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The U.S. response to the Burundi Genocide of 1972

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The U.S. Response to the Burundi Genocide of 1972

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JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Dedication

For my family
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis committee for helping me with this project. Dr. Guerrier, your paper edits and insights into America during the 1970s were invaluable. Dr. Owusu-Ansah, you helped me understand the significant impacts of the Belgian colonial legacy on independent Burundi. Dr. Seth, you provided challenging questions about the inherent conflicts between national sovereignty and humanitarian intervention. All these efforts, and many more, have helped to strengthen my thesis. I would also like to give a special thanks to my parents. Dad, your work on the Nigerian Civil War served as my guiding light throughout this project, and mom, I never would have been able to transcribe the Nixon Tapes without your help.
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Abstract

On 29 April, a group of Hutu fighters crossed into Burundi from neighboring Tanzania, attacking Tutsis in the southern towns of Rumonge and Nyanza-Lac. At the same time, a smaller group of Hutus attempted to seize a military garrison located on the outskirts of Bujumbura, Burundi’s capital. Amid this ethnically charged environment, Burundi’s Tutsi-dominated government responded not only with a counteroffensive against the attackers, but also launched a violent campaign of reprisals against Burundi’s Hutu majority population. Though the genocidal nature of the reprisals had become apparent to the U.S. Embassy as early as 26 May, the U.S. State Department maintained the position that both U.S. interests and leverage in Burundi were minimal. However, in 1972, the U.S. bought upwards of eighty percent of Burundi’s coffee crop. The U.S. decided to respond with humanitarian relief, but attempted to avoid appearing pro-Hutu. Behind the scenes, the State Department sought to engage the Organization of African Unity and United Nations in order to pressure the Burundi government to stop the killings. During the fall of 1972, Nixon surprisingly took interest in what had happened in Burundi and began expressing his displeasure with State’s “weak” response. He demanded the U.S. minimize relations with Burundi and planned to condemn the Burundi “genocide” in an upcoming vote in the World Bank. Despite demands for stronger action on Burundi, no “coffee option” crossed Nixon’s desk.
Introduction:
“Preventing mass atrocities and genocide is a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the United States.”

~Barack Obama

Throughout the twentieth century, Democrats and Republicans alike have paid lip service¹ to the idea of human rights. In reality however, the U.S.² response³ to serious man-made humanitarian disasters has consistently fallen noticeably short of America’s idealistic proclamations. More often than not, the U.S. response to human rights abuses has been that of a third party observer. And observing, so to speak, through the classified situation reports that are exchanged between U.S. government officials in the field and Washington, is usually both the beginning and end of any political response to reports of

¹ In relation to genocide I emphasize the tendency toward lip service because U.S. criminalization of genocide did not occur until 1988. Though the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide on 9 December 1948 (effective 12 January 1951), the U.S. Senate failed to ratify the agreement on the grounds of the ever-present U.S. fear of surrendering U.S. national sovereignty to an international body. As Samantha Power aptly chronicles, it shamefully took nineteen years, 3,211 daily speeches by Senator William Proxmire on why the U.S. should legally commit to the genocide treaty, and President Reagan’s angering of the American Jewish community to get the U.S. government to finally commit to the Genocide Convention. The U.S. Senate voted 83 to 11 for ratification on 11 February 1986, making the U.S. the ninety-eighth country to do so since the treaty’s adoption by the U.N General Assembly. However, it would then take another two years of Senate backpedalling for it to finally to pass the Genocide Convention Implementation Act, the legislation necessary for the U.S. to actually criminalize genocide. Also an important addendum, the U.S. worked in a sizable opt-out clause for itself, which has effectively made it impossible for the U.S. to bilaterally accuse another country of committing the act of genocide.

² For the purpose of introductory remarks I may at times oversimplify the U.S. foreign policy decision-making process by portraying policymaking as the action of a single entity, the U.S. government. In the main body, however, I will strive to identify, as specifically as the documents allow, the different foreign policymaking actors involved in the story of U.S. relations with Burundi during the period of 1972-74. Similarly, when I offer the policy position of groups such as the “State Department” or Nixon’s “NSC Staff,” I am referring to the consensus opinions that made it into policy option papers, not the dissenting opinions that did not. In the case of Burundi, citing African sensitivity to the appearance of Western intervention in African affairs, the State Department’s consensus opinion advised a degree of caution that verged on inaction. A minority within the State Department, however, wanted to see a stronger U.S. response to reports of gross human rights violations in Burundi.

³ I am referring to diplomatic political engagement, not humanitarian aid. In the case of state-sanctioned or state-sponsored human rights violations, examples of a U.S. political response could range from a public statement of moral outrage (sadly and surprisingly, this is a huge step for most governments to take) to the more radical political option of seeking to apply some form of bilateral pressure on the perpetrators or sponsors of genocide. The U.S. almost never opts for political engagement as a response to massive human rights abuses. I am making this clarification because regardless of the interest of the American public, congress, or president, the U.S. government has consistently responded by taking a leading role in providing humanitarian relief to disaster areas.
serious human rights abuse. Genocide after genocide—Armenia, the Holocaust, Cambodia, Bosnia, and Rwanda—each one testifies to this hands off historical pattern in U.S. foreign policymaking. While various Americans inside and outside of government took a personal interest in trying to do something to help in each of these better-known cases of genocide, the official U.S. government response to mass human rights abuses has consistently been too little, too late. And though the U.S. leaders who oversaw the foreign policy decision-making processes during these humanitarian crises often tell others and themselves that they did everything they could, many leave public service

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4 Throughout this whole paper, I am drawing a distinction between what I am calling “soft human rights violations” and “gross/severe human rights violations.” I have taken these concepts from the 1973 testimony of Niall MacDermot before House of Representatives Subcommittee on International Organizations and Movements. MacDermot was the Secretary General of the International Commission of Jurists at the time of his testimony. Examples of “soft” human rights violations are the denials of the right to vote, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, the right to organize, the rule of law, and access to educational and economic opportunity to a particularly group of people. A “gross” or “severe” human rights violation is the denial of the right to life to a particular group. To use a few real world examples from the 1970s, I see Jim Crow in the American South, apartheid in South Africa, Soviet migration restrictions, and even the torture of political prisoners in Greece and Brazil as examples of “soft” violations. While it is true that some people ultimately had their right to life denied in all the above examples, none of them involved the denial of the right to life to the degree that life was denied to males Hutus in Burundi in 1972. So at the risk of seeming exceedingly arbitrary, I am establishing a body count of over 50,000 unarmed, non-hostile civilians in order to distinguish a clear line between “soft” and “gross/severe” human rights violations in which the right to life is denied.

5 I firmly believe that the “massacre” in Burundi in 1972 was “genocide.” The Burundi government’s campaign to eliminate Burundi’s Hutu leadership and the subsequent killing of Burundi’s non-elite Hutus both fit the definition of genocide as provided in Article II (a) of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Article II: “In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group.” In my analysis, when I call events in Burundi “killings, massacres, reprisals,” etc. this is merely semantics on my part; I believe it was genocide. When these less legally binding euphemisms occur in my narrative, they often represent the perspective and word choice of the State Department prior to (and then after) the 26 May unofficial recognition of “genocide” in Burundi by the U.S. Embassy in Bujumbura.

6 In 1915, the U.S. had not become the world power it would in the aftermath of the Second World War. Therefore, its ability to politically engage the Ottoman Empire was limited. However, Wilson’s determination to remain neutral in the First World War, a U.S. geopolitical national interest, further deterred the U.S. from addressing Turkish human rights abuses. However, the U.S. Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau, Sr., actively reported to Washington the Turkish atrocities against the Armenians. It is quite clear in his writings that he is trying to reconcile the competing forces of national sovereignty and human rights intervention.

7 After significant foot-dragging, NATO did eventually bomb the Serbian aggressors, but only after the Serbian army had undertaken several rounds of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia.
harboring lingering doubts. Many ask themselves, “Could I have done more?—Should I have done more?”

The odds are heavily stacked against U.S. political intervention in the name of human rights. There are many reasons for this. Oftentimes, U.S. national interests conflict with the pursuit of a genuine humanitarian cause. In seeking to contain the perceived threat of Soviet expansion during the Cold War, the U.S. propped up a succession of disreputable “strong men” all over the world and then turned a blind eye to human rights violations of these “friendly” regimes. While ignoring human rights abuses on the grounds of conflicting strategic interests may be a poor excuse from a purely moral standpoint, this suggested pattern is a truism of U.S. foreign policy.

More common, massive human rights abuses take place in regions of the world that fall outside the realm of U.S. priority national interests. There are several reasons

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8 An example of this, one that is pertinent to his paper, is the U.S. government’s silence when in 1971 West Pakistani forces massacred hundreds of thousands of Bengalis in East Pakistan (soon to become Bangladesh). Pakistan’s regional rival, India, came to the aid of East Pakistan. In the context of U.S.-China-USSR power politics, West Pakistan was at the same time a client of both the U.S. and China. For reasons of national self-interest, the U.S. and China had just begun what would eventually become the U.S.-China détente of the 1970s. The USSR supported India. From the U.S. perspective, raising the issue of West Pakistan’s human rights abuses would be counterproductive on two geopolitical fronts. Not only would it offend West Pakistan, but also it would demonstrate to the Chinese that the U.S. government was unwilling to take the unpopular humanitarian stance (which the PRC has historically had no problem doing) for the sake of warmer U.S.-Chinese relations.

9 I know that in philosophy to discuss morality is to open the proverbial can of worms. I do not want to do that. When I say “morality” in this instance and throughout the paper I am sticking to a rather simple understanding of the word. As it relates to human rights abuses and genocide, “morality” for me is my belief that the vast majority of humankind will condemn genocide (or any similar instance of human rights violations that warrant a debate over whether or not it is genocide) when alerted to it and at minimum would want to see their respective governments do the same.

10 The slaughter Nazi Germany wrought on the Jews, Roma, and a whole host of other “undesirables,” the inspiration for the word “genocide” in fact, proved that atrocities of the genocidal kind were not the exclusive province of the “Third World.” Nevertheless, the growing pains much more acutely felt throughout the developing world seem to make these countries more prone to large-scale breakdowns of law and order. In the absence of law and order, human rights abuses can more easily occur. Political instability, poor economic prospects, reliance on unpredictable cash crop prices, clan verses national-based allegiances, are the kinds of growing pains I am referring to. That Rwanda experienced genocide in 1994, with its poor economy, reoccurring ethnic troubles, and a Belgian colonial legacy that did no favors for the Rwandan Hutu-Tutsi relationship, can hardly be called a surprising development. The U.S. has had the tendency to undervalue the global economic periphery. Historically the U.S. has prioritized its relations
for this, but the net result is that human rights abuses occurring in these low priority regions generate little attention in the American media, the American public, and the behind closed-door discussions of senior level U.S. policymakers.\footnote{Regarding genocide awareness, there is a bit of a symbiotic relationship between the American media and American public. If the press fails to adequately cover massive human rights violations, the abuses will undoubtedly go unnoticed by the American people. Press coverage does not necessarily mean the Americans will care enough to ask their government to do something about what they are seeing and reading about in the news. Nevertheless, the attentiveness of the American people to human rights issues is usually a necessary first step prompting U.S. leaders to take greater note of human rights violations.} Without said public attention, any action on the part of U.S. policymakers in response to reports of severe manmade humanitarian disasters becomes almost exclusively an exercise in personal morality.\footnote{This will be the case in Burundi in 1972. However, a notable exception to this rule, at least for the time period I am working with, is the Jewish exodus from behind the Iron Curtain. In Oval Office meetings, Nixon complains to George Bush Sr. about Jewish lobbyists who exerted considerable (disproportionate Nixon thought) pressure on U.S. leaders to help get Jewish victims of persecution (and many I imagine who just wanted to escape the Soviet sphere) to either the United States or Israel. This Jewish immigrant question was humanitarian as well as political and action on the issue could score Nixon political points with the American Jewish community.} Usually, with few political points to be scored from taking a strong stand on a human rights issue and the potential for political capital to be lost, and with so many more pressing national security priorities on the U.S. foreign policy agenda, personal morality consistently loses out to political expediency.

In the rare event that a U.S. policymaker decides on his or her own to push for action in response to severe human rights violations, or in the equally rare instance that a loud enough American public outcry persuades a U.S. policymaker to take a stand for human rights, the policymaker must then reconcile humanitarianism with the overwhelmingly powerful and inherently conflicting force of national sovereignty. Though not exclusively, genocides and other massive manmade disasters often have the problematic habit of occurring within a single state’s borders, thereby instantly limiting
the international community’s jurisdiction and ability to respond. As a tactic, human rights abusers religiously counter Western-led humanitarian initiatives in the United Nations by accusing the Western leaders of neocolonial meddling and Western imperialism. In the U.N., human rights violators can avoid unwanted attention by simply accusing the international body of exceeding its legal mandate in its attempts to intervene in a sovereign state’s “internal affairs.”

