have led a person to that forecast," he says. "Most of us thought that if a war broke out, it would be quick, that these poor people didn't have the resources, the means, to fight a sophisticated war. I couldn't have known that they would do each other in with the most economic means." Assistant Secretary Moose agrees: "We were psychologically and imaginatively too limited."

Dallaire, for one, quickly saw that withdrawal threats only encouraged the militants. They knew that if they pushed harder, disrupted longer, they could get rid of the UN peacekeepers who were implementing the agreement they hoped to sabotage. UN withdrawal was a carrot, not a stick. But as the Canadian officer resisted the political approach of his colleagues, he was scolded and scoffed. "The general attitude," remembers Beardsley, "was, 'Shut up. You're a soldier. Let the experts handle this.'"

But within weeks the "experts" had vanished, and Dallaire was on his own.

Recognition
Crimes Against Humanity

In the first days after the checkpoints were hoisted and the massacres began on April 6, 1994, Dallaire maintained his contacts with Colonel Bagosora and other Rwandan army officials. But these men, the ringleaders of the slaughter, assured Dallaire and foreign diplomats that they were committed to stopping the killing and continuing the peace process. They even appealed to Dallaire for help in brokering a cease-fire. They claimed, as had Talaat and Milosevic, that they needed time to rein in the "uncontrolled elements."

Initially, although Dallaire was aghast at the killings, he believed that the Hutu gunmen and militia were only pursuing their "political enemies." In the first few days, moderate Hutu and leading Tutsi politicians had been the main targets of attack. As in Cambodia, this gave rise to the notion that the killings were narrowly tailored reprisals rather than harbingers of a broadly ambitious genocide. Ordinary people, Dallaire and others hoped, would be left alone.

Dallaire and other foreign observers passed through two phases of recognition. The first involved coming to grips with the occurrence not only of a conventional war but of massive crimes against humanity. All Tutsi were targets. The second involved understanding that what was taking place was genocide.

The first wave of recognition swept through UN headquarters—and was relayed back to Western capitals—very quickly. Two days after the plane crash, on April 8, Dallaire sent a cable to New York indicating that ethnicity was one of the dimensions behind the killing. The telegram detailed the political killings, which then included not only ten Belgian peacekeepers and Prime Minister Uwilingiyimana, but also the chairman of the Liberal Party, the minister of labor, the minister of agriculture, and dozens of others. It refuted the impression (and the claim by the Hutu authorities) that the violence was uncontrollable. Dallaire described instead a "very well-planned, organized, deliberate and conducted campaign of terror initiated principally by the Presidential Guard"; he urged that UN forces make protecting government leaders their "major task." Dallaire still considered the killings mainly as political adjuncts to a civil war and his own role as broker of a cease-fire.

The following day, though, Dallaire's thinking shifted. Beardsley, Dallaire's executive assistant, got a frantic call by radio from a pair of Polish UN military observers who were at a church run by Polish missionaries across town. "Come get us," the UN officials said. "They are massacring people here." Beardsley got permission from Dallaire to take a Bangladeshi armored personnel carrier through the front lines. He passed about twenty roadblocks and reached the church.

When we arrived, I looked at the school across the street, and there were children. I don't know how many, forty, sixty, eighty children stacked up outside who had all been chopped up with machetes. Some of their mothers had heard them screaming and had come running, and the militia had killed them, too. We got out of the vehicle and entered the church. There we found 150 people, dead mostly, though some were still groaning, who had been attacked the night before. The Polish priests told us it had been incredibly well organized. The Rwandan army had cleared out the area, the gendarmerie had rounded up all the Tutsi, and the militia had hacked them to death.

Beardsley left a first-aid kit and his ration of water for the wounded. He promised to come back later in the evening with help. But by the time he
managed to clear dozens of additional roadblocks, the militia had finished off the survivors. The Polish priests, who had been pinned up to the wall with a barrel of the gun, were broken-hearted. Beardsley remembers, "They kept repeating, over and over, 'These were our parishioners.'" All Beardsley could do was make sure the details of the massacre were communicated back to headquarters in New York.

