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Out of Sight, Out of Mind?: American Citizens and the Genocide in Rwanda

By

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CHAPTER ONE

"THE WORLD HAS NEVER APPEARED MORE HOPELESS OR HELPLESS"

Rwandan Horrors and the World’s Inaction

Two months after the outbreak of genocide in Rwanda, Boutros Boutros-Gali, the Secretary General of the United Nations, declared: “We must recognize that . . . we have failed in our response to the agony of Rwanda, and thus have acquiesced in the continued loss of human lives. Our readiness and capacity for action has been demonstrated to be inadequate at best, and deplorable at worst, owing to the absence of collective political will.” ¹ The United States Ambassador to the United Nations Madeline Albright expresses similar frustration in her autobiography, “I was not among the few who saw very early that the decade’s most shocking crimes would engulf the small country of Rwanda. My deepest regret from my years as a public servant is the failure of the United States and the international community to act sooner to halt those crimes.” ² These and other individuals in positions of leadership during the genocide admit responsibility for the failure of the international community and acknowledge regret for the tragedy that occurred during their watch. Although both Boutros-Gali and Albright include explanations of how the 1994 Rwandan genocide unfolded and why the international community did not act, they do not attempt to excuse their actions. Rather, they acknowledge the horrifying consequences of the genocide as well as the failure of the international community to stop it.

This admission leads to difficult but important questions concerning how a repeat of these events can be prevented in the future.

Diplomats from around the world attended the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 1948 in an attempt to create a system that would prevent horrors similar to the Holocaust from ever recurring. Genocide was defined as “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.” The United Nations General Assembly unanimously passed a law declaring genocide a crime against humanity. The Convention was adopted on December 9, 1948, and it was ratified on October 16, 1950, thereby becoming official international law. According to this Convention, the occurrence of genocide in a sovereign state both permits and requires humanitarian intervention on the part of the international community. Article I states, “The Contracting Parties confirm that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international law which they undertake to prevent and punish.” Although it was decades after the decision of the U.N. General Assembly, the United States ratified the genocide convention in 1986.

In 1994, less than one year after the signing of the Arusha Accords, a treaty expected to resolve the internal conflict in Rwanda, the Hutu ethnic group engaged in a massive genocide. On the night of April 6, 1994, a plane carrying President Habyarimana of Rwanda and President Ntaryamira of Burundi was shot down near the Kilgali airport. The Hutu-led government and extremists blamed the events on Tutsi rebels, even though many thought that the crime had been

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4 Ibid.
5 The reluctance of the United States centered on the objection that it may interfere with U.S. state sovereignty. Opponents feared that it could be applied retroactively, or too broadly and apply to domestic affairs. These criticism were unfounded, however, and President Reagan backed the Convention in 1985, which led to its 1986 ratification by the Senate. The final step was the 1988 passage of the Genocide Implementation Act.
committed by Hutu extremists, a theory that has since been supported by evidence. Hutu activists put roadblocks up by the next morning and they began killing the Tutsis and moderate Hutus immediately. Linda Melvern describes the carefully planned slaughter: “Simultaneously, in a swift operation, moderate politicians and members of Rwanda’s thriving pro-democracy and
human rights movement—everyone who had spoken out for democracy, Hutus and Tutsis alike—were murdered. The lists of victims, written on index cards, had been neatly stored in wooden boxes on metal library shelves.”

In 100 days, Hutus slaughtered at least 800,000 of their fellow Rwandan citizens, the Tutsis. Although the United Nations had peacekeeping forces on the ground to enforce the Arusha Accords, it withdrew the majority of these troops and labeled the conflict a civil war, not genocide. The world became increasingly aware that the civil war was in actuality genocide, but the United Nations and other bodies failed to act with the speed that would have enabled effective intervention. Journalist Philip Gourevitch clarifies the difference between civil war and genocide. In a civil war, two forces are fighting each other. Civilians may or may not be involved. In contrast, although genocide may have a political basis, the goal is to exterminate the particular group in question. Gourevitch explains this distinction: “The idea [of genocide] is to eliminate what is perceived as a blood line... In a civil war, a baby is not a serious enemy element. Here, it is, because 60 years from now, that baby could be an adult.”

Alain Destexhe confirms that in Rwanda, the entire Tutsi population was targeted. The size and scope of the

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7 While an exact death toll will never be known, Historian Gerald Prunier provides careful calculations to support the 800,000 figure, which is approximately eleven percent of the Rwandan population. This number has since become the accepted figure. The lowest reasonable estimate, offered by Alison Des Foiges, is 500,000, and the highest is over a million.
1994 genocide in Rwanda demonstrates a shocking failure of the international community to uphold the standards created at the Convention and respond to crimes against humanity.

This chapter proceeds in the following manner. I begin by presenting the main conclusions of the present literature on the international community’s involvement in the Rwandan genocide, and then I explain the importance of U.S. decisions and the need for a closer analysis of the role of American citizens in influencing these decisions. Here, I develop this case primarily by critically summarizing common explanations of U.S. inaction. This establishes arguments important to ensuing chapters, in which I make the case for U.S. citizen engagement to pressure leaders to intervene to stop genocide.

Gaps in Current Scholarship

The Rwandan genocide has generated much scholarship in a relatively short period of time, as the disastrous consequences of the decisions and non-decisions made by the international community led scholars and politicians alike to search for an explanation. Literature on the subject tends to label the problem as a failure of the United Nations to carry out its responsibilities. The United States’ powerful influence in the U.N. and its active discouragement of intervention make it another primary target for blame. In their respective portrayals of the disaster, analysts often invoke the memory of the Holocaust and the supposed desire of the Western world to prevent its recurrence. Gourevitch condemns Western actors, “The West’s post-Holocaust pledge that genocide would never again be tolerated proved to be hollow, and for all the fine sentiments inspired by the memory of Auschwitz, the problem remains that denouncing evil is a far cry from doing good.”10 The parallels between the Rwandan genocide

10Philip Gourevitch, We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families (New York: Picador USA, 1998), 170.
and the Holocaust make the events in Rwanda even more shocking, since by the 1990s most assumed the world was better prepared to act against these crimes than it was in the 1930s and 1940s.

The scholarly literature concerning Rwanda specifically and humanitarian intervention generally tends to focus on the role of political leaders in both the United Nations and the United States. The importance of public opinion is emphasized, but almost always as a result of the opinions and decisions of positional leaders. Most authors blame the failure of leadership on the absence of political will. Often forgotten is the silence of the American public, except as a result of leaders’ inaction. In an ideal representative democracy, political will comes from the need for political leaders to meet the interests of the people who elect them. If a lack of political will caused U.S. leaders to ignore the crisis in Rwanda, then the possibility exists that the situation could be reversed and political capital could rely on action rather than inaction. Thus, American citizens are important, active players in the equation, and as such, they deserve more attention.

My analysis focuses directly on the role of the American public, rather than the more common approach of accentuating the role of political leaders. My reason for this focus is threefold: first, the frequent placement of blame on the United States; second, the important role of the ‘average’ citizen in a representative democratic system; and third, the moral obligations of American citizens to members of other countries. This chapter develops the first point by presenting the most prevalent explanations of U.S. inaction and the resultant reasons for which it is often the most criticized actor. The second and third rationales for the focus on the American public will be introduced here and are main themes that will be expanded throughout the remainder of the paper. The importance of American citizens is a subject of detailed analysis in Chapters Two and Three, in which I argue that citizen advocacy holds the greatest potential to
make the democratic system more responsive and therefore better able to react effectively to events like the Rwandan genocide. Likewise, Chapters Four and Five expand on the idea of effective followership as it relates to citizen advocacy and the duty of Americans to citizens of other countries.

Statement of Assumptions

The argument that American citizens have made a difference in US policy decisions regarding Rwanda assumes two distinct claims about the Rwandan genocide to be true: first, humanitarian intervention in Rwanda would have been justified; and, second, it was both possible and would have been effective. Both claims are widely accepted and supported by scholarly accounts of the event, and with the benefit of hindsight, by many political leaders who failed to act at the time. The establishment of such claims makes it difficult to argue that the international community was not able to help the Rwandans.

The claim that humanitarian intervention would have been justified in this case is a common starting point for most accounts of the Rwandan genocide. Scholars and politicians now agree that a violation of Rwanda’s state sovereignty would have been acceptable given the situation. These persons reason that states are bound to uphold certain basic responsibilities to their citizens, and that any state engaging in gross violations of human rights fails to fulfill this duty and loses its right to sovereignty. International law, as established by the Genocide Convention and ratified by two-thirds of the member states, supports the case that an international body such as the United Nations could have intervened in Rwanda and would have been justified in doing so. Eric Heizne explains that genocide, crimes against humanity, and certain war crimes make the use of force, normally illegal, legal: “Crimes that are subject to
universal jurisdiction are considered intolerable by international law . . . These crimes are considered . . . to be such an affront to human dignity that it is incumbent upon states to see that they are prosecuted, regardless of where they occur.\textsuperscript{11} The genocide in Rwanda most certainly fits into this special category.

My next assumption, perhaps slightly more contested but still widely accepted, is that the United States, with the support of the United Nations, could have taken actions that would have stopped, or, at the very least, significantly lessened the killings of the Tutsis. Some argue that the U.N., or another multilateral force, should have led the humanitarian intervention, and the U.N. is therefore more blameworthy than the U.S. Others assert that the U.S. should have been the primary actor in the intervention. Either way, the important point is that a legitimate actor could have taken steps that would have lessened the genocide. This assumption is supported by two separate conditions.

The first condition is that the international community had the means by which to intervene. In order to be able to intervene effectively, either the United States, the United Nations, or a different nation or multilateral organization would have needed knowledge of and information about the genocide as it unfolded, as well as the proper equipment and monetary support. Three authors exploring the blameworthiness of the various actors have made parallel arguments along these lines. Michael Barnett, in his account \textit{Eyewitness to Genocide}, and Linda Melvern, in her history \textit{A People Betrayed}, focus on the U.N.'s failure. Samantha Power, in her book \textit{A Problem From Hell}, analyzes it as a failure by the leadership of the United States. All three agree that the international community had knowledge of the genocide, even if it did not admit to or acknowledge the severity of the problem. In addition, all three authors agree that

\begin{footnotesize}
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even if the United States did not have the necessary information, the reason for this absence was purposeful rather than excusable ignorance. Based on these accounts, it would seem, then, that the international community did have enough information and resources to launch a humanitarian intervention.

The second claim of this assumption is that humanitarian intervention would have made a difference. At the outbreak of genocide, General Romeo Dallaire, head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda, requested 5,000 troops, a relatively small number that would not have presented a great burden economically or militarily. Dallaire thinks that, in the early stages, as little as one battalion (about 800 people) could have secured Kigali, Rwanda’s capital, because the killings began there and then spread to the rest of the country. While he requested 5,000 troops, he believes that he could have halted the genocide with 1,800, in addition to an expanded mandate and necessary equipment. Scott Feil conducted a research panel that concluded that 5,000 peacekeepers could have saved a half million Rwandans. Researchers note that this force would have had the greatest chance of success if offered in mid-April, when the perpetrators were still cautious about international opinion and genocide was not yet widespread.

The most commonly referenced support for these predictions is the ability of the relatively small force of United Nations peacekeepers during the outbreak of the genocide to maintain some order and prevent killings in their presence. The killings escalated immediately following the peacekeepers’ departure from Rwanda. Destexhe and Power point out that Tutsis

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12 I offer further support for this claim in Chapter 2, during the discussion of when the international community knew that events in Rwanda properly fit under the term genocide.
15 Colonel Scott Feil, “Could 5,000 Peacekeepers have saved 500,000 Rwandans?: Early Intervention Reconsidered,” Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, Georgetown University, vol. III. no. 2 (April 1997).
were grouped together, which would have made it easier for U.N. forces to protect many lives at once.\textsuperscript{17} The story of a Senegalese captain saving hundreds of lives single-handedly confirms these predictions. Power explains: “The Hutu were generally reluctant to massacre large groups of Tutsi if foreigners (armed or unarmed) were present. It did not take many U.N. soldiers to dissuade the Hutu from attacking.”\textsuperscript{18} These explanations and anecdotal evidence strengthen the assertions by General Dallaire and others that a relatively small force could have stopped the genocide. Several analysts, including Power, Barnett, and Jamie Metzl argue that even actions short of military intervention, such as jamming the radios used to spread anti-Tutsi propaganda, would have lessened or perhaps even ended the killings.\textsuperscript{19} Evidence suggesting that it was possible to lessen or halt the genocide undercuts the argument for dismissing the case on the claim that the international community could not have done anything.

The importance of these first two basic assumptions is that they narrow the range of possible explanations and justifications for inaction during the genocide. As the various accounts of the genocide prove, it would be difficult to argue successfully that intervention was either unjustified or logistically impossible. Therefore, the discussion of the Rwandan genocide can start with the assumption that action was possible, thus making the question of why the international community did not act all the more important and challenging.

\textbf{Explanations of the Failure of the United States}

Although the blameworthiness of the U.N. and the U.S. are often discussed interchangeably, my focus is on the responsibility of the United States. In the case of Rwanda,

\textsuperscript{17} Destexhe, 9; Samantha Power, “Bystanders to Genocide: Why the United States Let the Rwandan Tragedy Happen,” The Atlantic (September 2001), 18.
\textsuperscript{18} Power, 2001, 18.
\textsuperscript{19} I return to the radio-jamming case in Chapter Three.
the United States is particularly responsible because of its power and influence in the United Nations and because its resistance to intervention is frequently cited as the reason for which the United Nations did not intervene. Barnett takes a position that many scholars support. He points out that the United States has a permanent seat on the Security Council, which grants it responsibility for concerns of both national and international peace and security.\textsuperscript{20} He writes, “The most powerful states bear more responsibility because they have the capacity to do more and they sit on authoritative councils that profoundly shape the scope of humanitarianism.”\textsuperscript{21} While I do not believe that other states should escape responsibility, I do think that holding the United States to high standards is both acceptable and necessary.

Another reason that many accounts of the international community’s response place the most blame on the United States is because of its status as the most outspoken opponent to humanitarian intervention during the crisis. Gourevitch’s claim illustrates the commonly shared viewpoint: “The desertion of Rwanda by the U.N. force . . . can be credited almost single-handedly to the United States.”\textsuperscript{22} Even if this claim is overstated, it does suggest why actions of the United States are so heavily criticized and what can be done to prevent such disasters from occurring in the future. By using the United States as a focus, I can deal with the actor most closely tied to the failure of the international community. An examination of the factors most frequently cited as explanations for the inaction of the United States creates a helpful framework for understanding the important role of American citizens in U.S. policy decisions.

If one accepts the argument that U.S. domestic politics were a main reason for the international community’s failure to halt the genocide, then two main options for improvement

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\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 180-181.  \\
\textsuperscript{22} Gourevitch, 150.  
\end{flushright}
become evident. The first would be to change the system of international governance to try to remove genocide from the realm of domestic politics. The second is to work within the domestic political system in a manner that would allow for an increased concern for genocide in the future. I believe the second approach is more practical, as it works within the framework created by the current political system of sovereign states. I acknowledge the limitations of the democratic political system and suggest strategies to expand the boundaries of US national interests in the future. While I do not dismiss the possibility of eventual reform of the international political system, I am deliberately choosing to work within the framework of changing the domestic political system in the hope that this will generate more immediate positive change.

Assignment of blame for U.S. reluctance to act in Rwanda typically falls on those in formal positions of leadership at the time, including President Clinton and his administration, Pentagon officials, and members of Congress. Melvern observes: “The Rwandan genocide should have been the defining scandal of the presidency of Bill Clinton . . . But the administration took the easy option and failed to push the moral boundaries; there were no votes to be gained advocating help for another collapsed African state.” 23 Wheeler makes a similar assertion, “Accepting that such an intervention depended crucially upon U.S. leadership and capabilities, the buck stops at the door of Clinton’s White House.” 24 These interpretations, which are supported by many other critics who arrive at similar conclusions, emphasize the importance of United States leadership. I do not deny the importance of leaders in positions of direct responsibility. However, I hope to use these and similar assessments of the inaction of the United States to explore U.S. domestic political dynamics more fully.

24 Wheeler, 239.
Why did political leaders fail in their responsibilities? How can this failure be prevented in the future? My answer to such questions—to be developed in the arguments of this thesis—is that the silence of individual American citizens played a determining role in the inaction of the United States during the Rwandan genocide. One of the most cited reasons for the failure is the absence of political will, which, in a democratic system, stems at least partially from public opinion. If the inaction came from the silence of the American public, working within the system to increase political will offers the best chance at improving the system in the future. This is a solution that has not yet been thoroughly investigated. Madeline Albright asserts, “The world has taken a number of steps to make future Rwandas less likely, but added together they do not equal in importance to the fundamental question of political will.”

Power’s description of the relationship between politicians and public opinion reveals the important role of American citizens. The American system depends on leaders acting both in response to, and out of fear of, public opinion. However, the very leaders listening to the public are the individuals who play a formative role in shaping public opinion. Power observes, “American leaders have both a circular and deliberate relationship to public opinion.” This observation is supported by her description of the processes by which political leaders make decisions. Officials wait for citizens to voice their concerns before taking action, as they want to be sure that they have the necessary support before moving forward. However, oftentimes, citizens are not aware of problems happening across the globe unless leaders draw attention to them. Thus, the circle is closed, neither side acts, nothing is accomplished and agency is not established. We must find a way to enable the American public to break free from that closed circle.

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25 Albright, 155.
U.S. Inaction Explained

Explanations of U.S. policy decisions before, during, and after the genocide typically fall under one or more of several categories: compassion, information, national interests, and historical context. The low status of the Rwandan crisis within the U.S. government and among the American public can be attributed to a combination of these four factors. These categories are by no means completely separate from each other, of course. For example, a lack of compassion and difficulty identifying with the victims has direct connections to the assumptions of tribal conflict that grew from the lack of country-specific knowledge. Wheeler explains, “The selective gaze of humanitarianism in the West relates not only to how human suffering is constructed, but also to the locations that become the site of attention.” This statement references the closely linked variables that are involved in decisions determining which countries receive attention from the international community.

The Limits of Compassion

The first explanation of U.S. inaction is the argument that both policy decisions and public opinion are affected on some level, perhaps even subconsciously, by the ability of individuals to identify with and feel compassion for other individuals. The discrepancies between the perceived relative worth of citizens of different countries and races and ethnicities became apparent in the Rwandan case. Political leaders admit the fact that the country in question was a remote African nation made decisions to ignore the genocide easier to justify. In late May of 1994, a British House Delegate, Tony Worthington, remarked, “It is inconceivable that an atrocity in which a half million white people had died would not have been extensively debated

27 Wheeler, 308.
in the House.”28 The difference between the value of Americans and of Rwandans is revealed in a U.S. officer’s comment, who told General Dallaire, “We are doing our calculations back here and one American casualty is worth about 85,000 Rwandan dead.”29 It could be argued that there are legitimate political reasons (according to current American attitudes) for U.S. political leaders to value American casualties over deaths of citizens of another country. Nevertheless, this comment is troubling.

If the same crimes had occurred in a European country, would the U.S. army officer still have used the ratio of one American death to 85,000 European deaths? Power repeatedly points out the hidden yet determinant role that American biases toward people of certain nationalities or ethnicities play in shaping U.S. policy. She shares General Dallaire’s illustration of the difference between explaining numbers of Rwandans killed and numbers of Europeans killed. He believes the response would have been much greater if the expectation was that 50,000 Europeans were going to die, stating, “racism slips in so it changes our expectations.”30 These analogies reveal the Western tendency to assume American or European lives are far more important than the lives of African citizens. Clearly, the low status of Rwandans in the minds of Westerners influenced their reactions to the genocide.

These biases were not restricted to the policy decisions of U.S. officials. Preconceived notions of the superiority of Western citizens similarly affected the ‘average’ American citizen. This phenomenon may present even more of a problem than the idea that politicians make such stark calculations, as citizens cannot justify this stance on the grounds that it is necessary for U.S. political or military power as easily as politicians can.

