

But their scattershot approach has missed many opportunities. Had Clinton recognized the possibilities of regional action earlier, for instance, he might have exploited the offers of Nigeria, Tanzania, Ghana, and others to send peacekeepers to Rwanda in the early stages of the 1994 genocide. In the end—as James Miskel of the U.S. Naval War College and others have noted—those troops stayed home because they lacked transport and other equipment. And today the U.S. president considers his failure to act in Rwanda one of his deepest regrets.

Given the alternatives, why has the regional option been so marginalized? One answer is that moving to regionalism is, structurally, a steep uphill climb. The entire U.S. government is still built around bilateral relations. U.S. ambassadors to nations are far more powerful than their counterparts to regional organizations; within the State Department, weak desk officers run most regional policy. And decision-making tends to follow the organizational structure. Another reason is that few in Washington care to face up to the possibility that they may have to act less unilaterally and become more indulgent of others' agendas. As for the U.N., it is loath to sideline its own forces.

And regionalism will not look as pretty as U.N. initiatives. Any order the Nigerians now bring to Sierra Leone, for example, is bound to be more rough-edged than that promised (though never delivered) by the U.N.-sponsored Lomé Accord. The last time the Nigerians intervened in that conflict, they occupied Freetown with 10,000 troops while ceding the rebels free run of the countryside—and the diamond trade. But whatever their methods, Nigerians did manage to stop

the killing and the limb-hacking. As one Pentagon planner put it tersely, "To pursue regionalism, the United States really has to have a tolerance of regional objectives"—and, he could have added, of regional methods. Still, the United States and the United Nations could make their support conditional on regional actors' observing international norms of behavior.

A system of U.N.-sponsored regio-cops, then, will be far from ideal. It is a messy, often inconsistent muddle-through solution with many risks. But in an environment of astringent alternatives—a determinedly minimal U.S. role and a grossly underfunded and undersupported U.N.—there may be no other practicable way for the international community to stop the atrocities it no longer seems able to stomach. ☹