By the fourth day, April 10, 1994, Dallaire had concluded that Bagotora and the Hutu militiants were ordering a massive campaign of crimes against humanity; against anybody carrying a Tutsi identity card. "Only when I saw with my own eyes the militias at the roadblocks pulling people out of their vehicles did it really become clear," he says. "At that point you couldn't argue anymore that it was just politically motivated slaughter." Hutu officers kept insisting that the violence was a product of war, but Dallaire had come to see that the civil war between the RPF rebels and the government forces was a separate problem. "I saw that one side was eliminating civilians behind the lines," Dallaire explains. "And what was going on at the front had nothing much to do with the killings of civilians going on in the back."

Dallaire did not then imagine a full-scale, countrywide genocide. Indeed, although he quickly grasped the savage nature of the violence, his imagination was hemmed in by his knowledge of the region's "last war," which had occurred between Tutsi and Hutu in neighboring Burundi. "Burundi had just blown up, and 50,000 had been killed in just a few days," Dallaire explains. "So when the plane went down, we actually expected around 50,000 plus dead. Can you imagine having that expectation in Europe? Racism slips in so it changes our expectations." Still, with the smell of decomposing flesh already intolerable, Dallaire knew that regardless of the numbers likely to be killed, he would need outside help.

On April 10 Dallaire made the most important request of his life. He telephoned New York and asked for reinforcements so as to double his troop strength to 5,000. Just as crucial, he appealed for a more forceful mandate so he could send his peacekeepers to intervene to stop the killings. If he did not get a positive response, he knew he had neither the soldiers, the ammunition, the fuel, the vehicles, the communication equipment, nor even the water or food—what few survival rations he had were rotten and inedible—to mount any sustained opposition to the militiamen. He could do nothing but await his instructions. The United States, more than any other country, would dictate the UN reply.

The Intervention That Wasn't

David Rawson was sitting with his wife in their residence watching a taped broadcast of the MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour when he heard the back-to-back explosions that signaled the downing of President Habyarimana's plane. As the U.S. ambassador, Rawson was concerned primarily for American citizens, whom he feared, would be killed or injured in any outbreak of fighting. The United States made the decision to withdraw its personnel and nationals on April 7. Penned within his house, Rawson did not think his presence was of any use. Looking back, he says, "Did we have a moral responsibility to stay there? Would it have made a difference? I don't know, but the killings were taking place in broad daylight while we were there. I didn't feel that we were achieving much."

Still, about 300 Rwandans from the neighborhood had gathered at Rawson's residence seeking refuge, and when the Americans cleared out, the local people were left to their fate. Rawson recalls, "I told the people who were there that we were leaving and the flag was coming down, and they would have to make their own choice about what to do. . . . Nobody really asked us to take them with us." Rawson says he could not help even those who worked closest to him. His chief steward, who served dinner and washed dishes, called the ambassador from his home and pleaded, "We're in terrible danger. Please come and get us." Rawson says, "I had to tell him, 'We can't move. We can't come.'" The steward and his wife were killed.

Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Moose was away from Washington, so Bushnell, the acting assistant secretary, was made the director of the task force that managed the Rwanda evacuation. Her focus, like Rawson's, was on the fate of U.S. citizens. "I felt very strongly that my first obligation was to the Americans," she recalls. "I was sorry about the Rwandans, of course, but my job was to get our folks out. . . . Then again, people didn't know that it was a genocide. What I was told was, 'Look, Pru, these people do this from time to time.' We thought we'd be right back."

At a State Department press conference on April 8, Bushnell made an appearance and spoke gravely about the mounting violence in Rwanda and the status of Americans there. After she left the podium, Michael McCurry, the department spokesman, took her place and criticized foreign governments for preventing the screening of the Steven Spielberg film Schindler's List. "This film movingly portrays . . . the twentieth century's most
horrible catastrophe,” McCurry said. “And it shows that even in the midst of genocide, one individual can make a difference.” McCurry urged that the film be shown worldwide. “The most effective way to avoid the recurrence of genocidal tragedy,” he declared, “is to ensure that past acts of genocide are never forgotten.” No one made any connection between Bushnell’s remarks and McCurry’s. Neither journalists nor officials in the United States were focused on the Tutsi.

On April 9 and 10, in five different convoys, Ambassador Rawson and 250 Americans were evacuated from Kigali and other points. “When we left, the cars were stopped and searched,” Rawson says. “It would have been impossible to get Tutsi through.” All told, thirty-five local employees of the U.S. embassy were killed in the genocide.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher knew little about Africa. At one meeting with his top advisers, several weeks after the plane crash, he pulled an atlas off his shelf to help him locate the country. Belgian foreign minister Willie Claes recalls trying to discuss Rwanda with his American counterpart and being told, “I have other responsibilities.” Christopher appeared on the NBC news program Meet the Press the morning the U.S. evacuation was completed. “In the great tradition, the ambassador was in the last car,” Christopher said proudly. “So that evacuation has gone very well.”