28 Quoted in Melvern, 2000, 232.
29 Quoted in Samantha Power, 2002, 381.
In “Compassion and Terror,” Martha Nussbaum links the failure to intervene in Rwanda to the present limits of compassion. She compares American’s reactions to Rwanda with the events of September 11th, 2001, “When disaster struck in Rwanda, we did not similarly extend concern . . . because there was no antecedent basis for it: suffering Rwandans could not be seen as the larger ‘us’ for whose fate we trembled.”\(^{31}\) Nussbaum connects the sense of identity of American citizens and their self-interests with their level of compassion, arguing that if they could identify with or were more affected by the events in Rwanda, then they would feel more compassion and thus be more inclined to act. General Dallaire expresses his frustration with the world’s lack of compassion for the Rwandans: “I believe today if some outfit decided to go into Rwanda and eliminate the 320-odd [silver-back] mountain gorillas that . . . there would be today more of an effort, more of an involvement by people just like you and me and many others than there would be if they’re slaughtering [Rwandans] again by the thousands in that same country.”\(^{32}\) This comparison reflects the influence that compassion plays in determining an individual’s response (or lack of response) to a problem.

One possible reason for this prioritizing of certain individuals and groups over others is the idea that the more removed the victim is from the individual, the more difficulty he or she has imagining and feeling compassion for the victim. Elaine Scarry asserts that our imagination of others helps determine the actions we take toward them.\(^{33}\) She shares the idea of Bertrand Russell, who suggested that Westerners should read the newspaper and change the name of countries to see how much they are shaped by these factors. Suppose that the Rwandan genocide were occurring in England (“200,000 Slaughtered in London”). One can safely assume that the

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\(^{32}\) Dallaire, interview by Ted Koppel.

world’s response would have been quite different, especially in the United States. It is only after becoming aware of these biases that individuals can begin to assess them and decide their moral worth, a project I will undertake with my discussion of the appropriate duty of American citizens.

Information and Misinformation

A related possible reason for the failure of the United States to intervene was the lack of accurate information during the genocide from individuals knowledgeable about Rwanda and its history. One outgrowth of this was the assumption made by various government branches, the media, and the American public that the violence was “normal tribal conflict,” implying that it was not shocking or even troubling. Samuel Makinda explains that the classification of Hutus and Tutsis as separate, identifiable ethnic groups is itself somewhat problematic, “The Rwandan conflict had much more to do with the misguided policies of the post-independence leaders, dictatorial rule and ethnic competition between the majority Hutus and the minority Tutsis.”

Belgians, the primary colonizers of Rwanda, forced Rwandans to carry identification cards. The classification was based more on wealth than on ethnicity: the minority Tutsis were the elitist cattle owners whom the Belgians placed in leadership roles, while the majority Hutus were the farmers. Violence in Burundi, a neighboring country also populated by Hutus and Tutsis, which in October 1993 led to the deaths of 40,000 people, played a role in the “blindness bred by familiarity” argument. When the Rwandan genocide broke out, officials mistakenly believed it would be a similar type of ethnic violence.

At the time, the world’s general perception of Africa as a place of much tribal fighting interfered with the recognition of the genocide. Wheeler hints at the volitional aspect of cognitive mistakes, a connection I return to in Chapters Three and Four: “It is comforting for those of us who live in the West to think that what happened in Rwanda was the result of ancient tribal hatreds; that the orgy of violence that consumed Rwanda is an African phenomenon that we could do very little about . . . The fact is that this genocide, like that of the Holocaust, was the product of deliberate political design.”

He criticizes Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Gali for framing his reports in terms of a tribal war, despite the communication of General Dallaire and the Human Rights Watch, both of which portrayed it as a genocide. Wheeler believes that Boutros-Gali’s representing the violence in this manner helped support the decisions of the Security Council to refrain from intervening. Power explains that even regional specialists believed the violence to be a normal outgrowth of tribal or ethnic conflict. The fact that even regional specialists stereotyped the violence as “normal” reveals that the lack of country-specific knowledge allowed the conflict to be misrepresented.

Because the media are such an important source of information, flaws in media coverage can have repercussions that damage the ability of the public and the government to grasp fully and respond appropriately to international crises. The media’s somewhat problematic portrayal of the Rwandan conflict had a significant impact on the representation of the conflict among the Clinton administration and the American public. Flaws included inaccurate information, inadequate information, and coverage that was not as extensive as the severity of the massacre would seem to warrant. A relatively brief analysis of the media’s role during the genocide is

36 Wheeler, 209.
37 Ibid., 220-221.
helpful to the present discussion and will be useful information for the discussion in later chapters.

The most noticeable characteristic of inaccurate representation was the portrayal of violence as typical to Africa. Power indicates that this trend did occur in the coverage of Rwanda: “Not all the reporting helped clarify the nature of the violence for the outside world. If all the reports portrayed the killing as extensive, many also treated the violence as typical.”³⁹

Peter Jakobsen names this a common problem in media coverage of international conflicts.⁴⁰ The steady coverage of crises creates a public impression that areas such as Africa have constant and unsolvable problems. This is particularly relevant to the U.S. inaction during the Rwandan genocide, as it helps explain why citizens were not more alarmed and demanding of action. It also supports Power’s argument that outsiders assumed the violence was typical of the African country. The media’s representation of the violence as typical tribal warfare prevented the American public from fully grasping the scope and severity of the genocide as it unfolded.

A lack of knowledge and information about Rwanda also led the media to focus too heavily on the U.S. response, rather than on the details of the problems in Rwanda. Jon Western (in reference to Somalia) points out this tendency: “Because of a lack of resources, expertise, and access to a particular conflict, the media often focuses [sic] attention on the United States policy response and reporting from Washington.”⁴¹ During the genocide, this made it more difficult for Americans to question U.S. policies and realize that they were not sufficient.

Media coverage was problematic, but nonetheless it was sufficient enough to alert those paying careful attention that the problems in Rwanda were serious and deserving of further

³⁹ Ibid., 355.
consideration. For their part, U.S. leaders most certainly had enough information to prevent flawed media coverage from being an acceptable excuse. Alison Des Forges confirms this viewpoint, arguing that although press coverage was not excellent, there was enough evidence for those working in the Clinton administration to realize that the Tutsis were being systematically massacred.\textsuperscript{42} Jakobsen also supports this view, stating that despite some media pressure, the Western governments did not respond to the early warnings because they lacked the requisite “political will,” not because they were unaware of the problems.\textsuperscript{43} The assumptions made by those in positions of leadership directly tied to the handling of diplomacy and media representation influenced the American citizens’ understandings of the violence in Rwanda, as they were led to make similar assumptions.

Although U.S. leaders most likely had more access to information than did the average American, citizens still had enough information at their disposal to make a properly informed assessment of the situation in Rwanda. If the American public was not aware of the genocide and could not have been expected to be, then its inaction could be excused and its role would take a much lower priority than that of the media. However, Power and others carefully establish that the American public along with the Clinton administration did indeed have sufficient information to understand that Rwanda was experiencing genocide. Power refutes President Clinton’s after-the-fact explanation that the world did not appreciate the genocide, stating that, even if this explanation is accurate, it is not an excuse: “Survivors and witnesses had trouble making the unbelievable believable. Bystanders were thus able to retreat to the ‘twilight between knowing and not knowing.’ But this is not an alibi. \textit{We} are responsible for our

\textsuperscript{42} Alison Des Forges, \textit{Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda} (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999), 623.

\textsuperscript{43} Jakobsen, 133.
incredulity.”

On the topic of the media, she asserts, “Still, for all the flaws in coverage, the major media gave anybody reading or watching cause for grave alarm.” Notice that in both statements Power does not confine her assertion to those within the government—rather, by using language such as “we” and “anybody,” she suggests that the typical American citizen could (and should) have known. Thus, in the case of Rwanda, media coverage can be established as having provided the necessary information for humanitarian response.

Explanations for the failure of the United States to act lay elsewhere (or at least not primarily with the media).

In addition, media coverage is, on some level, an indication of the interests of the American public. Michael Ignatieff argues that the biased nature of television coverage is simply a reflection of its audience, “It may be the case that television cannot create any moral relationship between the audience and the victim where none exists already. If television’s gaze is partial and promiscuous, it is because ours is no less so. The TV crews go where we were already looking.” This observation relates the flaws in the media coverage to the misguided perspectives of American citizens. This returns us to the need to examine the influence of citizens.

National Interests

The third explanation for U.S. inaction during the genocide is the absence of specific, tangible national interests in Rwanda such as political or economic concerns. The absence of such interests made Rwanda a low priority among both American political leaders and the

44 Power, 2002, 505.
American public. Power points this out through her observation that there was never a top-level meeting of U.S. political or military leaders focused specifically on the problem in Rwanda.\textsuperscript{47} Wheeler also credits the failure of the international community to intervene to the prioritizing of narrow national interests over those of the Rwandan citizen's.\textsuperscript{48} Both Anthony Lake, the national security adviser, and President Clinton explained the inaction of the United States by stating that the U.S. did not have vital interests in Rwanda and could not be expected to solve every problem in the world.\textsuperscript{49} A remark by Bob Dole, then Senate minority leader, after the successful withdrawal of American forces from Rwanda reveals the priority of domestic interests: "I don't think we have any national interest there."\textsuperscript{50} These statements illustrate the narrow understanding of national interests under which politicians and their staff were working. Rwanda was kept at its low status because of the absence of direct connections that would link its internal affairs more closely with U.S. national interests.

The United States does have a vested national interest in following international law. To fail to do so would, over time, hurt the credibility of the United States. However, in the case of Rwanda, the U.S. worked within a much more restricted framework. One contributing factor was the lack of concern for Rwandans among the other powerful nations. This allowed the national interest to uphold one's political obligations to be viewed as a lesser concern.

This lack of attention can be at least partially explained by the absence of political costs. Power makes this connection: "Rwanda guaranteed no sense of urgency and could be safely avoided at no political cost."\textsuperscript{51} Politicians realized that their actions in Rwanda would not have a measurable effect on the opinions of their constituents toward them. Officials working for

\textsuperscript{47} Power, 2002, 366.  
\textsuperscript{48} Wheeler, 300.  
\textsuperscript{49} Wheeler, 229; Melvem, 2000, 190-191.  
\textsuperscript{50} Quoted in Power, 2002, 352.  
\textsuperscript{51} Power, 2002, 366.
elected politicians, such as mid-level and senior officials in the State Department, although not bound to the interests of constituents, still worked within the assumption that the United States would not take action. This explanation opens the possibility for a solution that works within the framework of political costs and benefits. The statements above are made from the perspective of politicians and policy makers. However, they were able to make them because public opinion would not be adversely affected by inaction. This connection will be returned to in the following chapter.

Wheeler criticizes Western countries for allowing narrow national interests to have such an influence on their policies, “It was the refusal of Western governments to accept this cost [risking soldiers when no direct strategic or economic interests involved] that was the obstacle to humanitarian intervention in Rwanda.”\(^5^2\) Nigeria’s Ambassador Gambari points out that this type of policy-making reflects the double standard of showing much more concern for Europe than Africa.\(^5^3\) National interests have a legitimate role in U.S. policy decisions. The problem is that they were defined so narrowly that they excluded action in the face of genocide.

*Historical Context*

A final explanation for the inaction of the United States is also related to the idea of political costs and benefits: the historical context of the time played an important role in the decisions of the United States government. After the end of the Cold War, the United Nations increased in both scope and prominence. During the early 1990’s, the U.N. had forces in twenty-four countries. Member states began to complain about the funds required for this mission and urged the United Nations to scale back its peacekeeping efforts. The United States was

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\(^5^3\) Barnett, 127.
particularly outspoken in this regard, insisting that the U.N. not spread itself and its resources too thin. The status of the United States as the world’s only remaining superpower made its position especially powerful.

At the time of the Rwandan genocide, the most relevant crisis shaping the vision of the Clinton administration, Congress, and the American public was the recent intervention in Somalia. Events there further called into question the post-Cold War trend toward the expansion of the United Nations and its peacekeeping efforts. The fall of Somali warlord Siad Barre’s government in 1991 triggered a downward spiral of events in the divided country as opposing clans fought for power and control over crucial resources such as humanitarian aid. The disappearance of a central state, accompanied by increasing violence and population movement, helped create a famine in some regions of Somalia. The famine continued into 1992, when in August President George Bush began Operation Provide Relief and airlifted food into the country. In November 1992 this effort was extended to a United States military deployment (Operation Restore Hope) with the aim of protecting and assisting relief agencies in the distribution of food. Operation Restore Hope ended abruptly when, on October 3, 1993, Somalis shot down a Blackhawk helicopter, killing eighteen American soldiers. The resultant prime-time media coverage included gruesome footage of a dead U.S. soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu while Somalis cheered. The events embarrassed the U.S. government and incited a public U.S. outcry. Citizens questioned why the United States was providing help in areas that were hostile to Americans. President Clinton immediately announced a six-month plan for a complete withdrawal of American forces.

Scholars stress the formative role this disaster had on shaping the Clinton administration’s vision of humanitarian efforts. Even those who had fully supported U.S. efforts
in Somalia reneged on these ideals, “With Somalis dragging dead soldiers in the streets of Mogadishu and congressional offices receiving about three hundred calls a day from angry constituents, no one was willing to support the U.S. mission.”\textsuperscript{54} The Clinton administration became acutely aware of the possible risks involved in peacekeeping. An important distinction, though, is the fact that while Somalia and Rwanda were lumped together because of their location in Africa, their situations were very different on many levels. One historian explains, “[Diplomats] seemed unable to dissociate Rwanda from Somalia, although the two cases had few points of comparison beyond their common location on the African continent.”\textsuperscript{55} The administration’s inaccurate portrayal contributed to the failure of the United States to recognize the Rwandan genocide for what it was and act to stop it in an appropriate timetable.

The dominant beliefs of Republicans in Congress during the Clinton administration also played a key role in shaping the perspective of the administration. Even before the crisis that spelled the end of U.S. involvement in Somalia, President Clinton was careful to argue for reforms that would please those members of Congress who sought to lessen the power and control of the United Nations. In a speech to the United Nations General Assembly in September 1993, Clinton spoke of his support for the U.N. but also emphasized the need to make reforms that would result in a more careful selection process of peacekeeping missions.\textsuperscript{56} Michael Barnett’s analysis of the role of the United States in the United Nations points out the importance of the anti-U.N. Congress in shaping the administration’s views on Rwanda. Clinton’s conditional support for the U.N. as a response to Republicans critical of the institution. Following the events in Mogadishu, Congress placed even more pressure on Clinton

\textsuperscript{55} Des Forges, 20.
to limit the U.S.'s role in the United Nations. Barnett portrays members of Congress as 
"increasingly hostile" toward the U.N., pointing to financial considerations as their main source 
of criticism. He takes the position, "While in principle the [Clinton administration] favored the 
Rwandan operation, in practice it objected to any proposal that might give Congress yet another 
opportunity to scrutinize Clinton's foreign policy."\(^{57}\) Barnett credits the anti-U.N. Congress with 
the reason why the United States suggested such a small number of troops as an appropriate 
number of peacekeepers in Rwanda after the outbreak of the genocide. The important role of 
Congress points to the potential of public opinion and voting to make a significant difference. 
These contextual factors explain the perspective of the Clinton administration both before and 
during the Rwandan genocide, which help to explain part of its hesitancy in considering 
intervention.

Concluding Thoughts and Points of Further Inquiry

Paul Kagame, the leader of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) during the genocide and 
the current President of Rwanda,\(^ {58}\) expressed his grave disappointment in the international 
community, "The world has never appeared more hopeless or helpless. All those claiming to be 
civilized had turned their backs. I knew that we were alone . . . I developed contempt for those 
people in the world who claimed to stand for the values of moral authority."\(^ {59}\) This statement 
correctly labels the world's treatment of Rwanda as an ethical failure. It is precisely this 
ocurrence that is so important: unless we can arrive at a suitable explanation for why we "turned 
our backs," we cannot be certain that we will respond differently if genocide were to break out 
today.

\(^ {57}\) Barnett, 71.
\(^ {58}\) The RPF played a key role in defeating the extremist government and halting the genocide.
\(^ {59}\) Quoted in Melvern, 2000, 189.
This chapter establishes the powerful role of United States policy decisions in the failure of the international community to prevent or stop the Rwandan genocide. It also reveals the need for further examination of the role of American citizens in influencing these decisions and their outcomes. I plan to use and refine these arguments in the coming chapters in the hope that this inquiry will help uncover tangible steps American citizens can take that will lead toward a more promising future for those individuals facing the extreme situation of genocide.

Chapter Two explains the importance of the American public in determining the fate of the Rwandans during the genocide. I expand upon the arguments presented above, showing specific and tangible instances when either the voices or the silence of the public influenced U.S. policy decisions. This discussion incorporates the appropriate role of the media in shaping, and being shaped by, public opinion. In addition, it deals with the complexity of the democratic system and the circular relationship between politicians and their constituents, in the context of the decisions made during the Rwandan genocide.

Chapter Three argues that a focus on public opinion is not only necessary to prevent future humanitarian disasters, but also that it is perhaps the best solution. I begin by exploring the reasons behind the failure of the U.S. government, and I label some of these shortcomings as problems inherent in our political system. I then show why I consider the American public to be the agent most able to provide a promising solution. Individual citizens removed from direct role responsibility do not have as much to risk by championing certain causes. They can avoid the initial barrier that many politicians face of having to please all sides of the debate. In addition, they are one step removed from the bureaucratic institution of the U.S. government, and so have a valuable perspective. By limiting reliance on persons whose jobs demand a somewhat narrow view of self and national interests, the potential for increased compassion and action is expanded.
Chapter Four offers suggestions for the furtherance of public concern and action in cases of genocide in other countries. American citizens have a moral duty to act in the case of genocide. Enlightened self-interest and increased compassion can act in support of the principle of moral duty, but neither is sufficient in itself. The remoteness of Rwanda presents challenges in trying to rise above the bias of national interests. Some argue that it could be overcome by an expanded view of enlightened self-interest, in which every country is seen as a valuable piece of the world market and therefore is important to powerful nations. Sadly, it seems that, although Rwanda should be within the concern of these nations, the country’s low political and economic status give it much lower priority than many other countries of the world. Therefore, it would be difficult for American politicians to see Rwanda as a global political and economic concern. Similarly, increased compassion will help but not solve the problem in itself. It is for these reasons that I place the most emphasis on establishing a moral duty. I appeal to both deontological and consequentalist arguments, showing that each leads to the conclusion that American citizens have a duty to help others in situations as dire as that of the Tutsis during the genocide.

The final chapter, Chapter Five, draws together these various themes and offers concluding thoughts regarding the future role of the United States and American citizens. I expand on the implications of the arguments presented in the first four chapters and name the lessons that Rwanda offers. The failure of the United States in Rwanda shows the importance of compassionate and moral followership in addition to the need for thoughtful and responsible leadership. Citizen advocacy is desperately needed to prevent such disasters from occurring in the future.
CHAPTER TWO

“MAKE MORE NOISE”

Rwanda is small, poor, and globally insignificant . . . Given the fact that there was no political will, either in Washington or other capitals, to intervene, the American strategy is to keep expectations as low as possible. Washington’s thinking . . . [is] the number of forces needed to stop [tribal warfare] would be too high for public opinion to accept. There will be no political cost at home for such an approach.”

Iqbal Riza, deputy to Kofi Annan in the Department of Peacekeeping during the Rwandan genocide, believes that the international community’s slow response to ethnic cleansing in Bosnia was not because the United Nations lacked the capacity to intervene, but rather because the member states did not have sufficient incentive. He explains, “What was lacking was the political will, which was mustered thirty years later when the situation had reached a level where public opinion would not accept it. And that political will was also lacking in Rwanda.” In this statement, Riza suggests direct causation between public opinion and political will. Once public concern for Bosnia reached a certain level, international leaders were forced to act. A lack of political will is the most common explanation of the failure of the international community to intervene in Rwanda. It encompasses multiple factors and names the fact that political leaders did not have enough incentive to intervene. The present chapter examines the role that public opinion plays in determining political will. If Riza’s connection holds true, as I believe it does, and public opinion does contribute to political will, which in turn leads to action, the role of American citizens becomes fundamental.

Calculations of American public opinion exerted a powerful role on both the Clinton administration’s perspective during the Rwandan genocide and the policy decisions it made during the genocide and the refugee crisis that followed. Samantha Power accurately portrays the failure of the United States to intervene in Rwanda as stemming from the silence of the American people as well as the hesitancy of the Clinton administration to seek public criticism or support: “U.S. officials were able to make potent political calculations about what the U.S. public would abide. Officials simultaneously believed the American people would oppose U.S. military intervention in central Africa and feared that the public might support intervention if they realized genocide was underway.”\(^{62}\) The reluctant administration did not make decisions without some degree of consideration of the predicted public reaction. The present chapter analyzes the relationship between the various actors, using descriptions of the political climate and examples of policies that show the role of public opinion. The stark contrast between the inaction of the United States during the genocide and the humanitarian efforts during the refugee crisis following the genocide illustrates the possibility of immediate action following public demand, as well as the inaction that is possible in the absence of public demand.

