

[ PEACEWORKS ]



# MAKING PEACE AFTER GENOCIDE

## ANATOMY OF THE BURUNDI PROCESS

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UNITED STATES  
INSTITUTE OF PEACE

## ABOUT THE REPORT

This report distills the author's experience as a presidential special envoy to Africa's Great Lakes region from 1996 to 2001, and as the director of a Burundi leadership training initiative from 2003 to 2009. The report was written by the author in his personal capacity. The views expressed are his alone and do not represent the positions of any organization. Any errors or factual inaccuracies are solely his responsibility. The author would like to thank, in particular, Ambassador James Yellin, Fabien Nsengimana, Eugene Nindorera, Elizabeth McClintock, Alain Lempereur, Steve McDonald, Don Matteo Zuppi, Aldo Ajello, Carolyn McAskie, Youssef Mahmoud, Mamadou Bah, Nureldin Satti, Peter Uvin, and Rene Lemarchand for the numerous contributions they made along the way. Many others, too many to be identified by name, also offered important insights for which the author is extremely grateful.

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[ The conflict between Tutsi and Hutu in Burundi . . . is at the heart of Central African regional instability, producing massive refugee flows, insurgencies, and cross-border violence. ]



## Summary

- The Tutsi-Hutu conflict, both in Rwanda and Burundi, is unique in being the only intercommunal violence among Africans that has led to genocide.
- The conventional wisdom that ethnic conflict in Africa is the product of cultural diversity and ancient tribal antagonisms is wrong on both counts.
- The Burundi conflict is best understood as a result of the manipulation of ethnic identities by the political class in the struggle for postcolonial control of the state.
- The conflict in Burundi is significant in part because of the massive refugee flows, insurgencies, violence, and regional instability it fostered, and in part because of the innovative approach to peacebuilding in postwar Burundi.
- The Burundi peace process, which lasted more or less from 1993 to 2005, is as convoluted as the conflict.
- Four phases of Burundi's peacemaking can be distinguished: the initial UN intercession, Julius Nyerere as facilitator, Nelson Mandela as facilitator, and the transitional government.
- A number of critical lessons for establishing peace in the wake of violence can be drawn from the Burundi experience.
- Process matters.
- One of the most important facilitator skills is the ability to listen.
- All parties, especially those with destabilizing potential, must be at the negotiating table.
- Timely and coordinated donor support are imperative.
- Negotiations will, without question, be affected by the military circumstances of a conflict.
- The risks of embassy clientitis and donor or facilitator fatigue should not be taken lightly.
- Regional support for the peace process is indispensable but has its downsides.
- Effective facilitation depends on coordinated diplomatic intervention.
- Building long-term collaborative capacity among the former belligerents is critical to a sustainable peace.
- Democracy has numerous viable forms, and distinguishing between core universal principles and the institutional diversity of those forms is critical.



## Introduction

It is a small country, no larger than the state of Maryland, with a population numbering just over 8 million.

The dimensions of the human tragedy that has played itself out in Burundi since the country's independence in 1960, however, are anything but diminutive: an estimated 400,000 killed, some 800,000 forced to flee the country, and many tens of thousands internally displaced. The human catastrophe that is Burundi is dwarfed in Africa only by its neighbor, Rwanda, which in 1994 saw close to 1 million of its population systematically murdered.

This report examines the efforts that regional states and other international actors undertook to end the Burundian cycle of violence. Their efforts were significant for a simple reason: the ramifications of the conflict extended far beyond Burundi. Indeed, the conflict between Tutsi and Hutu in Burundi, as in Rwanda, is at the heart of Central African regional instability, producing massive refugee flows, insurgencies, and cross-border violence.

The Burundi conflict therefore cannot be fully understood, much less resolved, without reference to the wider region. The Tutsi-Hutu schism within Burundi and the war within the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)—which involved as many as seven national armies, two rebel groups, and a host of foreign armed groups based within Congolese territory—were interlinked. Not only did the belligerent parties operate across borders, but a very large number of regional states were also interested parties in both conflicts. Moreover, events in Rwanda directly affect Burundian political dynamics and the DRC, just as Burundian developments affect the perspectives and actions of both Rwandans and the Congolese.