Christopher stressed that although U.S. marines had been dispatched to Burundi, there were no plans to send them into Rwanda to restore order: They were in the region as a safety net, in case they were needed to assist in the evacuation. “It’s always a sad moment when the Americans have to leave,” he said, “but it was the prudent thing to do.” The Republican Senate minority leader, Bob Dole, agreed. “I don’t think we have any national interest there,” Dole said on April 10. “The Americans are out, and as far as I’m concerned, in Rwanda, that ought to be the end of it.”

Dallaire, too, had been ordered to make the evacuation of foreigners his priority. At the UN, Kofi Annan’s Department of Peacekeeping Operations, which had rejected the field commander’s proposed raid on arms caches in January, sent an explicit cable: “You should make every effort not to compromise your impartiality or to act beyond your mandate, but [you] may exercise your discretion to do [so] should this be essential for the evacuation of foreign nationals. This should not, repeat not, extend to participating in possible combat except in self-defense.” Neutrality was essential. Avoiding combat was paramount, but Dallaire could make an exception for non-Rwandans.

While the United States evacuated overland without an American military escort, the Europeans sent troops to Rwanda so that their personnel could exit by air. On April 9 Dallaire watched covetously as just over 1,000 French, Belgian, and Italian soldiers descended on the Kigali airport to begin evacuating their expatriates. These commandos were clean-shaven, well fed, and heavily armed, in marked contrast to Dallaire’s exhausted, hungry, ragtag peacekeeping force.

If the soldiers ferried in for the evacuation had teamed up with UNAMIR, Dallaire would have had a sizable deterrent force. He commanded 440 Belgians, 942 Bangladeshis, 843 Ghanaians, 60 Tunisians, and 255 others from twenty countries. He could also call on a reserve of 800 Belgians in Nairobi. If the major powers had reconﬁgured the 1,000-man European evacuation force and the 300 U.S. Marines on standby in Burundi and contributed them to Dallaire’s mission, he would finally have had the numbers to stage rescue operations and to confront the killers. “Mass slaughter was happening, and suddenly there in Kigali we had the forces we needed to contain it, and maybe even to stop it,” he recalls. “Yet they picked up their people and turned and walked away.”

The consequences of the exclusive attention to foreigners were felt immediately. In the days after the plane crash, some 2,000 Rwandans, including 400 children, had grouped at the Ecole Technique Officiele under the protection of about ninety Belgian soldiers. Many of the Rwandans were already suffering from machete wounds. They gathered in the classrooms and on the playing field outside the school. Rwandan government and militia forces lay in wait nearby, drinking beer and chanting, “Pawa, pawa,” for “Hutu power.” On April 11 the Belgian peacekeepers were ordered to regroup at the airport to aid the evacuation of European civilians. Knowing they were trapped, several Rwandans pursued the jeeps, shouting, “Do not abandon us!” The UN soldiers moved them away from their vehicles and fired warning shots over their heads. When the peacekeepers had departed out through one gate, Hutu militiamen entered through another, firing machine guns and throwing grenades. Most of the 2,000 gathered there were killed.

In the three days during which some 4,000 foreigners were evacuated, about 20,000 Rwandans were killed. After the American evacuees were safely out and the U.S. embassy had been closed, Bill and Hillary Clinton visited the U.S. officials who had manned the emergency-operations room at the State Department and offered congratulations on a “job well done.”
What Did the United States Know?