The multitude of factors that influenced the U.S. government’s decisions during the 1994 Rwandan crisis are far too interrelated to delineate precisely. However, when these decisions are examined from almost any angle, the American public is a constant force. The often-mentioned but little-analyzed domestic pressure on the Clinton administration shaped its decisions, both implicitly through influencing the paradigm through which it viewed the crisis as well as by placing explicit restrictions on its actions.\(^{63}\)

\(^{62}\) Power, 2002, 373.

\(^{63}\) For purposes of simplicity, I refer to the Clinton administration as the primary actor, even though it often reflects the combined efforts of several different governmental agencies, including the State Department, the Pentagon, and the National Security Council.
Domestic pressure can be roughly traced to three main sources: Congress, the media, and the American public. Each of these three actors influences, and is in turn influenced by, the others. Throughout this chapter I will attempt to distinguish as carefully as possible among the roles and the actions of each of the different actors, while realizing that none acted independently of the others. In terms of ability to place domestic pressure on the Clinton administration, Congress has perhaps the most direct role. The media also has a powerful influence on the decisions of the executive branch. However, both Congress and the media draw their strength from the American public: they are powerful in part because they are both representative of public opinion and are seen as having an influence in determining public opinion. This chapter focuses on the public but also includes some analysis of the role of Congress and the media, as a discussion of the public without these components would neglect the importance of these actors.

Everything to Lose and Nothing to Gain?

An understanding of the perspective that the leaders of the Clinton administration brought to the table in the spring of 1994 is crucial to uncovering the reasons for their decisions before, during, and after the genocide. Fear of domestic political backlash led intervention in Rwanda to be viewed as a politically risky move. Evidence illuminating the dominant role of the political atmosphere on the administration’s decisions in turn reveals the importance of the American public.

Somalia Syndrome

As explained in Chapter One, the military intervention in Somalia, symbolized by a naked American soldier being dragged through the streets in Mogadishu and broadcast on
national television, created a political climate in which the American public was questioning the appropriate role of the United States in interfering in distant countries. The events in Somalia had a strong influence on the Clinton administration’s perspective and actions during the genocide. The reason behind this influence revolves around public opinion. The influence of public opinion is revealed in two ways: first, Somalia was labeled a disaster because of public outcry; second, the results of this public outcry are evident in how the Clinton administration reacted to Rwanda.

The aftermath of Somalia affected the way political leaders and the American public viewed future humanitarian efforts. Barnett emphasizes the impact of Somalia: “The events of Mogadishu reverberated around the world and sent Washington into an apoplectic frenzy... it is virtually impossible to exaggerate the impact of Somalia on the U.N.” Although Barnett focuses on the United Nations, at the heart of Somalia’s importance was its impact on the United States, and its consequent impact on the U.N. The very reason for the fact that Somalia was viewed as such a crisis reveals the powerful impact of U.S. public opinion. The American public, perhaps not aware of the possibility of risk to soldiers in what they viewed as a poor, famine-stricken African nation, were outraged at the sight of such violent anti-American sentiment. The Clinton administration’s fearful perspective was an outgrowth of the negative public reaction. Although there most likely would have been negative repercussions without the public reaction (such as the international community’s surprise at the embarrassment of American troops), public outcry was the primary reason the Somalia intervention was viewed as such a disaster. The public showed a very low tolerance for risk, which manifested itself in the government’s belief that humanitarian efforts were not worth the potential gain: “Somalia and other recent embarrassment in Haiti indicated that multilateral initiatives for humanitarian

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64 Barnett, 37.
purposes would likely bring the United States all loss and no gain." McCormick refutes the language of failure in reference to Somalia, estimating that President Bush's decision to intervene saved the lives 500,000 Somalis.

Clinton and his advisers realized that another humanitarian failure would have negative consequences for his approval ratings. Therefore, the almost complete absence of citizens advocating for intervention in Rwanda combined with the possibility that intervention may have negative repercussions on Clinton's political capital tilted the cost-benefit analysis to strongly oppose intervention. The following descriptions of the chain of events is telling: "The international fiasco in Somalia and the deaths of more than fifty professional soldiers so shocked the American people that the Clinton administration had to rethink its foreign politics [emphasis added]." As this statement suggests, the repercussions of this outcry were visible in the manner the administration reacted to Rwanda. This supports the claim that public opinion can shape the policies of the administration. While the Clinton administration certainly had the power to mold public opinion as well as to agree or disagree with it, the point here is that the administration's actions were heavily influenced by public opinion. Boutros-Gali's account speaks of a "direct connection" between Somalia and U.S. policy toward peacekeeping and then links it to Rwanda and the U.S.'s refusal to intervene. The repercussions of Somalia on the Clinton administration's handling of the Rwanda genocide are seen in two ways; first, it contributed to its categorization of the killings as tribal warfare; second, it fostered an intense fear of "risky" peacekeeping operations.

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Government officials and journalists alike seemed to interpret Rwanda in terms of the recent events in Somalia. Des Forges explains, "If Washington officials described the killings as 'chaos,' it was because they saw Rwanda through the prism of Somalia. In this light, Rwanda was another 'failed state,' just one in a series of political disasters on the continent." She also provides examples of journalists using rhetoric that fit within this over simplistic perspective.

It can be inferred, therefore, that the American people reading the papers and listening to the news also fell prey to this false analogy. Other accounts of the reaction of the United States reveal that while the aftermath of Somalia may have contributed to the international community's failure in Rwanda, it is neither the only reason nor is it reason enough to dismiss the failure on the grounds of insufficient knowledge or information. As the American public, our moral obligation to intervene in cases of genocide implies a certain level of effort on our part. In this case, sufficient information about and knowledge of the situation was available to those individuals who fulfilled this duty.

In addition to contributing to an inaccurate perception of Rwanda, the post-Somalia political fallout fostered a fear among the Clinton administration (as well as the U.N.) of future Somalias. Des Forges, Barnett, and Holly Burkhalter each label Somalia as a ghost. This seems a fitting description. The Clinton administration operated with the distinct fear that the disaster would be repeated. Gourevitch elaborates, "After Somalia, it's really clear that the Clinton administration was terrified of body bags." Scholars argue that this fear limited the administration's vision of what was possible, "For much of April, a Clinton administration that

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69 Des Forges, 624.
70 Ibid.
71 Gourevitch, *Frontline* interview.
saw Somalia lurking around every corner never even debated the merits of intervention.

Barnett explains that the United States may have been only willing to express this fear privately. Although perhaps politically prudent, the acknowledgment that foreign policy was dictated by fear of future failures would have seemed selfish, especially in light of the nature of the problems in Rwanda. The United States government did not want to be seen as placing such a high priority on the lives of American soldiers that it had to avoid all possibilities of risk, even in the face of genocide.

As this explanation reveals, the events in Somalia had such a formative role in shaping the response of the Clinton administration that possible solutions were ruled out before they were even fully considered. The perspective of the administration can be largely credited to the public outcry following Mogadishu. If there had not been such a negative reaction among Americans, members of the Clinton administration would most likely not have had such an intense fear of another Somalia. This connection reveals that the public plays an important, but not necessarily positive, role in the executive branch’s attitude toward foreign policy. Public opinion in itself is not enough: it must be both informed of international news and aware of moral obligations, a topic I return to in later chapters.

Congressional Pressure

The dominant beliefs of Congress during the Clinton administration also played a key role in shaping the administration’s perspective. As explained in Chapter One, Clinton was trying to balance the opinions of the anti-U.N. Congress with his desire to support U.N. efforts.

A January 1994 editorial by Senate minority leader Bob Dole represents the perspective of

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73 Barnett, 12.
members of Congress opposed to increased U.S. involvement in the United Nations. He writes, "It is not in America’s interests to let the U.N. define our foreign policy . . . when the U.N. Security Council votes, American taxpayers should grab their wallets." Dole introduced his proposed "Peace Powers Act," which aimed to limit the power of the United Nations through various restrictions. Dole hoped to include Congress in U.N. decisions: "The act should insure that U.S. foreign policy interests, American soldiers and American taxpayers are better protected." Dole’s focus on convincing Americans that their best interests involved less support for intervention reflects the power of public opinion, as well as the type of opposition that Clinton faced.

Barnett labels Clinton’s balancing strategy “tough love,” arguing that at the time both the media and the American public agreed with his reasoning. In fact, Barnett even argues that the Clinton administration deliberately supported positions opposed to intervention in the hopes that putting this “tough love” strategy into action would benefit the administration by increasing domestic support for his foreign policy. He points to the specific instance of the U.S. opposition to both the renewal and the expansion of the UNAMIR mandate, “Now Clinton officials marching up to Capitol Hill would be able to point to a concrete instance of their ability to say no to peacekeeping when certain conditions had not been met . . . Washington had no strategic interests at stake or any powerful domestic constituencies to fear. It could safely make an example of Rwanda.” Melvern makes a similar argument, “The Clinton administration was determined to demonstrate a tough policy to an anti-U.N. Congress to show that the U.N. could be selective.” One does not necessarily need to accept the strong argument that the

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75 Barnett, 33.
76 Ibid., 95.
77 Melvern, 2000, 112.
administration (and Congress) purposefully sacrificed Rwanda for their political gain. The weaker version points to the larger argument important to the present examination of the domestic perspective: action was perceived by the administration as risky while inaction was not because it did not see any tangible losses at stake.

The executive branch looks to the legislative branch to voice the concerns of the people. In this case, Congress gave Rwanda relatively little attention, which made it easier for the administration to avoid taking action. However, if more Congressmen had demanded action, they could have motivated the administration to act rather than resist intervention. Power contrasts the response of the White House to the demands of the U.S. Congress in regards to their policy of sending back Haitian refugees with the massacres in Rwanda that were occurring at the same time. Power follows this criticism with a quotation from representative Alcee Hastings (D-FL) that reflects the reality of domestic politics: “In my constituency, I’m first to admit that the primary focus is on Haiti . . . Africa seems so far away, and there is no vital interest that my constituency sees.”

This example brings the relationship between public support and governmental leadership into play. In order for elected officials to risk political capital advocating for citizens of other countries, there must be some support coming from the constituents. Without constituent support, legislators are inclined to focus their energies elsewhere, thus placing the burden of responsibility solely on the executive branch.

Congressional opinion is a reflection, with one or more degrees of separation, of public opinion. While this linkage is not as direct as the connection between public outcry and the administration’s response after Somalia, it is nonetheless present and relevant to my argument that public opinion played an influential role in U.S. policy decisions during Rwanda.

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Although I have separated the impact of the Somalia case and dominant Congressional opinions for the purpose of this discussion, they are closely connected. Even before October 1993, Republicans in Congress had been critical of Clinton’s foreign policy. Barnett explains that Clinton became an easy target among Republicans who believed that the United Nations relied too heavily on U.S. financial support and had too much power over American soldiers. The embarrassment of U.S. soldiers in Somalia fed the criticism that many individuals in Congress had already begun. Thus, it was the combination of Somalia and anti-U.N. sentiment in Congress that caused the administration to view future humanitarian efforts with caution and even fear. As a result, the Clinton administration had a narrow vision of possible actions it could take in Rwanda.

_Hearing Silence_

Fear of domestic political backlash was only part of the reason for the decisions that the administration made, however. Numerous accounts of the role of the United States in Rwanda cite the absence of American demands for action as a main reason for the eventual decision on the part of the administration not to intervene. The reasons for and role of silence deserves more explanation if the U.S.’s failure to intervene is to be prevented in the future. Although less tangible and admittedly harder to prove, the silence of the American public actually permitted inaction to be seen as a politically safe move. In as much as is possible, I will show that the members of the Clinton administration “heard” silence, and then explain the impact of this silence on their perspective.

Power emphasizes the silence of American citizens, “All possible sources of pressure—U.S. allies, Congress, editorial boards, and the American people—were mute when it mattered

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79 Barnett, 37.
for Rwanda.” She explains that opponents of intervention made more noise than did supporters: “There were few letters or phone calls to the U.S. Mission or to the U.N. or to the White House to urge that something be done, and these few signs of compassion were overwhelmed by the sheer number that urged the administration to resist the intervention temptation.” Burkhalter claims that the combination of general opposition toward peacekeeping and the lack of a domestic constituency advocating for intervention led to Clinton’s policy of inaction during the genocide. The connection she draws between the aftermath of Somalia and the silence of American citizens in determining the approach of the Clinton administration during the genocide is supported by many accounts of U.S. policy decisions.

The absence of expressed support for intervention influenced the decisions of the Clinton administration. In her history of the Rwandan genocide, Des Forges provides specific situations that reveal the impact that the silence of American citizens had on the policy decisions of the Clinton administration. Clinton reportedly asked during a meeting concerning Rwanda if the Congressional Black Caucus had expressed concern for the plight of the Rwandans. Although this group is one step removed from public opinion, it certainly listens for public opinion and is influenced by it, perhaps more directly than President Clinton. Clinton was informed that the Caucus had not voiced concern. This example shows that Clinton’s decision-making process was affected by what the people thought should happen in Rwanda. Des Forges offers another example that is particularly telling. A representative of the Human Rights Watch asked Anthony Lake how they could have a more powerful role in influencing policy. Lake responded, “Make

81 Ibid.
82 Burkhalter, 53.
83 Des Forges, 624.
If public support for Rwandans were obvious, it seems that at the very least officials would not be able to escape action in the manner that they did, by either ignoring or not listening for more information about the nature of the crimes that were being committed. Power makes this connection, “The American public expressed no interest in Rwanda, and the crisis was treated as a cease-fire or as a ‘peacekeeping problem’ requiring a U.N. withdrawal. It was not treated as a genocide demanding instant action.”

As a result of this silence, politicians were able to ignore the problem in Rwanda without negative political repercussions. Scholars explain the Clinton administration’s failure to act in Rwanda as stemming at least in part from the sad reality that there were no votes to be gained through action. Conversely, nor were there any votes to be lost by inaction. As shown by the domestic outcry after Somalia, it seemed that humanitarian intervention was a politically risky move. Silence was an incentive for inaction. Thus, public opinion seemed to dictate that the administration ignore the genocide. As the decisions examined in the next section will show, the administration neither explained the reality of the situation to the public nor sought input regarding what courses of action the public would deem acceptable. Melvern explains, “There was no moral outcry about the genocide and this made it easier for politicians to claim that the hatred in Rwanda was impervious to military intervention and that public opinion was not prepared to pay the price for casualties. And so, like the Jews, the Tutsis were abandoned to their fate.” Des Forges makes a similar observation concerning the important relationship between the tendencies of the administration and the continuance of these policies because of the absence of public demand: “Those at the top had little incentive to go beyond the outcry from the American people, a consideration of overwhelming importance for political leaders who at the

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84 Quoted in Des Forges, 624.
86 Melvern, 2000, 229.
time focused more on domestic than on international issues.”\textsuperscript{87} The argument that leaders took advantage of the silence to continue on the path of least resistance will be expanded in Chapter Three, in which I argue that it is for this reason that public opinion becomes even more important and potentially constructive.

The administration’s fear of a “risky” peacekeeping operation and the silence of American citizens help explain why the Clinton administration approached the genocide with the perspective that it did. These descriptions provide clues for instances when citizen voices would have helped. The following analysis of decisions adds evidence to these assertions, strengthening the argument outlined above.

**Decisions**

The influence of public opinion on the manner in which Clinton handled the Rwandan genocide is revealed in several United States policy decisions that reflect a careful attempt to avoid potential risk while not appearing to ignore completely the plight of the Rwandans. The stances that most fully reveal the importance of American opinion are the Clinton administration’s refusal to label the crisis \textit{genocide} and its use of the Presidential Decision Directive 25.

\textit{Genocide}?

The reluctance of United States’ leaders to use the term \textit{genocide} in describing the events in Rwanda is one of the most frequently cited examples of their indifference to the true situation in Rwanda, as well as their attempt to avoid the legal and moral obligation to act. As a signatory to the Genocide Convention, the United States was legally obliged to take action against the

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{87} Des Forges, 624.
perpetrators in cases of genocide. In addition, the United States publicly vowed never to let the horrors of the Holocaust be repeated. Historian Gerald Prunier links the desire to avoid another “Somalia” to the Clinton’s administration consistent shying from the term genocide. He criticizes its attempt to explain away the Tutsis deaths as acts of genocide rather than genocide: “If one goes by the State Department’s surrealistic reasoning, no intervention should have been made against the Nazi death camps since the German authorities were at the time killing large numbers of non-Jews.”

His criticism adheres to the argument that many scholars share: the U.S. government’s attempt to justify its inaction through the use of precise language that avoided the word genocide until the very end of the crisis can be labeled as one of the most prominent and easily recognizable failures to treat the genocide in the expected moral and legal manner. Tony Marley, Political Military Advisor for the U.S. State Department during the genocide, confirms that the administration knew the events in Rwanda were genocide. James Woods, Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs at the Department of Defense, gives a similar description, claiming that the Pentagon knew it was genocide within ten to fourteen days after the outbreak of killing. Woods expressed his disappointment in the administration’s wavering on the use of the term: “That was a very miserable day for me.”

The government officials’ avoidance of the term reveals their awareness of possible repercussions and the importance of maintaining positive political favor. U.S. leaders were hesitant to label the problem genocide for fear that, if they did, the American public (and international community) would demand action. The administration’s reluctance to admit

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91 Ibid.
genocide reveals a careful balancing of calculations of public opinion. On one hand, the fear of public criticism drove leaders to try to avoid naming the Rwandan conflict genocide. However, on the other hand, leaders knew that they could not continue to avoid the issue if the public found out that the events should be labeled genocide and the leaders were in fact failing to acknowledge the problem. Power explains, “[American officials] also believed, understandably, that it would harm U.S. credibility to name the crime and then do nothing to stop it.”

One particularly condemning example of concern over the appropriate language occurred during an interagency teleconference. Susan Rice, a member of the National Security Council, asked, “If we use the word genocide and are seen as doing nothing, what will be the effect on the November [congressional] election?” Power comments on this statement, using testimonies from Rice’s fellow staff members to show that even though co-workers were surprised to hear this comment spoken aloud, it was not far removed from the silent thoughts of those same individuals. This instance reveals the normally unspoken role of domestic interests in the Clinton administration’s handling of the international crisis. In addition, the evidence of the two-way relationship between elected leaders and their constituents opens up opportunities for possible solutions. Careful observers would have known that genocide was occurring in Rwanda, regardless of whether the administration labeled it as such. Americans could have used this knowledge to question why the administration was avoiding the term genocide. If the American public had already been demanding action on the part of the US government, perhaps Rice would have made a similar comment about the upcoming election that would have encouraged action instead of careful avoidance of the problem.

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Similar calculations are evident in the proceedings during a United Nations meeting on April 30, 1994. The Security Council was debating whether or not the word *genocide* should be used. The Council President Colin Keating wanted a statement before his term ended that very night, and so threatened to open the meeting to the public, a move that would allow the general public to learn of the positions of the respective governments. Des Forges interprets, "Those most opposed to a strong statement did not want that and so were obliged to agree on a statement that included the wording of the Genocide Convention, although it did not use the word genocide." This sequence of events illustrates the careful positioning of the members of the Security Council. Wheeler gives credit to the media and the resultant pressure, "The Security Council's Presidential Statement of April 30 reflected its response to the growing international demand from domestic publics and humanitarian NGO's for action to stop the killings. Media coverage finally galvanized the U.N. into action." This statement appropriately portrays press coverage as the medium by which the various actors were informed and took steps to argue that the United Nations should take action. Wheeler's placement of partial agency on the public opinion of the respective nations again emphasizes the power of public opinion to shape policy decisions.

A similar example is the assertion that the U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher refused to label the killings *genocide* until pressure from both Congress and the media left him with no other choice. Burkhalter's account confirms this causation: "The administration equivocated from May until mid-June, when congressional outrage and a rash of critical articles in the press forced Secretary of State Warren Christopher to finally invoke the term." Des Forges credits this change in policy to a *New York Times* story in early June that referenced a

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95 Des Forges, 638-639.
96 Wheeler, 226.
97 Burkhalter, 47.
State Department directive that discouraged use of the word.\textsuperscript{98} The scales had finally tilted, and public realization of administrative policy forced recognition of the proper name for the horrors in Rwanda.

Each of the above examples position the fear of negative public opinion as the driving force behind the U.S.'s decision to finally acknowledge that genocide had occurred in Rwanda. While actors such as the members of the Security Council and the U.S. Secretary of State at first avoided the term because of its legal and moral implications, they knew that at a certain point they had to use it or the public would be outraged by their careful avoidance. They understand their moral obligation to act, as did the public.