The Burundi conflict is significant for a second reason as well: the use of an innovative long-term leadership training initiative in collaborative decision-making, one that targets key leaders in all sectors and is designed to build the foundations for a more sustainable peace and to enable a country to effectively tackle the multiple challenges of postconflict reconstruction. The lessons gleaned from this experiment in conflict transformation may well be applicable to other divided societies.

In neither the Arusha peace process (for Burundi) nor the Lusaka peace process (for the DRC) did the United States or its diplomats take leadership of the facilitation. Rather, as a matter of policy, it was decided that the United States should play an active but secondary, supportive role—working with the key facilitators, providing financial and technical support as needed, encouraging the belligerent parties toward negotiated settlements of their conflicts, and coordinating diplomatic efforts with the regional sponsors of the two peace processes—the Rome-based Catholic lay order of Sant' Egidio that was facilitating discrete talks between belligerent parties, and the European partners (most notably, France, Belgium, the United Kingdom, and the European Union). Thus this analysis reflects, in large measure, the judgments not of a lead facilitator but rather of a diplomatic participant-observer.

## The Nature of the Tutsi-Hutu Conflict

*“The Tutsis talk of genocide, the Hutus of exclusion.”*

—Advisor to facilitator Nyerere, 1996

The conflict between Tutsi and Hutu, in both Rwanda and Burundi, is unique to the African continent in that it is the only instance of intercommunal violence among Africans leading to genocide.<sup>1</sup> Most Americans are aware of the horrific 1994 Rwandan genocide, which

claimed the lives of close to 1 million persons, predominantly Tutsis but many moderate Hutus as well.

What is less known is that the first regional genocide took place in Burundi in 1972, when the Tutsi government of the day systematically massacred approximately 150,000 educated Hutus. Thousands more, both in Rwanda and in Burundi, have been killed either in intercommunal violence or in indiscriminate attacks on civilians by rebel forces or national armies. As recently as October 1993, Burundi was plunged into another round of violence by the assassination of the nation's first democratically elected Hutu president, Melchior Ndadaye. As many as 150,000 died in the weeks immediately following that assassination—both in Hutu massacres of unarmed Tutsis and in the Tutsi-led army assault on Hutu peasants that followed.

A second recurrent theme in Burundi's immediate postindependence political history is the economic and political dominance of the minority Tutsi (an estimated 14 percent of the population), in combination with the systematic exclusion of the Hutu majority (approximately 84 percent of the population) from key social, economic, and political institutions. In the words of a leading scholar on Burundian political life, "in no other state in the continent, with the qualified exception of South Africa, has minority rule been carried to such an extreme."<sup>2</sup>

It is this combination of extreme inequality, on the one hand, and recurrent intercommunal violence, on the other, that has made the conflict one of the most intractable in Africa. Almost no Burundian commune or family has been unaffected. It should come as no surprise, then, that fear and insecurity, as well as a reciprocal demonization of the two groups, gave rise to exceedingly low levels of intercommunal trust and confidence—and to a pattern of preemptive violence, each side fearing that restraint invited vulnerability.

This was the stage on which the Burundi peace process would unfold, presenting all who were involved in efforts to resolve the conflict—diplomats and facilitators alike—unique and difficult challenges.

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### *Distinguishing Tutsi and Hutu*

Ethnic conflict in Africa is commonly characterized as the product of cultural diversity and the expression of ancient tribal antagonisms. However, this conventional wisdom is wrong on both counts.

In Africa, no less than in the United States, Europe, or Asia, most ethnic conflict arises not from the differences among people, but from their similarities. It is this that moves people into conflict—their desire to control the same political offices, the same commodity marketing contracts, the same command posts within the army, or the same restricted number of slots in educational institutions or the civil service.