Just when did Washington learn of the sinister Hutu designs on Rwanda’s Tutsi? As always, the precise nature and extent of the slaughter was obscured by the civil war, the withdrawal of U.S. diplomatic sources, some confused press reporting, and the lies of the perpetrator government. Nonetheless, both the testimony of U.S. officials who worked the issue day to day and the declassified documents unearthed by the National Security Archive indicate that plenty was known about the killers’ intentions. Those officials who were quickest to diagnose genocide looked not at the numbers killed, which were, as always, difficult to ascertain. They looked instead at the perpetrators’ intent: Were Hutu forces attempting to destroy Rwanda’s Tutsi? The answer to this question was available quickly: “By 8 a.m. the morning after the plane crash, we knew what was happening, that there was systematic killing of Tutsi,” Joyce Leader, the deputy chief of mission, recalls. “People were calling me and telling me who was getting killed. I knew they were going door-to-door.” Back at the State Department, she explained to her colleagues that three kinds of killing were going on: casualties in war, politically motivated murder, and genocide. Dallaire’s early cables to New York likewise described the armed conflict that had resumed between rebels and government forces and also stated plainly that savage “ethnic cleansing” of Tutsi was occurring. U.S. analysts warned that mass killings would increase. In an April 11 memo prepared for Frank Wisner, the undersecretary of defense for policy, in advance of a dinner with Henry Kissinger, a key talking point was that “unless both sides can be convinced to return to the peace process, a massive (hundreds of thousands of deaths) bloodbath will ensue.”

Whatever the inevitable imperfections of U.S. intelligence early on, the reports from Rwanda were severe enough to distinguish Hutu killers from ordinary combatants in civil war. They certainly warranted a heightened intelligence gathering operation to snap satellite photos of large gatherings of Rwandan civilians or of mass graves, to intercept military communications, and to infiltrate the country in person. In fact, in a shocking new revelation, some two dozen U.S. special forces were sent on a one-day reconnaissance mission to Kigali within a few days of the beginning of the murder campaign. According to one U.S. officer, the Marines returned from Kigali “white as ghosts,” describing “so many bodies on the streets that you could walk from one body to the other without touching the ground.” They reported that the metal leaf-springs of cars were being sharpened into knives, and that the scale of the slaughter was mammoth. The men were debriefed immediately, and the report was sent to European Command Headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany. On April 26, 1994, an unattributed intelligence memo titled “Responsibility for Massacres in Rwanda” reported that the ringleaders of the genocide, Colonel Bagosora and his crisis committee, were determined to liquidate their opposition and exterminate the Tutsi populace. A May 9 Defense Intelligence Agency report stated plainly that the Rwandan violence was not spontaneous but was directed by the government, with lists of victims prepared well in advance. The agency observed that an “organized parallel effort of genocide [was] being implemented by the army to destroy the leadership of the Tutsi community.”

Dallaire was acutely conscious of the importance of the media. Although he had had no previous occasion in his military career to court press attention, he says he immediately saw that a “reporter with a line to the West was worth a battalion on the ground.” Between juggling the safety of his own peacekeepers and the protection of Rwandans, Dallaire shuttled reporters around Kigali whenever possible. “At that point,” he recalls, “the journalists were really all I had.” He permitted Mark Doyle of the BBC to live with the peacekeepers and file two stories a day from Dallaire’s satellite phone.

Not all the reporting helped clarify the nature of the violence for the outside world. If all the reports portrayed the killing as extensive, many also treated the violence as typical. During the conflict in Bosnia, U.S. officials had tried to convince journalists that the conflict was born of “ancient tribal hatreds”; in Rwanda reporters in the field adopted this frame on their own. Asked what caused such violence, CNN’s Gary Streiker reported by telephone from Nairobi that “what’s behind this story is probably the worst tribal hostility in all of Africa, hostility that goes back centuries long before European colonization.” Also reporting from Nairobi, Michael Skoler of NPR told of Tutsi killing Hutu as well as Hutu killing Tutsi. When NPR’s Daniel Zwerdling interviewed Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, an associate professor of African studies at Howard University, Zwerdling simply could not accept Ntalaja’s nuanced explanation of the violence:

Zwerdling: Why are things in Africa so bad? Why is tribal violence so deep?
Ntalaja: Most of it has been exacerbated by politicians hungry for more power.

Zwerdling: ... Well, of course, politicians can exacerbate what tensions already exist. I mean, you're not arguing, are you, that these tribal hatreds were not already there before modern politicians came along?

Ntalaja: I'm saying that the ethnic groups do have prejudices and people do tend to feel they may be different from other groups. But it's not enough to make a person pick up a knife or a gun and kill somebody else. It is when politicians come and excite passion and try to threaten people—make people believe that they are being threatened by other groups that are going to be extinguished.

Zwerdling: Of course, in most of these battlegrounds, though, there is ancient ethnic hatred and something that surprises me actually is that you're blaming modern, contemporary African politicians for this divide and conquer, playing one tribe against another.

