forces from Uganda and Rwanda in many of the crimes, suggesting that some may have amounted to genocide” (Onyiego 2010).

Data Availability

With regards to the information available, it is difficult to find records from before the civil war and genocide, since the Hutu regime sometimes destroyed them. In *Conspiracy to Murder*, Linda Melvern (2004: 57) notes:

Most of Rwanda’s arms deals were negotiated through the Rwandan embassy in Paris.... When the Genocide was over, extensive records were found in the Embassy offices, but not one of them concerned Rwanda’s relationship with France. All the documents related to this crucial aspect of the Genocide had been destroyed by Colonel Sebastien Ntahobari (Rwanda’s military attaché in France).

Another potential barrier to information gathering is rooted in Kigali’s policy prohibiting *ubwoko*, or tribal affiliation, in order to build a sense of “Rwandaness” after the conflict (US Department of State 2011). Consequently, the topic of ethnicity is extremely taboo and it is quite difficult to talk to Rwandans about their tribal affiliations. The former US Ambassador to Rwanda, W. Stuart Symington, tells the story about how one newly-arrived US Embassy employee, after asking a Rwandan about his tribal affiliation at a party, was declared *persona non grata* by the government in Kigali and departed Rwanda less than a week later. These laws, addressed in greater detail below, amount to censorship that prevents free discourse about the direction the country and its government are taking. When using data from surveys or interviews, this must be taken into account as Rwandans might alter their true answer or mask their true feelings. However, any research into the topic would undoubtedly benefit from a survey that simply addressed perceptions of democracy and civil rights relative to repression and a sense of freedom, which could then be followed up with focus groups and more detailed interviews.

Government-Provided Data

In Rwanda, as elsewhere, there is truth to the idea that “history is written by the victors.” The Kagame regime has gone to great pains to portray Rwanda as a success story, which has benefitted the country internationally. As such, there is no motivation to provide data that would convey a negative image or scare investors away. However, some researchers might not want to avoid these subjective evaluations, since much can be learned by assessing peoples’ attitudes in coun-

terpoint to the manner in which government data are presented. The subjective should be vetted against the objective.

Outliers

Additionally, researchers must identify outliers that could account for Rwanda’s post-conflict success. Undoubtedly, some of the praise – and accompanying aid – heaped upon Rwanda by the West since the genocide comes from a guilt-ridden world as a way to quell its conscience. Assessments of Rwanda also are made in relation to other struggling African nations, some of which are perpetually in a state of chaos and anarchy.

Mitigations

One way to mitigate many of the problems listed here is to analyze documents, books, papers, and studies authored by Rwandans themselves. However, as already mentioned, Rwanda limits free speech under the umbrella of preventing “genocide ideology” and “sectarianism,” a broadly-applied law widely criticized in the international community as a tool of political repression and a means of silencing legitimate critics of the government (Kinzer 2010). As British ex-pat Graham Holiday wrote in his “Kigali Wire” blog, “The blogging community, such that it is, consists mainly of expats blogging. Most of those appear to be transient, they’ll often only be here for a year or so and then they’re gone. So, there’s little to no effect. It’s rare to find bloggers within Rwanda blogging on these issues (of censorship)” (Mashuli 2011). Indeed, research I have conducted thus far has not identified a significant body of Rwandan authors, writers, or bloggers, and none of the stature of better-known African writers such as Nigeria’s Chinua Achebe (*Things Fall Apart*), Lesotho’s Thomas Mofolo (*Chaka*), or South Africa’s Alan Paton (*Cry, The Beloved Country*). Certainly, none are critical of the current government. A researcher’s true understanding of Rwanda is therefore limited by this dearth of first-hand resources.