\textit{Presidential Decision Directive 25}

Scholars argue that the United States slowed the peacekeeping process down in early May through its attempt to apply the Presidential Decision Directive 25 (PDD-25), publicly released on May 3, 1994. This statement, developed by Richard Clarke of the National Security Council, listed criteria that should be taken into consideration during U.S. discussions concerning the appropriate level of U.S. participation in foreign intervention. In order for troops to engage in combat (the final stage on a continuum of intervention), the proposed course of action had to further the interests of the U.S., be necessary for the operation's success, have an "acceptable" degree of risk, have an exit strategy, and have domestic and congressional support.\textsuperscript{99} The list of criteria reflects the priority of public support, as congressional and public support is a specific criterion.

\textsuperscript{98} Des Forges, 641.
\textsuperscript{99} Power, 2002, 342.
Wheeler is careful to point out that PDD-25 defines U.S. interests fairly broadly. Rwanda could have fit under “a threat to or breach of international security” within either the category “urgent humanitarian disaster coupled with violence” or “gross violation of human rights coupled with violence.” He explains, “Consequently, the Clinton administration could have defended forcible humanitarian intervention in Rwanda for the first two weeks in April on the grounds that halting genocide was both a moral duty and in national interests.” According to Wheeler’s analysis, although the Clinton administration used PDD-25 to avoid intervention, the actual wording of the document does not dictate this course.

PDD-25 reveals a shaping of U.S. policy around the perception that the American public wanted a more restricted use of American troops abroad. The purpose of the document was to provide a careful set of guidelines that would limit the possibility that the administration would become involved in humanitarian efforts that would have negative repercussions similar to Somalia. The reason for and content of the document shows a deliberate attempt on the part of the administration to cater to public demand. As such, PDD-25 shows the role of public opinion in determining when and how the U.S. military should be deployed. Wheeler, Destexhe, and Des Forges each establish a connection between the public outcry following Mogadishu to the reasons for the crafting of PDD-25. James Woods names PDD-25 as a direct result of the effect of Somalia on peacekeeping. These linkages show that the administration wanted to avoid making the same “mistake” again, and so assembled a checklist of criteria with which to assess whether intervention in a foreign country was necessary. Representative David Obey (D-WI) described the intention behind PDD-25: “Zero degree of involvement and zero degree of

100 Wheeler, 224.
101 Ibid.
102 Wheeler, 224; Destexhe, 10; Des Forges, 163.
103 Woods, Frontline Interview.
risk and zero degree of pain and confusion.”

Boutros-Gali is also critical, noting the narrow nature of U.S. interests: “The new rules were tightly drawn as to scope, mission, duration, resources, and risk so that only the easiest, cheapest, and safest peacekeeping operations could be approved under them.”

The perception that peacekeeping was risky stemmed from the negative public response after Somalia. This led to the establishment of PDD-25, which in turn had a measurable effect on the inaction of the international community. Des Forges blames PDD-25 for the delay in the U.N.’s response to Rwanda: “[The United Nations] discussion about the size, mandate, and strategy for a new peacekeeping force continued until May 17, in part because of US rigidity in applying its new standards for approval of peacekeeping operations.” De Waal and Omaar also blame PDD-25 for delays in troops and money. It can be deduced, then, that the American public did contribute to the failure of the international community during Rwanda.

Possibilities

I emphasize the role of public opinion by contrasting the inaction of the United States government during the genocide with the help it provided to the refugees during the summer refugee crisis. I argue that the differences in the Clinton administration’s outlook and resultant policy decisions can be explained almost entirely by differences in public demand. This study also hints at lessons for the future regarding the importance of access to accurate and timely information and the dangers of depending on emotions dictated by television images.

104 Quoted in Burkhalter, 48-49.
105 Boutros-Gali, 134.
106 Des Forges, 23.
107 De Waal and Omar, 157.
A crucial point to keep in mind throughout the following analysis is that the media derive influence from the combination of the real and perceived power they have to sway public opinion. Although they may seem at times to influence directly the decisions of the government, this is only because the government believes that the people are or will be persuaded by the media’s line of argument. Thus, the media is important because public opinion is important. The truth of this statement is revealed by trying to reverse it—public opinion is important because the media is important. This would not hold true, as media coverage is the means by which the public becomes informed rather than the end goal in itself.

The relatively recent trend toward television news and real-time reporting has changed the role of the media in affecting public opinion and policy decisions. Some scholars claim that a process termed the “CNN effect” can explain peacekeeping efforts during the 1990's. This argument asserts that television coverage of a crisis leads to public criticism of the government’s current policy, which in turn leads to pressure on the government and finally results in the government taking action.\(^{108}\) Peter Jakobsen studied three humanitarian interventions that are frequently cited as evidence of the CNN effect (Iraq in 1991, Somalia in 1992, and Rwanda in the summer 1994) and arrives at a more qualified assessment of the CNN effect. He first limits the CNN effect to being a useful framework only in cases “when Western governments oppose military intervention in conflicts where massive human rights violations occur.”\(^{109}\) He then claims that while the CNN effect was not the cause of the respective interventions, it did play a necessary role in bringing about a change in policy in each case.\(^{110}\) Because it appropriately


\(^{109}\) Jakobsen, 2000, 134.

\(^{110}\) Ibid, 134-135.
gives the media agency but stops short of assigning it complete power to change policy, Jakobsen’s argument sheds light on the calculations behind the policy decisions of foreign governments.

In addition, while many analysts have debated the CNN effect and rightly pointed out the impact of television, it is by no means the only important form of media coverage. This is particularly true in the case of Rwanda, as television stories with pictures were rather limited during the actual genocide. The ramifications of this fact will be shown in the explanation of media coverage during the refugee crisis.

Comparison to the Refugee Crisis

The differences in the media’s portrayal of the genocide and the refugee crisis and the resultant differences in U.S. policy decisions supports the argument that American public opinion played a determining role in the United States’ treatment of Rwanda. RPF forces took over Rwanda’s capital, Kigali, on July 4, 1994. Although refugees were first mentioned in the news in the beginning of May, the true exodus of Rwandans began on July 14. It is estimated that one million people fled to Zaire within a time span of two days.\footnote{Melvern, 2000, 217.} Melvern cites statistics showing a total of two million people left Rwanda, leading to the sad conclusion, “Sixty percent of Rwanda’s population was now either dead or displaced.”\footnote{Ibid., 218.} Prunier provides similar numbers. He places the percentage of displaced Rwandans at fifty percent of the total population.\footnote{Prunier, 312.}

Public opinion is important, but that is not to say it is not subject to mistakes. The delayed response to the problems in Rwanda is an example of one such mistake. I am not
criticizing American efforts in helping the refugees, as the country was in desperate need of assistance. The key issue is the comparison of the quick response to the refugee crisis to the prolonged inaction during the genocide.

Melvern’s analysis of the international response to the refugee crisis is appropriately cynical. It is difficult to accept the sad truth that, on the one hand, the Tutsis went ignored during the months of genocide, while on the other hand, those who perpetrated the crimes and fled the country following the RPF’s victory were helped quickly and efficiently. Admittedly, many Tutsi and moderate Hutu victims as well as innocent Hutus were among those who fled. It seems ironic, though, that the difference in response was so great, particularly in light of the important details of the slaughters—the perpetrators were helped while innocents had been ignored up until this point. Melvern writes, “Amid an uproar of public outrage at the agony in these camps, the American administration decided on a major response costing $300 - 400 million, with up to 4,000 military to reinforce hundreds of US civilians, mostly independent, relief workers, together with a massive airlift.”¹¹⁴ She notes that it took only three days from the time the orders were issued for the military to be in Rwanda. In exasperation, she ends with a criticism of the international reaction, “Dallaire believes that in the case of the refugee camps in Goma, precious resources were wasted in fuelling a charade of political conscience-cleansing by the developed states in deference to the media and their constituents.”¹¹⁵ Melvern uses strong language to frame her argument, calling the refugees “the largest group of fugitive murderers ever assembled.”¹¹⁶ Prunier’s assessment is even more condemning, as he asserts that the exodus was planned and carried out by the same persons that were responsible for the genocide.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Ibid.
¹¹⁶ Ibid., 224.
¹¹⁷ Prunier, 314.
Keeping these realities in mind, the present analysis now turns to an explanation of why the international community responded so quickly and generously to the Rwandan refugees, many of whom had taken part in the genocide.

Media coverage of Rwanda peaked not during the spring massacres that killed upwards of 800,000 people, but rather during the refugee crisis that followed the genocide. Strobel tracked evening television news footage of Rwanda from April to August and reported that the amount of news stories numbered forty-three in April, forty-three in May, twenty-seven in June, sixty-five in July, and thirty-eight in August [emphasis added]. He calls the power of television images “shallow and limited . . . the images from Rwanda have no impact on United States policy until their content changes in July, when hundreds of thousands of helpless refugees fled from for the country’s borders.” He believes that television coverage of ethnic warfare was not sufficient to motivate public action. In reference to the inaction during the genocide and the aid provided during the refugee crisis, Strobel asserts, “Policymakers probably read the public mood correctly.” In short, the public was not concerned with helping the Rwandans during the genocide but was motivated to provide assistance during the resultant refugee crisis. Tony Marley, a State Department official during the genocide, believes that Americans reacted so quickly to the refugee crisis because of the CNN factor: “Once CNN and other media began portraying this disaster in Goma and the public started leaning on Congress, the U.S. government was forced to act.” This statement shows that although the media are the

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118 See Jakobsen; Strobel; Melvern.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
122 Marley, *Frontline* interview.
means by which the government is pressured, it is public opinion that drives this pressure and creates change.

This difference in the world’s response to the two situations is a sad testament for the need for increased compassion and sense of duty among the publics of the countries with the power and resources to act in situations such as genocide. Placing the victims of crises into broad categories is problematic, as it often neglects to consider the uniqueness of the situation. This labeling then affects how the American public responds to the problem. Prunier compares the extent of television coverage during the spring and summer and concludes that the increased availability of television images during the refugee crisis affected “the relative perception of the two events.”

Although his explanation is not as incriminating as Strobel’s, it again raises an important question—do Western publics such as the United States rely too heavily on visual images? It seems that the lack of television images during the genocide inhibited the potential for public demand that would spur governmental action. Dallaire reports that journalists were in Rwanda, as he purposefully helped them in an effort to inform the world of the genocide. Dallaire believes that it was a lack of interest in Rwanda rather than a lack of information that most contributed to the inadequate coverage: “And so the media was getting the story. The stuff was coming out. It wasn’t being published.”

He cites a study of ABC, CBS, and NBC news coverage during the genocide which revealed that the Tonya Harding story received more coverage than Rwanda. This evidence supports the claim that proximity and ability to identify with the victim affect both what is aired as well as the observer’s reaction to it.

Strobel argues that it was the public outcry from the television coverage of the Rwandan refugees that made the difference in the administration’s quick response. He cites a U.S. Defense

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123 Prunier, 274.
124 Dallaire, interview by Ted Koppel.
125 Ibid.
Department official, who spoke in reference to the refugee crisis, “The public awareness of what was going on clearly motivated the U.S. . . . It seemed impossible to stand back and not do anything.” ¹²⁶ Shawn McCormick also links the differences in media coverage with the United State’s quick decision to offer aid to Rwanda, “It was at that stage the Clinton administration, reacting to the intense media coverage of the human catastrophe, decided it was in the national security interest of the United States to help end the suffering of the Rwandan people.”¹²⁷ His use of the term “national security interest” points out the contradiction between U.S. inaction during genocide and U.S. action during the refugee crisis. Neither problem fell within the immediate national security interests of the United States. The administration used this type of language to justify the disparities between its approaches to the respective problems. The greater extent of media coverage, coupled with increased public attention, were two important variables in the Clinton administration’s decision to help the Rwandan refugees.

The importance of the media cannot be overestimated. However, the reason for its importance is its effect on the American public. It is both a stimulus and a gauge of public opinion. The widespread belief that United States leaders intervened during the refugee crisis because of public demand and television coverage supports the main conclusion of this chapter—calculations of American public opinion play a powerful role in the decisions of the Clinton administration. The reaction to the refugee crisis shows what may have happened if the American people had made more noise during the genocide in April and May.

¹²⁶ Strobel, 143.
¹²⁷ McCormick, 164.
Conclusion

One scholar summarizes well the intent of this chapter in emphasizing the important role of the American people, “Until Americans are informed and involved in demanding that their governments become engaged more fully, earlier, and more vigorously . . . the ‘next Rwanda’ will likely be handled much the same. Judging from our government’s inaction, you would never know that a textbook case of genocide had been perpetrated in central Africa. This might also be said judging from the silence of the American people.”

Admittedly, public opinion is only one of several components of an ideal solution. It is, however, a vital one that frequently goes overlooked in the midst of criticism of the failure at the level of national governments and international organizations. As the above analysis reveals, the voice of the American people permeates the perspectives and decisions of the administration, even when that voice is represented as silence. American citizens must realize and take advantage of their power to create political will, thereby influencing the decisions of U.S. leaders. Rather than serving as an impediment, the media can play a positive and influential role in this process as well.

128 Burkhalter, 54.
CHAPTER THREE
“SILLY HUMANITARIAN ISSUES”

How could the most powerful leaders in the world remain complacent while upwards of 800,000 innocent Rwandans were slaughtered by their fellow citizens? Destexhe believes that the spirit of “optimistic determination” in which the United Nations was founded has faded and “pragmatism” has taken over.\textsuperscript{129} He names the world’s inaction as a consequence of this change. Upon reading about the genocide, I was initially hesitant to place blame on individual leaders such as President Clinton. It is unfathomable that world leaders could have known about the genocide, had the means necessary to stop it, and still neglected to act. Yet this is precisely what occurred. My initial reservations remain, however. I concede that individuals such as Clinton and the members of his administration are to some extent blameworthy, but I also maintain that the problem runs much deeper than the faults of individual leaders. To be sure, Rwanda is not the first time genocide has been ignored by international powers. In her study of the role of the United States during the genocides in Cambodia, Iraq, Bosnia, Rwanda, and Kosovo, Power writes, “One of the most important conclusions I have reached, therefore, is that the U.S. record is not one of failure. It is one of success. Troubling though it is to acknowledge, U.S. officials worked the system and it worked.”\textsuperscript{130} How exactly does this system function, and what can American citizens do to improve it in the future? How have U.S. leaders repeatedly avoided confronting genocide, despite the U.S.’s status as a world leader and signatory to the Genocide

\textsuperscript{129} Destexhe, 1995, 3.
\textsuperscript{130} Power, 2002, 508.
Convention? My analysis takes the tendency of U.S. leaders to work within a narrow understanding of self and national interests into account and offers a solution that can help overcome the problems created by this tendency.

The list of what the United States did not do is long. The U.S. government failed to heed warning signs in the early spring of 1994, refused to classify the killings as genocide, withdrew U.N. forces instead of sending additional support, and neglected to take intermediate actions, such as providing armored personnel carriers for the Ghanaian U.N. forces or jamming the radio lines used to spread anti-Tutsi propaganda. There are a multitude of possible explanations for each of these decisions. Yet they all share a common characteristic: the prioritization of practical concerns at the expense of principled considerations. By practical concerns I refer to the logistical factors that influenced decisions, such as financial constraints, limited resources, and the influence of public opinion.\textsuperscript{131} Principled considerations refer to the normative realm—what U.S. leaders should have done for moral reasons without regard to empirical concerns. In examining this phenomenon and studying the pressures that contributed to it, I hope to show that the failures of individual leaders and the laws that govern the international community cannot adequately explain the inaction of the United States. Because neither of these variables is fully responsible for U.S. decisions, the best solution must lie at least partially outside these realms. Replacing the individuals in power or reforming the laws will most likely help but will certainly not ensure future success against genocide. Citizens and their failure to act or voice disapproval played an important role as well. I use an analysis of the pressures on U.S. leaders to show why American citizens may be the best agent for change.

If a solution does not rest entirely the leaders, where else can one be found? Was it the international legal system that prevented the international community from responding? Quite

\textsuperscript{131} Of course, practical concerns always reflect implicit values about what is important and what can be overlooked.
the opposite, as the laws set in place by the Genocide Convention helped the case of advocates for intervention and posed a barrier to opponents. As a signatory to the Genocide Convention, the United States had a legal obligation to act in cases of genocide. The U.S. refusal to label the killings \textit{genocide} seemed an attempt to avoid being legally bound to act. Boutros-Gali claims, “Albright and everyone else knew perfectly well that the mission was to stop the genocide then in progress. Although it was a clear case of genocide, U.S. spokesmen were obviously under instructions to avoid the term in order to avoid having to fulfill their treaty obligations under the 1949 Genocide Convention.”\textsuperscript{132} He blames Albright for “just following orders.”\textsuperscript{133} By this, he refers to the orders of the administration, which dictated a different course of action than would the “orders” of the Convention. The very standards put in place to ensure that genocide did not go ignored in the future failed to work as they were intended. This demonstrates the value of political will. Without the motivation to uphold these standards, leaders were able to avoid their duties to Rwanda specifically and to humanity generally.

I will begin by explaining what exactly I mean by the gap between practical concerns and principled considerations. I then examine the factors that contributed to this gap, arguing that the dual pressures of the priorities of U.S. leaders and the nature of the bureaucratic process by which decisions were made led politicians to commit ethical failures. For example, bureaucracy tends to create an impersonal atmosphere and to allow individuals to hide or escape responsibility for the decisions they make. After studying these two pressures in the broad context of the genocide, I turn to specific examples that further demonstrate the seeming callousness of U.S. leaders. The armored personnel carrier (APC) incident and the refusal to jam radio broadcasts exemplify the misguided choices made by U.S. officials. I will use these

\textsuperscript{132} Boutros-Gali, 135-136.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid, 136.
examples to support my primary claim: an increased effort on the part of the citizens is the most promising solution to prevent genocide in the future. Finally, I will describe this solution on a broader level, explaining why it circumvents many of the barriers faced by politicians when we depend entirely on them to guide U.S. decisions. In doing so, my aim is not to assign or erase blame, but instead to map out how and why the United States failed so that the conclusion can serve as a set of lessons for the future.

Practical Concerns versus Principled Considerations

As addressed in the previous chapter, United States leaders were acutely aware of the risks that intervention might entail. Decision-makers were so attuned to seemingly rational calculations that they lost sight of the important moral issues at stake. Today, their actions are widely considered unethical. I will begin this section with testimonies of several individuals in positions of leadership at the time. These statements help illuminate the dichotomy that developed between the practical and the principled forms of action. Analyses of the decisions made before, during, and immediately following the genocide reveal that it was the practical course of action that won. In addition, as several scholars point out, not only did the practical course of action become the line of action the U.S. administration took, but it also was twisted in a manner that made it seem principled at the time. Identifying the source of the ethical failure is the primary goal of this section. A secondary goal of this section is to question the assumption that changing the individual leaders in power or international laws would prevent this gap from occurring in the future.

Barnett’s describes, “States allowed an almighty realpolitik to smother their faint humanitarianism—a depressingly familiar story that reinforces the time-worn view that cold-
hearted strategic calculations always trump noble ideals.”¹³⁴ Two possible explanations arise: either political leaders did not internalize the relevant moral considerations that accompanied their decisions, or they were aware of the implications but nonetheless chose to place them at a lower priority than practical considerations. Some combination of both phenomena is perhaps the most accurate description. Yet, this does not explain exactly why the breakdown occurred. Why did practical considerations dictate decisions? More importantly, what dynamic existed that allowed practical considerations to appear principled?

Power points to this occurrence, “It is striking that most officials involved in shaping U.S. policy were able to define the decision not to stop genocide as ethical and moral.”¹³⁵ Not only could officials defend their actions as adhering to practical constraints, but these practical considerations also played such an overwhelming role that they seemed ethically justified. Power explains that this is evidenced in several ways: first, officials exaggerated the risks of intervention; second, they cited a purported goal of refraining from action in order to preserve the future of peacekeeping; third, they wasted time; fourth, “The almost willful delusion that what was happening in Rwanda did not amount to genocide created a nurturing ethical framework for inaction.”¹³⁶ Power’s analysis underlines the role of volitional forces in the decision-making process. While these mistakes could be labeled as partially cognitive, the volitional aspect played a crucial role in inhibiting judgment. It was the volitional aspect that led to the cognitive mistake as well. In this case, the reluctance of leaders to commit the resources that would enable intervention contributed to their belief that their decisions were ethically justified. If this explanation is accurate, there was more than a breakdown between empirical and normative concerns; the empirical and normative were actually reversed in an attempt to

¹³⁴ Barnett, 4.
justify U.S. policy decisions. In other words, the failures were a combination of volitional and cognitive mistakes: the interests of the leaders prevented them from comprehending the relevant moral issues. This possibility strengthens my claim that the ethical failure resulted from the neglect of legitimate moral considerations.