Still, for all the flaws in the coverage (especially by those stationed outside Rwanda), the major media gave anybody reading or watching cause for grave alarm. From April 8, 1994, onward, reporters described the widespread targeting of Tutsi and the corpses piling up on Kigali's streets. American journalists relayed stories of missionaries and embassy officials who had been unable to save their Rwandan friends and neighbors from death. An April 9 front-page Washington Post story quoted reports that the Rwandan employees of the major international relief agencies had been executed "in front of horrified expatriate staffers." On April 10 a New York Times front-page article quoted the Red Cross claim that "tens of thousands" were dead, 8,000 in Kigali alone, and that corpses were "in the houses, in the streets, everywhere." The Post the same day led its front-page story with a description of "a pile of corpses six feet high" outside the main hospital. On April 12 the American evacuees, many of whom were Christian missionaries, described what they had seen. Phil Van Lanen, a relief worker with the Seventh-Day Adventist Church mission in Rwanda, wept openly when he told William Schmidt of the Times of the murder of the eight Tutsi girls who used to work in his dental clinic. Chris Grundmann, an American evacuee who worked for the Center for Disease Control, was quoted as saying, "It was the most basic terror." He told how he and his family hunkered down in their house with mattresses against the windows and listened to the ordeals of Rwandan victims over a two-way radio. "The UN radio was filled with national staff screaming for help," he said. "They were begging: 'Come save me! My house is being blown up,' or 'They're killing me.' There was nothing we could do. At one point we just had to turn it off."

On April 16 the New York Times reported the shooting and hacking to death of nearly 1,200 men, women, and children in the church where they had sought refuge. On April 19 Human Rights Watch, which, through Des Forges, had excellent sources on the ground in Rwanda, estimated the number of dead at 100,000 and called on the Security Council to use the term "genocide." The 100,000 figure (which proved to be a gross underestimation) was picked up immediately by the Western media, endorsed by the Red Cross, and featured on the front page of the Washington Post. On April 24 the Post reported how "the heads and limbs of victims were sorted and piled neatly, a bone-chilling order in the midst of chaos that darkened back to the Holocaust." The Red Cross issued the most authoritative statement on the killings on April 26, declaring that "at least 100,000, but perhaps as many as 300,000" Rwandans had already been killed. On April 28 the British aid agency Oxfam warned that these estimates were too low and that 500,000 people had been reported missing.

The Tutsi rebels in the Rwandan Patriotic Front publicly appealed for a Western response. On April 13 they accused the Rwandan government of carrying out genocide. They invoked the Holocaust. In an April 23 letter to the head of the Security Council, the KPF representative, Claude Dusaiti, reminded Security Council members and the secretary-general, "When the institution of the UN was created after the Second World War, one of its fundamental objectives was to see to it that what happened to the Jews in Nazi Germany would never happen again." But as Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani had found in Iraq and as the Bosnian government was learning around the same time, those who are suffering genocide are deemed to be biased and unreliable. Besides, the analogy that most gripped American minds at the time was not the Holocaust but Somalia. Dusaiti met with Albright, the U.S. ambassador, four times during the genocide. He did not know it, but Albright was aware of her constraints going into the meetings. Before one of them, she received a briefing memo that reminded her, "You should be mostly in a listening mode during this meeting. You can voice general sympathy for the horrific situation in Rwanda, but you should not commit the USG to anything."
The “G-Word”

The putrid smell in Kigali told Dallaire all he needed to know about the scale of the murders. Once he had made the mental leap from viewing the violence as war to viewing it as crimes against humanity, he had begun to employ the phrase “ethnic cleansing” to describe the ethnically motivated killing, a phrase he was familiar with from having presided over the dispatch of Canadian troops to the former Yugoslavia. He recalls his thought process:

I was self-conscious about saying the killings were “genocidal” because, to us in the West, “genocide” was the equivalent of the Holocaust or the killing fields of Cambodia. I mean millions of people. “Ethnic cleansing” seemed to involve hundreds of thousands of people. “Genocide” was the highest scale of crimes against humanity imaginable. It was far off the charts, that it was not easy to recognize that we could be in such a situation. I also knew that if I used the term too early, I’d have been accused of crying wolf and I’d have lost my credibility.

Two weeks into the killing, Dallaire telephoned Philippe Gaillard, who ran the International Committee for the Red Cross mission in Rwanda, and asked him for a book on international law. Dallaire leafed through the Geneva conventions and the genocide convention and looked up the relevant definitions. “I realized that genocide was when an attempt was made to eliminate a specific group,” Dallaire says, “and this is precisely what we saw in the field... I just needed a slap in the face to say, ‘Holy shit! This is genocide, not just ethnic cleansing’.”