It is true that if people do not speak the same language, or have different cultural understandings of what we call the rules of the game, the intensity of the conflict might increase and thus be more difficult to manage. This is particularly so when different ethnically defined groups have significantly unequal resources. Cultural differences, however, are not what bring people into conflict in the first instance, and few conflicts in Africa are linked to ancient antagonisms. On investigation, such claims almost invariably prove to involve significant historical revisionism.<sup>3</sup>

Burundi is a vivid example. One normally thinks of ethnicity as an expression of cultural, linguistic, or religious differences. No such distinctions apply to the Tutsi and Hutu, however. They speak the same language, share a common culture and Burundian identity, look back to a traditional common monarchy, have for centuries lived peacefully together occupying



the same hills and communes, and have intermarried. The two do have distinct origins and physical prototypes: the Tutsi are believed to have migrated from the East and are generally described as tall with angular facial features; whereas the Hutu are believed to be of Bantu origin, and are often characterized as short and stocky. Inter-marriage, however, has made these physical characteristics an extremely imperfect predictor of ethnic identity. Today one finds as many short Tutsi as tall Hutu. Moreover, although Burundians theoretically derive their ethnic identity from their fathers, the many children of mixed marriages have further blurred the Tutsi-Hutu distinction.

What traditionally distinguished Tutsi and Hutu were their occupational differences: Tutsis tended to be cattle herders and Hutus generally farmers. But even this distinction was not ironclad. Many Hutus grazed cattle and “it was by entrusting their cattle to the Hutu that the Tutsi were able to establish clientage ties with Hutu elements, thus bringing Hutu and Tutsi together into a complex web of reciprocal rights and obligations. Far from driving a wedge between Hutu and Tutsi, their different occupational statuses provided the basis for a closer union.”<sup>4</sup>

Before Westerners arrived and intruded, Burundi was ruled by a princely oligarchy, known as the *ganwa*, a clan traditionally viewed as ethnically distinct from both Hutu and Tutsi, and which provided a unifying point of reference for all Burundians. Tutsis and Hutus were linked to one another as “patrons” and “clients,” but social standing and ethnicity were imperfectly correlated. Moreover, the traditional order did not impose any rigid system of social stratification. Enterprising or fortunate Hutus, for example, could come to exercise considerable influence, and enjoy wealth or social standing greater than that of many Tutsi. It was, in Rene Lemarchand’s phrase, “status, not ethnic identity,” that “was the principal determinant of rank and privilege.”<sup>5</sup> In addition, regional or clan distinctions (e.g., northerner versus southerner, or *Batare* versus *Bezi*) were often as salient as or more salient than the Hutu-Tutsi categories.

Political divides in precolonial Burundi centered not on Tutsi-Hutu distinctions, but on competition within the princely *ganwa* clan. This struggle was perhaps the dominant political motif of that era. Competing *ganwa* factions sought to mobilize support among both Hutu and Tutsi. Ethnic tensions between Hutu and Tutsi, though not unknown, were rare. “When ethnic tensions did emerge, they were highly localized and more often than not were generated by the abuses of local princely authorities acting hand in hand with Tutsi elements.”<sup>6</sup> Moreover, unlike in Rwanda, where the expansion of the monarchy involved direct confrontation with existing Hutu kingdoms, in Burundi the kingship did not become identified with Tutsi supremacy, but instead “derived much of its legitimacy from its symbolic identification with Hutu elements.”<sup>7</sup>

In sum, although Burundians traditionally defined themselves as Hutu or Tutsi or Twa (a generally marginalized pygmoid group comprising no more than 1 percent of the Burundian population), evidence of ethnically based political mobilization is scant. Even by 1962, when Burundi became independent as a constitutional monarchy, the principal line of political cleavage was not between Tutsi and Hutu, but between the *Bezi* and *Batare*, two princely factions with ethnically mixed followings.

### *Decolonization and Ethnic Identities*

The conflict between Tutsi and Hutu today is thus best understood as resulting from the manipulation of ethnic identities by members of Burundi’s political class in the struggle for control of the postcolonial state.