Nearly without fail, the international community’s unwillingness to challenge the dominance of national sovereignty has derailed any potential for substantial U.N. response to severe human rights abuses that fall within a single state’s borders. Accusing the U.N. of exceeding its mandate is effective because more than a handful of U.N. member states have their own internal troubles. An explosion of factional strife might attract unwelcome attention in the U.N. From the perspective of many member states, U.N. intervention in a neighbor’s internal problems of today could establish the broad precedent for greater U.N. humanitarian intervention in the world’s trouble spots of tomorrow, potentially including their own countries. During the first two decades of African independence, this feeling reflected the sentiments of many Black African leaders. Given the continent’s immensely diverse population, and that European colonizers paid little heed to Africa’s pre-colonial power structures when drawing the many territorial borders that would eventually define independent states, the seeds were

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13 This is one of many tragic legacies of colonial rule in Africa. When the Europeans carved up Africa they ignored many traditional kingdom, ethnic-based, and clan-based boundaries. The end result for independent Africa was that many Africans found (and today still find) themselves lumped into a “Nation” to which they have few historical ties and limited allegiance.

14 This occurs in the U.N. as well as in other supranational bodies. The inaction of the Organization of African Unity for this reason during the Burundi Genocide is a case in point.
sown for future internal discord in Africa.\textsuperscript{15} This should not be taken exclusively as a vilification of Africa’s leaders, however, because historically all states have viewed human rights crusading in the U.N. as a general taboo.\textsuperscript{16}

The Burundi Genocide of 1972 is a lesser-known episode in the history of U.S. response to genocide, an episode in which the questions of whether the U.S. could and should have done more are justified.\textsuperscript{17} President Richard Nixon briefly grappled with both during the fall of 1972. As such, two research questions have guided this examination of the U.S. response to the Burundi Genocide:

1) What was the U.S. response to reports of serious human rights violations in Burundi?
2) Could the U.S. have done more to stop these human rights violations and prevent future human rights abuses in Burundi?

The first of these questions is the easier of the two because the record of U.S. action, and inaction, can be found within the paper trail left behind by the U.S. State Department and Nixon’s National Security Council. In Burundi, the Tutsi ethnic minority governed over the Hutu majority. During late April of 1972, a failed Hutu invasion from Tanzania and internal coup precipitated the systematic, government-sponsored slaughter of Burundi’s Hutus. The magnitude of this campaign, however, would not become apparent to the U.S.

\textsuperscript{15} I do not want to imply that all African leaders or leaders of other former colonized peoples who fear outside interference do so because it will limit their respective abilities to commit human rights abuses. It is perfectly understandable for former colonies to be suspicious of the intentions of the developed world, particularly the former colonizers. It is just that far too frequently these legitimate suspicions lose their value when used over and over again as a tool to sabotage constructive diplomatic efforts to address the world’s human rights problems.

\textsuperscript{16} The exception to this rule was the regular condemnation of White Minority rule in Southern Africa in the U.N. Commission on Human Rights. The desire to avoid talks of U.N. human rights intervention was not limited to the developing world. For example, the United Kingdom during 1970s was none too willing to bring its problems in Northern Ireland before the U.N. Commission on Human Rights.

\textsuperscript{17} While my own convictions are that the U.S. should have done more in Burundi, questions of “should” involve too much personal moralizing on the part of me the writer and you the reader. However, when dealing with human actors as they craft the U.S. government’s response to serious human rights abuses, I do think that morality is a valuable concept to consider. Similarly, I think “could the U.S. have done more?” is a valid question in diplomatic history. This is particularly true in the case of Burundi because a handful of Americans asked this very question of the U.S. government in 1973.
until late May of 1972. Determining that the U.S. had minimal interests in Burundi, the U.S. decided to focus its efforts on humanitarian relief. Furthermore, the State Department’s approach toward Black Africa, especially from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, favored strict U.S. neutrality in African internal affairs. Making careful efforts to avoid appearing either pro-Hutu or pro-Tutsi, the U.S. immediately began providing food, clothing, and medicine to the Burundi government with no strings attached.

When it became abundantly clear that the same Burundi government was slaughtering its own people and had been diverting U.S. relief exclusively to its Tutsi population, the U.S. suspended all humanitarian assistance to Burundi until the Burundi government could assure the U.S. that its aid would reach the entire Burundi population. Diplomatically, during the first week of chaos, the U.S. Ambassador to Burundi sought to convince Burundi President Michel Micombero to bring an end to the killing. When the U.S. Ambassador’s efforts failed, the State Department then looked to international organizations to put pressure on the Burundi government. The African leaders in the Organization of African Unity, guided by the principles of non-intervention and national sovereignty, seemed thoroughly disinterested and unwilling to involve themselves in Burundi’s troubles. In the United Nations, the fact that the violence was occurring within Burundi’s own borders and that only the Belgians were calling it genocide left potential U.N.’s peacekeeping initiatives anemic.

The second research question is the more difficult and controversial one to try to answer. Could the U.S. have done more? The State Department maintained that it could do very little because of its minimal leverage in Burundi. Though its initiatives directed at the Burundi government, OAU, and U.N. failed, the U.S. State Department held that its
policies had placed the U.S. government in a position of active but quiet leadership in attempting to bring about an end to the “Burundi Tragedy.” However, in 1973, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace published a report that accused the U.S. government, particularly the State Department’s African Affairs Bureau, of callousness and ineptitude during what it was calling the “Burundi Genocide.” The report argued that the U.S. did in fact have a very unique form of leverage available for use in Burundi. Burundi’s economy was almost solely dependent upon its coffee exports. Steadily growing since the 1960s, by the early 1970s the U.S. was importing upwards of eighty percent of Burundi’s annual coffee crop. The authors of the Carnegie report—including Roger Morris, who had served as an African expert in the National Security Council in both the Johnson and Nixon administrations—argued that the U.S. government should have at least explored the idea of a coffee boycott as a means to pressure the Burundi government to stop killing its people. According to the authors, the State Department dismissed the idea out of hand, thereby sentencing thousands of Burundian Hutus to their deaths.

The heretofore untold story of the Burundi genocide concerns the response of President Richard M. Nixon. Surprisingly, Nixon briefly demonstrated a deep personal interest in the U.S. response, albeit a late interest since the genocide had already ended by the time he started talking about this neglected and low priority foreign policy issue. But, in the fall of 1972 Nixon began expressing his disgust with the reports he had requested detailing State Department’s handling of the Burundi episode. He was very upset that State had not alerted him to the severity of the violence in Burundi sooner. For Nixon,

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this newfound interest in Black Africa was humanitarian and personal; it was not political. Though the 1972 election was just around the corner, no one in America was talking about what had happened in Burundi during the fall. In fact, very few had talked about it in the summer when the genocide was occurring. Though the U.S. had missed the opportunity to act during the summer, going forward, Nixon demanded that the State Department formulate a stronger policy towards Burundi. At the very least, Nixon believed the U.S. should publicly express moral outrage at what he alone within his administration was then calling the “Burundi Genocide.”

The State Department was not forthcoming with stronger policy options for Burundi and no mention of a “coffee option” ever crossed Nixon’s desk. Despite the State Department’s disinterest in taking stronger action against Burundi, Nixon immediately ordered State to minimize relations with Burundi, cancel all bilateral aid and exchange programs, and frankly inform the Burundi government that the U.S. did not approve of its “genocide” and could not normalize diplomatic relations with the Burundi government until it demonstrated an appreciable change in its respect for human rights.

In another notable instance of presidential engagement, at Nixon’s urging, the U.S. planned to publically condemn the “Burundi Genocide” during a vote on a loan for Burundi in the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.
Located in central Africa, Burundi is a small, landlocked country that had a population of 3.5 million at the start of 1972. Rwanda borders Burundi to the north and Tanzania to the east and southeast. Lake Tanganyika sits along Burundi’s southwestern border and Burundi shares a roughly sixty-mile northwestern border with Zaire. Demographically, Burundi has two population groups of political consequence, the Hutu and Tutsi. The Hutu are the ethnic majority, representing about eighty-five percent of the population. The Tutsi are the minority, making up only fourteen percent. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Burundi’s export economy was almost exclusively based on its coffee crop. At this time, U.S. importers, namely Folgers, purchased nearly ninety percent of Burundian coffee. While this foreign market domination might make Burundi seem like a Banana Republic, independent Hutu landowners in Burundi’s northern provinces produced most of Burundi’s annual coffee crop. Hutu landownership and generally high world coffee prices did, in fact, guarantee some profit for Hutu farmers during this time period.¹ However, with political power resting primarily in Tutsi hands, a good deal of wealth transference occurred, disproportionately enriching Burundi’s Tutsi leadership at the expense of rural Hutu farmers. On par with the rest of sub-Saharan Africa in the 1970s, Burundi was one of the world’s least developed countries.

Burundian independence in 1962 restored the King of Burundi, the Mwami, as a constitutional monarch. Under the constitutional monarchy, the Tutsis continued to run the Burundi government, effectively limiting Hutu participation in the important military

and civil service positions. Hutu feelings of disenfranchisement produced the failed coups of 1965 and 1969. The Tutsi dominated Burundi army crushed both Hutu coups. In the wake of the 1965 Hutu uprising, the Tutsi victors overthrew the *Mwami* in a bloodless coup and made Burundi a republic. A republic in name only, Tutsis still dominated the politics of new Republic of Burundi.

Westerners over the age of twenty are at least vaguely familiar with the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Because of their limited exposure to Rwanda, most view the Hutu-Tutsi troubles in a contextual vacuum, failing to understand the relationship’s broader significance to reoccurring instances of ethno-political strife in the African Great Lakes region. Many also fail to grasp the complexity of the Hutu-Tutsi relationship, simply and incorrectly attributing the violence witnessed in places like Rwanda to “age old” tribal rivalries. American diplomats and policymakers, have, at times, made this same mistake. This, however, is not the place to dispel tribal misconceptions or articulate the theories on why ethnic violence happens in the first place. Suffice it to say, ethnic tension was a primary cause of the killings in Burundi. The bulk of this violence happened from May through July in 1972, but continued through the late summer. Though the figures still cannot be provided with any real accuracy, estimates place the death toll at 80,000 to 200,000 victims.\(^2\) While these figures may appear small in comparison to some of the more familiar genocides, for example, the Holocaust, it is important to note Burundi’s 1972 population of only 3.5 million when contemplating the impact of the 1972 genocide on the people of Burundi. Once considered, the implications of the deaths become clearer. In three months, a sizable portion of Burundi’s Hutu population disappeared.

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\(^2\) More exact estimates do not exist. The Burundi government is not very forthcoming about what happened in 1972. Unsurprisingly, many Tutsis will argue for the lower figure while many Hutus will argue for the higher figure.
On 29 April 1972, an armed group of Hutus and reported Mulelists crossed the Tanzanian border and entered southern Burundi. Though the invading force consisted of only 500-1500 men, the predominantly Tutsi Burundi government did not know this figure at the time and saw the invasion as a threat to its continued survival. The invaders concentrated their attacks on the southern Tutsi-populated towns of Rumonge and Nyanza-Lac, capturing both and murdering thousands of Tutsi inhabitants in the process. At the same time as the 29 April attacks in southern Burundi, a much smaller group of Hutus attempted to seize a military garrison on the outskirts of Bujumbura, Burundi’s capital. Amid this ethnically charged environment, the Burundi government

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3 The makeup and exact plans of this invasion force is still largely unknown. The Burundi government claimed the invading force consisted of Hutus and Mulelists who intended to overthrow Burundi’s Tutsi leadership. The Burundi government reported that these invaders established a short-lived Hutu republic in the southern Bururi province until the Burundi army defeated them. The Burundi government also claimed that some of the dead invaders had Congolese tribal markings, citing this as evidence of Mulelist involvement. However, the claims of the Burundi government throughout this whole period are suspect.

4 The Burundi government reported that the invaders contained “Mulelist elements.” The term Mulelist referred to supporters of the deceased Pierre Mulele. Of the Bapende ethnic group, during the 1964 Simba rebellions, Mulele led a Maoist faction in the Kwilu District of what today is the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Zaire in this story). In 1968, Zairian President Joseph Mobutu lured Mulele out of exile with the false promise of political amnesty. Mulele was promptly arrested, brutally tortured, and then executed. A spiritual and drug induced sense of invulnerability made Mulelists fearsome in battle. Should faith and drugs prove insufficient, Mulelist commanders offered a third incentive to fight; they shot soldiers who retreated. While the Burundi government may have actually believed that Mulelists made up at least part of the invading force in the south, identifying the invaders as Mulelist also could have been a tactic to court military assistance from Zaire since Mobutu would not want to see his enemies get a foothold in Burundi.

5 This number is a rough estimate. The point to be emphasized is that it was always relatively small. There are several reasons for this uncertain figure. The fluidity along the Burundi-Tanzanian border allowed invaders to enter and flee Burundi as needed. During the initial confusion, the Burundi government was unable to accurately assess the true size of the invading force. Later, the Burundi government went back and fourth between announcing total rebel defeat and maintaining the specter of a continued insurgency, the latter being used to justify continued reprisals against Hutu “traitors.”

6 Nyanza-Lac sits along Lake Tanganyika in Makamba province, Burundi’s southern most province. Makamba is adjacent to Tanzanian border. Rumonge also sits along Lake Tanganyika, located a little further north in Bururi province.