Dallaire included the term for the first time in his situation report during the last week in April. Reuters quoted him on April 30 warning, “Unless the international community acts, it may find it is unable to defend itself against accusations of doing nothing to stop genocide.” And he began using the term confidently in May. Even after he had adopted the label however, he left the semantic battles to others. “I didn’t get bogged down in the debate over the genocide terminology,” he remembers. “We had enough proof that it was genocide, and for those who didn’t agree, we had crimes against humanity on a massive scale. What more did we need to know to know what we had to do?”

Even after the reality of genocide in Rwanda had become irrefutable, when bodies were shown choking the Kagera River on America’s nightly news, the brute fact of the slaughter failed to influence U.S. policy except in a negative way. As they had done in Bosnia, American officials again shunned the g-word. They were afraid that using it would have obliged the United States to act under the terms of the 1948 genocide convention. They also believed, rightly, that it would harm U.S. credibility to name the crime and then do nothing to stop it. A discussion paper on Rwanda, prepared by an official in the Office of the Secretary of Defense and dated May 1, testifies to the nature of official thinking. Regarding issues that might be brought up at the next interagency working group, it stated, “I. Genocide Investigation: Language that calls for an international investigation of human rights abuses and possible violations of the genocide convention. Be Careful. Legal at State was worried about this yesterday—Genocide finding could commit [the U.S. government] to actually do something.”

At an interagency teleconference in late April, Susan Rice, a rising star on the NSC who worked under Richard Clarke, stunned a few of the officials present when she asked, “If we use the word ‘genocide’ and are seen as doing nothing, what will be the effect on the November [congressional] election?” Lieutenant Colonel Marley remembers the incredulity of his colleagues at the State Department. “We could believe that people would wonder that,” he says, “but not that they would actually voice it.” Rice does not recall the incident but concedes, “If I said it, it was completely inappropriate, as well as irrelevant.”

The Clinton administration opposed use of the term. On April 28 Christine Shelly, the State Department spokesperson, began what would be a two-month dance to avoid the g-word, a dance that brought to mind Secretary Christopher’s concurrent semantic evasion over Bosnia. U.S. officials were afraid that the use of the stinging term would cause demands for intervention that the administration did not intend to meet. When a reporter asked her for comment on whether Rwanda was genocide, she sounded an awful lot like her boss:

Well, as I think you know, the use of the term "genocide" has a very precise legal meaning... Before we begin to use [the] term, we have to know as much as possible about the facts of the situation, particularly about the intentions of those who are committing the crimes... I'm not an expert on this area, but generally speaking there—my understanding is that there are three types of elements that we look at in order to make that kind of a determination.
Shelly suggested that the United States had to examine "the types of actions" and the "kind of brutality" under way. It had to look at who was committing the acts and against whom (i.e., "whether these are particular groups, social groups, ethnic groups, religious groups"). And it needed to assess "extremely carefully" the intent of the perpetrators and whether they were trying to eliminate a group in whole or in part. "This one," Shelly said, "is one which we have to undertake a very careful study before we can make a final kind of determination."

It was clear that copies of the genocide convention had been circulating within the department, as Shelly possessed an impressive familiarity with its contents. In applying the convention's terms, Shelly said, "Now, certainly, in those elements there are actions which have occurred which would fit." She agreed that killings were being directed toward particular ethnic groups. The problem lay in gauging intent. Here she gave a largely indecipherable account and refused to commit herself or the U.S. government:

The intentions, the precise intentions, and whether or not these are just directed episodically or with the intention of actually eliminating groups in whole or in part, this is a more complicated issue to address. . . . I'm not able to look at all of those criteria at this moment and say yes, no. It's something that requires very careful study before we can make a final determination.

When asked whether a finding of genocide would oblige the United States to stop it, Shelly again referred back to the terms of the genocide convention, saying that the law did not contain an "absolute requirement . . . to intervene directly." Pressed again to reveal whether the United States viewed events as genocide, Shelly stalled:

Well, I think it's—again, I was trying to get the point across that this is—in order to actually attach the genocide label to actions which are going on, that this is a process that involves looking at several categories of actions. And as I've said, certain of the actions very clearly fall into some of the categories that I've mentioned. But whether you can wrap this all up in a way that then brings you to that conclusion, I'm simply not in a position to make that judgment now.