But was it the fault of individual leaders? Many critics of U.S. policy decisions place both blame and future agency on the most prominent leaders. One frustrated U.S. official recorded his thoughts in his journal, “We have a foreign policy based on our amoral economic interests run by amateurs who want to stand for something—hence the agony—but ultimately don’t want to exercise leadership that has a cost.”\textsuperscript{137} Wheeler’s analysis concurs with this assessment. He admits that President Clinton “would have encountered resistance at home from Congress and public opinion, but the President surely has a moral responsibility to lead public opinion and enlarge their moral imagination.”\textsuperscript{138} Wheeler assumes that President Clinton has sufficient moral imagination to enlarge that of others. This could be a faulty assumption—perhaps citizens have the moral imagination and the agency to enlarge the vision of their leaders rather than the other way around.

The cost of action, from the perspective of the leader, may have been too great. Political leaders are, by nature of their position, somewhat bound to the concerns of their constituents. Ideally, President Clinton should have exercised principled leadership by responding to the genocide quickly, with a willingness to devote both U.S. troops and other resources to help Rwandans. However, as explained in Chapter Two, the public was not demanding this action. Silence on the part of the public leaves the leader with two options. He can choose the course of action that he believes the public will support or the course of action that the public would most

\textsuperscript{137} Quoted in Power, 2002, 385.  
\textsuperscript{138} Wheeler, 239.
likely disapprove (even if he believes it is the morally right course). During the genocide, enough evidence existed to lead Clinton to believe the public was opposed to intervention.

Should he have been expected to lead morally and take action regardless? Placing the burden of responsibility on our elected leaders to gauge public opinion and chose a course of action does not include a sufficient amount of public voice. As the attempts to prevent a repeat of the Holocaust have shown, it may be that leaders alone cannot be relied on to solve the problems. I hope to show why we may want to place more hope in the agency of the people.

The Role of United States' Leaders Priorities on Policy Decisions

When faced with a foreign crisis, U.S. national leaders, from the President to Congressmen, inevitably have a very different set of priorities than does the typical American citizen. National leaders have a greater role responsibility and personal investment in such decisions. President Clinton is my primary example throughout this analysis, as his role can be examined in the most direct manner. The President answers to American citizens as voters in the Electoral College and Clinton was still in his first term at the time of the genocide, which means his personal investment was particularly high. His decisions could influence his re-election chances. A leader's role responsibility and personal investment in the decision-making process are often dependent on each other. National interests of the country and the self-interests of the President will often align closely but do not always mesh. Narrowly defined, neither includes the well-being of the citizens of a distant African nation. The silence of American citizens, as explained in the preceding chapter, permitted President Clinton and U.S. government officials to safely assume that they would be seen as meeting the perceived priorities of American citizens and their own interests without giving much consideration to the genocide in Rwanda. This
section will examine the outcome of the two main sources of concern for politicians: their responsibility to make policy decisions in the best interests of their constituents and their personal investment in their success as individual politicians. Both concerns affect their decision-making, which, in the case of Rwanda, led to misguided goals and ethical failures.

The President of the United States is committed to actions that further the perceived national interests of the country. This creates a specific set of priorities and constraints. President Clinton’s administration worked within a narrow understanding of U.S. national interests, however, when making decisions concerning Rwanda. While similar problems in a more powerful or more threatening nation would be considered matters of national concern, Rwanda’s problems were not. The President and others saw explicitly humanitarian causes as located outside U.S. national interests. When faced with risk (such as a repetition of the “Black Hawk” incident in Somalia or criticism from Congress), the administration’s preference was to avoid involvement. James Woods was told by a superior at the Defense Department’s African Affairs Bureau, “Look, if something happens in Rwanda-Burundi, we don’t care. Take it off the list. U.S. national interest is not involved and we can’t put all these silly humanitarian issues on lists... Just make it go away.”139 This blunt directive reveals the manner in which national priorities dictated action that favored pragmatism over “silly humanitarian issues.” Working for national interests can be a principled act, but not to the extent to which this was carried during the genocide. Genocide anywhere, regardless of the country’s relationship to the United States, should not be considered a “silly humanitarian issue.”140 The paradigm of national interests influenced the way in which officials responded to information about the conflict in Rwanda. Power explains, “Ethnic bloodshed” in Africa was thought to be regrettable but not particularly

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139 Woods, Frontline interview.
140 I return to this claim in Chapter Four.
unusual. U.S. officials spoke analytically of ‘national interests’ or even ‘humanitarian consequences’ without appearing gripped by the human stakes.”

Rwanda had the unfortunate position of falling outside U.S. national interests and being viewed as a concern that was in opposition to the interests of American citizens. Leaders believed that helping Rwandans would work against the immediate needs of their constituents. As Wheeler observes, “The appalling failure of Western states to end the killings in Rwanda demonstrates that, even in the case where there is good reason to think that the use of force would have been successful with only limited casualties, state leaders resolved the agonizing moral conflict between their duties to strangers and citizens in favor of the latter.” He describes the two tensions as opposing forces: answering one duty would not work against the other. This assumes an incompatibility of interests, however. Citizens feeling they have a duty to help and voicing this belief could have shifted the problem in favor of intervention, thereby reducing or even completely eliminating the “agonizing moral conflict” that Wheeler describes.

The personal investment of political leaders in policy decisions arises from the desire to maintain or strengthen political capital as well as the wish to further the success of the institute or organization. Little political capital could be gained, it seemed, from intervention in Rwanda; in fact, if Somalia taught the administration anything, it was that acting to save Africans could lose, not gain, political capital. Barnett explains, “Therefore, while in principle the United States favored the Rwandan operation, in practice it objected to any proposal that might give Congress yet another opportunity to scrutinize Clinton’s foreign policy.” Although maintaining a positive public image for the purposes of re-election is perhaps the most obvious reason why politicians have a high personal investment, it is by no means the only factor. In Clinton’s case,

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142 Wheeler, 300.
143 Barnett, 71.
other considerations included strengthening his relationship with Congress and responding to those questioning his foreign policy skills so that he could achieve his other goals. A similar analysis could be made of members of Congress and even appointed staff members such as U.N. Ambassador Madeline Albright and Secretary of State Warren Christopher. The disconnect between the self-interests of the leaders and the interests of Rwandans led to an ethical failure on the part of the leaders. Note the significant overlap between role responsibility to work within national interests and the personal investment at stake. In the case of Rwanda, both contributed to policies of inaction during the genocide. If, through citizen commitment, the self-interests of leaders and interests of Rwandans are more aligned, there is a greater chance the leader will offer assistance to the Rwandans.

A common criticism of President Clinton's treatment of Rwanda is that he should have exercised moral leadership. Such leadership in this case would have entailed disregarding narrow self-interests to gain public favor and perhaps even the responsibility to make decisions that are of immediately benefit to American citizens. Critics believe that presidential leadership demands the commitment to look beyond narrow interests and act in cases where greater principles are at stake. My analysis reflects somewhat more sympathy for President Clinton and those working for the U.S. government. After mapping out the situational forces that play a role in policy decisions, it seems no wonder that the Clinton administration remained silent on the matter. As explained above, working within the interests of the administration was seen as the only available choice. Priorities were distorted by the limited perspective of leaders bound by the interests of followers and personal investment in the decisions. This pressure led to decisions that favored pragmatic actions over principled concerns (or failed to uphold the most
important principles), and left diplomats wondering how they had arrived at the result that they did.

The Role of the Bureaucratic Process on Policy Decisions

The priorities of the leaders in the Clinton administration became further distorted during the decision-making process. Decisions that at the time were considered rational appear, in hindsight, to have been irrational and unethical. The drawbacks of the bureaucratic process become apparent, particularly in the context of similar situations in history. As pointed out in the statements above, Clinton, Albright, and other policy makers became entangled in a web of day-to-day decisions and lost sight of important, overarching ethical considerations.

Glover explains the forces that made the Holocaust possible, “Sometimes the political inadequacy seems to have come, not from anti-Semitism, but from the human response being shriveled by bureaucracy.”\(^{144}\) Here, Glover places more emphasis on the process than on motivational forces, in this case, anti-Semitism. Bystander behavior during the Holocaust suggests how the practical considerations of bureaucracies can lead to a reduced importance of ethical considerations. One of the many lessons the Holocaust offers is that this process can have disastrous human consequences. In the case of Rwanda, it was not anti-Semitism but rather a simple lack of concern for Rwandans.

Barnett’s study of the role of the United Nations in Rwanda carefully explores how an organization and its members are affected by the limits imposed by a bureaucratic structure and its processes. Those working for the United Nations were dedicated to preventing genocide, but they still failed to intervene while Tutsis were being slaughtered. Barnett explains the

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difficulties that arise when institutions such as the U.N. are entrusted, “We instinctively believe that genocide and crimes against humanity trump all other moral claims and obligations. . . . But before we accept this moral fundamentalism, we must recognize that the U.N., like all institutions, assumes at any single moment a multitude of responsibilities and obligations.”¹⁴⁵ This explanation characterizes the conflict that arises between the principled and the practical (or between principles and other principles) and the problems that can arise when members of institutions are the only individuals making important decisions. The limitations and complexities of bureaucracy make these distinctions even more difficult to make. As Barnett explains, bureaucracies provide a system for handling information and also tend to shape how decisions are made. He summarizes the effects of institutional pressure, “Well-meaning individuals made regrettable choices, owing to a U.N. culture that restricted their field of vision and a crisis environment that made it doubly difficult for them to imagine alternative ways of seeing, knowing, and acting.”¹⁴⁶ He cites the concerns of Max Weber and Hannah Arendt regarding bureaucracies. Weber warned against allowing yourself to be dictated by rules, while Arendt argued, “Bureaucratic institutions can dehumanize individuals.”¹⁴⁷ This analysis points to the inherent nature of bureaucracy that contributed to the failure of the United Nations to intervene in Rwanda. Barnett concludes his book with a nuanced assignment of blame that takes the forces of institutions into account but does not absolve individuals of responsibility.

Many of Barnett’s points regarding the problem of institutional culture in the U.N. can be extended to the United States and used to support of the claim that American citizens are in an advantageous position to overcome these limitations. Barnett provides a wish for the future, “The hope is that the institutionalization of ethics does not lead to individuals to substitute

¹⁴⁵ Barnett, 6.
¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 118.
¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 8.
bureaucratically laced moralities for private moralities.”\textsuperscript{148} Fostering concern among American citizens for citizens of other countries offers a way to achieve this goal. In order not to rely completely on political leaders to resist the pressures of institutional culture, engaged and concerned citizens could provide a system of checks and balances that our foreign policy seems to need desperately.

The testimonies of Susan Rice and David Rawson, both of whom were intimately involved with U.S. policy decisions during the genocide, point to a phenomenon of moral gradualism. Poor decisions were made, one after another, but it was not until the final cumulative effect of these decisions could be seen that their full impact was realized. The phrase, “Death by a thousand cuts” is a fitting description of this process. Members of the government such as Rice and Rawson now regret making these choices, and they provide articulate explanations that reveal they were unaware of the problem created by each concession until it was too late. Rice, who worked for the peacekeeping department at the National Security Council, explains, “There was such a huge disconnect between the logic of each decision we took along the way during the genocide and the moral consequences of the decisions taken collectively. I swore to myself that if I ever faced a similar crisis again, I would come down on the sides of dramatic action, going down in flames if that was required.”\textsuperscript{149} Rawson, the U.S. ambassador in Kigali, speaks of a similar realization, “One of the things I learned and should have already known is that once you launch a process, it takes on its own momentum. I had said, ‘Let’s try this, and if that doesn’t work, we can back away.’ But bureaucracies don’t allow that. Once the Washington side buys into a process, it gets pursued, almost blindly.”\textsuperscript{150} These statements point to the pressure that the very nature of the process exerts on the individuals.

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid, 181.
\textsuperscript{149} Quoted Power, 2001, 27.
\textsuperscript{150} Quoted in Power, 2002, 346.
making decisions. Personal and institutional investment in each decision build as the process moves along, leading individuals to believe mistakenly that their set of choices is very limited. They get locked into choices that they would not make if not facing these pressures. Rice and Rawson express a commitment to act differently next time. These vows point to an inherent flaw. Good decision-making should not depend on each individual resisting bureaucratic pressures. Citizens are a step removed from the process, as they are not involved in every small decision along the way. This degree of separation makes citizens less prone to the problem of moral gradualism. Citizens can positively shape the system by working as an external source of influence, thereby forcing the individuals within the bureaucracy to make decisions that will be morally acceptable to those more removed from the decision-making process.

**Pressures in Practice: The Influence of U.S. Priorities and Institutional Pressure**

Two specific failures by the American leadership most clearly illustrate the flawed decision-making process inherent in the political bureaucracy: first, the decision to refuse to provide technical resources that would have enabled the jamming of radio lines inside Rwanda, and later, the reluctance to provide armored personnel carriers (APCs) to Ghanaian soldiers in a timely manner. Both seemed small decisions of practicality at the time, but each had large and terrible consequences.

**Radio Jamming**

During the genocide, local radio was extremely important, as it was one of the main sources of information. A major station, Radio-Television Libre Milles Collines (RTLM), broadcast hate propaganda that directed Hutus to murder their Tutsi neighbors. Announcers
would go so far as to air the exact location of hiding Tutsis, directing listeners to find and kill them. Power explains that that United States could have taken action to stop the radio broadcasts by destroying the antenna, playing counter-broadcasts that urged Rwandans to stop the genocide, or jamming the radio lines.¹⁵¹

Jamie Metzl provides a detailed and insightful analysis of the role of RTLM radio broadcasts in the Rwandan genocide and the failure of international actors to prohibit these broadcasts through the use of radio jamming technology. Metzl’s assertion that U.S. and U.N. officials had prior knowledge of the role of the radio in assisting the perpetrators of genocide is confirmed by historic accounts of the genocide as well as government records that show discussion about whether or not the U.S. should jam the lines. General Dallaire estimated that a timely jamming of the radio would have saved many lives.¹⁵² The recent conviction of RTLM news media executives by an international court underlines the importance of the radio broadcasts. The prosecutor in the international court explains, “The media was every bit as important as the weapons of war.”¹⁵³ A witness also highlighted the damage done by the radio, “What RTLM did was almost to pour petrol, to spread petrol throughout the country little by little, so that one day it would be able to set fire to the whole country.”¹⁵⁴ While jamming the radio would have involved monetary expenses as well as potential risk to the soldiers who would be required to keep the lines restricted, it did not require the resources or the level of risk involved in a full intervention. Rather, it is an example of a “middle ground” type of action that

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.
would have been effective but not overly demanding on the United States. In short, it was the least the U.S. could have done.

While Metzl focuses on how international law can be revised to better enable intervention in the form of radio jamming in the future, he acknowledges that logistical and political reasons against involvement were the primary forces driving the United States’ reluctance to intervene. He cites governmental officials and human rights advocates as supporting this explanation. In fact, international law in this case was used as an excuse to shield the Western powers’ actual concerns. It was by no means an insurmountable barrier had U.S. officials been determined to halt the propaganda being spread by the radio in Rwanda. The United States could have jammed the radio stations while remaining in compliance with international law, if they either classified Rwanda as an enemy state (not recognizing the Hutu regime), or if the Security Council had approved a Chapter VII response to a “threat to international peace and security”.

The United States’ refusal to use its radio jamming technology stands out as one of the most prominent examples of the misguided judgments the U.S. officials made during the genocide. Taking action would not have been overly demanding on U.S. resources. Melvern argues that radio jamming was one of the least risky (because is was not overly expensive and did not place many soldiers at risk) forms of action the United States could have taken. Power’s analysis illustrates the volitional role of leaders’ interests in the formation of the government’s priorities, “Pentagon planners understood that stopping the genocide required a military solution. Neither they nor the White House wanted any part in a military solution. Yet instead of undertaking other forms of intervention that might at least have saved some lives, they

155 Metzl, 635.
156 Ibid.
157 Ibid, 635.
justified inaction by arguing that a military solution was required.” Burkhalter blames the inaction on a lack of political will and the influence of the bureaucratic process: “It appears that neither the State Department nor the NSC pursued [radio jamming] seriously, and that the Pentagon discouraged serious inquiry by making it sound as if it were a technical impossibility. In any event, the Clinton administration . . . failed to take the one action that, in retrospect, might have done the most to save Rwandan lives.”

These accounts reveal the common pressures that contribute to this particular ethical failure. First, it seems officials approached the decision-making process with the wrong goals in mind. Leaders were more concerned with maintaining a pre-determined course of inaction than considering alternative methods of intervention such as radio jamming. At the very least, officials valued monetary costs and political risks at a much higher priority than the halting of genocide. Second, small decisions (or acts of indecision) made along the way added up as “a thousand cuts” to a horrific outcome. The cumulative effect of each decision to avoid radio jamming, particularly when placed in the context of the U.S. refusal to engage in other methods of intervention, resulted in an ethical failure that now haunts Rice, Rawson, and most certainly dozens of others involved in the decision making.

*The APC Incident*

The failure of the United States to provide the armored personal carriers needed to transport Ghanaian soldiers around Rwanda stands out as one of the most obvious examples of logistical and political concerns taking priority over the needs of the suffering Rwandans. After stalling on the part of the United States, the General Assembly finally approved UNAMIR II on May 17. By that point, member states were well aware that the events in Rwanda constituted

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160 Burkhalter, 51.
genocide; the Secretary-General had started describing it as such in mid-May. The member
states could no longer use ignorance of the true nature of the conflict as an excuse. Because of
the widespread killings and the devastation that had already occurred, the speed at which
UNAMIR II could be carried out was of utmost importance for the success of the mission.
Ghana provided 800 soldiers for the initial troops, but requested that they be provided with
armored personnel carriers, a resource that Barnett terms a “military necessity.”

On May 19, the U.N. sent out a request for APCs. It was not until the last few days of May that the U.S.
responded by saying they had 50 APCs in Germany. Haggling between the U.S. and the U.N.
over whether the U.N. would lease or purchase the equipment, insurance policies, and the cost of
the transport wasted precious time. The APCs were in Uganda and fully equipped by late June,
but the U.N. did not have trucks large enough to transport them to Rwanda. In the end, the first
of the APCs only began arriving in Rwanda in early August, by which time more than 800,000
Rwandans had been killed. This logistical stall was one of the primary reasons that UNAMIR II
completely failed to carry out its mission.

Analysts cite the APC incident as one of the most poignant examples of the U.S.’s failure
to realize the immense human suffering allowed to continue by its insistence on following
procedure. Wheeler targets Western states in general and the United States specifically through
his assertion that providing the APCs was the least the U.S. could do, as it and the other Western
powers had failed to provide troops or sufficient funds. Burkhalter calls this incident symbolic
of U.S. policy during the genocide. She offers the testimony of a Defense Department official,
who admitted that a high-level official with the resolve to speed the process along could have
successfully done so, but “at no time did any senior figure in the Clinton White House or State

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161 Barnett, 143.
162 Wheeler, 229.
163 Burkhalter, 51.
Department focus on the larger issue: the effect that foot-dragging and red tape were having on
the ability of the United Nations respond to the genocide.”\textsuperscript{164} Thus, the U.S.’s failure to provide
APCs in a timely manner reflects the distorted perspective of those individuals working in the
administration and insisting on working out details before taking action.\textsuperscript{165} Barnett’s account of
the APC incident arrives at a similar conclusion: “The image of Pentagon bureaucrats holding
endless meetings with their U.N. counterparts while the genocide was raging appeared
stunningly callous to nearly all. But the United States insisted that there were bureaucratic
procedures to follow . . .”\textsuperscript{166} Barnett argues the President Clinton was the single individual who
could have sped up the process. His placement of blame directly on President Clinton is helpful
to the present analysis, as it reflects the sad irony that while the President may be in the best
position to act outside of the rules, he may be the least able to have the perspective that would
deem doing so a necessity. Power criticizes the Pentagon, claiming that Vice President Gore
committed the APCs and it was Pentagon officials that stalled their delivery.\textsuperscript{167} While each
scholar divides the responsibility for the U.S. inaction slightly differently, each emphasizes the
absence of ethical considerations during arguments over details that are trivial in comparison to
the human cost.