A RECENT HISTORY OF RWANDA

Although it is easy to identify when Rwandan rebel forces crossed the Ugandan-Rwandan border, it is difficult to pin down the spark that ignited the Rwandan civil war between the two main ethnic groups. Tribal tension existed for years, with struggles resulting in power passing back and forth between Hutus and the Tutsis long before the Germans (and later the Belgians) claimed Rwanda as one of their colonies during the “Scramble for Africa” in the late 1800s. Surely the Belgians codifying their support for “the disenfranchisement of the Hutus and the reinforcement of ‘the traditional hegemony of well-born Tutsis’ ” in the 1930s did not help (Gourevitch 1998: 56). The Hutus, with a majority of the population, eventually formed the *Parti du Mouvement de l’Emancipation Hutu*

(Parmehutu), taking power after overthrowing the Tutsi-run government in November 1959, and Grégoire Kayibanda eventually won a UN-supervised election less than two years later. However, rampant corruption in his administration resulted in a military coup d'état in July 1973, and Major General Juvenal Habyarimana, a fellow Hutu, took power (Global Security 2011).

Shortly afterwards, as a result of the violent overthrow and increasingly repressive policies of the Belgian-administrated and Hutu-led Habyarimana government, around 130,000 Rwandan Tutsis fled to neighboring countries (Meredith 2005: 160). Although initially tolerated, these refugees soon made up a majority of the population in many areas, increasing tension over food, land, employment, and other limited resources. Eventually, a combination of host government xenophobia towards Tutsis, increasing Western pressure for democracy in Africa, and a longing for "the way it used to be" by members of the diaspora (almost 400,000 by 1991), resulted in some Tutsi clamoring for a return, by any means, to Rwanda (Meredith 2005: 530). It was from these refugees that General Fred Rwigyema formed a 4,000-man army that invaded Rwanda on 1 October 1990, officially starting the Rwandan civil war (Meredith 2005: 491). After three years of brutal fighting, and no lack of war crimes or human rights violations on either side, both parties met at Arusha, Tanzania in 1993, eventually signing a power-sharing agreement. However, further massacres of Tutsi prompted the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) to recommence their attacks, eventually putting more pressure on the Hutu-regime.

Tension came to a boiling point when President Habyarimana's plane was shot down on 6 April 1994, sparking the genocide (Meredith 2005: 507). RPF forces once again went on the offensive, eventually taking Kigali; Paul Kagame, until then the military leader of the Tutsi-dominated RPF, took charge. However, Hutu militias (referred to as *Interahamwe*, "those who work together" or sometimes "those who attack together"), fearing punishment and Hutu tribal members fearing retribution, fled the country in droves, eventually numbering two million and settling largely in the Great Lakes region, notably Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) (Gourevitch 1998: 93). Standing up a government-in-exile, they began a campaign to destabilize the Tutsi-dominated government, basing their operations out of the refugee camps and employing recently emigrated Hutu. Of the refugees crossing into Zaire, the UN Force Commander at the time, Lieutenant General Romeo Dallaire, writes in his book *Shake Hands with the Devil* (2003: 471) that:

The Zairians were finally disarming the RGF (Rwandese Government Forces, mainly Hutus at that time) at the border, stripping some of them of items such as machetes and rifles, but large weapons—artillery, heavy mortars, anti-aircraft guns and anti-

tank systems—were being waved through and escorted north of the city. Neither the Zairians nor the French were taking any measures to separate the militias, gendarmes or soldiers from the civilians as they crossed the border.

It was a situation that would hardly facilitate regional stability.

As a result of the attacks inside Rwanda that followed, President Kagame decided to send RPF forces into Zaire to counter the threat posed by the Hutus, beginning a series of wars subsequently dubbed the "First Congo War" and "Second Congo War." The latter, eventually involving nine African nations and resulting in the death of an estimated 5.4 million people, is referred to without hyperbole as "Africa's World War" (Economist 2010b). Echoes of it are still felt in the region today.

THE BOTTOM LINE: DOES RWANDA WORK?

