

2.2 Could The UN Have Made a Difference?

In assessment studies such as this, it is useful to seriously consider 'what if' scenarios. If realistically the international community could not have done better, then the lessons to be learned consist mainly of repeating the successes. On the other hand, prima facie evidence that the international community could have done better provides grounds for attempting to identify how. Going through a quick 'what if' exercise can give us that prima facie evidence.

Such a 'what if' exercise need not be too divorced from reality if we set down clearly some concrete operational proposals for a 'what if', and place this in the actual crisis context. In Rwanda, the key contextual factors were cultural, political and military. In that context, we can make some initial assessment as to whether perceived failures and shortcomings did in fact adversely affect the situation, and could it have been done better. However, before leaping into the academic exercise of 'what if', it will be useful to quickly review the successes and failures of Operation Turquoise. It provides an interesting backdrop for the 'what if' exercise.

Operation Turquoise

On the 15th of June, French Minister Juppé announced a willingness to intervene in Rwanda in concert with European and African partners if the massacres did not stop. Their European partners elected not to get involved, but did end up along with the US and the Secretary General in supporting the French in getting UN authorization. There was a great deal of debate in and around the SC, with various countries strongly opposed to a unilateral French initiative but at the end of the day SC Res 929 22 June 1994 passed 10-0-5 (abst: China, Brazil, Nigeria, Pakistan, New Zealand). It was to be strictly humanitarian and not constitute an inter-position force, and in addition it was only given a mandate until UNAMIR was brought up to the necessary strength or at most two months⁷.

Within days the French started to deploy their troops with a peak force strength of 2,555 French⁸ and 350 Francophone African troops⁹. With headquarters in the Zairian towns of Bukavu and Goma, they quickly took up a presence in the western and south-western portions of Rwanda reaching almost to Butare.

⁷ For a detailed account of the politics in and around the SC concerning Operation Turquoise, see the Crisis Chronology in the Annex to this report, particularly the entries for June 15, 17, 20, 21, and 22.

⁸ French forces included , a company of commandos, 4 mechanized infantry companies, a light armoured squadron, support units, 11 helicopters, and fighter aircraft.

⁹ African components included 2 Senegalese companies, a section from both Chad and Guinea-Bissau, and assorted troops from Mauritania, Egypt, Nigeria, and the Congo.