The APC incident is a perfect example of the gap that appears when pragmatic concerns
take priority and decisions are made in a manner that is viewed later as devoid of ethical
principles. Officials lost sight of the most important goal at hand and were overly concerned
with insignificant bureaucratic procedures. Because citizens are not involved with bureaucratic

\textsuperscript{164} Quoted in Burkhalter, 51.
\textsuperscript{165} The United States’ quick response to the refugee crisis in the summer, as explained in Chapter Two, is an
example of what is possible if citizens vocalize concern.
\textsuperscript{166} Barnett, 143.
\textsuperscript{167} Power, 2002, 379.
processes such as securing the details for the APC’s, they are better able to see and vocalize the relevant moral dimension.

Barnett’s conclusion seems fitting, as it points to a clear explanation for ethical failures, “Why individuals use a different moral yardstick once they are inside an organization is a matter of much empirical debate . . . Perhaps Western culture has been governed by rules and legalities to the point that rules and legalities become a substitute for private morality.”\textsuperscript{168} I hope to turn next to a solution to this problem: citizens may be able to avoid the pressures that create “a different moral yardstick” and therefore can help ensure that in the future U.S. leaders are reminded of the most relevant ethical considerations. Practical concerns, which undoubtedly play an important role, can take the form of challenges to be confronted rather than used as excuses for inaction.

How can a bureaucracy designed to avoid risk be changed to respond to larger ethical concerns? I believe that answer must come from outside the bureaucracy—–in this case, from the American citizens who elect our leadership.

\textbf{The Advantages of Citizen Advocacy}

Power points to my proposed solution in her statement, “In a democracy even an administration disinclined to act can be pressured into doing so. The pressure can come from the outside or the inside.”\textsuperscript{169} Sadly, Rwanda is a case study in how even well-intentioned individuals (assuming we give them all the benefit of the doubt) inside the administration can fail to act. The repeated failure of those on the inside calls for pressure from the outside.

\textsuperscript{168} Barnett, 175.
\textsuperscript{169} Power, 2002, 508.
Citizens are in a better position to set principled goals for humanitarian interventions because they are less influenced by motivational forces that favor a policy of avoidance. They are also able to avoid some of the cognitive mistakes associated with these tendencies. Lieutenant General Wesley Clark supports this claim, “The Pentagon is always going to be the last to want to intervene. It is up to the civilians to tell us they want to do something and we’ll figure out how to do it.”\textsuperscript{170} Hesitancy on the part of leaders is a result of the pressures that stem from role responsibility and bureaucracy. General Dallaire also emphasizes the importance of setting principled goals, “An operation should begin with the objective and then consider how best to achieve it with minimal risk. Instead, our objective began with an evaluation of risk and if there was no risk, the objective was forgotten. You can’t begin by asking if there is a risk. If there is no risk, they could have sent the Boy Scouts, not soldiers.”\textsuperscript{171} Citizens typically have less personal investment in the outcome and so have a higher tolerance for risk. Simply stated, citizens have less to lose. In Rwanda, the Clinton’s administration’s fear of loss was a powerful force driving many of its decisions.

In addition, citizens who make the effort to educate themselves are in a better position than political leaders to make an objective analysis of each policy decision as the process unfolds. The example of the Holocaust helps explain this point. In his study of the Holocaust, Glover argues that bystanders to genocide have a strong moral obligation to help, but he admits that this action becomes more difficult when discussing specific ethical dilemmas faced by leaders. He advises, “A code of ethics for officials should include having the imagination to look through the rules to human reality.”\textsuperscript{172} This is the same argument made by critics of Clinton’s decisions. Could it be possible that officials in positions of formal leadership cannot fully “look

\textsuperscript{170} Quoted in Power, 2002, 373.
\textsuperscript{171} Quoted in Melvern, 2000, 130.
\textsuperscript{172} Glover, 392-393.
through the rules” in the manner Glover advocates? The events in Rwanda demonstrate members of bureaucracies can lose sight of important goals and become lost in day-to-day decisions. As “outsiders” to the bureaucracy, citizens have an advantageous perspective. Because they are less aware of the logistical details and pragmatic concerns attached to policy decisions, they can question decisions that seem unethical, even in cases when the problems may go unnoticed by leaders.

Let us briefly consider the hypothetical scenarios of the reactions of citizens in the case of the radio jamming and APCs policy debates, so that we can better envision exactly how the advantages of citizens would play out. An American aware of the genocide in Rwanda reads an editorial that criticizes the U.S. government for failing to consider any intermediate steps short of military intervention. The author of the editorial mentions radio jamming as an example of a mode of intervention that did not involve troops. Because the reader does not have the all or nothing perspective that dominated the Clinton administration, he questions why the government has not considered this form of action. The use of radio to spread propaganda encouraging the genocide stands out as particularly gruesome and worthy of being stopped through any possible means. The reader can recognize the larger goal of lessening the killings and can then think critically about U.S. policy decisions. In the case of the APC incident, an individual informed of the delay in delivery of these vehicles to Rwanda would almost certainly be shocked. He probably would have the foresight to realize that haggling over prices and delivery is not an acceptable excuse in the face of the many deaths that occurred for each day that the delivery was stalled. The advantageous perspective of citizens does not guarantee that it will translate into action on behalf of the victims of genocide. Recognizing the relevant ethical considerations is
one step in the right direction, however, and citizens have a unique capacity to make these judgments without being overly influenced by other, less important factors.

**Vision for the Future**

I acknowledge that the standards and actual behaviors of personal leadership and the system of international law could stand to benefit from improvement. However, as the above analysis demonstrates, citizen advocacy is one level of change that can have a powerful impact. Citizens have an advantageous perspective that can help ensure that moral principles are not substituted aside or overridden by narrow national interests.

Taking this argument a step farther, citizen advocacy has the potential to do more than simply counteract the motivations that drive politicians. It can change the direction of these motivations. Citizens voicing concern for Rwandans could have enabled politicians to see intervention as both within national interests and favorable for their individual political capital. This would have provided motivation to counter forces that led to inaction.

Robert Johansen argues that “national interests” are often vaguely defined and interpreted in a misguided manner. He questions the common assumption that national interests are exclusive of international interests. Citizens in today’s world are affected by many variables that are outside of the narrow interests of a particular nation-state. Johansen criticizes politicians for overemphasizing short-term interests such as public support at home and neglecting long-term interests of the nation in the process.¹⁷³ He calls on powerful political leaders to support these efforts by changing their focus to reflect international priorities instead of narrow domestic interests. His strategy, if carried out, would certainly improve the international community’s

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response to crises. However, I believe the example of Rwanda proves that it would not be
enough. Political leaders are unlikely to change the system alone; the support and
encouragement of their constituencies are much needed. Johansen accurately explains the
seeming disparity between values and action, as defined in a narrow sense of humanitarian
intervention: “One might conclude that an articulation of global interests would say: ‘Stop mass
starvation, war, and ethnic cleansing;’ however, an articulation of national interests seems to say:
‘Don’t ask me or my fellow citizens to feed the hungry, disarm the violent, or stand between the
rapist and the victim. No, I can’t pay any more to avert the continuation of such misdeeds.’”174
My solution aligns public support in a manner that places more value by the U.S. government on
the interests of citizens in countries such as Rwanda, thereby avoiding or at least reducing the
dichotomy between values and action. Politicians would no longer have to make the choice
between the two forces, as acting in cases of genocide could help and would certainly not harm
their short-term interests while building a stable global community.

The United States needs a method of setting and achieving goals that keeps relevant
principled concerns a top priority in cases of genocide. The U.S. could be more effective in
preventing genocide if the ultimate aim of the politicians was not of acting in the narrow self-
interests of the people but, rather, responding to the demands of citizens who show concern for
members of other countries.

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174 Johansen, 286.
CHAPTER FOUR

“NOBODY SHOULD FEEL HE HAS A CLEAR CONSCIENCE”

The existing literature on the role of the United States in Rwanda assumes moral obligation but tends to not go into specifics. Assertions often take the form, “The United States has a duty to intervene in cases of genocide.” From where does this duty come? Why is the United States the primary actor? Who, specifically, is implied by the term United States? Most accounts fail to incorporate the question of the responsibility of American citizens and of human beings. In addition, scholars are often much more focused on showing why intervention was justified than assessing whether or not it was required. Genocide is a serious crime because it is a violation of the most basic human right, the right to life. It is viewed as a threat not just to the victims but to all of humanity. As such, the question of the moral obligation of American citizens deserves further exploration. The goal of this chapter is to arrive at an answer to this question, explaining and offering support for each of the above claims.

After opening with a summary of the legal obligations of the United States to genocide victims, I will turn to the issue of the respective role-based responsibilities of the U.S. government and individual American citizens. In reference to Rwanda, Kofi Annan remarked, “Nobody should feel he has a clear conscience in this business. If the pictures of tens of thousands of human bodies rotting and gnawed on by dogs... do not wake us up out of our apathy, I don’t know what will.”

Annan uses business to refer to the leaders of the international community. I hope to challenge this placement of responsibility. At the very least,  

175 Melvern, 2000, 235.
it should not be taken as an assumption that the responsibility to intervene in genocide is solely that of national political leaders in the international community. Can American citizens fail to act and maintain a clear conscience? An affirmative answer to this question could take one of two forms. The first would conclude that genocide victims do not fall within the responsibility of the international community. The second affirmative response would conclude that some actor within the international community has an obligation to help but that it is not the duty of American citizens to provide this assistance. I refute both affirmative answers and appeal to social contract theory to show that the duties of the United States government are just a recognition of the duties of American citizens. Finally, I turn to the primary argument of the chapter: American citizens have a moral obligation to help victims of genocide. Support for this claim comes from both deontological and consequentialist philosophies.

The present chapter is primarily prescriptive in nature. The best approach to the study of moral obligations, however, is one not limited to prescriptive arguments. To that end, this chapter builds on the arguments developed in the previous chapters. The role of American citizens in the U.S. policy of inaction and the possibility that citizens have a valuable perspective strengthens the conclusion that Americans have a moral obligation.

Legal Obligations to Genocide Victims

Statements of legal obligations are useful to the present analysis but are not sufficient in themselves to answer the question of the scope of the moral duty of American citizens to victims of genocide. They are helpful because arguments pertaining to legal obligations are often grounded upon assertions of moral obligation. The U.S. government's decision to ratify the Genocide Convention was the expression of a legal obligation supported by moral claims. As
discussed in Chapter One, the legal obligation to assist victims of genocide comes specifically from the status of the United States as a signatory to the Genocide Convention. The Convention itself is based on moral claims. Law represents a means by which to uphold moral standards: in this case, to ensure that genocide is not carried out without intervention by the international community.

The international community failed to uphold this legal duty, however, in the spring of 1994. Heizne describes the tendency of the international community to act in some cases, even less severe ones, and not in others, “The use of force may acquire legality under the Charter framework, but the Security Council has a history of failing to authorize the use of force when it could have averted atrocities (Rwanda), while authorizing force in non-humanitarian endeavors (first Gulf War, Afghanistan).”176 He questions the effectiveness of the United Nations Charter, arguing that Security Council decisions reflect the interests of the permanent member states. As Allen Buchanan notes, “There is an unacceptable gap between what international law allows and what morality requires.”177 These observations reveal the failure of the international community to act in a manner required by morality. This gap points to the need to establish a moral duty that can support the legal duty, helping to ensure that the international community in the future acts in a manner that fulfills both.

The discussion would be inadequate if it remained only in the realm of legal obligations, as it does not give sufficient attention to citizens, and it does not provide adequate motivation for states (or citizens) to act against perpetrators of genocide. The discussion can now move to who has this moral duty, and what its content is.

176 Heizne, 89.
177 Quoted in Heizne, 90.
Connection between Duties of the U.S. Government and Duties of U.S. Citizens

U.S. leaders took most of the blame for the country’s inaction during the Rwandan genocide. In this process of assigning blame, the connection between the duties of the U.S. government and American citizens is often forgotten or not made explicit. Certainly, there are strong arguments in favor of the separation of role responsibility between political leaders and “common” citizens. One could establish an argument that separated the role responsibility but gave both political leaders and citizens an obligation to help victims of genocide. However, when the roles are separated in this manner, the political leaders are the actors more closely associated with the obligations of the United States, while the duties of citizens are not as carefully scrutinized. What I am arguing against is not necessarily the separation of role responsibility, but rather the placement of complete responsibility on leaders without consideration of the role of citizens. My goal here is to establish the moral duty of American citizens to help others in situations as dire as that of the Tutsis in the spring of 1994.

Barnett’s “empathetic reconstruction” focuses on those in formal positions of responsibility, such as representatives to the Security Council. I find a critique of his placement of responsibility useful to introducing my own position, as he is very careful and deliberate with his placement of responsibility. Highlighting the differences helps introduce my own position. Barnett employs the analogy of a police officer, comparing the role of a police officer to that of an average citizen. He argues that a person’s respective level of responsibility differs in accordance with his official position, not just his capacity to help. This supports Barnett’s rather conservative assignment of blame, as he only feels comfortable making a moral judgment if the individual was in a position of direct responsibility during the genocide.  

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178 Barnett, 4.
179 I noted some of the differences between his focus and mine in Chapter One.
Barnett explains, “Yet our notions of responsibility rest not only on causation but also on the duties that actors are expected to perform . . . Responsibility, in short, is assigned to actors who are expected to perform specific tasks because of the role they occupy. Only a select few, and not all, will be forever associated with the genocide.”

This statement contains two important elements: the notion of causation and role expectations. As he indicates, role responsibility is connected to causation. Certainly, those individual who influence the outcome of the event in question are seen as more responsible, since their actions are directly linked. I agree with this explanation of responsibility, but disagree with the actors whom Barnett considers causally linked. As shown in Chapters Two and Three, the actions (or inactions) of Americans citizens did indeed have a causal role on U.S. policy decisions, which in turn contributed to the world’s failure to respond to the genocide. Barnett’s second condition for assigning responsibility is role expectations. American citizens are expected to take an active role in the American democratic system. Although many fail to do this, that may be the result of inaccurate ideas of role expectations rather than a correct placement of responsibility. I contend that many more than a “select few” should be associated as responsible for the genocide. Because of its nature, genocide involves even onlookers without formal role responsibility—everyone who is able is obliged to assist. Therefore, while an individual’s formal role impacts his responsibility, responsibility should not be limited to those in positions of formal leadership. As members of a democracy, American citizens do have a role in U.S. policy decisions.

While on one level Power’s *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* is a criticism of the U.S. government’s policy decisions, she widens the responsibility: “We have all been bystanders to genocide.” As Power indicates, the American citizens have been

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180 Barnett, 169.
bystanders to genocide. The responsibility of the U.S. government is simply a recognition of the collective duties of individual citizens. Social contract theory supports this claim.

Social contract theory is based on the view that the United States government as an institution represents the moral duties shared by all Americans: According to John Locke, the people entrust the government with responsibility, and the government is dependent on acting with the consent of the people. Locke defines political society as a compact between the individuals that make up the community. The power of political leaders is a derivative of the collective power of the citizens who elected those leaders. In other words, the obligations of the government are the obligations of the citizens. The role of the government is to carry out these obligations. This does not mean, however, that the government should be left to carry out these responsibilities without the involvement of the citizens. Citizens must remain engaged so that they can provide a voice to show the government how to act, even in questions of foreign policy. Although modern globalization complicates social contract theory, the same basic principles hold true. International law becomes domestic law once it is signed by the United States. Therefore, when the United States ratified the Genocide Convention, American citizens also gave their consent, albeit implicitly, to be bound by the constraints of this international treaty.

Placing the full burden of moral obligation on the U.S. government is problematic for another reason. Asserting that the United States has a moral duty without showing the basis for this assertion—the collective duties of the people—places too much agency on the government. It assumes duties are dictated by the state. Assigning the state responsibility absent from participation on the part of the citizens increases the likelihood that the United States will fail to

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carry out these duties. In addition, unless citizens demand otherwise, leaders tend to assume narrow national interests. In this sense, politicians take actions that are of explicit and obvious benefit to their constituents. However, American citizens, as citizens of the world, may feel a broader moral obligation.

In the following sections, explanation of the moral duty of American citizens tied to explanation of the appropriate moral duty of the United States as a government. This is primarily because, as shown above, the obligations of the government are synonymous with the obligations of citizens, and also because there is some question as to whether the responsibilities of the United States as a nation is even the correct category with which to analyze our moral obligations to one another as members of the human race.

The Moral Duty of American Citizens:

*The Nature of Genocide and Why it Carries Moral Duties*

The crime in question, genocide, is such an atrocious crime that there is little debate over its placement as the greatest violation of human rights and the resultant moral and legal obligation that comes with it. The nature of the crime narrows the range of acceptable explanations of responsibility. A description of the nature of genocide and why it is considered such a terrible crime sets the stage to introduce moral theories that support the claim that American citizens have a duty to help.

The Genocide Convention and related international law use precise and narrow definitions of genocide purposefully, so as to keep the classification to the specific crime and not put undo burden on the nation state. The International Commission of Intervention and State
Sovereignty 2002 report states that nations have a “responsibility to protect.” 183 This means the international community has both the right and responsibility to intervene in cases of large-scale loss of life or large-scale ethnic cleansing. Although there is an appropriate and necessary role for national political interests in the current political system of sovereign nation-states, there is also a limit to the appropriate sphere of these interests. Genocide is an egregious violation of the most basic of human rights. The special classification of this crime reflects an important moral classification. This moral classification is based on the limited definition of genocide and the threat that stems from this definition.

Alain Destexhe’s argument for why genocide deserves special classification echoes the defense that Ralph Lemkin offered during his efforts toward the passage of the Genocide Convention, “It is the first and greatest of the crimes against humanity because of its scale and the intent behind it: the destruction of a group. It is, therefore, a crime that obliges the international community to respond: The elimination of any group that is representative of the human race must affect the whole human race.” 184 Lemkin’s explanation makes several different claims here, all of which help clarify why genocide carries such a distinct moral obligation. First, note its description as the “first and greatest of the crimes against humanity.” Its placement in this position helps explain why the arguments of different philosophical backgrounds come to the same conclusion: it is a crime against all of humanity. The combination of the scale and the intent behind genocide are what make it the most severe crime against humanity. The intent is to exterminate members of a group because of their position as members of that group. The scale is such that the whole group is targeted, again, because of their designation as members of that

183 Singer, 2002, 126.
184 Destexhe, 4.
group. In the case of Rwanda, perpetrators extended their list of targets to those who had some Tutsi heritage, or were Hutu but were seen as connected with Tutsis.

Description still does not answer the question of why this is the most serious of the crimes against humanity, however. The reasoning most often used in defense of this placement is the common fear that stems from another individual being threatened solely because he is a member of a particular group. This reasoning can be somewhat difficult to pinpoint. Martin Niemöller famously commented, “First they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the communists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a communist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak out for me.”

This syndrome places genocide in a special category. Destexhe appropriately recognizes the human cost is so high that it affects every member of the human race. Although he gives primary agency to the states that signed the Genocide Convention, he calls the failure to uphold these standards a “huge moral setback for the whole human race.” Note the connection between the Genocide Convention, a legal document, and the placement of genocide as a moral setback. In addition, perhaps the most important component of Destexhe’s condemnation is his inclusion of every member of the human race in the failure to act in Rwanda. This connects the severity of the crime to the responsibility of individuals to prevent it. It is this connection that I hope to explore later in the chapter, through applying both deontological and consequentialist arguments to the question of whether American citizens have a duty to intervene in cases of genocide.

There is some disagreement over which of the events of the twentieth properly fit under the classification genocide. Destexhe argues that there have been only three genocides in the

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185 Glover, 381-382.
186 Destexhe, 16.
twentieth century: the murder of the Armenians by the Turks in the Ottoman Empire, the Nazi Holocaust, and Rwanda. He makes an important distinction, “The specific meaning [of genocide] has been watered down, taken out of context, and trivialized. . . . there is a difference between a civilian killed in an air raid or from cholera in a refugee camp and one deliberately chosen for death on the grounds of being born a Jew or a Tutsi.”

Power would disagree with Destexhe’s argument that the events in Cambodia and Yugoslavia were not genocide. She would agree, however, the genocide is such a horrific crime that it deserves a special, very specific classification. Melvern also criticizes overuse of the term: “We have lost the meaning of the word, and yet no more heinous crime exists. Nothing is graver in the criminal sense than a deliberate state policy to exterminate a people on the basis of their ethnic identity. Under international law the crime of genocide is considered the most serious crime against humanity. Genocide is at the apex of international human law.”

Melvern views genocide as such a serious crime that she voices the need to limit the classification. Despite these important disagreements, even under the most restricted applications of the classification of genocide, Rwanda is included. Along with the murder of the Armenians in 1916-1917 and the Jews in the 1930s and 1940s, the killings in Rwanda were genocide by all scholarly definitions.