7 The Burundi government claimed the invaders had a “genocide list” that identified Tutsi targets. According to the Burundi government, after killing the marked Tutsis, the invaders murdered every other Tutsi they could find and then planned to kill every Tutsi in Burundi. The Burundi government wildly exaggerated the death toll in the south, claiming that the invaders killed as many as 50,000 Tutsis. By early June, the U.S. Embassy in Bujumbura had received reliable reports that suggested that both Tutsis and Hutus had been killed in Bururi and Makamba provinces and the death toll was closer to 2,000.

8 No more than 150 people.
responded not only with a counteroffensive that defeated the invaders, but also began a violent campaign of reprisals against Burundi’s Hutu population. In the immediate wake of 29 April, the Burundi army and the ultra-Tutsi Jeunesse Révolutionnaire Rwangasore\(^9\) began detaining Hutu leaders. Most arrested Hutus were killed.

At the U.S. Embassy in Bujumbura, monitoring developments in Burundi and filing reports back to Washington required a nonstop effort. With only a small diplomatic mission, the U.S. Embassy was sorely understaffed for the crisis management that the chaos in Burundi would require. In preparing reliable reports for Washington, U.S. Embassy officials also had to overcome a considerable “fog of war” that had settled over the southern and central portions of Burundi during the first month of bloodshed. And the Burundi government did U.S. Embassy officers no favors in dispersing this fog. On 30 April, it instituted a curfew in Bujumbura and set up roadblocks to prevent travel from Bujumbura to Burundi’s southern and interior provinces. Though it would gradually push back the curfew in Bujumbura and take down some of the roadblocks over the course of the summer, the Burundi government effectively prevented U.S. diplomats from physically seeing anything other than Bujumbura’s foreign sector. And until late July, the U.S. Embassy engaged in a constant battle with the Burundian Foreign Ministry to get permission to allow U.S. Embassy officials to go and check up on the safety of the under 150 American missionaries working outside of Bujumbura. Luckily for whites, both the 29 April invaders and the Burundi government went to great lengths to make

\(^9\) During the summer of 1972 the JRR, serving as a Tutsi militia, engaged in the roundup and execution of Hutus in Bujumbura and throughout the countryside. Mobs of JRR members supplemented the genocidal actions of the Burundi army, killing Hutus males the army had missed or had chosen not to kill, and patrolling the Zairian, Tanzanian, and Rwandan borders so as to prevent Hutu refugees from escaping Burundi. The actions of the JRR in 1972 are akin to those Interahamwe during the Rwandan Genocide of 1994.
sure white foreigners came to no harm, as the deaths of Americans or Europeans might have the unwanted effect of actually generating Western interest in what was happening in Burundi.  

Via personal two-way radios, until the Burundi government banned their use, missionaries provided the Western diplomatic corps with its most reliable reports from southern and central Burundi. As often happens in the aftermath of a failed coup, U.S. Embassy officials fully anticipated and accepted that there would be a period of government reprisals against the plotters and their accomplices. However, as early as the close of the first week in May, the U.S. Embassy began substantiating claim after claim that the anticipated period of government reprisals against the “guilty” had expanded into a wholesale government sponsored extermination of Burundi’s Hutu elite. On 26 May, the U.S. Embassy chargé d'affaires, Michael Hoyt, reported to the State Department African Affairs Bureau in Washington that genocide was occurring in Burundi.

10 Only one Westerner, a Belgian, was unintentionally killed. However, several Europeans went missing for a while due to the breakdown of internal communication in Burundi.

11 The embassies of Belgium and the United States were the most active members of the Western diplomatic corps in this story. The entire 1972 list of principal diplomatic and consular corps accredited to and resident in Bujumbura is as follows: The Vatican, United Nations Development Program, Cyprus, France, Rwanda, Zaire, United States, Soviet Union, People’s Republic of China, Greece, North Korea, Belgium, Federal Republic of Germany, Luxembourg, and Italy. List taken from Thomas Melady, *Burundi: The Tragic Years* (New York: Orbis Books, 1974), xi.

12 In the extensive collection of cables between Bujumbura and Washington that I have examined, Hoyt only once describes the killing happening in Burundi as “genocide.” Though the situation reports become increasingly graphic, “genocide” returns to being called “reprisals, killings, massacre, etc.” I could not find the reason for this, but I can speculate. While the U.S. had not signed the Genocide Convention as of 1972, and thereby was not bound to its provisions, the word “genocide” carried great weight regardless. With the recognition of genocide also came the implication something should be done to stop it. My guess is that someone in the Bureau of African Affairs advised the U.S. Embassy in Bujumbura to stop calling the killings “genocide.” This makes sense considering State’s hypersensitivity to African accusations of U.S. meddling in internal affairs and the resulting difficulties that such accusations might cause for the State Department’s initiatives all across sub-Saharan Africa.

13 Ambassador Melady left Burundi on 25 May and returned to Washington to prepare for his prearranged reassignment to Uganda. That Hoyt calls the massacres in Burundi “genocide” the day after Melady departed is odd. My guess is that Melady, described as an “eternal optimist,” was in denial about the extent of the killings and was still willing to believe President Micombero when he said, over and over
Once the scale of the reprisals against Hutus had become apparent, the U.S. Embassy contemplated how to best provide humanitarian relief for the suffering Burundians and urge the Burundi government to halt its bloodletting, without at the same time compromising the official U.S. policy of nonintervention in Africa’s internal affairs. However, this task quickly became impossible. In Burundi, humanitarian relief and political intervention had become intertwined because the U.S. Embassy could not ensure that U.S. relief was reaching Burundian Hutus without intervening in Burundi’s internal affairs.

The strongest manifestation of U.S. nonintervention in Burundi was the U.S. Embassy’s strict neutrality in Burundi’s Hutu-Tutsi troubles. In Burundi’s short history, the U.S. had two Ambassadors expelled from Burundi. Each expulsion occurred in the aftermath of a failed Hutu coup; in both cases the Burundi government made unsubstantiated accusations of U.S. missionary and Embassy complicity. As a result, the State Department’s African Affairs Bureau maintained a hypersensitivity to the Burundi government’s claims of U.S. interference in Burundian internal affairs. The Burundi government’s suspicion of U.S. intentions was partly a consequence of the fact that American missionaries primarily ministered to Burundi’s Hutus. This was an accident of history. American missionaries did not come to Burundi seeking Hutus. Rather, one of the many Belgian colonial legacies in Burundi was that Belgian missionaries had already captured the market on Tutsi souls. When American missionaries began going to Burundi in the 1930s, they found the Hutu ministries to be

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14 Burundi became independent on 1 July 1962.
15 The first U.S. Ambassador to Burundi, Donald Dumont, was declared persona non grata in 1966. The Burundi government expelled Ambassador George Renchard in 1969.
wanting. Making it a goal during his tenure as U.S. Ambassador to Burundi, Thomas Melady succeeded more so than any of his predecessors in convincing President Michel Micombero that the American missionaries in Burundi were nonpolitical.

For the U.S., the Burundi government’s historic suspicion of American intentions made the crafting of any response a delicate task. Somehow, the U.S. had to get the Burundi government to end its reprisals against Hutus while avoiding accusations of American imperialism. This desire to stop the killings was purely humanitarian because the U.S. had no other interests in Burundi. From a national security perspective, Burundi, along with most of East Africa, was inconsequential. With a few notable exceptions,\(^{16}\) the USSR and China had failed to gain a foothold Black Africa. Even where the Soviets and Chinese succeeded in gaining a minimum of influence, African leaders saw Eastern imperialism as frequently as they saw Western. This mutual suspicion of non-Africans had helped keep the Cold War out of Africa. And as it so happens, the relative lack of Cold War implications in Black Africa helped keep Africa off of the U.S. foreign policy agenda.

Economically, Burundi was equally unimportant to the U.S. Burundi had no industry to speak of and its extreme poverty and reverse preferential tariffs with the European Economic Community made it unattractive to U.S. investors and exporters respectively. The United States only interest was Burundian coffee. Since the 1960s the U.S. had consistently purchased a growing majority of Burundi’s annual coffee crop, reaching as high as eighty-one percent of Burundi’s coffee harvest in 1972. Burundian

\(^{16}\) But still insignificant from the broad perspective of total U.S. national security interests in the 1970s.
coffee, however, made up only a negligible fraction of the yearly global coffee import of the U.S.

Throughout the whole Burundi episode, the State Department maintained the position that the U.S. government had no leverage in Burundi. On the humanitarian front, Ambassador Melady immediately authorized the use of the U.S. Embassy’s $25,000 contingency fund for the purchase of food and supplies for suffering Burundians. In a first form of mild political engagement, on 5 May Melady met with President Micombero and gently suggested that world opinion would not look favorably upon continued reprisals. Despite Micombero’s assurances that the killings had run their course, the arrest and execution of Hutus intensified throughout May. In a second failed effort to end the bloodshed, this attempt initiated by the Papal Nuncio, the Western diplomatic corps, and Zaire, sent President Micombero a letter appealing to his conscience to end the killings and bring about national reconciliation. Again, despite the Burundi government’s assurances, the killing continued.

When it became apparent that the U.S. Embassy’s subtle nudges would not change the Burundi government’s behavior, the U.S. hoped it could encourage international bodies to pressure the Burundi government to halt the reprisals. Maintaining that Africans wished to settle their own affairs, the State Department first looked to the Organization of African Unity to find a solution to Burundi’s problems. Throughout the remainder of 1972 but most intensely before the June meeting of the OAU in Rabat, the State Department quietly encouraged the leaders of Black Africa to bring attention to the ongoing ethnic strife in Burundi. With a few exceptions, rather than address the concern of “genocide” in Burundi, African leaders and the OAU publicly

17 France disagreed with the wording of the letter and refused to sign.
accepted the Burundi government’s version of events and expressed complete solidarity with the Burundi government. After the disinterest from the OAU, the U.S. turned to the United Nations and Secretary General Kurt Waldheim in search of a solution. In late June, the U.N. sent a three man fact-finding mission to Burundi to assess the country’s relief needs and investigate accusations that the Burundi government had been using U.N. relief vehicles and aid to lure Hutus out of hiding for slaughter. Despite being “escorted” on a show tour of the country by the Burundi Foreign Ministry, U.S. Embassy officials believed that the U.N. investigators had seen through to the genocidal truth of the reprisals. At the very least, the fact-finding mission concluded that disaster relief was not being distributed evenly to all Burundians. Nevertheless, the time-tested accusation of U.N intervention in a sovereign state’s internal affairs and the resulting timidity of the U.N. Secretariat, along with the collective willingness on the part of U.N member states to ignore the killings in Burundi, prevented the U.N. from offering a more rapid solution that might have saved Hutu lives. Quite telling of the U.N.’s inability to uphold the ideals of the Genocide Convention, in August the U.N. Commission on Human Rights went silent on the Burundi genocide. Per usual, the main item on the agenda of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights was the injustice of Africa’s White Redoubt.

Could the U.S. have done more? The State Department did not believe it could have because of its minimal leverage in Burundi. Though its initiatives directed at the Burundi government, OAU, and U.N. failed to make any appreciable difference in the total Hutu body count, the State Department maintained that its policies placed the U.S. to ensure the government’s future survival.

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18 The Burundi government’s version was that Hutu rebels and Mulelist elements invaded Burundi on 29 April with the intent to kill all Burundian Tutsis. According to the Burundi government, the invaders murdered upwards of 50,000 Tutsis in southern and central Burundi before being defeated by the Burundi army. Thus, the government’s reprisals against proven “traitors” were just and necessary measures to ensure the government’s future survival.
government in a position of active but quiet leadership in attempting to bring about an end to the violence in Burundi. In 1973, through the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Roger Morris, Michael Bowen, Gary Freeman, and Kay Miller levied harsh criticisms at the U.S. government over its handling of the genocide in Burundi. In particular, Morris and company targeted the State Department, claiming that a combination of bureaucratic inertia, callousness, and general disinterest in the protection of human rights in Africa led the State Department to dismiss out of hand a proposed “coffee option” and instead settle for the wholly unsurprising and all too familiar do-nothing option. According to Morris, the U.S. role of near sole importer of Burundian coffee presented the U.S. government with a unique opportunity to change the behavior of the Burundi government. Morris believed that working within the framework of the International Coffee Organization, or through a voluntary or presidential boycott of Burundian coffee, the U.S. could have and should have sent the Burundi government the strong message that the U.S. government would not tolerate genocide in Burundi.

Morris’s report is the most detailed account of the U.S. response to the Burundi genocide. It is problematic, however, because of Morris’s obvious biases against the State Department African Affairs Bureau and the fact that his sources are not identified. Morris had served as Kissinger’s Africanist on Nixon’s National Security Council until he resigned in April 1970 in protest at the intensified air war in Cambodia. And there also was no love lost between Morris and the State Department. During his NSC tenure, Morris engaged in many policy battles with the African Affairs Bureau, “in the murky reaches of the 6th floor at state—with a Bureau which is neither top heavy with talent nor
excessively realistic about Africa’s priority in U.S. foreign policy.”19 As leaking classified information is never really a good career builder, State Department officials interviewed by Morris and company did not want attribution, so Morris’s report contains no citations. As such, Morris’ provides the testimonies from a self-selected group, either his trusted contacts still within government or those State Department officials who were upset enough with the minimal U.S. response to the Burundi genocide to talk with Morris. In this manner, Morris’ sources present a one-sided account of the State Departments response to the massacres in Burundi.