The UN Security Council was becoming bitterly divided over whether to use the word. Czech Ambassador Karel Kovanda had begun complaining that 80 percent of the council's time was focused on whether and how to withdraw Dallaire's peacekeepers, the other 20 percent on getting a cease-fire to end the civil war, which he compared to "wanting Hitler to reach a cease-fire with the Jews." None of their energy was concentrated on the genocide. When the president of the Security Council drew up a statement that named the crime "genocide," the United States objected. The original draft read: "The Security Council reaffirms that the systematic killing of any ethnic group, with intent to destroy it in whole or in part constitutes an act of genocide. . . . The council further points out that an important body of international law exists that deals with perpetrators of genocide."

But the United States was having none of it. In a cable sent from New York to the State Department, a political adviser wrote:

The events in Rwanda clearly seem to meet the definition of genocide in Article II of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. However, if the council acknowledges that, it may be forced to "take such action under the charter as they consider appropriate for the prevention and suppression of acts of genocide" as provided for in Article VIII.

On American (and British) insistence, the word "genocide" was excluded from the Security Council statement. In a gesture that testified to both Lemkin's success in imbuing the term with moral judgment and his failure to change the policymakers' political calculus, the final statement read:

The Security Council condemns all these breaches of international humanitarian law in Rwanda, particularly those amounting to crimes against the civilian population, and recalls that persons who instigate or participate in such acts are individually responsible. In this context, the Security Council recalls that the killing of members of an ethnic group with the intention of destroying such a group in whole or in part constitutes a crime punishable under international law.

The testy genocide debate started up in U.S. government circles the last week of April, but it was not until May 21, six weeks after the killing in Rwanda
began, that Secretary Christopher gave his diplomats permission to use the term "genocide"—sort of. The UN Human Rights Commission was about to meet in special session, and the U.S. representative, Geraldine Ferraro, needed guidance on whether to join a resolution stating that genocide had occurred. The stubborn U.S. stand had become untenable internationally.

The case for a label of genocide was the most straightforward since the Holocaust. The State Department's assistant secretary for intelligence and research, Toby Gati, who had analyzed whether Bosnian Serb atrocities were genocide, again undertook the analysis, which she summarized in a May 18 confidential memo: Lists of Tutsi victims' names and addresses had reportedly been prepared; Rwandan government troops and Hutu militia and youth squads were the main perpetrators; massacres were reported all over the country; humanitarian agencies were now "claiming from 200,000 to 500,000 lives" lost. Gati offered the Intelligence Bureau's view: "We believe 500,000 may be an exaggerated estimate, but no accurate figures are available. Systematic killings began within hours of Habyarimana's death. Most of those killed have been Tutsi civilians, including women and children." The terms of the genocide convention had been met. "We can never know precise figures," Gati says, "but our analysis had been reporting huge numbers of deaths for weeks. We were basically saying, 'A rose by any other name...’" The word-processing file containing the intelligence memo was titled "NAMERWANDAKILLINGS."

Despite this matter-of-fact assessment, Christopher remained reluctant to speak the obvious truth. When he issued his guidance, on May 24, fully a month after Human Rights Watch had identified the killings as "genocide," Christopher's instructions were hopelessly muddled:

The delegation is authorized to agree to a resolution that states that "acts of genocide" have occurred in Rwanda or that "genocide has occurred in Rwanda." Other formulations that suggest some, but not all of the killings in Rwanda are genocide... e.g. "genocide is taking place in Rwanda"—are authorized. Delegation is not authorized to agree to the characterization of any specific incident as genocide or to agree to any formulation that indicates that all killings in Rwanda are genocide."

Notably, Christopher confined permission to acknowledge full-fledged genocide to the upcoming session of the Human Rights Commission.

Outside that venue State Department officials were authorized to state publicly only that "acts of genocide" had occurred.

State Department spokesperson Shelly returned to the podium on June 10, 1994. Challenged by Reuters correspondent Alan Elsner, she attempted to follow the secretary's guidance:

Elsner: How would you describe the events taking place in Rwanda?
Shelly: Based on the evidence we have seen from observations on the ground, we have every reason to believe that acts of genocide have occurred in Rwanda.