In order to properly decide if Rwanda works, it is necessary to decide what it means for a country to "work." It cannot be merely stability, for totalitarian regimes can provide stability while citizens live in fear. It cannot be purely security, as a brutal military can be a tool of a one-party democracy. For the purposes of this article, I define a country as "working" by evaluating the most common metrics used by various non-governmental organizations (NGOs), non-profits, think tanks, and government agencies. Because of the focus that Rwanda has gotten as a result of the genocide and the stability and rebuilding that followed, there exist copious amounts of data (quantifiable, qualifiable, and anecdotal) on which to base an assessment of Rwanda's status today. It is important to note that in most cases, the connection between the indicators below and the measuring if a country "works," is a corollary relationship, not a causal one. In other words, seeing a country increase its educational expenditures as a percentage of GDP, or witnessing very few coup d'états, does not cause a country to work; it could simply mean a tyrant is spending more money, or effectively using his security apparatus to quell any chance of a coup. But rather, there may be a correlation between a country that "works" and what is demonstrated by the indicators listed below.

Stability

"Stability" means there is as a continuity of governance at all levels, with little "likelihood that the established government will be destabilized or overthrown by unconstitutional or violent means, including domestic violence and terrorism" (World Bank 2010). Put more simply, there will be no "unscheduled" changes of government, and that when it is time for a ruling party to depart, as dictated by elections, constitutional mandate, or other means, its members will do so.



Continuity of Government

While continuity of government could be seen as an indicator of stability, in studying Africa one must delineate between “continuity of government” and “continuity of leadership.” A dictator who refuses to leave office might be providing a type of continuity, but this certainly does not indicate the kind of “political stability” we associate (e.g.) with 43 peaceful transitions of executive power in the United States.

Number of Coup d'État Attempts

Since President Kagame assumed power in 1993 (via coup d'état, ironically) there have been only two unsuccessful coup attempts (December 2008 and April 2010) (Rwandaonline 2009; Rwandarwabanyarwanda 2010), which are fairly insignificant. This is especially true compared with other African nations in that same period of time, for which coups—both attempted and successful—have been a way of life: Chad, Lesotho, and Nigeria each have had four attempted or successful coups d'état. Code d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Sudan, and Zimbabwe each have had five. The Gambia and Guinea each have had six, Mauritania and Niger seven, and Equatorial-Guinea an astounding 11 (Marshall and Marshall 2010). For Rwanda, this may indicate satisfaction with the administration, though more likely, as an effective security apparatus.

Invasions

There have been no invasions since General Paul Kagame invaded Rwanda (or “returned to liberate,” depending on your take) in 1990.

Insurgencies

There is an on-going fight in DRC and north-west Rwanda, directly related to the emigration of Hutus after Kagame's RPF took charge in 1993. Many *Interahamwe* understandably feared retribution by the Tutsis because of the genocide and fled to neighboring Zaire (now the DRC). It is unlikely that those Hutus in command, made up largely of those facing the most serious charges in connection with the genocide, will give up either their fight or their units, and the conflict will continue for the predictable future, though without tangible threat to the regime.

Terrorist Acts Aimed at Overthrowing the Government

There are occasionally individual grenade attacks (the least committal in terms of conducting a systemic attack), most in Kigali and frequently cited as examples of Hutus continuing to target Tutsis, or extremists from both sides trying to destabilize the Kagame administration. But aside from the north-west region, there has been no large-scale fighting inside Rwanda since 1994.

Security

“Security” means having limited threats, both domestically and externally, to Rwandan citizens' physical welfare (the most important *immediate* need for Rwandans—or anyone in these circumstances—in the wake of the civil war and genocide). While the terms seem similar, an issue of “stability” addresses attempts at destabilizing or overthrowing the government, while an issue of “security” addresses various attempts targeting the people of that country.

Crime Rates and Patterns

The US Department of State lists Rwanda's crime rates as “medium,” and warns, “Attempted home robberies, automobile break-ins, pick-pocketing, purse snatchings, and theft of vehicle accessories in Kigali do occur, but most crimes committed in Rwanda are non-violent.” DoS goes on to state that drugs are not a problem, there is little evidence of scams, and notably for Africa, there are no “off limits” areas (Bureau of Diplomatic Security 2011). Of the 15 Africa countries I visited in 2010-2011, Rwanda felt by far the safest, possibly because of greater economic opportunity precluding the need to turn to a life of crime.