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19 Memorandum From Roger Morris of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), Washington, May 13, 1969.
Fall of 1972 and Nixon’s Response:
“Just be totally honest--Isn’t a person a person, goddamnit?”
~Richard M. Nixon

Though mainly targeting the State Department’s Bureau of African Affairs in his condemnation of U.S. disinterest in preventing human rights abuses, Morris saw the Nixon administration as party to the State Department’s callous and inept response to the Burundi genocide. Ironically, in the fall of 1972 Nixon had the same things to say about the State Department’s handling of Burundi. By itself, Nixon railing at State is not too surprising. Nixon really loathed and mistrusted the bureaucracies. In private, it did not take much to get the president going about the “bureaucratic assholes” in this or that department. What is surprising, however, was Nixon’s sudden, albeit brief, personal interest in Burundi’s problems during the fall of 1972. Domestic interest in Burundi most certainly had not prompted Nixon to begin caring about what had happened. After a bout of June coverage in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and a handful of magazines, the American media largely ignored the Burundi killings. Most telling of American disinterest, CBS was the only major television network to run a segment on Burundi. NBC cancelled its only bit. And in no way was U.S. action or inaction on the Burundi problem going to influence the upcoming presidential election. The violence in Burundi was so far removed from the American public conscience that the McGovern campaign did not, and probably could not, use the inadequate U.S. response as a means to criticize Nixon. Nixon’s political nemesis, Ted Kennedy had gained little attention when he tried

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2 As part of the 1972 presidential campaign, McGovern supporters criticized Nixon’s human rights record, particularly the bombings in North Vietnam. Nixon was angered by the “liberal hypocrisy,” as he called it, of his detractors who screamed in the press about U.S. actions in Vietnam but said nothing about serious human rights violations in places like Burundi.
in late June, from his Senate Foreign Relations perch to raise awareness, and had dropped the issue when nothing came of it.³

Personally, the Burundi massacres disgusted Nixon. In September, Nixon shocked the State Department when he suddenly and uncharacteristically began demanding detailed reports on State’s summer initiatives in Burundi. Once received, Nixon made known to State his extreme dissatisfaction with their “weak” action on Burundi.⁴ As a result, Nixon demanded that the State Department provide him with stronger policy options for Burundi. As Nixon’s sudden interest occurred in September of 1972, the genocidal period of killing in Burundi had already come and gone. This is not surprising because it is consistent with the trend of senior-level U.S. interest in genocide arriving too little, too late. No amount of coffee boycotting could help the thousands of victims who had already been murdered in Burundi. And it was partly Nixon’s own fault that the Burundi genocide did not make it onto his desk sooner; he had specifically removed African affairs from his daily foreign policy agenda. Nevertheless, Nixon expected that the State Department would have worked harder to halt genocide, even in the absence of a specific presidential directive to do so.⁵ It having failed to act during the summer, Nixon demanded that the State Department formulate a plan that would allow the U.S. to at least express moral outrage at what he alone among U.S. policymakers was then calling the “Burundi Genocide.”

⁵ I have no evidence of Nixon specifically saying this. But based on Nixon’s reaction in September, I believe he thought that the State Department should have raised a red flag and consulted with his NSC staff as soon as its Embassy in Bujumbura used the word “genocide” to describe the massacre in Burundi.
Despite Nixon’s personal interest in seeing stronger bolder action taken on Burundi, the State Department offered him very little in the way of stronger policy options. State maintained its position that the U.S. had minimal leverage in Burundi and at no time did State prevail upon Nixon with any form of coffee option. State’s claim of “minimal leverage” seems to be greatly at odds with the fact that U.S. importers purchased nearly ninety percent of Burundi’s annual coffee crop. While the ability of a coffee boycott to end the 1972 genocide or change the future behavior of the Burundi government is debatable, the U.S. role as nearly sole importer of Burundian coffee is not. As Morris pointed out, this economic arrangement unarguably gave the U.S. unique leverage over the Burundi government. Since a coffee boycott never happened, discussion of the coffee option brings with it a whole host of unanswerable historical “what ifs.” Rather than go too far down that road, the real significance of the coffee option is that it never crossed the president’s desk, despite his desire to see stronger policy options for Burundi.

Why did the coffee option never reach Nixon? Either the State Department dismissed it out of hand, as Morris claims, or it never even considered the coffee option in the first place. The paper trail left behind by State seems to suggest the latter. Regardless, it was not in the African Affairs Bureau’s broader interests to offer the president such a radical policy option, one that he just very well might take. Since the OAU had already expressed solidarity with the Burundi government, there would have been no favorable response from Africa’s leaders to a U.S. boycott of Burundian coffee, as this would have come across as the epitome of U.S. interference in Africa’s affairs. Almost certainly, the African reaction to a coffee boycott would have been more along
the lines of *how negative?* rather than positive or negative. With the net result of a coffee boycott being increased African hostility towards the U.S. State Department, State’s inherent bureaucratic interest was in not encouraging any form of coffee option.

In the fall of 1972, Nixon’s interest in Burundi was predominantly moral. After Kennedy’s fleeting attempt to criticize Nixon on Burundi, the Democrats failed to make an issue of it. By the close of August, the already sporadic newspaper reporting on Burundi had come to an end. On the whole, the world was largely uninterested in what had happened in Burundi. Yet Burundi remained on Nixon’s mind throughout the rest of the year. During this time, he reflected on the minimal U.S. response and why the world had turned a blind eye to human rights abuses in some areas of the world, but cared greatly about them in other places. Mostly with Kissinger, but also with his staff, Nixon addressed what he saw as a glaring “double standard” in the world’s concern for human rights and an alarming human rights double standard in the U.S. approach toward Africa.

Nixon saw the strongest expression of this double standard in U.S. policy toward Southern Africa. The State Department was always pushing for a harder line with the White Minority governments and was “always on the side of the Blacks,” in Nixon’s opinion, no matter how deplorable the actions of these black African leaders.6 Meanwhile, though White Minority rule was undoubtedly unjust, the governments in Salisbury and Pretoria were not engaging in the systematic elimination of their black majority populations. Yet black African governments in 1972, including Burundi, loudly condemned the human rights abuses of Rhodesia and South Africa, but said nothing about the genocidal actions of the Burundi government. Nixon did not accept this double

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standard, nor would he accept the unspoken rule he saw in the State Department that the U.S. is “going to stand still on the grounds that any African government that overthrew a colonial power thereby becomes lily-white by our standards and [is] thereby beyond criticism.”

Oddly, in Burundi of all places, Nixon experienced a rare moment of moral clarity. This moral clarity was made largely possible only because of the political insignificance Nixon assigned to Africa. In the absence of domestic attention, significant East-West power politics, or any serious threats to U.S. national security interests as a result of taking stronger action against Burundi, Nixon believed that the U.S. should have done more to end the Burundi genocide. Having missed the opportunity to act while the killing was taking place, the U.S. could at the very least publicly condemn the actions of the Burundi government and express moral outrage. Recalling the U.S. Ambassador and cancelling all bilateral aid programs to Burundi would be a good start, but the president wanted the State Department to provide him with even stronger policy options. Despite the potential economic leverage U.S. coffee imports offered, a stronger policy suggestion never came from the State Department. It was Nixon, of all people, hidden underneath his closed-door crudeness and none-too-subtle racist remarks about those “yellow people” and these “black cannibals,” who held the more enlightened human rights position on the Burundi genocide.

The events in Burundi prompted little White House action during the summer of 1972. However, reports of ethnic violence in Burundi did at least capture the attention of Nixon’s National Security Council, as Burundi’s problems managed to make it into

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Nixon’s NSC morning briefings. The first significant NSC report on “Tribal Slaughter in Burundi” came on 26 May in a NSC memorandum to General Alexander Haig, Nixon’s Deputy National Security, from NSC staffer Melvin Levine.\(^8\) It seems more than coincidence that Kissinger’s NSC staffers produced this report on the same day DCM Michael Hoyt used the word “genocide” to describe the events he was witnessing in Bujumbura. The 26 May memo and two following memos on 9 and 26 June, also authored by Levine, capture the general NSC assessment of the violence in Burundi. Importantly, they offer the NSC evaluation of the need, if any, for some form of U.S. response to the Burundi crisis.

As the title of the 26 May memo suggests, Levine cast events in Burundi in an oversimplified, tribal manner. While the nuances of Burundi’s Hutu-Tutsi troubles are lost in reports such as this, probably a result of the need to be succinct and the expected unfamiliarity with such a low-priority area of the world, the recognition of the fact that the Burundi government has been “systematically murdering educated Hutus” in an effort to “permanently suppress the Hutus” could not have come across any clearer.\(^9\) Despite the absence of anything close to accurate estimates, Levine placed the Burundian death toll between 30,000-100,000, with no end to the killing in sight. As the summer of 1972 progressed, the NSC death toll estimate became both more accurate and larger. Levine reported “over 50,000” dead on 9 June\(^10\) and “upwards of 100,000” on 26 June.\(^11\)

Like the State Department, the underlying NSC assessment of the Burundi problem was that “U.S. interests in Burundi are negligible.” Burundi’s insignificance did not necessarily preclude the U.S. from caring, however. As Levine put it, the U.S. found itself “on the horns of a dilemma” in which humanitarianism and U.S. policy for Africa were at odds. From the purely humanitarian perspective, the U.S. could not “acquiesce by silence in this terrible tragedy.” At the same time, the “general low-profile policy” of the U.S. towards Africa “militates against moral posturing.” At least during the summer of 1972, the NSC accepted State’s position that the U.S. had minimal leverage in Burundi. Operating under this assumption, it had few qualms with what State was calling the “middle course” action. The middle course, as State termed it, consisted of the initiatives outlined in the previous chapter. It involved not taking sides in Burundi’s Hutu-Tutsi problems, providing humanitarian relief to the entire Burundian population, quietly urging Black African leaders to pressure the Burundi government to stop the killing, and finally, encouraging U.N. involvement in Burundi in the hopes that an international humanitarian presence would make it harder for the Burundi government to continue killing its people.\textsuperscript{12}

In accepting State’s assessment of minimal U.S. options in Burundi, there was little left for the NSC to do. Seeing as State was handling the initiatives with the OAU and U.N., the NSC staff assigned to Africa largely sat and waited for reports on the successes or failures of State’s efforts. Believing that the U.S. had minimal leverage in Burundi, the NSC saw only one possible next step in the direction of a stronger policy response. The U.S. could make a public statement denouncing the actions of the Burundi

government, but the NSC staffers concluded that this would “have little or no positive effect in Burundi, except to subject our embassy to official wrath—perhaps including closure of the Mission—and would result in African accusations that we are meddling in their affairs.” State made this very same argument. As a result of this conclusion, the NSC decided it would be best to avoid “quixotic moral posturing” on an African internal affair.\textsuperscript{13} Nixon, apparently unaware, and certainly not engaged in these policy deliberations, was, of course, not asking for stronger options at this time.

While accepting State’s initiatives on Burundi as the best U.S. option, sitting and waiting in the NSC involved paying close attention to the potential for U.S. domestic interest in Burundi. Largely ignored during May, Burundi’s troubles attracted some media and congressional attention in June. This increased U.S. attention coincided with the Burundi government allowing a handful of reporters into Burundi. During May, foreign journalists had been banned, contributing to the shortage of news coming from inside Burundi. The legacy of the recent and unprecedented American interest in the Nigerian Civil War likely contributed to the NSC decision to at least monitor the Burundi situation closely so that the Nixon administration would be ready to respond to the American people, should the violence in Burundi “break more sharply into the public view than has thus far been the case.”\textsuperscript{14}

But unlike Biafra, U.S. attention to Burundi’s problems was minimal and fleeting. In the \textit{New York Times} and \textit{Washington Post}, the informative reports of June became sporadic in quantity and less substantial in quality as the summer continued. The few


U.S. magazines that had printed an article or two on Burundi stopped after June. Of the major television networks, only CBS aired a segment on Burundi. Two Democratic Senators tried to raise the issue with the American public but found little American interest. The violence in Burundi had so outraged Senator John V. Tunney of California that he spoke up about it on 12 June. However, Tunney’s interest was “not a problem” for the Nixon administration, Levine told Kissinger, because “Tunney seems satisfied that the US Government has done what it can to urge moderation and relieve suffering.”\(^{15}\) Senator Edward M. Kennedy’s take on the Burundi problem was more threatening to the Nixon administration. Kennedy leaked graphic reports from the U.S. Embassy in Bujumbura and accused the Nixon administration of pressuring the State Department to cover up the severity of the violence in Burundi. But Kennedy’s accusations did not generate the intended uproar and the Nixon administration was fairly certain that nothing would come of Kennedy’s unfounded claims because he had no “ammunition for charges embarrassing to the Administration.”\(^{16}\) Shortly thereafter, Kennedy dropped Burundi as a means to criticize Nixon’s human rights record.