The extreme nature of genocide calls for a specific classification of the corresponding moral duty. Nicholas Wheeler’s principle of “solidarism,” if extended from the focus on the government to the level of citizens, offers a valuable principle on which a theory of moral duty can be properly based. It places a careful limit on justified partiality: “Humanitarian intervention is a moral duty in cases of what I call ‘supreme humanitarian emergencies.’” Wheeler is mistaken, however, in his placement of who has the duty. He explains, “The challenge for

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187 Ibid.
188 Melvern, 1997, 333.
189 Wheeler, 13.
politicians, NGOs, media, and concerned citizens committed to human rights is to ensure that
governments do not evade this responsibility and are always held accountable for their actions in
dealing with regimes that egregiously violate human rights.” While this explanation of
responsibility correctly points out that citizens play a role in making sure governments carry
through with this duty, it fails in its labeling of the responsibility on the government. The act of
humanitarian intervention falls on the government, but the motivation for and determination of
this action is properly placed on citizens. As explained in the discussion of social contract
theory, the government is simply an expression of this responsibility. Wheeler describes the
state as a structure that frames the agency of a particular individual. It may frame it, but it
should not reduce or detract from this agency. Failing to recognize this agency can lead to
serious failures of the system to uphold ethical standards, as the genocide in Rwanda
demonstrates. Appeals to both deontological and consequentalist arguments support this limited
placement of moral duty in “supreme humanitarian emergencies.” While these respective
philosophies may support an interpretation of more expansive moral duty, my focus here is on
the specific and limited humanitarian emergency of genocide.

Limitations of Appeals to Compassion and Enlightened Self-interest

Expressions of the need to help genocide victims often focus on appeals to compassion or
enlightened self-interest. The respective appeals have a firm basis and seem commonsensical.
The appeal to compassion utilizes our emotions to inspire a certain feeling toward victims of
genocide. The argument for enlightened self-interest has several kinds of support. The most
frequent assertion is that allowing perpetrators of genocide to carry out these acts anywhere is
dangerous, as it could be a possible threat to the interests as the members of the United States.
The genocide in Rwanda provided a test of these two claims, and both failed to generate action on behalf of the Tutsis. I explain their respective failures to demonstrate the benefits of an appeal to moral duty, which I will expand upon in the following section. Grounding the moral obligation on the moral duty to act in cases of genocide avoids some of the problems inherent in an appeal to compassion or argument for enlightened self-interest.

That said, the important task at hand is inspiring citizens to act in cases of genocide for whatever moral reasons will move them to action. Therefore, regardless of the motivation, if the action is directed to that end, it is a worthy goal. Thus, while I intentionally point out some of the flaws in the arguments for compassion and enlightened self-interest, I also acknowledge the praiseworthy attempt to reach the same goals as those I put forth in this paper. They are beneficial in so far as they successfully require this moral obligation. I appeal to a moral duty because I believe that the obligation is sufficiently strong to accord the proper moral obligation to act in the case of genocide.

The argument for compassion appeals to emotions of kindness and sympathy to elicit feelings of obligation. Television images and newspaper pictures often appeal to compassion. Kofi Annan, as cited earlier in this chapter, referenced pictures of suffering Rwandans and expressed frustration that if these types of images did not inspire action then he was not sure what could. This is exactly the problem, however. Such pictures do not guarantee recognition of the obligation to assist the victims. Depending on compassion for others to motivate action is insufficient, as emotions of compassion are dependant on the position of the actor relative to the person in need. Martha Nussbaum explains the role of compassion, “Thus compassion serves a psychological link between our own self-interest and the reality of another person’s good or
ill.”\textsuperscript{191} While she believes compassion provides the best source of motivation to act, she uses the genocide as an example of the limits of compassion, “When genocide was afoot in Rwanda, our own sense of self-sufficiency and invulnerability stopped us from imagining the Rwandans as people who might be with us; we were therefore culpably inactive toward them.”\textsuperscript{192} She expresses disappointment in the American response, “The genocide in Rwanda didn’t even work up enough emotion to prompt humanitarian intervention.”\textsuperscript{193} The very fact that the genocide failed to provoke an emotional response reveals the limits of compassion. The genocide in Rwanda was a horrible tragedy, and still American citizens were not motivated to the point of taking action. While American citizens should show more sympathy toward victims of genocide, it seems that feelings of compassion are too bounded by personal position to appeal to it as the primary source of support for why U.S. citizens have a moral obligation. Perhaps as Americans begin to recognize and accept their duty to victims of genocide we will be more influenced by compassion. Nussbaum writes, “Things that occasion a strong emotion in us are things that correspond to what we have invested with importance in our account to ourselves that is worth pursuing in life.”\textsuperscript{194} Compassion may serve to complement the understanding of moral duty, but it should not be argued for in the absence of the argument for moral duty.

Scholars argue the assisting Rwandans during the genocide would have fallen within the enlightened self-interest of the United States, as it would help reduce long-term dangers and strengthen international security. Des Forges, McCormick, and Burkhalter each explain that the

\textsuperscript{191} Nussbaum, 2002, xi.
\textsuperscript{192} Ibid., xii.
\textsuperscript{193} Nussbaum, 2003, 13.
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., 16.
killers were watching the reactions of the international community closely. The inaction of
the international community encouraged the perpetrators to continue with the genocide.

The remoteness of Rwanda makes intervention difficult to support from the point of view of enlightened self-interest, however. Although nations did not feel sufficiently motivated to act during the genocide, some strong arguments support the assertion that early intervention would have been in the best interest of the international community. The sequence of events in Rwanda reveals that this argument may not work in all cases. Leaders have competing interests. The enlightened self-interest of securing the safety of Tutsis threatened by extermination did not have a direct tie to economic or political interests and therefore could be ignored at no harm to the leader. In fact, leaders may have been risking more by responding to the genocide, as explained in Chapters Two and Three, because of adverse public opinion concerning peacekeeping missions at the time. As Power points out, the system works: perhaps it was that international leaders did not comprehend future problems, but it is more likely that they did understand, and what they understood was that perpetrators of the genocide were not a threat. Those who planned the genocide had a specific goal—eliminate the Tutsis and moderate Hutus—and they were willing to do what it took. This goal was internal, and it did not seem that the perpetrators would move beyond the borders of the state. Therefore, it would be difficult to use the argument for enlightened self-interest to prove the responsibility of the United States to intervene.

Deontological and Consequentialist Foundations

The assertion that American citizens have a moral obligation to help victims of genocide can be supported by both deontological and consequentialist arguments. While the respective

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195 Des Forges, 595; McCormick, 164; Burkhalter, 45.
196 See Chapter One for additional support and explanation.
moral frameworks approach the question from different angles, they arrive at the same conclusion: in the extreme situation of genocide, the duty to act in cases of moral obligation may be logistically difficult and require the sacrifice of lesser interests, but it is nonetheless important and still required. Neither the failure of others to act nor the location of Rwanda as a tiny country on the other side of the world counts as an excuse or decreases the extent of their moral obligation. Both deontological and consequentialist frameworks exert a fairly strict duty to act, which could certainly be extended beyond action in times of genocide. For the purposes of the present discussion, however, I only aim to outline duties as they relate to the obligation of American citizens to the victims of genocide.

John Rawls’s argument, deeply indebted to Kantianism, provides a helpful deontological argument in support of the moral duty of American citizens to assist victims of genocide. Although my placement of responsibility is more focused on the followers than is Rawls’s, his arguments support the assertion that American citizens have a duty to assist victims of genocide.

In *The Law of Peoples*, Rawls extends his ideas of justice as fairness to the realm of international law and politics. Through the use of images of a realistic utopia, Rawls provides a clear answer to the question of the appropriate blameworthiness of the United States for the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. His portrayal of the Law of Peoples as a *realistic utopia* provides a helpful structure for searching for a better world while acknowledging the realities that restrict these efforts. Rawls states that a realistic justice can be achieved through the law, and that a utopian justice is guided by ideals of a “reasonable and just society.”¹⁹⁷ This blend of realism and idealism strengthens his theory and increases its application to the present study.

Rawls maintains the domestic realm as the basis from which theories of justice grow.

¹⁹⁷ Rawls, 14.
He accepts Immanuel Kant's idea, "We are to begin with the social contract idea of the liberal political conception of a constitutionally democratic regime and then extend it by introducing a second original position at the second level, so to speak, in which representatives of liberal peoples make an agreement with other liberal peoples." This idea stems from the assumption that a world government would fail, and thus the global level cannot be the starting point for developing ideas of justice as fairness. His placement of domestic politics as the basic level seems an appropriate decision given the current division of the world into distinct nation-states and mirrors the approach I employ here.

Rawls offers eight principles of the Law of Peoples that he developed from historical events and the tenets of international law. The one most relevant to the present analysis states, "Peoples have a duty to assist other peoples living under unfavorable conditions that prevent their having a just or decent political and social regime." Rawls labels states holding these unfavorable conditions as "burdened states." He furthers specifies that this duty to assistance only applies in so far as the burdened states are aided in the transition to a society that enables the establishment of either liberal peoples or decent peoples. In addition, he limits his use of human rights to apply only to "a special class of urgent rights," which includes "the security of ethnic groups from mass murder and genocide." Rawls believes that both liberal peoples and decent hierarchical peoples will support his use of human rights. The genocide in Rwanda falls under the "special class of urgent rights." The existence of human rights violations reveals that Rwanda did not have a "just or decent political or social regime," and thus would be classified as a burdened state. Therefore, other nations (liberal peoples and decent hierarchical peoples) would have a duty to assist Rwanda.

198 Ibid., 10.
199 Ibid., 37.
200 Ibid., 79.
Rawls concludes with the prediction that the duty to intervene is one of the principles most likely to be violated. He cites the unfamiliarity and distance of foreign societies as the primary explanation for why liberal peoples fail to recognize and act against human rights violations, "A statesman may find it difficult to convince public opinion in his or her own people of the enormous importance to them of enabling other societies to establish at least decent political and social institutions."\textsuperscript{201} In making this statement, Rawls is clear in his assertion that it is the responsibility of the leader to at least try to uphold the principles of the Laws of Peoples, while convincing his followers that they should do likewise. The leader has the role of trying to convince the people of why the moral obligation is important, but the burden of responsibility is inclusive of all the members of the society. Rawls's prediction has proven true, as demonstrated by the failure to intervene in Rwanda. This reveals that the duty is not necessarily easy to adhere to: there are barriers, such as the difficulty of identifying with and feeling compassion for others, as Rawls points out. These barriers, however, do not weaken the demand of the duty.

Consequentialist theories arrive at moral judgments based on the outcome of the action in question. Utilitarianism, a type of consequentialist theory, judges the outcome by utility, or which action will result in the greatest good for the greatest number. Utilitarian philosopher Peter Singer's arguments provide an interesting comparison to Rawls's. Although Singer uses a different basis of judgment, he arrives at the same conclusion—American citizens have a duty to assist genocide victims.

Singer's arguments can be applied to the world's current system of nation-states, but, unlike Rawls, he calls for a "redefinition of state sovereignty."\textsuperscript{202} Singer challenges Rawls's model, stating that it resembles an "international order" instead of Singer's preferred model, a

\textsuperscript{201} Ibid., 126.
\textsuperscript{202} Singer, 2002, 5.
“global order.” Singer explains, “From a moral point of view, the development of the world into a ‘global village’ has made an important, though still unrecognized, difference to our moral situation.” The implication most relevant to the present study is that Americans can no longer use their geographical location as a justification for ignorance or inaction. Singer recognizes the current system of nation-states, with leaders whose role responsibility is to care first and foremost about their citizens. He then questions the limits of this justified partiality, “Is the division of the world’s people into sovereign nations a dominant and unalterable fact of life? Here our thinking has been affected by the horrors of Bosnia, Rwanda, and Kosovo. In Rwanda, a United Nations inquiry took the view that 2,500 military personnel, given the proper training and mandate, could have saved 800,000 lives.” Singer explains that while leaders are justified in some degree of prioritization of national interests, there is a limit to this prioritization. Rwanda is an example that exceeds this limit.

Singer argues, “The U.N. should, within the limits of its capacities, authorize intervention to stop crimes against humanity, where it can reasonably expect to do so without doing greater harm than it prevents. This suggests not only a right to intervene, but in appropriate circumstances, a duty to intervene.” Singer believes the U.N. should be the primary actor in order to prevent conflicts of interest among the countries. Although directed at the United Nations, this utilitarian claim provides a useful framework to begin the analysis of the moral duty of American citizens. This line of argument is similar to that of Rawls in that it asserts that intervention in the case of genocide is both justified and required. The apparent difference between Singer’s assignment of responsibility and my focus on the United States is easily

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203 Ibid., 9.
204 Singer, 1972, 232.
206 Ibid., 144.
resolved. The United States had an active role in determining U.N. decisions during the genocide. As a member state, the United States is part of the United Nations. In much the same way that American citizens make up the basis of the U.S. government, member states are the body of the U.N. Therefore, partial responsibility for the actions of the U.N. falls on the U.S., which in turn falls back on American citizens. That stated, the discussion can turn back to the task of assessing the duty of American citizens.

Judging the obligation of the United States to act during genocide through Singer’s utilitarian stance involves weighing the costs and benefits of intervention with the costs and benefits of inaction. In the case of Rwanda, even if the interests of Americans are given much higher concern than those of Rwandans, a utilitarian argument would conclude that intervening in Rwanda would have produced greater overall utility than that consequences of inaction. Therefore, one would conclude that intervention was justified and required.

Singer would say, and I would agree, that citizens have responsibility to care for other citizens in the world. Although his focus in One World is the United Nations, Singer certainly does not neglect to emphasize the importance of individual responsibility in other works. In his article entitled “Famine, Affluence, and Morality,” Singer uses the 1971 East Bengal Famine, which generated an enormous refugee problem, to show the duties of citizens of advanced nations. He places blame on citizens as well as governments, as famines can be stopped but the Bengalis were not helped, or at least not before nine million were displaced. Singer’s treatment of the world as a “global village” disregards arguments that individuals are only capable of helping individuals within their society. He makes an important claim, “If it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without sacrificing anything of comparable moral
importance, we ought, morally to do it.” He recognizes that this is a very demanding theory of obligation, and so loosens of comparable moral importance to morally significant. He notes, “This principle makes no distinction between cases in which I am the only person who could possibly do anything and in cases in which I am just one among millions in the same position.” Singer admits that this aspect has an effect psychologically on feelings of guilt, but argues that it should not affect the moral principle. Therefore, even though millions of American citizens did not act during the Rwandan genocide, each individual citizen is just as morally responsible as he would be if he were the only person in the position to offer assistance.

Singer does not consider acting within the bounds of national interests to be a reasonable excuse. His belief in the equality of human beings and method of weighing moral importance reveals that he would not accept nation states avoiding responsibility based on the claim that their national interests were of a greater importance than those of Rwandan citizens, especially because of the great utility produced at the low cost. Americans can be more concerned with national interests, just as a mother can be more concerned with her daughter, and be morally justified in following these interests. However, in cases of genocide, the pressing duty is to help victims, which can override narrow national interests. In this case, the greater utility would be served by helping Rwandans. Goodin argues that special duties to certain people derive from basic duties for everyone—just divided responsibility—so these can be overridden if a pressing basic duty comes up. He cites Rwanda as an example: “If duties we owe families, friends, and fellow citizens derive their moral force from the duties we owe to human beings in general, ‘then they are susceptible to being overridden (at least at the margins, or in exceptional circumstances) by those more general considerations.’” A very strong case can be made that humanitarian

207 Singer, 1972, 231.
208 Ibid., 232.
catastrophes such as the Rwandan genocide are just these sorts of 'exceptional circumstances.'

Like Rawls, Singer admits that it is difficult to convince individuals to accept responsibility for members of other countries. He explains the effect that an individual's location in a society has on his understanding of morality: "Moral attitudes are shaped by the needs of a society, and no doubt society needs people who will observe the rules that make social existence tolerable. From the point of view of a particular society, it is essential to prevent violations of norms against killing, stealing, and so on. It is quite inessential, however, to help people outside one's own society." Singer labels this explanation, rather than justification. Morality demands that we act in a manner that will at least meet minimal requirements such as assuring that members of other countries are not purposefully slaughtered. Other scholars point out similar difficulties of convincing Americans to accept this placement of moral obligation, which comes at least partially from the advantaged position of Americans. Barnett asserts that the United States was hesitant to pass the Genocide Convention, "Genocide prevention was a low priority in the United States, and international law offered few rewards to the most powerful nation on earth." Power supports this claim in her statement that the treaty took so long to be ratified because it did not "promote pleasure or profit for Americans." Power cites U.S. officials who are critical of the narrow vision of cost-benefit analysis as it is applied to human rights, arguing that it reflects an overly high prioritization of U.S. interests and the false assumption that the loss of human life in a country such as Rwanda does not affect the United States.

210 Singer, 1972, 237.
211 Barnett, 69.
States. Establishing a moral duty to intervene in the case of genocide does not require that U.S. citizens view a Rwandan life as equal to that of an American, but simply that helping victims of genocide is more important than some other concerns.

Singer’s utilitarian argument, although based on a different premise than Rawls’s, arrives at a similar moral obligation. Like Rawls, he emphasizes that moral obligations are what individuals should do, even if the action is outside what individuals are normally inclined to do. He recognizes that living a moral life may include choices that are difficult and impose on the interests of individuals (or collective political entities, such as nation states). Distance from an individual in need does not lessen their obligation. Although they were thousands of miles from Rwanda, American citizens had a moral obligation to help. The form of assistance that they can offer is quite different than that of leaders such as President Clinton or Madeline Albright, but they share in the duty to assist nonetheless.

The Specific Duties of the United States as the World’s Superpower

The United States, including its government and citizens, is even more obliged morally than are other nations because of its tremendous power and post-Holocaust pledge to the prevention of genocide. Gourevitch speaks to the power of the United States: “One should always remember that in the United Nations Security Council, the United States is essentially the 800-pound gorilla that sits where it wants and can bend others at its will. It’s the great power.” Destexhe echoes this sentiment and offers the implications, “As the lone superpower today, the United States cannot escape the accompanying moral and political obligations to deal

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213 Ibid., 385.
214 Singer, 2000, 134.
215 Gourevitch, *Frontline* interview.
with a genocide.” Anthony Lang offers three principles in defense of his placement of additional responsibility on certain countries, one of which is especially applicable, “Countries that are powerful have an obligation to aid those that are not.” Similarly, Power explains that she focused her study on the United States because of its status as the country with the potential for the greatest impact, tremendous power, commitment to Holocaust education in an effort to prevent its recurrence, and education. These arguments reflect a common expectation: the United States should use its power to work for the interests of these causes.

However, as Lang points out, there are strong counter-arguments to the above claims: “States are not humanitarian aid agencies that have the freedom to help every country in every part of the world: They are political organizations whose primary responsibility is to ensure the welfare of their citizens . . . In a world where countries rule themselves, many claim that no state is obligated to act in the interest of another.” Anthony Lake makes a similar argument: just because the U.S. has the power does not mean that it should be required to use it. Recently, Lake explained, “Our power does indeed require that we consider carefully its use in such circumstances—and there is no doubt that the United States shares the same blame for the failure by the international community. But the possession of such power does not bring with it an automatic responsibility to use it.” Barnett explains, “Can does not imply ought. Most Americans would probably agree.”

But surely ability to intervene is somewhat connected to responsibility. Barnett is correct in pointing out that can does not imply ought. Ought implies can. If a state such as the U.S. has

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216 Destexhe, 15.
219 Lang, 144.
220 Quoted in Barnett, 171-172.
221 Barnett, 172.
It is the ability to intervene but neglects to do so, it needs more of a justification for this decision than could a country that did not have the capacity to intervene and so could not have had the opportunity. The United States has the good fortune to be in a position of tremendous agency. It seems fair to say that this role can bring with it limited correlative duties. Again, limiting the role to cases of genocide reconciles the opposing lines of argument. Expecting nations such as the United States to offer resources and assistance to other countries in the case of genocide is not expecting them to be ‘humanitarian aid organizations.’ The United States can keep its responsibility to work for the interests of its citizens a top priority, and still act in cases of refugee crisis that warrant involvement.

Conclusion

Genocide is a crime against humanity. It threatens the most basic of rights, the right to life. Americans should act in a manner that recognizes their duty to stop the perpetrators of genocide. The fact that moral duties are not easy is perhaps the most important claim of the entire chapter. This must be recognized in order for excuses for inaction to be deemed unacceptable in the future.

When asked about the role of national interests, General Dallaire gave the following response.