Numbers of Political Prisoners and Politically Motivated Executions

Although Rwanda initially used the death penalty to punish perpetrators of the genocide, the government outlawed the death penalty in 2007 (Amnesty International 2007). There remain miscellaneous reports of illegal detentions, holding of political prisoners without charge, and other abuses, though these do not appear to be widespread.

Limited Threats to Physical Welfare

According to the Rwandan Judicial Police, since 2005 “cases of murder have gone down 36%, rape and defilement 34%, and robbery 4.7%” (Asiimwe 2010). These improvements, as with “Crime Rates and Patterns” above, may be related to improved economic conditions benefitting the average Rwandan.

Incidents of Inter-Ethnic Violence

As mentioned in the above section on “terrorist acts,” there are extreme and irreconcilable members of both Hutu and Tutsi factions who continue to target moderates and members of the state opposition. Not widespread because of an effective security apparatus, this undoubtedly combines with relatively recent memories of the genocide to cause fear in the minds of some everyday Rwandans.

Improved Welfare

Initially less pressing than security concerns, but as important or perhaps more so in the long run, “improved wel-

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fare" is circumscribed by all the other issues a nation needs to address for its people to believe that things are getting better. This includes the metrics that can be hardest to measure (improvements to education and health, expanding freedom of press), but that conceptually indicate if life – wellbeing – is improving.

Food Security

According to *The Economist*, Kagame counts providing food for all Rwandans as his greatest achievement:

"For the first time in Rwandan history we have almost 100% food security." [Kagame] says his government has given villagers cattle, fertilizer and better seed. He reels off a list of crops that, he claims, have had record harvests: cassava, maize, rice, sorghum, sweet potatoes and wheat. "We're selling food to Burundi, Tanzania and Congo" (2010a).

Health

The government in Kigali has doubled health expenditures during Kagame's reign (from 4.5% of GDP in 1994, to 9% today), and this improved focus on health has resulted in lower crude birth rates (from 24.0 per 1000 in 1993, to 19.7 in 2009) and infant mortality rates (from 135.7 per 100,000 in 1994, to 59.1 today). Simultaneously, life expectancy has increased from a low of 26.8 years in 1993 to 54.7 in 2010. Access to improved sanitation facilities has increased (52.4% of the population had access in 1990, compared with 60.6% in 2009) (World Bank 2011a). HIV prevalence rates remain unimpressive, ranking the country as 25th on the continent, even if the number has declined slightly in the last couple of years (CIA 2011).

Education

This has been a mixed bag in Rwanda. The administration in Kigali has increased expenditures slightly (from 4.3% of GDP in 1999, to 4.9% in 2009), ranking 10th of the 35 African countries for which data were available in 1999, and 13th of the 33 countries available in 2009. Approximately 85% of youth are enrolled in primary school, and both males and females (ages 15-24) have achieved a 77% literacy rate. The percent of trained teachers greatly improved from 48.6% in 1999 to 93.9% in 2009, but during that same time frame, Rwanda dropped to the second highest teacher/pupil ratio in Africa, dropping from 54.2 to 1 in 1999, to 68.3 to 1 in 2009 (UNESCO 2011).

Economic Improvement

Per capita GDP has more than doubled under Kagame, from \$4,507 in 1994 to \$9,216 in 2010. But poverty remains a pressing problem, with no significant change in the past five years to the 58% of the population living below the poverty

line; 89% of people are living below \$2/day, and 76% living on \$1.25/day (World Bank 2011). Recognizing this, Kagame published his "Vision 2020," with ambitious but realistic goals for the country.