Neither a regional power nor blessed with precious resources, Burundi was unimportant to the U.S. in just about every way. However, one final factor also likely helped keep Burundi off the agenda in the summer of 1972. In Burundi, many rumors circulated about who was ultimately behind the 29 April invasion. One reoccurring rumor was that the Chinese were in some way behind it in an attempt to expand their foothold in Africa and create a haven for Mobutu’s enemies in Burundi. Though Nixon’s

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Africa policy in the 1970s stated that the U.S. wished to see Africa free of great power rivalries, the U.S. had consistently been unable to overlook communist gains throughout the world, even in places as remote as Burundi. Yet by July, the State Department had become rather certain that the Chinese had not instigated events in Burundi. At most, “already-inclined rebels” might have had Chinese training in Tanzania before attacking Burundi, but the U.S. Embassy in Bujumbura treated this possibility as highly unlikely. All evidence obtained by the U.S. Embassy suggested “the roots of the conflict lie in the internal dynamic of Burundi society.”

For whatever reason, Nixon took a personal interest in Burundi in late September of 1972. The NSC files and Nixon tapes do not reveal the exact reason for this interest. Nor do they specifically indicate why he started thinking about Burundi in the fall rather than during the summer when the genocide was happening. Obviously, higher priority foreign policy issues demanded Nixon and Kissinger’s attention during the summer. It was a busy summer for Nixon and Kissinger, but probably no more so than any other. The foreign policy realm witnessed action on SALT, exploration of the newfound relationship with China, and, of course, the ongoing war in Vietnam. Importantly, Nixon also had the 1972 election to worry about. Though the most recent round of SALT concluded successfully on 26 May with Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, U.S. relations with the USSR, or relations with China, or the Vietnam conflict were likely no more or less of a distraction in the summer of 1972 as they were in the fall. The same is true of Nixon’s campaign for reelection. If anything, he probably would have been more focused on the election in the fall. What is certain, however, is that Nixon did not start examining the

U.S. response to the Burundi genocide in reaction to domestic pressure. By September of 1972, the handful of Americans who had been following the massacre in Burundi during May-August had stopped and the American press had gone almost completely silent on the issue.

The most likely explanation is that no one in the White House brought the issue to Nixon’s attention. Kissinger, Haig, and the NSC staff probably did not think that Burundi’s problems warranted presidential action, nor presumably, did they want to distract the President from higher priority issues. While Nixon’s strong feelings on Burundi in September suggest otherwise, the NSC determination that Burundi’s troubles need not be raised with the president is partly Nixon’s own doing. After a little over one year in office, Nixon feared he and Kissinger had been spreading themselves too thin in their efforts to individually address the foreign policy concerns of the entire world, rather than following the customary practice of leaving the bulk of the non-priority issues to the bureaucracies. As a result of this assessment, Nixon made the calculated decision to “concentrate on big battles and win them” and farm out the rest of the foreign policy agenda to the departments because winning the smaller battles would not be crucial to the success of the administration.

Under the new arrangement, Nixon only wanted to see the priority issues. For Nixon, priority items included policy toward USSR, China, Eastern Europe as it related to relations with the Soviets, Western Europe, Vietnam, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. All

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18 None of the NSC documents from May-August show any evidence that Nixon saw them. However, the documents from the fall have a “President Has Seen” stamp or indicate which memo “tabs” are for the president.

19 Memorandum From President Nixon to the President's Assistants and Kissinger, Washington, 2 March 1970.
of Africa and Latin America, with the exception of Cuba, were not to reach Nixon’s desk except in the rare event that drastic developments required a presidential decision. Nixon was abundantly clear, however, that the bureaucracies should not entertain the misperception that he did not care about what was happening in the low non-priority regions of the world. He did care, but could not justify spending the time on these places because he did not see them as impacting the success of U.S. foreign policy in the foreseeable future. Not confident that the bureaucracies would follow his general policy guidelines in the regions he intended to farm out to them, Nixon advised Kissinger to have his NSC aides keep an eye on the bureaucracies’ handling of non-priority regions, or to actually assign trusted NSC staffers to any particular region where the State Department and company could not be trusted to follow the president’s policy guidelines.

As for why Nixon began thinking about Burundi in September, there seem to be several reasons. The first is the main argument of this paper; it is that Nixon’s interest in Burundi was predominantly moral because circumstances in Burundi allowed for Nixon to have a rare moment of moral clarity. But treating Nixon’s actions on Burundi as purely moral would be giving his inner humanitarian instinct too much credit. While morality may have been his primary impulse for wanting to see stronger action taken on Burundi, his vindictive hatred of the clientism he perceived in the State Department’s African Affairs Bureau gave him additional incentive to force the issue with a reluctant bureaucracy. Not only might his actions end up saving some “poor assholes” in Africa, but he would also be shaking up an African Affairs Bureau that he felt he regularly had to do battle with over policy. Southern Africa, the Portuguese colonies, Nigeria during its
civil war, and now Burundi, all were places where Nixon’s policy wishes were different from State’s.

Though doused with a heavy amount of cynicism, Nixon’s interest in Burundi was also a bit of an exercise in intellectual curiosity. Throughout the fall, Burundi remained on Nixon’s mind. In particular, he latched on to what he saw as hypocrisy in the world’s concern for human rights. Partly it was personal. He did not like how the McGovern campaign accused his administration of human rights violations in Southeast Asia, but at the same time seemed to care little for Burundi. Why? he asked rhetorically, because events in Burundi did not fit the constructed narrative of “Nixon the human rights violator in Vietnam” and could not be used to hurt him in the upcoming election. Less personal, he was appalled by the hypocrisy of the Black African leaders who led all out verbal attacks on South Africa in the OAU and U.N. but said nothing about blacks killing blacks in Burundi. Worse, he was disgusted with how, as he saw it, the State Department followed a similar hypocritical path, pushing for a harder line with South Africa, using the argument that it morally is the right thing to do, while being at the same time completely unwilling to criticize the actions of the Burundi government because it might upset Black African leaders.

Aside from personal morality and philosophical questions about human rights, two temporal factors brought Burundi to Nixon’s attention in late September 1972. One was the preparation for his annual address at the U.N. Though none of Nixon’s advisors anticipated a change in the trend of U.N. unwillingness to discuss human rights concerns outside of Southern Africa, George H. W. Bush, U.S. Ambassador to the UN, revisited the Burundi massacres when preparing Nixon for his talks with the world’s leaders. In
one briefing on the morning of 19 September, Nixon asked Bush which issues in the U.N. Human Rights Commission, if any, might come up in his discussions with other heads-of-state in New York. Kissinger and Secretary of State Rogers also were present at this meeting. As far as the evidence goes, this is the starting point of Nixon’s personal interest in Burundi. The following is Bush’s reply to Nixon’s question and some of the commentary that followed:

**Bush:** Really there is very little conscious [about human rights] and a lot of it stems from this U.N. internal affairs tactic, like the Irish terrorism. Nobody discusses that there because that is the internal affairs of the United Kingdom. So there’s very little issue that concern our people [but Americans might] wonder why the hell isn’t the U.N doing something about it—the Burundians eating each other up, 200,000 of them digested each other and there’s not the slightest word in the U.N. about it.

**All:** [Reaction to 200,000]

**Nixon:** ...Nobody cares…

**Kissinger:** You would think with all the bleeding hearts in the country. I was reading about this, they have killed every male of every family that has any education at all—grammar school—Hulus…

**Bush and Rogers:** Hutus.

**Nixon:** Wow…why?

**Kissinger:** Because there was an uprising of the others whose name I keep forgetting…

**Bush:** Hutu. It is a tribal thing Mr. President. It’s basic fundamental tribal warfare.

**All:** [Topic changes to Uganda then returns to Burundi]

**Nixon:** Here’s an interesting fact. Except for Biafra where you have the Catholics involved, or Rhodesia where they…where you get the American blacks concerned about the whites putting it on them—at least in South Africa nobody’s killing the Africans

**Rogers:** Well…

**Bush:** Not that many of them

**Nixon:** They are not eating any of them. For Christ’s sake if they eat each other nobody gives a damn. Isn’t that true?

**Bush:** Forty-two votes and none of them speak up.

**All:** [Back to discussing Idi Amin and Uganda]

**Nixon:** I have been hearing about Burundi for a long time—heard about it in the Senate.

**Bush:** Brad Morris is handling that. He is with the U.N.
Kissinger: It’s a governmental policy. It isn’t that the soldiers are running wild. It’s a systematic effort to kill the male members of educated…

[Nintelligible]
Nixon: How do they do it?
Bush: Shoot them.

Kissinger: Go around to the villages and shoot them
Bush: Or take a bayonet and kill them.
Nixon: Good God!"20

The other factor that brought Burundi to Nixon’s attention was the rapidly deteriorating situation in Uganda. The crisis in Uganda, coming so recently after the killings in Burundi had winded down, forced Nixon to think about East African issues; he was left with a generally sour view of the region. On 25 January 1971, General Idi Amin overthrew Ugandan President Milton Obote. Since then, Amin’s subsequent purge of Obote supporters in Uganda, usually the ranking members in the army and civil services, left the country in great disarray. The purges possibly had resulted in the deaths of 4,000-5,000 Ugandans by September 1972. Racist and paranoid, Amin then expelled the Israelis and roughly 55,000 non-Ugandan Asians and continued to suspect that the U.K. and U.S. sought his overthrow. Uganda became a priority issue in late September 1972 when several hundred Obote supporters left their refuge in Tanzania and attacked Amin’s forces in southern Uganda. Obote’s supporters expected a popular uprising to follow their invasion. The popular uprising never came and Amin’s forces defeated the invaders. Though “riding high” after having bested Obote for a second time, the power struggle nevertheless made Amin even more paranoid of outsiders, leading Nixon to take quite seriously Amin’s earlier warning that white people would make good targets for his

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army if any attempt was made to unseat him.21 Uganda was much like Burundi in that U.S. interests there were negligible.22 And though there was no talk of “genocide” in Uganda or nearly as high a body count, the September unrest got fast tracked to a priority level U.S. foreign policy issue. The sole reason for this was the threat the situation in Uganda presented to American and British nationals.23

The British position in Uganda was significantly more precarious than the American. Like in Burundi, the U.S. had a small presence in Uganda, only several hundred Americans who were mostly located in Entebbe. The relative concentration of Americans made planning for evacuation easier. The roughly 7,000 British nationals, however, were spread all across the country. And worse for Britain, Amin saw British nationals as more threatening than American. Feeling underprepared to evacuate 7,000 of its people from Uganda, Britain turned to the U.S. for help but was repeatedly “stonewalled” by the State Department. For a week, State refused to have logistical talks with the British. London had to bypass the State Department entirely and directly contact Kissinger in order to get American assistance in Uganda.24

On the evening of 24 September, Kissinger called Nixon to inform him of Britain’s pressing concerns and the unwillingness of the State Department to even talk with the British. “Screw State! State is always on the side of the Blacks—to hell with them!” was Nixon’s response. As America’s closest NATO ally, Nixon was determined to help the British with whatever they needed, with or without the help of the State

22 The main difference from the U.S. perspective being that prior to Amin, the U.S. had traditionally supported Uganda in order to promote East African stability.
23 Though accidental, one member of the U.S. Peace Corps was killed in the September violence in Uganda.
Department. Nixon ordered Kissinger to personally assure London through his private channels that the U.S. would help Britain evacuate its people as needed from Uganda. In order to avoid drawing unnecessary attention from both Uganda and the State Department, Nixon and Kissinger decided to send General Andrew Goodpaster to Uganda. Overtly, Goodpaster would appear to be in Uganda to help plan the American evacuation. Covertly, he was there to provide the British with the consultations they desired and help them prepare for their evacuation.

It was sometime after his pre-U.N. consultations with Bush and the outbreak of violence in Uganda that Nixon began requesting immediate reports on the U.S. response to Burundi. Using information largely from State’s assessment of the Burundi situation, NSC staffer Fernando Rondon prepared a briefing on 20 September that was speedily hand-delivered to Deputy Assistant to the President Alex Butterfield at 4:40 pm. The memo contained nothing all that different from the May and June memos. It stated that tribalism was at the root of Burundi’s problems, that the Burundi government had systematically targeted male Hutus in its reprisals, that Africa’s leaders were thoroughly disinterested in trying to end the killing in Burundi, U.S. interests in Burundi were microscopic, that the U.S. would continue to provide humanitarian aid if it could assuredly reach both Hutus and Tutsis, and finally, that no further action was recommended on Burundi. The main difference now was that that Rondon could report the death toll with more certainty, “well over 100,000,” and conclude that State’s engagement of the OAU and U.N. had ultimately failed to stop the killing in Burundi. Importantly, he also was able to hint at the Belgian response, which seemed to surpass all bilateral U.S. efforts, though Rondon does not bluntly make this claim. Some Belgian
policymakers had already characterized the killings in Burundi as genocide, and had begun discussing the termination of Belgian military aid and a slowdown of economic assistance programs as a result. Regarding State’s initiatives, Rondon concluded that the bloodshed ended not because of any U.S. efforts, but because “the Tutsi government has frankly run out of Hutu targets.”

A day or so later a more sizable report came from State itself. Its summary of State Department initiatives contained nothing new but its closing statements, somewhat at odds with Rondon’s earlier report, assured the president that “the U.S. role was one of active quiet leadership of an international effort, handicapped by our history of difficulty with Burundi, African attitudes, and the reluctance of most European governments to get out in front.” About State’s report, Nixon had this to say:

This is one of the most cynical, callus reactions of a great government to a terrible human tragedy I have ever seen. When Paks try to put down a rebellion in East Pakistan, the world screams. When Indians kill a few thousand Paks, no one cares. Biafra stirs us because of the Catholics; the Israeli Olympics because of the Jews; the North Vietnam bombings because of Communist leanings in our establishment. But when (one-third of all the people of a black country) are murdered, we say and do nothing because we must not make blacks look bad (except, of course, when Catholic blacks are killed).