Elsner: What's the difference between "acts of genocide" and "genocide"?
Shelly: Well, I think the— is you know there's the legal definition of this... Clearly not all of the killings that have taken place in Rwanda are killings to which you might apply that label... But as to the distinctions between the words, we're trying to call what we have seen so far as best as we can; and based, again, on the evidence, we have every reason to believe that acts of genocide have occurred.
Elsner: How many acts of genocide does it take to make genocide?
Shelly: Alan, that's just not a question that I'm in a position to answer.\(^2\)

The same day, in Istanbul, Warren Christopher, by then under severe internal and external pressure to come clean, relented: “If there is any particular magic in calling it genocide, I have no hesitancy in saying that.”\(^3\)

Response

“Not Even a Sideshow”

Once the Americans had been evacuated from Rwanda, the massacres there largely dropped off the radar of most senior Clinton administration officials. In the situation room on the seventh floor of the State Department, a map of Rwanda had been hurriedly pinned to the wall when Habyarimana’s plane was shot down, and eight banks of phones had rung off the hook. Now, with U.S. citizens safely home, the State Department chaired a daily interagency meeting, often by teleconference, designed to coordinate midlevel diplomatic and humanitarian responses. Cabinet-level officials focused on crises elsewhere. National Security Adviser Anthony Lake, who happened to know Africa, recalls, “I was obsessed with Haiti and Bosnia during that period, so Rwanda was, in journalist William Shawcross’s words, a ‘sideshow,’ but not even a sideshow—a no-show.” At the NSC the person who managed Rwanda policy was not Lake but Richard Clarke, who oversaw peacekeeping policy and for whom the news from Rwanda only confirmed a deep skepticism about the viability of UN deployments. Clarke believed that another UN failure could doom relations between Congress and the United Nations. He also sought to shield the president from congressional and public criticism. Donald Steinberg managed the Africa portfolio at the NSC and tried to look out for the dying Rwandans, but he was not an experienced infighter, and, colleagues say, he “never won a single argument” with Clarke.

The Americans who wanted the United States to do the most were those who knew Rwanda best. Joyce Leader, Rawson’s deputy in Rwanda, had been the one to lock the doors to the U.S. embassy for the final time. When she returned to Washington, she was given a small room in a back office and told to prepare the State Department’s daily Rwanda summaries, drawing on press and U.S. intelligence reports. Incredibly, despite her expertise and her contacts in Rwanda, she was rarely consulted and was instructed not to deal directly with her sources in Kigali. Once an NSC staffer did call to ask, “Short of sending in the troops, what is to be done?” Leader’s response, unwelcome, was “Send in the troops.”

Throughout the U.S. government, Africa specialists had the least clout of all regional specialists and the smallest chance of affecting policy outcomes. In contrast, those with the most pull in the bureaucracy had never visited Rwanda or met any Rwandans.

The dearth of country or regional expertise in the senior circles of government not only reduces the capacity of officers to assess the “news” but also increases the likelihood—a dynamic identified by Lake in his 1971 Foreign Policy article—that killings will become abstractions. “Ethnic bloodshed” in Africa was thought to be regrettable but not particularly unusual. U.S. officials spoke analytically of “national interests” or even “humanitarian consequences” without appearing gripped by the human stakes.

As it happened, when the crisis began President Clinton himself had a coincidental and personal connection with the country. At a coffee at the White House in December 1993 Clinton had met Monique Muwamariya, the Rwandan human rights activist. He had been struck by the courage of a woman who still bore facial scars from an automobile accident that had been arranged to curb her dissent. Clinton had singled her out, saying “Your courage is an inspiration to all of us.” On April 8, two days after the onset of the killing, the Washington Post published a letter that Alison Des Forges had sent to Human Rights Watch after Muwamariya had hung up the phone to face her fate. “I believe Monique was killed at 6:30 this morning,” Des Forges had written. “I have virtually no hope that she is still alive, but will continue to try for more information. In the meantime, please inform everyone who will care.” Word of Muwamariya’s disappearance got the president’s attention, and he inquired about her whereabouts repeatedly. “I can’t tell you how much time we spent trying to find Monique,” one U.S. official remembers. “Sometimes it felt as though she was the only Rwandan in danger.” Miraculously, Muwamariya had not been killed; she had hidden in the rafters of her home after hanging up with Des Forges and eventually managed to talk and bribe her way to safety. She was evacuated to Belgium, and on April 18 she joined Des Forges...