This economic project plans to boost GDP sevenfold, find paying jobs for half of Rwanda's subsistence farmers, nearly quadruple per capita income to \$900, and turn his country into an African center for technology, all by 2020. The government is doing what it can—it has, for instance, committed to investing annually 5% of its GDP in science and technology by 2012—but to reach those goals, it's going to need outside assistance (Chu 2009).

As a way to get this outside assistance to fund continued growth without accepting more aid, President Kagame is actively trying to attract foreign investors, and his efforts have paid off. The World Bank rated Rwanda "world's top reformer" in their 2011 *Doing Business* report, saying "Rwanda is the easiest place to do business in East Africa and the fourth best in Africa" (All Africa 2011). Kagame should also be commended for avoiding the "aid mentality" so prevalent in Africa; his approach was clearly reflected in the attitude and work ethic of the Rwandans I met.

Freedom of the Press

Earlier having ranked #107 in Reporters Without Borders' assessment (2010), its "Press Freedom Index" saw Rwanda drop over 60 places to #169 out of 178 in 2010. The organization stated that "Rwanda, Yemen and Syria have joined Burma and North Korea in the group of the world's most repressive countries towards journalists." A 2011 country report by Amnesty International notes: "The government used regulatory sanctions, restrictive laws and criminal defamation cases to close down media outlets critical of the government.... Some leading editors and journalists fled the country after facing threats and harassment."

Freedom of Expression

In the same report, Amnesty International wrote: "A clampdown on freedom of expression and association before August [2010] presidential elections prevented new opposition parties from fielding candidates." It continued: "The authorities continued to misuse broad and ill-defined laws on 'genocide ideology' and 'sectarianism.' The laws prohibit hate speech, but also criminalize legitimate criticism of the government."

Free and Fair Elections

"Labeled a staunch economic reformer by Western governments, but also called a ruthless dictator by his opponents and by human rights groups," Max Delaney wrote in August 2010, "Mr. Kagame is widely expected to win by a landslide,



at least in part because several of his opponents have been forbidden from participating and others have been killed in what rights groups and analysts suspect were assassinations.” He ended up winning 93% of the vote (BBC 2010). However, given how fractured the Rwandan political process has been in the past, Phil Clark proposed in *The Guardian* (2010) that while the Tutsi-dominated RPF is hardly loved in the countryside, many Hutu (who constitute around 85% of the population) view a vote for Kagame as a vote for continuing peace and stability – no mean achievement after years of violence. The whole stability of the country therefore depends on Kagame maintaining his status, and so repressive political acts can be an integral part of Rwandan progress. To maintain cohesion in a divided party, Kagame has struck out against relatively unthreatening targets as a show of strength.

Perhaps the Hutu fear the renewed retribution of a divided but hard-liner dominated RPF more than the repressive policies of a united but stable Kagame administration.

Corruption

In its 2010 “Corruption Perception Index,” Transparency International gave Rwanda a score of 4.1; this certainly does not put it on par with Sweden or Switzerland, but it is the 5th best score in all of Sub-Saharan Africa.

THE CHALLENGE: LIMITING THE TRAGEDIES ASSOCIATED WITH CIVIL WAR

If we believe that a country’s post-conflict success either (a) justifies US involvement to prevent a civil war, or if that is unsuccessful, (b) justifies the conduct of its civil war and the decisions that its leaders make afterwards, it is possible for US decision makers to better choose which side to support in a conflict. But could doing so actually limit the tragedies associated with civil war? Or would it only lengthen the fight and increase suffering? And will any peace achieved as a result last long enough to justify US support in the first place?