I do not buy this double standard. Tell the weak sisters in the African Bureau of State to give a recommendation as to how we can at least show moral outrage. And let’s begin by calling back our Ambassador immediately for consultation. Under no circumstances will I appoint a new Ambassador to present credentials to these butchers.

This short note from Nixon to Kissinger, written in the margins of the president’s copy of the report from State, contains several of Nixon’s feelings on the world’s inconsistent feelings.

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concern for human rights, the human rights double standard he saw glaringly present in U.S. policy, and his disposition towards the need for stronger action to be taken on Burundi.

Breaking Nixon’s reply down, he tours some of the world’s human rights issues that had occurred during his presidency. The “Paks,” as Nixon calls them, is his reference to the Bangladesh Liberation War and the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971. In the spring of 1971, East Pakistan burst into the world news when it asserted its autonomy from West Pakistan. West Pakistan responded to the East Pakistan move for independence with military force. A bloody war ensued, during which the West Pakistan army killed hundreds of thousands of Bengali civilians in East Pakistan. India, a Soviet sympathizer and enemy of West Pakistan, entered the war on the side of East Pakistan. Traditionally, the U.S. had supported West Pakistan in an effort to counter the Soviet influence in India. Despite West Pakistan’s geopolitical importance, reports of atrocities committed by the West Pakistan army against Bengalis in East Pakistan led the U.S. congress to impose sanctions on West Pakistan. Fearing that West Pakistan’s defeat would result in unchecked Soviet expansion in the region, Nixon defied Congress and routed military supplies to West Pakistan through Iran and Jordan. Though Nixon did not approve of West Pakistan’s slaughter of East Pakistanis, in this case, the perceived threat of Soviet expansion trumped human rights concerns.

Nixon had another strategic reason to not push the human rights issue with West Pakistan. Since the Sino-Soviet split, China and the USSR had battled each other for influence across the world. Given its close proximity, the Indian subcontinent was important to both China and the USSR. Like the U.S., China was a supporter of West
Pakistan. In 1971, the rapprochement Nixon and Kissinger had begun with China was in its infancy. Because China placed importance on its West Pakistani ally, Nixon and Kissinger feared that any equivocation in U.S. support for West Pakistan would hurt their normalizing initiatives with China. Again, East-West strategic considerations trumped human rights.

“Biafra” and “the Catholics” refer to the Nigerian Civil War. In 1967, the eastern portion of Nigeria attempted to secede from the whole. The population of the Republic of Biafra, as it then called itself, was predominantly of the Ibo ethnicity. Many of Biafra’s Ibos had few ties to the mostly Muslim north. Importantly, Biafra sat atop some of Nigeria’s most precious oil fields, which Nigeria would lose ownership of if Biafran independence succeeded. Biafran independence also threatened the dissolution of Nigeria, the onetime poster child for successful transition from British colonial rule to African self-governance. Over the next three years, the forces of the Nigerian Federal Military Government battled Biafran freedom fighters. Though militarily superior, the FMG was unable to quickly overcome Biafran resistance. As a result, the FMG turned to a war of attrition against Biafra, essentially trying to starve out the fledgling republic. During this war, and because of the FMG’s blockades, millions of Biafrans died of starvation.

In an unprecedented international response to the suffering in Biafra, the U.S. and Western Europe launched the most extensive African humanitarian relief campaign that the world had ever seen. The protracted nature of the conflict allowed time for the international media to pick up on the story. The fact that Biafran children were the first and most common victims of starvation grabbed Western attention. Irish Catholics
working in Biafra played a crucial role in letting the world know what was happening there. And the Biafran government itself, knowing that international intervention on its behalf was the only way its independence struggle could succeed against the military superiority of the FMG, told its story to anyone who would listen in the hopes of gaining Western sympathy and support.

Members of both the American Right and Left supported Biafran independence. An indication of American interest in the Nigerian Civil War, Nixon pledged to do more for Biafra as one of his campaign promises in 1968. Nixon’s personal sympathies lay with Biafra. Once in office, Nixon followed through on his promise, or at least attempted to follow through. On the Biafran issue, he ran into a State Department that was completely wedded to a FMG victory. State’s support for the FMG was at odds with the official U.S. policy of neutrality in the Nigerian Civil War. In particular, the U.S. Embassy in Lagos was unashamedly pro-FMG, so much so that it sanitized its reports on Biafran suffering in order to prevent the growth of sympathy for Biafra among U.S. policymakers. The State Department saw the FMG victory as inevitable, and it therefore made sense in the long run for the U.S. to support the victorious party. Supporting the FMG during its civil war would preserve good U.S.-Nigerian relations for after the war. State also argued that successful Biafra independence would precipitate a wave of secession movements all across Black Africa, whereas an FMG victory would have the opposite effect of reassuring the territorial integrity of the sub-Saharan states.

As a final comment on Nixon’s note to Kissinger, the “Israeli Olympics” is a reference to the summer games in Munich, Germany, in 1972. Nixon wondered how the deaths of eleven Israelis could receive more collective world sympathy than the deaths of
100,000-200,000 Africans. On 5 September, Palestinian terrorists from the group Black September broke into the Olympic village, took hostage, and then killed eleven Israeli athletes. The North Vietnamese bombings and comment about “Communist leanings” is likely a bit of the older, Red-baiting Nixon coming out. Nixon also gets his math wrong when he says the Burundi government killed one third of its people. The population in Burundi was about 3.5 million before the genocide. Even the largest death toll estimates come nowhere close to one third of Burundi’s total population. The math miscalculation is not so important in this instance. What angered Nixon was that the Burundi government could slaughter hundreds of thousands of its own people without receiving the slightest reprimand from the international community.

In the wake of genocide in Burundi, Nixon saw the most heinous manifestation of a human rights double standard in the U.S. approach toward South Africa. As Kissinger explained it, “State is anti-white and exceptionally liberal.” Nixon agreed completely with this assessment. Nixon believed that the policy of the State Department’s African Affairs Bureau, particularly the policy of Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs David Newsom, was to support whatever black government was in power in an effort to maintain good diplomatic relations with the Africans, no matter how deplorable the actions of certain African governments. As part of this arrangement, State pursued the foreign policy agenda of their host countries, namely their opposition to the White Minority governments of southern Africa. “No sir, never” was Nixon’s response to State’s draft of a speech that Rogers was to give at the U.N. in the fall. The draft, according to Kissinger, contained an “all-out attack” on the governments South Africa and Mozambique. Citing State’s moral hypocrisy, Nixon vetoed the draft on the grounds
that the U.S. could not aggressively condemn apartheid in the U.N. and then equivocate on the immorality of what had happened in Burundi. But this was State’s attitude, according to Nixon and Kissinger. They “scream” when they see a government they do not like but do not “say a peep” when the Burundi government kills a few hundred thousand of its people or Idi Amin institutes a reign of terror.

In Nixon’s opinion, State’s unwillingness to even consider Biafran independence, its minimal efforts in trying to end the Burundi genocide and reluctance to make a public statement of moral outrage, and its trivializing of Idi Amin’s actions all testified to the State Department’s unwavering preference for strict non-intervention and pro-Black African position. On the topic of State Department’s human rights hypocrisy in Africa, Nixon told Kissinger over the phone “this damn double standard is just unbelievable.” Nixon’s September phone conversations with Kissinger about Burundi offer some genuinely candid moments that provide further insight into Nixon’s thoughts on the human rights responsibilities of the U.S.

**Nixon:** Don’t you really feel, I mean…I mean…but be totally honest—isn’t a person a person goddamn? You know, there are those that talk about Vietnam…these people far away that we don’t know…and you remember that poor old Chamberlain who talks about the Czechs…that they were far away and we don’t know them very well. Well goddamnit, people are people in my opinion!

**Kissinger:** Well it’s not only that…

**Nixon:** I don’t mean our national interest gets involved, but every time…every time that anybody else gets involved…you know every time it’s one other or us…and you have a little pressure appear, State goes up the wall. But I am getting tired of this business of letting these Africans eat 100,000 people and doing nothing about it.

According to Nixon, in the absence of significant national security reasons to not take a stand for human rights, like in the case of the Bangladesh Liberation War, the U.S.
should act to prevent genocide and massive human rights abuses. In the case of Burundi, Nixon believed the U.S. should have done more.

And Nixon let the State Department know his dissatisfaction with the African Affair’s Bureau’s handling of both Uganda and Burundi. Nixon was “outraged by the whole damn thing,” meaning State’s unwillingness to talk with London about getting its people out of Uganda. As for the Americans in Uganda, Nixon wanted everyone evacuated as soon as possible. Nixon could not understand State’s unwillingness to treat Amin as the “prehistoric monster” he appeared to be or take more seriously the threat he posed to the lives of American and British citizens in Uganda. Nixon really thought that the 7,000 U.K. nationals in Uganda were going to be slaughtered; this was unacceptable. The report from former U.S. Ambassador to Burundi, Thomas Melady, assured the White House that in Uganda no Americans had been arrested and only a handful of British had actually been killed. Though a “sweet guy,” an eternal optimist, and great supporter of his administration, Nixon saw Melady missing the bigger picture. According to Nixon, Melady was “totally African—all African…he just doesn’t understand.” While the U.S. Embassy in Kampala and State’s African Affairs Bureau seemed to be of the opinion that the deteriorating safety of Westerners in Uganda did not yet warrant a U.S. evacuation, Nixon thought otherwise: “Well goddamnit, if a Britisher is killed,” Americans should get out of Uganda. Furthermore, the U.S. should do everything it could to help the British escape Uganda, rather than settle for State’s “fine howdy do” of a plan that only considered the American evacuation and left the British stranded.

For Burundi, Nixon wanted Kissinger to “get that Burundi Ambassador’s ass out of there right now…and that’s an order goddamnit!” Whereas Nixon recalled Melady
from Uganda for instructions and to get Melady’s personal account of what was going on in Uganda, Nixon recalled Ambassador Robert Yost as a first step in an informal break of diplomatic relations with Burundi’s “butchers,” as he called the Burundi government. Importantly, Nixon also demanded that the State Department’s African Bureau, he called them the “weak sisters” in his note to Kissinger, formulate a stronger policy response to show the Burundi government that the U.S. did not approve of its actions. At the very least, Nixon believed the U.S. should publicly condemn the Burundi government, thereby expressing moral outrage. By September, Nixon was convinced the Burundi death toll exceeded 200,000. Reflecting on this number with Kissinger, he was dumbfounded that “in the whole Burundi business” the State Department had “not sent one memorandum over to us on it” until he had begun demanding reports from State in September. Nixon was quite adamant with Kissinger, he wanted “State’s ass reamed out for that.”

Throughout September Nixon told Kissinger that he thought the African Affairs Bureau was a disgrace, but his feelings about the African division went well beyond his cynical view of State’s human rights hypocrisy. In seeking to find out “what the hell’s happened in Burundi,” Nixon genuinely distrusted the assessments coming from the State Department. This may be in part another legacy of Nixon’s experience with the Nigerian Civil War, in which the U.S. Embassy in Lagos played an active and intentional role in preventing American policymakers from sympathizing with the plight of the Biafrans. More likely, in the Burundi case at least, it seems to be a less sinister perception of the African Affairs Bureau and Embassy in U.S. Bujumbura. Nixon simply was not satisfied that he was getting a balanced perspective from State on Burundi because he saw the African Affairs Bureau as acutely wedded to the positions of its host African
governments. Unconfident in the judgments of his own State Department, Nixon instructed Kissinger to secretly contact the Belgian Ambassador to the U.S. to get the Belgian opinion on recent events in Burundi.

In response to Nixon’s desire to hear from the Belgian Ambassador, Kissinger also had his NSC staff provide the president with their own overview of the Belgian response. It indicated that the Belgians indeed took the strongest position against the massacres in Burundi. More so than any other Western country, members of the Belgian public, press, and parliament condemned the genocidal intentions of the Burundi government. Belgian attentiveness to the violence in Burundi led Foreign Minister Pierre Harmel to suggest that Belgium would “have to adjust its cooperation” with Burundi. The Belgians who cared about Burundi’s problems were critical of continued Belgian assistance programs to Burundi. Largely as a result of this domestic pressure, but also with some State Department urging, Belgium stopped shipping ammunition to Burundi. In July, Belgium also told the Burundi government that formal bilateral teaching agreements would be required that would give the Belgian Embassy the right to visit teachers throughout Burundi’s countryside without prior government consent, thereby giving the Belgian Embassy firsthand access to the Burundian countryside in the event of another outbreak of ethnic violence. Without the Burundi government’s acceptance of these terms, the Belgians said they had no choice but to recall their teaching mission. The NSC staffers who compiled the report did not anticipate the Burundi government’s agreement to these “modest” Belgian terms, as the Burundi government would likely see bowing to these extraterritorial Belgian demands as a “loss of face.” Finally, Belgium informed the Burundi government that it would reduce the services it provided through
the Belgian military assistance team. Privately, Foreign Minister Harmel informed the U.S. that Belgium had decided to completely withdraw its military assistance team. Belgium planned to phase out its military assistance to Burundi completely by 1 January 1974.