"I believe, as Kofi Annan has stated in the millennium speech he gave at the General Assembly called “We, the peoples,” that we have entered a millennium where in fact in humanity, the human race, is to become the dominant factor, not the self-interest. That in fact the 20 percent that’s running away with all the marbles cannot morally continue to do it when 80 percent of humanity, that three year-old kid in Rwanda that was grimy, that was dirty, that was sick, flies all over him, that three-year old. That level of consideration of human life raising these countries to that level out of self-interest is, I believe, an achievable objective in the centuries to come."

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Dallaire, interview by Ted Koppel.
The demand that American citizens recognize and act on their moral duty to assist victims of genocide is minimal, and supported by opposing philosophical perspectives. It is, simply put, the least they can do.
CHAPTER FIVE

"THE MILDEST AND MOST WIDESPREAD FORM OF BETRAYAL"

Valentina Iribagiza, a survivor of the genocide, recalls her horrific experience, "We were pretending to be dead. They took stones and smashed the heads of bodies. They took little children and smashed their heads together. They killed my family. I saw them kill my papa and brother."  

Philip Gourevitch shares the personal testimony of a Tutsi woman, Laurencie Nyirabeza, who managed to survive after being hit by a machete and thrown into a ditch. She witnessed the deaths of her entire family, ten persons in total, including her children and grandchildren. The man who committed the crime, Girumuhatse, has since returned to her town, living among the survivors. He asked for her forgiveness and then told her, "We’ll live together as usual."  

My motive for sharing these stories arises from my fear that, in studying the Rwandan genocide, we fall prey to the same barriers that contributed to the world’s inaction during the genocide. Looking back in history, even recent history, creates a distance much like that which interfered with the ability of Americans to identify with and feel compassion for Rwandans during the spring of 1994. It is too easy to study the events in Rwanda with detached sympathy, theorizing what the role of American citizens should be in the future, without fully internalizing how important it is that we follow through with these promises.

4 Gourevitch, 303-305.
5 Quoted in Gourevitch, 305.
A second phenomenon to which we, as observers and analysts, are susceptible to is the tendency to view the events in Rwanda as a horrible tragedy that has since ended. Yes, we say to ourselves, the international community failed and for that each of us is regretful. But reaching that conclusion, we are tempted to put the genocide away, as a matter of the past—as a historical event. Although the genocide has indeed ended, it is not history to the people of Rwanda. As Laurencie’s story reveals, murderers and survivors live together in the same towns. The tremendous human cost of the deaths of so many people in such a small country continues to be felt, and will affect Rwandan citizens for generations to come. These points are important to remember, as the more we can close the gap, in terms of both geographical and imaginative distance, the more promising our analysis will be. A similar genocide could well happen again soon, somewhere, and wouldn’t we act (or not act) in the same way as in 1994?

After the Holocaust, Primo Levi remarked about the power of self-deception in terrible times, “Things whose existence is not morally comprehensible cannot exist.” It is impossible to understand, much less fully internalize, the suffering that occurred and still continues in Rwanda. It seems, though, that the more we try to understand the pain, the greater the likelihood we will respond with sympathy and courage in the future. Try for a moment to place yourself in the life of Valentina or Laurencie. Imagine your reaction if one of your family members—a parent, sibling, child, or spouse—were murdered by a machete while you looked on, helpless and desperate to save your own life. Now envision witnessing several of your immediate family members being killed in this manner. Picture surviving this tragedy, and then having to live across the street from the person who did this to your family. This unimaginable scenario is reality for Valentina, Laurencie, and many other Rwandans.

226 Quoted in Barnett, 1.
Why is it that General Dallaire, one of the individuals who did the most to help the Rwandans, also feels the worst? He confesses, "The impact of the trauma of Rwanda has physically affected my brain and has put me in a state where there was no capability left of any desire for life, any desire to even consider life . . . I have failed in my duty as the U.N. mission commander to assist the Rwandans." General Dallaire lived through the genocide, as a witness to and actor in the events. But so did citizens of the United States. Of course, persons in positions of formal role responsibility such as Dallaire are bound to be more affected by the events in question. Yet his current level of suffering and regret, when compared to many Americans who feel no responsibility for the genocide, is disproportionate in terms of obligation. Dallaire's heightened feelings of trauma and guilt reveal the important role of proximity. While Americans cannot change the fact that they live their daily lives in a place far removed from the lives of suffering Rwandans, they can change the degree of responsibility that Americans feel or acknowledge. If we can increase the sense of responsibility understood by American citizens (and citizens of all countries, for that matter), then maybe we can increase the chance of action in future international crises.

As C.A.J. Coady points out, "Outrage is no substitute for insight. A legitimate concern for principles needs to be anchored by the factual reality within which the principles have to make sense and be applied." This is true, but it seems some sense of outrage is an appropriate reaction and helps facilitate the discussion. Along those lines, I urge readers of this thesis to recall the words of journalists Feral Keane, "Remember the figures, never ever forget them; in one hundred days up to one million people were hacked, shot, strangled, clubbed, and burned to

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227 Dallaire, interview by Ted Koppel.
death. Remember, carve this into your consciousness: one million.”\textsuperscript{229} This statement is particularly poignant when taken in tandem with the words of Katelijine Hermans, a Belgian journalist who was evacuated during the genocide, “It could have been different. But somebody has to decide it will be different, and nobody took the decision.”\textsuperscript{230}

I will use this final chapter to bring together the descriptive lessons from the first three and the prescriptive argument of the fourth. The goal of this chapter, as well as an overarching theme of this work, is to question the assumption that the “somebody” who had to decide it would be different was a leader, and therefore the rest of us are free of obligation.

The claims of each of the preceding chapters, when added together, create a powerful set of deductions: the United States could have acted and saved many lives but did not; U.S. leaders heard silence, and so continued their policy of inaction; American citizens are in an advantageous position to avoid some of the cognitive and volitional mistakes of political leaders; and, finally, both the U.S. government and American citizens have a moral obligation to act against genocide. This study of the role of U.S. citizens is a lesson in what is possible if citizens neglect their responsibility: this claim highlights the agency of Americans and calls for higher expectations of them to act as engaged citizens concerned with members of other countries.

Membership in the U.S. political system carries responsibilities—domestic and international—that should not be limited to individuals in positions of formal leadership.

In the earlier research stages of this project, I focused at first on the blameworthiness of the various actors within the United States: President Clinton, his administration, mid and senior-level officials, members of Congress, and the American public. My intention was to explain the

\textsuperscript{229} Quoted in Peter Ronayne, \textit{Never Again?: The United States and the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide Since the Holocaust} (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 159. I have used the figure of 800,000 throughout this work because it reflects a more cautious estimate and is thus less contested. Many believe, however, that more than a million Rwandans died during the genocide.

\textsuperscript{230} Quoted in Ronayne, 190.
many factors that played a role in each decision made during the genocide, showing how analysts
tend to assign blame too easily and without proper consideration of the many situational
constraints under which U.S. policy decisions are made. My focus has since shifted, however,
and each chapter now reflects a deliberate attempt to avoid the topic of blameworthiness.
Certainly, the claim that the U.S. government and American citizens have a moral duty to act
implies a certain degree of blame when inaction occurs. The choice to avoid the careful
consideration of levels of blameworthiness for each actor was intentional. In the case of
Rwanda, I feared my conclusion would either place most of the blame on leaders or move in the
other direction and reduce U.S. blame by explaining the many variables that led leaders to act in
the manner that they did. In his conclusion, Ronayne emphasizes that U.S. policies were one of
choice.\textsuperscript{231} This is an important point to remember. And the choice was not solely the
responsibility of the leaders—American citizens had agency, and they did not use it.

**Actions Speak Louder than Words**

During Rwanda, American actions did not live up to the expectation of assistance that
their words had created. An explanation of the American commitment to genocide prevention
sets the stage to emphasize their failure to live up to these standards, and sheds light on how this
lesson can help us shape a more promising future. I acknowledge that presenting evidence to
show the general support of Americans for intervention during genocide does not offer support to
the moral argument that Americans have a moral duty. As Peter Singer has observed, “Most
people could be wrong; we can’t decide moral issues by taking opinion polls.”\textsuperscript{232} But Singer
also states that explanation is relevant nonetheless, as it reveals the height of the bar that needs to

\textsuperscript{231} Ronayne, 198.
\textsuperscript{232} Singer, 2000, 122.
be cleared to establish the theory as a solid argument. American commitment to genocide prevention and punishment places the bar fairly low.

Surveys support the claim that American citizens believe the United States should intervene in countries where genocide is perpetrated. After Somalia, U.S. leaders believed the public to be against intervention in other countries, even in the case of Rwanda. However, CNN and USA Today polls following the deaths of eighteen American soldiers in Somalia found that the majority of people believed that the United States was doing the right thing in Somalia.233 Peter Ronayne comments, “What was missing was not public support but a sustained leadership effort to explain why the United States was in Somalia and what it was accomplishing after the famine relief effort. Indeed, a significant percentage of the American public embraces the notion of the United States as ‘the city on the hill’ and believes that humanitarian actions are often in the nation’s interest.”234 A 1994 poll found that 80% of the Americans surveyed favored intervention if the U.N. found genocide occurring in Bosnia or Rwanda.235 A majority, 60%, was still in support of intervention even when presented with the hypothetical of several thousand American casualties. Thus, while the United States could certainly stand to benefit from leadership in favor of intervention as well as an increase in American support for operations in countries such as Rwanda, the claim that U.S. citizens have a moral obligation is not too far removed from the verbal commitment Americans express when questioned and presented with hypothetical situations.

After the conflict in Yugoslavia, President Clinton stated in an interview, “While there may be a great deal of ethnic and religious conflict in the world . . . whether within or beyond the borders of a country, if the world community has the power to stop it, we ought to stop genocide

233 Ronayne, 201.
234 Ibid.
235 Ibid.
and ethnic cleansing.” Ronayne calls this statement the Clinton Doctrine, linking it back to his assessment of American public opinion, “The language of the Clinton Doctrine resonates with most Americans—they will not pay any price, but they will pay some price in the name of genocide prevention.” Ronayne focuses on leadership, believing that strong leadership from the top can mobilize public support into action. It is also an example, however, of citizens not following through with their professed moral values. It can be safely assumed that most Americans watching the news thought that somebody should do something.

Excuses or Lessons?

Following the Holocaust, Americans, along with the rest of the world, said that they had all learned an important lesson. The world learned that it was possible for humans to treat other humans in the most horrible of ways solely on the basis of ethnicity, even in the middle of the twentieth century. In an editorial during the Rwandan genocide, Des Forges pointed out the failure of the U.S. to uphold the Genocide Convention, stating, “We did not learn anything from the experience of the Holocaust.” I disagree. We learned important lessons from the Holocaust: genocide was possible in our modern world. In addition, we learned that we should act faster the next time. We learned what was possible to happen, but we did not learn that we also tend to let it happen. The lesson to be learned from Rwanda concerns our tendency to remain silent, whether for cognitive or volitional reasons. Gourevitch summarizes this lesson well, “I think that anybody who still believes that the world will not let it happen again, who believes the words ‘Never again,’ is deluding themselves dangerously.”

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236 Quoted in Ronayne, 199.  
237 Ronayne, 201.  
239 Gourevitch, Frontline interview.
lesson that Rwanda offers. “Never again” is verbal commitment that has failed. It is not enough to say we will act. We must follow through with these promises. The best way to ensure that this occurs is to realize our tendency to fail to recognize and act on these commitments when problems arise. Both the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide taught us powerful lessons, and we must draw from them everything we can so as to prevent such tragedies from occurring in the twenty-first century.

Taking these lessons into account, perhaps in the future the best strategy is to assume the worst in cases of possible or probable genocide. While genocide can be difficult to identify in the early stages, weighing the possible risks of not intervening and the resultant tremendous human loss with the risks of intervening and preventing genocide leads to the conclusion that in most cases it is best to err on the side of caution. This is especially true given our tendency to have trouble identifying with victims of genocide in countries far removed from our own. Ralph Lemkin, the advocate who initiated the Genocide Convention, questioned the proximity excuse: “If women, children, and old people were being murdered a hundred miles from here, wouldn’t you run to help? Then why do you stop this decision of your heart when the distance is 3,000 miles instead of a hundred?” Lemkin’s logic is helpful, as we should assess this tendency. What we should not do, however, is mistakenly assume that we will not be affected by this problem of identifying with the victim next time. Instead, we should recognize that our feelings of sympathy would be different if genocide occurred in Europe rather than in an African or Asian country. This provides even more reason to compensate for this natural human tendency by erring on the side of overreaction. This process applies the lesson of Rwanda: we tend to under

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240 Wheeler, 238.
react in response to problems in areas that are not within our narrow interests and imaginative range. Let us not have to learn this lesson again, as it will come at tremendous human cost.

In 1967, Senator William Proxmire, who took up the Genocide Convention ratification battle in the United States after Lemkin, stated, “They are the most lethal pair of foes for human rights everywhere in the world—ignorance and indifference.” Ignorance is no longer an excuse. Today’s global world allows attentive Americans to be informed of cases of massive human rights abuses in even the most remote locations. In addition, their status as citizens of the world’s superpower offers them the access to national resources that would enable intervention. This is not to say that citizens advocating for intervention guarantees U.S. action. My point is to show that for Americans, this possibility exists, whereas it may not for citizens of countries without the resources that enable them to offer assistance to other countries. Americans are more responsible because they are more able: with increased power and wealth comes increased responsibility.

With the possibility of ignorance eliminated or at least reduced, the discussion can turn to indifference. In the case of Rwanda, American indifference played a formative role. Consider the following hypothetical example. Suppose one hundred individuals in each of the fifty states wrote a letter to their Congressional representative after learning of the genocide during the second week in April. Hearing such demands, several Congressmen were motivated to draft a memo to the Clinton administration demanding a review of its current policy. On April 21, instead of voting to reduce the UNAMIR mission, the administration had the confidence and political will to advocate filling General Dallaire’s request for 5,000 troops. Scholars argue that

\[242\, \text{Power, 2002, 84.}\]
such a force probably would have saved hundreds of thousands of lives.\textsuperscript{243} Think about the implications: 5,000 letters, taking each individual no more than a few minutes to write, could have saved hundreds of thousands of lives. That many lives would probably have been saved with even fewer letters, but in any case the effort of writing even 5,000 letters seems a very small cost to pay for the number of lives saved.

The purpose of this hypothetical is not to predict what would have happened. Rather, it shows that it is easy to talk in vague terms, saying that citizens should have acted and maybe there would have been a different outcome. American citizens can strive to become more educated in international affairs, take an active role in the political process, and be more deliberate about voicing their concerns to their elected leaders. Narrowing the causation in this manner allows Americans to understand more clearly the burden of responsibility that they should feel. American citizens should not rely on the state to fulfill their moral obligation. To do so would neglect their responsibility and be an example of the bystander behavior that has had such disastrous consequences in the past.

**The Need for Effective and Moral Followership**

As explained in the preceding chapters, much of the blame for the Rwandan genocide falls on the individuals in formal positions of leadership. James Wood, a Defense Department official during the genocide, summarizes, “Most of all, though, it’s a failure of leadership of the Western countries. Everybody is, ‘Well, if the Belgians have bailed out, why should we do it? Where are the French? Where’s somebody else?’”\textsuperscript{244} Woods deems the problem a failure of

\textsuperscript{243} See Chapter 1.
\textsuperscript{244} Wood, *Frontline* interview.
leadership and then talks only about the leaders, as do many assessments of blame. This approach is problematic, however, because leadership is a dynamic process that cannot exist apart from followers. Leaders can and should make moral decisions, but focusing solely on leaders’ decision-making overlooks the active role that followers play in the process. Leaders at the time of the crisis, as well as scholars studying their decisions later, name the indifference of American citizens as a key variable in the decision to ignore the problem until it was too late. The Rwandan tragedy explicitly reveals the problems that stem from the absence of effective and moral followership.

John Rawls recognizes the difficulties involved in convincing individuals to move beyond their interests and follow the long-term goals of justice and fairness. His portrayal assumes that self-interests are typically the driving force behind decisions, “A legitimate concern about the duty of assistance is whether the motivational support for following it presupposes a degree of affinity among peoples . . . that cannot be expected even in a society of liberal peoples.” In this way, Rawls deals directly with the concept of limited compassion addressed by philosophers such as Martha Nussbaum. He devises the ideal of the statesman to counter this tendency and point to a leadership solution. Rawls explains, “The ideal of a statesman is suggested by the saying: the politician looks to the next election, the statesman to the next generation.” In theory, the statesman leader would compensate for the tendency of individuals to pursue their self-interests. His idea of a statesman reflects his expectation that leaders, at least on some level, look ahead and work for the pursuit of long-term goals interests or the interests of members of distant countries. By strengthening “relations of affinity,” peoples can become increasingly cooperative, as their interests become supported by mutual concern for one

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245 Rawls, 112.
246 Ibid., 97.
Rawls uses the spread of religious tolerance as an example of a principle that gained more and more support with the passage of time. He asserts, “The relatively narrow circle of mutually caring peoples in the world today must expand over time and never be viewed as fixed. Gradually, peoples are no longer moved by self-interest alone or by their mutual caring alone ... until eventually they become ready to act on the ideals and principles their civilization specifies.” The ideal of a statesman presents a hopeful solution to the limits of narrow interests and political reality.

Rawls’s description of the statesman leader provides a worthy example for political leaders to follow. This argument represents a potential counterpoint to my assertion that a solution can, and should, be found at the level of citizens. However, there is something to be said by the very occurrence of the failure of leaders such as President Clinton to act out against crimes of genocide in Rwanda. While the ideal of a statesman leader has intellectual appeal, I do not accept Rawls’s placement of responsibility solely on the leader. I suggest that we can arrive at a method of helping citizens to understand their role in the world and the importance of developing and standing by long-term goals. Political leaders are elected by today’s citizens, not by future generations. Therefore, as the policy decisions explained in the preceding chapters confirm, the interests and goals of political leaders can only be so far removed from the interests of the people that they lead. We should expect leaders to uphold standards of justice such as the duty to intervene in cases of genocide, but I believe that this strategy would be far more effective if followers had the ability and desire to understand these concerns as well. The development of a model that helps the followers understand long-term interests and the dire situations of other people, coupled with leaders striving to act in accordance with the model of the ideal statesmen,

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247 Ibid., 113.
248 Ibid.
may be the most appropriate manner of preventing failures such as the Rwandan genocide in the future.

Kofi Annan responded to the question “Why did not one intervene?” by saying: “The question should not be addressed only to the United Nations, or even to its Member States. Each of us as an individual has to take his or her share of responsibility [emphasis added].” 249 Barnett criticizes this type of apology from leaders in prominent positions such as President Clinton and Annan, “The very individuals who made the momentous decisions were now relocating responsibility by “democratizing” blame . . . they presented themselves as emissaries of other publics that, they insinuated, also shared responsibility. This democratization of blame, in effect, reduced their own particular culpability to a meaningless fraction.” 250 While it would be wrong to allow leaders to escape responsibility, I do think that Annan’s point is justified, as he is not “relocating responsibility,” but rather, emphasizing the important truth that each of us is responsible. Des Forges makes this point, “Genocide anywhere implicates everyone. To the extent that governments and peoples elsewhere failed to prevent and halt this killing campaign, they all share in the shame of the crime [emphasis added].” 251

Singer appropriately names the consequence of failing to act because no one else is doing so “follow-the-crowd ethics.” 252 Follow-the-crowd ethics creates bystanders who mistakenly assume that they do not have an active role in the problem. The result of this thinking on a collective level is that nobody takes an active role, and disasters such as the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide rage on until it is too late. Glover quotes Alexander Solzhenitsyn, survivor of the terror under Stalin: “The mildest and at the same time most widespread form of betrayal

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249 Quoted in Barnett, 154.
250 Barnett, 154.
251 Des Forges, 16-17.
252 Singer, 2000, 121.
was not to do anything directly, but just not to notice the doomed person next to one, not to help
him, to turn away one’s face, to shrink back . . . You kept silence. You acted as if you had not
noticed.”

As citizens of the most powerful country in today’s global world, Americans can no
longer make the excuse, “out of sight, out of mind.” Ten years ago Americans betrayed
Rwandans. Their betrayal was mild yet widespread, but had repercussions of tremendous human
cost. Each individual American most likely did not feel responsible for the genocide, but the
collective outcome of their bystander behavior contributed to the world’s inaction. This sad truth
can serve as an inspiration: this does not have to happen next time, as American citizens have the
agency to influence U.S. foreign policy decisions.

253 Quoted in Glover, 258.
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