Supporting the forces that may provide the most stable and secure government afterwards, in order to help them to defeat their opponents quicker and more definitively, can limit the tragedies associated with civil wars. But in considering any theory about US involvement helping to mitigate the problems of a civil war, the first and perhaps most important question to ask is how to decide which side to support. Obviously, each case is different, and it is the job of analysts, defense officials, and policy makers alike to perform “due diligence” on both sides of a potential conflict in order to find evidence of how opponents likely will act during and after a conflict, how they would react to the US’s offer of support, and how benevolent each would be if in power. The US certainly has a

checkered history of supporting causes simply based on who was “the enemy of my enemy” at the time, with sometimes-disastrous results for the treatment of the citizens of that country and negative results for how those citizens viewed America. Obviously, this approach requires that the US be willing to ask the right questions of potential beneficiaries, and not to accept routine sycophantic answers. It would be a diplomatic problem, not to mention a moral one, if the military forces to which Washington provides material support use it to commit the same atrocities they professed to be fighting to stop. Similarly, if the outcome of a conflict in one country contributes to instability in a neighboring country or surrounding region, this may overshadow otherwise positive domestic gains as well. An honest and enforceable pledge by a prospective beneficiary to provide security and stability, even if done while delaying other civil rights and liberties, is preferable to an empty promise to create democratic institutions and full rights for all citizens, with no intentions to actually do so. As Rwanda has shown, the best path may be one that under-promises and over-delivers.

Part I: US Support Before a Civil War

Once the US decides which side to support, there are several ways by which US involvement in a potential conflict could help prevent a civil war. Ideally, war would not begin in the first place. This would no doubt be an even trickier proposition than choosing which side to support after the commencement of hostilities. However, it is possible that if the US were to throw all of its diplomatic and, as appropriate, military support – to include the backing of the UN, African Union (AU), or other applicable international body – behind one side as the clouds of war started to gather, enough collective pressure could be brought to prevent an outbreak in the first place. This would require a version of the “carrot and the stick” approach: The “good guys” would be offered a carrot (US materiel and diplomatic support) and the “other side” threatened with the stick (facing a better-resourced opponent, with those resources coming from the US). Conversely and simultaneously, the former could be threatened with a withdrawal of that “carrot” (for violations of international standards of conduct, during and after cessation of hostilities), while the latter could be offered a “carrot” in the form of concessions to some of their demands. This combination could be used to prevent hostilities and to address injustices, real or perceived, that led to the threat of conflict in the first place.

Part II: US Support After the Start of a Civil War

If unsuccessful at preventing a civil war, there are ways that US involvement after the commencement of hostilities could limit the tragedies associated with a civil war. First of all, supporting one side in a conflict can bring it to a definitive



conclusion through decisive victory, preventing more casualties from a protracted war, and setting the conditions for stability in the long-term. In "Ending Civil Wars" (2010: 35), Monica Duffy Toft rebukes a focus on immediate, premature settlements, debunking the false belief that "the more quickly the violence can be halted, the greater the number of lives that can be saved, and 'lives saved' is the only cost of consideration." This aspect requires US policy makers to have the political courage and long-term vision to accept that contributing to a bloody fight in the short term is preferable to an uneasy peace that results in greater conflict, and wasted efforts and resources, afterwards. Similarly, Edward Luttwak, in "Give War a Chance" (1999: 43), proposes that it may be best to allow combatants to conclude fighting, taking the conflict to its natural conclusion instead of stopping it prematurely. He states that

a cease-fire tends to arrest war-induced exhaustion and lets belligerents reconstitute and rearm their forces. It intensifies and prolongs the struggle once the cease-fire ends – and it does usually end.... Imposed armistices, meanwhile – again, unless followed by negotiated peace accords – artificially freeze conflict and perpetuate a state of war indefinitely by shielding the weaker side from the consequences of refusing to make concessions for peace.

Not getting involved soon enough carries its own consequences, as former Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz recently wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* (2011):

The failure of the US to support the opposition [in Libya] more strongly...was a costly mistake. The delay in recognizing the National Transitional Council, the continuing delays in getting them access to frozen assets, and the refusal to provide arms made the conflict longer and bloodier...we are less able to support those who share our values.