Nixon’s response to the NSC report on the Belgian reaction was brief; he asked Kissinger “what have we done?” A few days later Kissinger’s NSC team prepared its own report on the U.S. response. Like Rondon’s report to Kissinger, it called into question State’s claim that its efforts put the U.S. in a role of “active quite leadership” in seeking to end the Burundi killings. The report recalled State’s attempt to “awaken African and international concern” and the minimal success of these efforts. It was hoped that Zaire, Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Rwanda would take an interest in bringing about an end to the violence in Burundi, but except for Zaire, the African leaders were unwilling to get involved. State did have more success engaging the U.N. The international body was slow to act, however, and its humanitarian presence in Burundi, though making it difficult for the killings to continue, came too little, too late. The report also indicated that the Belgian decision to stop shipping arms to Burundi was more the result of domestic pressure, rather than a result of State’s urging. In fact, the Belgian threat to withdraw its military and economic aid was the strongest policy response to the Burundi massacres. While the State Department’s efforts may have put made the U.S. in the role of the most active seeker of a multilateral solution to the killings in Burundi, in every way, the Belgians had made the strongest bilateral efforts, primarily their threat and eventual suspension of military aid to Burundi.
In the absence of stronger policy options from the State Department, Nixon and Kissinger decided to treat the recall of Ambassador Yost as a first step in downgrading Burundi status to “minimal” diplomatic relations. This demotion also included the termination of all bilateral aid, self-help funds, and cultural exchange programs to Burundi. The termination of bilateral aid did not include humanitarian relief, however, which the U.S. would continue to provide so long as U.S. aid reached the entire Burundi population. In fact, the termination of U.S. bilateral economic assistance to Burundi meant very little in a tangible sense, especially when compared to the more economically significant threat of a Belgian withdrawal from Burundi. Nevertheless, the termination of American aid was more of a symbolic gesture designed to make clear to the Burundi government that the U.S. did not approve of its mass slaughter of Hutus.

Lest the Burundi government misinterpret the message, the State Department had David Newsom meet with Burundian Ambassador Terence Tsanze on 18 October to inform the Burundi government of the U.S.’s change in policy and the reasons for it. Newsom relayed to Burundi Ambassador “the profound shock of the American people and of all levels of the United States Government over the mass killings of Hutus that had taken place,” and that U.S. relations with Burundi could not return to normal until the Burundi government demonstrated a noticeable change in its respect for human rights.27 The Burundi Ambassador reacted defensively to Newsom’s remarks. Though he acknowledged that his government’s response to the Hutu coup had been “severe,” Ambassador Tsanze held to the position that the 29 April invasion posed the greatest threat yet seen to his government’s continued survival. Furthermore, Tsanze adamantly

“denied any ethnic character to the reprisals” and confidently assured Newsom that his government could provide evidence that proved national reconciliation was underway. The Burundi Ambassador also assured Newsom that his government had secured the “equitable distribution” of Western humanitarian aid to all portions of Burundi’s population.28 This October meeting between Newsom and Tsanze had taken place after several diplomatic snubs the U.S. had directed toward the Burundi government. In New York, when the Burundi Foreign Minister asked to see Secretary of State Rogers, Rogers refused to meet with him, despite having received every other foreign minister who requested an appointment. Rogers also made the point to deplore the Burundi massacre in all his talks with other African dignitaries. Additionally, Ambassador Bush deliberately failed to attend a Burundi reception on 12 October.

In late September, Ambassador Yost returned to Washington for consultations. “In view of the considerable presidential interest in the U.S. relationship with Burundi,” Yost decided to provide his own feelings on recent political developments in Burundi.29 These early sentiments foreshadowed the arguments the State Department would start making in 1973, when it prematurely pushed for the normalization of relations with Burundi. Yost indicated that since early August, the U.S. Embassy had been reporting the growth in strength of a more moderate Tutsi faction in Micombero’s cabinet. The new Burundi Prime Minister Nyamoya seemed to lead the moderate faction, with Micombero’s approval. Any hope of national reconciliation, Yost argued, would happen under this group of moderate Tutsis. Yost also forecasted that the phasing out of Belgian

military assistance would cause Burundi to look for alternative arms suppliers, likely the USSR or China. In the wake of the Belgian military withdrawal, Yost warned that the Burundi government might interpret stronger U.S. actions against it as part of a broader Western pullout of Burundi. Yost believed that the U.S. should not rule out the possibility of the Chinese filling the void left by the departure of Belgian’s military assistance. Though the Chinese would probably find the Tutsi minority government to be an “uncomfortable bedfellow,” the temptation of “real-estate at the vulnerable eastern door to Zaire” might be too much for the Chinese to resist, given PRC consistent backing of Mobutu’s opponents. As a result of these conclusions, Yost advised the U.S. to “retain the greatest possible flexibility” in its minimal relations with Burundi, thereby affording the U.S. a free hand to make “selected gestures” toward the Burundi government if it showed signs of improvement on its human rights record. Nixon never met with Yost, however. Since Yost had only arrived in Burundi in late August, Rondon advised Kissinger that Newsom would be the better person for the president to meet with if he felt so inclined. Rondon himself met twice with Yost to make sure that the ambassador understood the president’s feelings on Burundi, and would not exceed his mandate of minimal relations upon his return to Burundi.

Nixon’s opportunity to express moral outrage came in the form of a vote for a loan to Burundi in the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.\(^{30}\)

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\(^{30}\) If Nixon was so passionate about Burundi, and was seeking an outlet to express moral outrage, why didn’t he simply issue a strongly worded statement to the press and American people? His 1973 comments on Burundi in his foreign policy report to congress are weak when compared to his wording for the IBRD vote. There is no use of “genocide” in Nixon’s report to congress or demands for U.S. action. I think there are a few reasons why Nixon did not bring his feelings on Burundi before the American public. First, such a public statement seems out of place considering American unfamiliarity with events in Burundi. At best, the collective American response would likely have been to ask \textit{what–where’s Burundi?} At worst, a public statement from Nixon might bring Burundi to the American attention for all the wrong reasons, all wrong reasons from Nixon’s perspective at least. Such a statement might catch the media’s
Because of Nixon’s personal interest in Burundi and his criticism of State’s response, the State Department decided it would be best to inform Nixon’s NSC that it planned “to interpose no objection on political grounds” in the upcoming IBRD vote for a loan to Burundi. The proposed $4.5 million loan was for the improvement of a vital north-south road within Burundi. The road had become an important artery for tourism, fishing, and cotton and coffee production. USAID had helped to finance some previous repairs to the road between 1962 and 1965. In 1970, an IBRD survey of the road revealed serious deterioration. The upcoming IBRD loan would be to repair this damage. The State Department argued that it would be unusual for the U.S. to oppose the loan in the IBRD Executive Board on the political grounds of disapproving of human rights atrocities in Burundi. The State Department did not anticipate that any other board members would oppose the proposed loan to Burundi for this reason. Nor did State think that this form of multilateral development assistance could be construed as a U.S. endorsement of the Burundi government’s reprisals against its Hutu population.31

Rondon alerted Kissinger to State’s plan to approve the IBRD loan for Burundi, “in view of the President’s feelings about the tribal slaughter which took place there.” Kissinger in turn informed the president about the loan. Nixon’s initial impulse was to abstain from the vote, which he handwrote as a third option onto the policy recommendation Kissinger provided him. Once Nixon realized that there was no option to abstain in the IBRD, he decided to approve the loan, but with a very strong caveat. The U.S. could approve the loan, but only if it did so with a strong public statement that

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condemned the Burundi genocide. During the vote, Nixon wanted the Executive Director to issue “a **strong** statement...disapproving of Burundi’s genocide—the statement is to be **broadly** publicized so our **not** objecting to the loan does not reflect approval of their policy of Genocide. This is an opportunity to get out the horrible story of what happened there.” However, for reasons unrelated to the violence in Burundi, the IBRD vote got delayed for nearly a full year. When the vote finally came, the State Department convinced Nixon’s NSC that it would be untimely to make such a strong statement because the Burundi government had shown signs of attempting to peacefully reconcile its ethnic troubles. The State Department determined that such a strongly worded condemnation would be counterproductive to the national reconciliation the U.S. Embassy in Bujumbura was encouraging. There is no evidence, however, that anyone consulted Nixon on this decision.

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Conclusion:
“The Department of State now considers that the Burundi Government has made progress in coping with its internal tribal conflict and that it is appropriate to re-examine our policy toward that country.”
~Harold Horan, U.S. National Security Council

On 24 April 1973, five days before the anniversary of the first bloodshed in the summer of 1972, Director of Central African Affairs Herman Cohen provided David Newsom with an evaluation of the Burundi government’s response to the U.S. policy of minimal relations. The State Department concluded that the killing had definitely stopped. The moderate leaders in the government were now emphasizing a campaign of unity and national reconciliation. Volunteer relief agencies and foreign observers unanimously reported that aid supplies were being distributed to the entire Burundian population. In fact, in some regions the Burundi government was actually helping provide relief services for Hutus. In other areas, it at least was not hindering international relief efforts. The State Department believed that the U.S. policy of minimal relations had served its purpose alerting the Burundi government to its poor world image as a result of the 1972 massacres. As a general conclusion, State determined that the “policy of minimal relations has achieved its purpose to the maximum extent…in short, we have gone about as far as we can go with that policy.”¹ As a result, the State Department began pushing for the normalization of relations with Burundi, arguing that the Burundi government had sufficiently begun to meet the prerequisites for normalization and that the U.S. should respond to this evidence of human rights progress in Burundi with positive diplomatic gestures.

¹ Memorandum From the Director of Central African Affairs (Cohen) to the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs (Newsom), Washington, April 24, 1973.
National reconciliation in Burundi proved to be fleeting, however. Like a reoccurring nightmare, in May of 1973 a band of Hutus invaded Burundi, this time from the south and the north. Crossing the Tanzanian border on 11 May and the Rwandan on 13 May, Hutu forces launched a “fairly well-coordinated attack which initially overwhelmed [the] defending Tutsi Army.” After the invader’s early success, the Burundi army drove them back. Despite their eventual defeat, the attackers managed to obtain arms and uniforms from killed Burundi soldiers, giving the invading Hutus “a permanent insurgency capability.”

Demonstrating the fragility of the supposed national unity in Burundi, Burundi’s Tutsi leadership responded to the May 1973 Hutu threat by arming Tutsi civilians and carrying out reprisals similar to the ones in 1972. But compared to 1972, the 1973 killings occurred on a smaller scale.

Unlike in 1972, several OAU member states took interest in Burundi’s problems during the summer of 1973. This African concern was hardly altruistic. During the reprisals of 1972, thousands of Hutu refugees fled Burundi. With the events of 1972 fresh in the minds of many Hutus, many escaped Burundi as soon as violence broke out in May of 1973. Burundi’s neighbors—Tanzania, Rwanda, and Zaire—wanted to end the stream of Burundian refugees flooding across their borders. This time, Burundi accused Rwanda of complicity in the northern invasion, leading to mudslinging between the two in the OAU but still no direct discussion of the unsustainable Hutu-Tutsi situation inside of Burundi. Tanzania in particular took great interest in the renewed Burundi violence because the Burundi army had crossed the ill-defined Burundi-Tanzania border in its “mopping up” efforts in the south, thereby violating Tanzanian sovereignty. Unlike in

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2 Telegram 114225 From the Department of State to the Embassy in Ethiopia, June 12, 1973, 2319Z

1972, the State Department believed that the continued refugee problem and new conflict between Burundi and Tanzanian justified the “internationalization of the problem” and that it would garner more international attention and action, at least from East African leaders.

While prior to May 1973 the State Department had been arguing that the Burundi government had shown sufficient evidence of national reconciliation, individually Ambassador Melady had a different assessment of the ethnic situation in Burundi. In light of reports of renewed ethnic violence, Melady felt “that the factors in the ethnic Hutu-Tutsi equation are such to almost guarantee another serious confrontation” in Burundi. Recalling that the voices of Tutsi moderates had been completely outmatched in 1972, Melady warned that “the ethnic fears and hatred are so deep that attempts at reconciliation and dialogue must be preceded by more pragmatic arrangements.” In Melady’s opinion, national reconciliation clearly had not occurred and would not in the foreseeable future.

Nixon’s displeasure with the State Department’s 1972 efforts, and personal interest in seeing stronger action taken on Burundi in the fall of 1972, impacted State’s handling of the renewed ethnic violence in 1973. The State Department was noticeably more frank with the Burundi government during the summer of 1973. In a meeting between David Newsom and Burundi Ambassador Joseph Ndabaniwe, Newsom pointedly advised the Burundi Ambassador that his government should seek outside help if it could not resolve its internal Hutu-Tutsi troubles. This uncharacteristically

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4 Memorandum From the Ambassador to Uganda (Melady) to the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs (Newsom), Washington, May 15, 1973.

5 With such a negative opinion of the success of national reconciliation, Melady advised a form of “Cyprus Solution” in which Burundi’s Hutus and Tutsis would be physically segregated to prevent ethnic confrontation. As for how this set up would work and who would impose it, however, Melady was unsure.
straightforward remark from a U.S. State Department official came as a shock to an Ambassador whose government was unwilling to even acknowledge that it had an ethnic problem. Newsom then advised the Burundi government to admit to the problem and the 1972 massacres because the denial only further discredited the Burundi government and invalidated any of its constructive steps at reconciliation. Newsom also told Ndabaniwe that the U.S. government had been in contact with Black African leaders, urging them to intervene to prevent the Burundi government’s “indiscriminate killing” of Hutus.

Newsom explained that the U.S. sympathized with the “complexity” of Burundi’s ethnic situation, but that no amount of complexity excused the Burundi government’s sponsored killings of Hutus by the JRR and army, which the U.S. knew was happening. There were too many reports for the Burundi government to deny the killings. Many countries in Africa have had ethnic problems, Newsom told Ndabaniwe, but only Burundi had resorted to massive slaughter as its solution. Most candidly, Newsom told the Burundi Ambassador that “Genocide by anyone in Africa is Still Genocide and must be condemned as such by all African leaders,” and that the U.S. “will continue to encourage [the] African leadership to pay attention to Burundi just as they do to [the] injustice [of] White Ruled Southern Africa for to fail to do so lessens their credibility and integrity as African leaders.”

Here is Newsom making a veiled reference to Nixon’s influence in the minutes of a follow up meeting with the Burundi Ambassador:

Mr. Newsom said he did not presume to tell GRB [Burundi government] how to run country but pointed out that feeling in US was generally that the GRB was minority government exerting forced domination on a large majority similar to situation in Southern White ruled Africa. He stated that this was not official USG view, but was opinion he encountered…

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6 Telegram 122179 From the Department of State to the Embassy in Burundi, June 22, 1973, 1617Z.
Newsom then restated that USG was under strong pressure to take steps against GRB, but did not want to do so.⁷

In late January of 1974, the U.S. normalized relations with Burundi. Despite the quick return to ethnic reprisals in the summer of 1973, the State Department again argued that the Burundi government had sufficiently demonstrated national reconciliation to warrant normalization. In alerting Kissinger to State’s desire to normalize relations, NSC staffer Hal Horan noted that a UNDP survey team had uncovered a $14 billion nickel deposit in Burundi and that one of State’s arguments for normalization was that the current policy of minimal relations with Burundi put U.S. companies at a disadvantage in staking a claim. Nevertheless, Horan concurred with State’s assessment and Kissinger routinely authorized the normalization of relations with Burundi. The documents suggest that Kissinger never consulted with Nixon on this decision, despite telling the president in 1972 that he would keep him informed of developments in U.S. policy towards Burundi.⁸

Despite Nixon’s unexpected interest and his demands that the State Department craft him a stronger U.S. reaction to the Burundi Genocide, the Burundi episode largely reinforces the *too little, too late, if at all trend* in the U.S. response to genocide. While this has largely been a story of missed opportunities, there is hope that things are changing for the better.⁹ On 4 August 2011, a new Presidential Study Directive

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⁷ Telegram 126711 From the Department of State to the Embassy in Burundi, June 28, 1973, 1540Z

⁸ A NSC staffer raised issue with this, arguing that Kissinger should have consulted the president because the State Department appeared to be using the NSC as a clearinghouse for a change in official presidential policy, likely a change Nixon would not have approved should he have been consulted. The comments seem to have been ignored as Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Brent Scowcroft routinely approved State Department’s recommendation for normalization of relations with Burundi.

⁹ In working on a project such as this it is hard to not want to see more action taken by the U.S. government to prevent genocide. I hope I am not naively anticipating a change that is not coming. I cannot
circulated throughout the Obama administration. This unprecedented document ordered within 120 days the creation of an Interagency Atrocities Prevention Board. For the first time in U.S. history, the President of the United States was making the prevention and punishment of genocide and other serious human rights violations a foreign policy priority of the U.S. government.

The Obama administration spells out quite clearly that “preventing mass atrocities and genocide is a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the United States.”\textsuperscript{10} Genocide and man-made human disaster prevention is a national security interest, the administration argues, because they create refugee crises and regional political instability. Poignantly, the Obama administration notes a critical result of the U.S. record of ignoring genocide. Consistent U.S. failure to take action has diminished U.S. moral credibility all across the world.\textsuperscript{11} In an effort to help restore some of this lost moral credibility, the Atrocities Prevention Board will be given the authority “to develop prevention strategies and to ensure that concerns are elevated for senior decision-making so that we [the U.S.] are better able to work with our [U.S.] allies and partners to be responsive to early warning signs and prevent potential atrocities.”\textsuperscript{12} Let’s

\begin{itemize}
  \item help but think of the books I have read on U.S.-Africa relations. In each decade—the fifties, the sixties, the seventies, the eighties, and so on—the vast majority of authors, though deploring past generations’ marginalization of Africa, predicted that their decade would be start of a newfound American interest in Africa. Here I am writing in 2012 and I have yet to see the materialization of this newfound U.S. interest in Africa.
  \item The White House, Presidential Study Directive on Mass Atrocities, Office of the Press Secretary (4 August, 2011).
  \item The Obama administration makes several other candid statements. It confesses that U.S. government action often arrives too late, when low-cost and low-risk policy options have been missed. It admits that up until now the U.S. has not had a policy framework for the prevention and response to genocide. It lists Kyrgyzstan, Cote d’Ivoire, Libya, and Sudan as focus areas for the Atrocities Prevention Board. It states that the U.S. will mobilize diplomatic, humanitarian, financial, and military (in extreme cases) means to prevent and respond to genocide and mass atrocities.
  \item The White House, Presidential Study Directive on Mass Atrocities, Office of the Press Secretary (4 August, 2011).
\end{itemize}
hope that the Obama administration and its successors intend to uphold the prioritization of genocide prevention.
Appendix A: Nixon Tape Transcriptions

Oval Office # 783: 19 September 10:39 am

**Bush:** Really there is very little conscious and a lot of it stems from this U.N. internal affairs tactic, like the Irish terrorism. Nobody discusses that there because that is the internal affairs of the United Kingdom. So there’s very little issue that concern our people [but Americans might] wonder why the hell isn’t the U.N doing something about it—the Burundians eating each other up, 200,000 of them digested each other and there’s not the slightest word in the U.N. about it.

**All:** [Reaction to 200,000]

**Nixon:** …Nobody cares…

**Kissinger:** You would think with all the bleeding hearts in the country. I was reading about this, they have killed every male of every family that has any education at all—grammar school—Hulus…

**Bush and Rogers:** Hutus.

**Nixon:** Wow…why?

**Kissinger:** Because there was an uprising of the others whose name I keep forgetting…

**Bush:** Hutu. It is a tribal thing Mr. President. It’s basic fundamental tribal warfare.

**All:** [Topic changes to Uganda then returns to Burundi]

**Nixon:** Here’s an interesting fact. Except for Biafra where you have the Catholics involved, or Rhodesia where they…where you get the American Blacks concerned about the whites putting it on them—at least in South Africa nobody’s killing the Africans

**Rogers:** Well…

**Bush:** Not that many of them

**Nixon:** They are not eating any of them. For Christ’s sake if they eat each other nobody gives a damn. Isn’t that true?

**Bush:** Forty-two votes and none of them speak up.

**All:** [Back to discussing Idi Amin and Uganda]

**Nixon:** I have been hearing about Burundi for a long time—heard about it in the Senate.

**Bush:** Brad Morris is handling that. He is with the U.N.

**Kissinger:** It’s a governmental policy. It isn’t that the soldiers are running wild. It’s a systematic effort to kill the male members of educated [unintelligible]

**Nixon:** How do they do it?

**Bush:** Shoot them.

**Kissinger:** Go around to the villages and shoot them

**Bush:** Or take a bayonet and kill them.

**Nixon:** Good God!

WHT #30: 21 September 7:42 pm

**Nixon:** Hello
Kissinger: Mr. President
Nixon: Oh Henry, I don’t want to irritate your evening but I was not satisfied with the report on Uganda which came from State.
Kissinger: Right.
Nixon: Now the man we have there is Melady, who is a sweet guy...he’s a great supporter of ours, but totally African—all African. He doesn’t understand. Now I know him—Tom Melady—I know him well. I want harder action taken. I want all...everybody from America evacuated as soon as possible.
Kissinger: Right
Nixon: I want hard action and second, I want to get that Burundi Ambassador’s ass out of there right now. And that’s and order goddamnit!
Kissinger: I’ll send the order today.
Nixon: We...I think you will agree Henry; we have really had a double standard on this thing.
Kissinger: Oh totally.
Nixon: And the African division...you know...do we care when they kill a poor goddamn Pakistani? Do we care when they...when these damn Africans eat a hundred thousand people. I mean, it has really gone too far. What do you think?
Kissinger: I couldn’t agree more.
Nixon: Alright. Well...well, you get on it. Tell them that I now...now...Melady’s report saying well no he...he said well no Americans have been arrested and there are few UKs that have been killed. Well goddamnit, if a Britisher is killed! I mean, call Melady back for instructions. Let’s call him back, how about that?
Kissinger: We can do both of those.
Kissinger: Right.
Nixon: Ok.
Kissinger: Right.
Nixon: Alright, bye.

CDSC #154-7: 24 September 11:37 am

Kissinger: Hello Mr. President
Nixon: Hi Henry, how are you?
Kissinger: I’m fine. I am sorry to disturb you.
Nixon: No that’s alright...fine...fine.
Kissinger: We have a problem in Uganda and I...
Nixon: Yeah.
Kissinger: The problem is this. The British are very worried that there may be a massacre of their 7,000 British they’ve got there and they are scattered all over the country.
Nixon: Of course.
Kissinger: They would like to have some secret talks with us about some logistic help.
Nixon: Sure, we’ll have them.
Kissinger: They tried it earlier this week and State has turned them down repeatedly.
Nixon: Screw State! State is always on the side of the Blacks—to hell with them!
Nixon: No uh...well I just can’t understand why we haven’t had them before. You know, like this thing on Burundi. Now I want State’s ass reamed out on that for not...for not...Henry, in the whole Burundi business—I’ve been watching it in the press—did you know they have not sent one memorandum over to us on it?

Kissinger: Absolutely.

Nixon: Or have they? Or have you had something I haven’t seen?

Kissinger: No no. They have not.

Nixon: What...well how do you feel about it?

Kissinger: Well I...

Nixon: I don’t mean our national interest gets involved, but every time...every time that anybody else gets involved...you know every time it’s one other or us...and you have a little pressure appear, State goes up the wall. But I am getting tired of this business of letting these Africans eat 100,000 people and doing nothing about it.

Kissinger: And when they have...and all these bleeding hearts in this country who say we like to kill yellow people...

Nixon: That’s right. We have...there hasn’t been in the eight years of war as were killed in three months in Burundi. Henry, the whole point is...and also well...it’s the thing Agnew stuck to McGovern where Agnew pointed out...now...now...they are talking about how many we have bombed in the North and I told your staff to get the figures for me how many South Vietnamese or anti-communist North Vietnamese have been killed by the North Vietnamese government...civilians? It’s unbelievable!

Kissinger: That’s right.

Nixon: Nobody gives a damn! And that’s what it is they’re involved in. I know what the Uganda thing is. What it is...it’s just like Burundi. The State...Newsom’s attitude...the attitude of State is to be for whatever Black government is in power. Am I right or wrong?

Kissinger: One hundred percent right.

Nixon: And that basically Henry was the problem on Nigeria. Now frankly, I was on the side of the Biafrans and not just...not because of the Catholics. And you were too. Not just because of the Catholics. But State was on the side of the Nigerian government. Why? Because they said well, all of the other governments would come apart. Well frankly, I’m almost of the opinion myself...this is far down the road. We need a new African policy, but first of all we shouldn’t have forty-two Ambassadors to these goddamn countries. And second place...you know I mean at the same level as anybody else. And the second place, my own view is that some federations down there are what are needed or something. I don’t know, but we can talk about that later. But at the present time, looking at Uganda, of course we have to help those 7,000 people. I asked Rogers about this when we met with Bush...uh were you there?

Kissinger: Yes I was there.
Nixon: Well you remember I said…what about the? He said, well we have got a plan to evacuate the Americans. Well now that’s a fine howdy do. What the hell are the damn British going to do? 7,000 of them! They will be murdered.

Kissinger: Well what…the way…

Nixon: Isn’t that really the problem or not?

Kissinger: That is exactly the problem.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: And the British are in the bush. All of yours or in Entebbe and actually they haven’t turned against our so much yet.

Nixon: No

Kissinger: But they have turned against the British.

Nixon: No, I understand.

[Nixon orders Kissinger to assure the British of U.S. help, via private channels. Nixon and Kissinger then decided to send Andrew Goodpaster to Uganda with the overt mission of planning the American evacuation but with the covert assignment of talking with the British, thereby bypassing State]

Nixon: Isn’t it awful though what this goddamn guy, the head of Uganda Henry…he is an ape.

Kissinger: He is an ape without any education.

Nixon: No. Well that’s probably no disadvantage I mean…

Kissinger: [Laughs]

Nixon: …I mean, you figure that asshole, the head of Ghana, had a brilliant education in the United States.

Kissinger: That’s right.

Nixon: I mean, let’s face it. No…no…what I mean is he…he really is a prehistoric monster. But the same with Burundi! But…can…I really, really got to shake up the Africa…well all the departments. But the African Department at State, Henry, is a disgrace.
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