All of this is not to say that letting the genocide happen was a necessary precondition for Rwanda's post-conflict success, but perhaps that letting the civil war play out after re-sourcing a "chosen side" may have been. It is possible that if the West had fully supported Kagame's forces, it could have brought the fight to a conclusion before the genocide even happened. Imagine a Rwanda where the civil war, brutal as it was, marked the worst point of the conflict, and not the genocide and the more than 800,000 additional deaths that followed. Had the US supported the RPF, there may have been a disciplined victory without a desire for revenge after taking power. As Chaim Kaufman points out in his 1996 article, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars,"

The Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) showed remarkable restraint during the 1994 civil war, but since then the RPF has imprisoned tens of thousands of genocide suspects in appalling conditions, failed to pre-

vent massacres of thousands of Hutu civilians in several incidents, and allowed Tutsi squatters to seize the property of many absent Hutus.

It is not difficult to picture the cycle of violence that this perpetuated.

Second, by receiving support from the US, combatants will not need to supply themselves at the expense of civilians, which can in turn greatly reduce the suffering of those who traditionally suffer most in war. Katelyn Jones explains: "Armed conflicts have decreased on the battlefield and increased in communities bringing the consequences of conflict into peoples' homes.... Whereas only 50 per cent of casualties were civilians in the Second World War, the figure is close to 90 per cent in more recent wars" (2011: 168). Civilians are truly "key terrain" for combatants; unfortunately, as a result of the decrease in traditional warfare and its associated conventions, there has been an increase in war crimes and crimes against humanity. Reducing the need for combatants to supply themselves at the expense of civilians would go a long way towards reducing the misery of those most defenseless. Further, if "our side" wins a more disciplined victory and does not cause undue suffering among civilians, it will be easier to gain domestic support for US efforts to provide resources to a "chosen side" in subsequent conflicts. This strong domestic support could further increase our influence, preventing even more civil wars or limiting the suffering associated with them as a result.

Part III: US Involvement After the End of a Civil War

Whether to prevent civil war or to limit its effect after conflict starts, US influence after cessation of hostilities could assist in a positive outcome to civil war in two main ways. First, the US can work with the new leadership, providing guidance and direction (and a bit of pressure, if necessary) to ensure that it governs in such a way as to identify and solve the root causes of such conflicts. This can create conditions that decrease the chances of conflict recidivism and prevent another outbreak of violence, which would cause even more casualties and greater suffering. This is not to say that good governance would be able to erase the memories of all the violence associated with this conflict. As described by René Lemarchand in his *African Affairs* article on the 1993 failed power sharing agreement in Rwanda, "It is hard to over-emphasize the intense fears and anxieties felt by most Hutu in the face of the RPF invasion, the mutual hatreds born of atrocities committed by invaders and defenders, and the climate of all-pervasive suspicion" (2006: 5). But it is a starting point for resolution of the underlying issues, and formulating a plan for moving forward.

Second, US involvement could be used to ensure that a "benevolent dictator" actually *remains* benevolent by applying pressure – again, using the "carrot" of support – for the

partner to establish the security, stability, and welfare described throughout this article. If not, again, the US support could be withdrawn, and a potential “stick” of sanctions or other punishment applied. A ruler would know that the stability of his position is assured by the support of the US government, and that this support is contingent on his conduct while in power; this influence could go a long way towards avoiding civil war, limiting of the tragedies associated with it, and preventing a return to it.

DICTATORSHIP TO DEMOCRACY: MAKING THE CHANGE

In the past, countries such as Brazil, Spain, Portugal, the Philippines, and Hungary have made peaceful (which is not to say “without contention”) transitions from dictatorship to democracy, and remain democratic today. Contemporarily, because of the “Arab spring,” we are currently witnessing additional examples of former dictatorships making the transition to democracy. Dictators like former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak rarely choose to transition their country to a democracy voluntarily and some remain in dynamic situations, with stability not guaranteed. But elections in June 2012 were judged free and fair, as were those in Libya (New York Times 2011). These developments, as well as others in the Middle East and North Africa, seem to support Carother’s argument about “Dominant-Power Politics,” which he admits can result in some stability. However, the risk remains that “the long hold on power by one political group [such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt] usually produces large-scale corruption and crony capitalism,” and a disaffected population may once again call for change, resulting in a return to conflict (2002: 12).

This therefore is not to say that the transition to democracy will be without conflict, which can result in the casualties a steady benevolent dictatorship may have been able to avoid in the first place. For one thing, a dictator could risk running afoul of his supporters in the elite and military establishment. As Paul Collier wrote, “reform might be dangerous. My friends, the parasitic sycophants with whom I have surrounded myself, might not put up with it” (2009: 29), and a violent struggle for power could ensue. Conflict can also come from the efforts of formerly repressed groups vying for newly-available power, such as after Ethiopia’s Mengistu Haile Miriam was overthrown, and minorities from the Tigray, Somali, Oromo, and Amhara continued to contend for position, sometimes violently (Harbeson 2005: 152). However, the circumstances of each of the above examples are unusual, and as with any case study, they cannot be used as unqualified evidence of likely outcomes for democratization in Rwanda. Further field research is necessary to determine more accurately the circumstances which would facilitate the successful transition from dictatorship to democracy there.

CONCLUSION

In 2011 Carina Tertsakian wrote for Human Rights Watch (HRW), questioning Kigali’s approach of accepting “economic development first, human rights later” by asking: “Would we be prepared to sacrifice our right to free speech or political participation for the sake of ‘reasonably equitable development’ or subjective ‘political stability’?” Despite this valid question, the majority of the metrics used to measure stability and security in Rwanda show a positive trend. While there are undoubtedly gains to be made with regards to improved welfare, and in particular more civil liberties and human rights, I contend that these are not the things that people in a post-conflict setting initially need most.

Where it gets tricky, however, is in determining when “enough” time has elapsed, and when a country is “ready” for the more liberal aspects of “improved welfare” like freedom of the press, a true multi-party democracy, the ability to criticize the government without fear of retribution, the right to a fair trial, and other rights. One study showed that the primary concern of most Africans is their daily economic situation (things like unemployment, poverty/destitution, and food shortage/drought), while less than 1% gave “democracy/political rights” as their biggest concern (Afrobarometer 2009). However, there is a threshold past which people who have grown used to only having their basic needs met begin to demand the greater freedoms which Kagame increasingly restricts. It is past this brink that a regime’s tolerance of opposition will be truly tested, as we have seen during the Arab Spring.

Dankwart Rustow earlier wrote, “in an age of modernization men are unlikely to feel a preponderant sense of loyalty except to a political community large enough to achieve some considerable degree of modernity in its social and economic life” (1970: 351). If “improved welfare” may be linked to Rustow’s “modernity,” Kagame’s continued rule may be contingent upon his ability to maintain the sense of community that thus far has been built on shared experience of the genocide. However, by 2020, 70% of Rwanda’s population will have been born since the genocide ended, and if levels of repression continue, there may come a time when this is not enough for the people to tolerate Kagame’s rule (Ruxin 2010).

Immediately following a brutal conflict like the Rwandan civil war and genocide, a “benevolent dictatorship” may be more beneficial, and more stable in the long run, than a pure, Western-style democracy with regards to establishing citizens’ basic rights. Rwanda under the current regime may never be a true democracy, though Kagame certainly does not seem to apologize for this. It may not even be an African version of it, with the four-term incumbent receiving 99% of the vote. But given Rwanda’s post-conflict success, Jack Chapman in *Think Africa Press* (2011) puts it succinctly:

The Applied Anthropologist

SHAWN RUSSELL

The Benevolent Dictatorship...

Kagame rules Rwanda with a strong centralized government, uncompromising in its management of the economy and willing to violate human rights.... [But] human rights violations are a small price to pay for Rwanda's remarkable progress. Kagame is a dictator. But as long as he maintains stability and delivers reasonably equitable development, he is the sort of dictator Rwanda needs.

Other African nations, given the challenges of development they contend with, might be able to benefit from the same kind of dictatorship.

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