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In Burundi, as in Rwanda, extreme population density, land shortage, and poverty were the volatile backdrop of postindependence politics. Given a minuscule entrepreneurial middle class and an agriculturally based, largely subsistence economy, private sector avenues to wealth and economic security were extremely limited. In effect, control of the state machinery in both countries was tantamount to access to the economy. Controlling the state administrative machinery meant access to civil service jobs, control of the powerful coffee marketing board, and the ability to dispense and receive state contracts and loans.

On the eve of Burundi's independence, Prince Rwagasore—beloved by Hutu and Tutsi alike as the embodiment of nationalism—was assassinated. Burundi then entered independence with political power broadly shared among Tutsi, Hutu, and ganwa, but it was not long before those competing for control of the state recognized the potency of ethnic appeals. Burundian politics quickly ethnicized and became increasingly violent. Tutsi elements, through a successful army coup, soon managed to eliminate virtually every Hutu political leader and consolidate Tutsi control over not only the army but all the key state institutions. In 1972, when a Hutu rebellion challenged the Tutsi takeover, the Tutsi powers responded with what was to be the region's first genocide of approximately 150,000 educated Hutus considered a threat to Tutsi hegemony.

The pervasive political violence of the postindependence period transformed the elite-driven conflict between the dominant Tutsi and the excluded Hutu into a mass phenomenon. Both Tutsi and Hutu internalized the deep fears and suspicions given voice by their ethnic compatriots within the Bujumbura-centered political class. This, in turn, made the political mobilization of ethnic identities all the easier, particularly given that virtually none of the killers—Tutsi or Hutu—were held accountable for the hundreds of thousands of violent deaths that occurred in the decades following independence. In effect, all Burundians came to see themselves as victims in search of justice. In Lemarchand's words, "if Hutu and Tutsi increasingly tend to define each other in terms of mutually antagonistic categories, this is not because of ancestral enmities but because ethnic identities have acquired a moral dimension—whether as a martyred community or a threatened minority—they never had before."<sup>8</sup>

This does not mean that the Tutsi and Hutu camps today are either cohesive or united, or that ethnicity is the only significant cleavage in Burundian political life. On the contrary, as we will see, both Tutsi and Hutu have remained deeply fragmented by salient clan and regional divisions and personal leadership rivalries. In recent decades, the Hima-Tutsi from Bururi Province have emerged as the dominant force, within both the army and the government. This powerful southern "Bururi lobby" not infrequently draws the wrath not only of Hutus but also of Tutsis from northern Burundi. Indeed, clan and regional divisions within the Tutsi and Hutu camps, at times, were a more formidable obstacle to a sustainable peace agreement than the Tutsi-Hutu cleavage. However, until recently intragroup competition often had the perverse effect of exacerbating the Tutsi-Hutu divide, rivals for power each accusing the other of having gone soft on their ethnic adversary or of not being aggressive enough in advocating their own ethnic group interests.

## **The Long and Tortured Path to Peace**

The history of the Burundi peace process is as convoluted as the conflict, with as many facilitators as belligerent parties. Three more or less distinct phases can be distinguished, however. In the first, the United Nations became directly engaged in attempting to facilitate the negotiation of new power-sharing arrangements that would stabilize the situation in Burundi, and end

the intercommunal bloodletting that occurred in the wake of the October 1993 assassination of Ndadaye. Although the UN intervention may have dampened the level of violence for a short period, it was not long before political violence began to spiral upward again, creating widespread fears that Burundi could become another Rwanda.

The second and most complex phase saw the emergence in early 1996 of former Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere as the regionally and internationally sanctioned Burundi facilitator. Until his sudden death in late 1999, Nyerere was effectively in charge (though not always in control) of an exceedingly complex peace process that played itself out in three geographically separate but linked arenas. The first arena was Arusha, Tanzania, from which the Burundi peace process and ultimate accord drew its name, and which served as the principal venue for all-party informal consultations and formal negotiations. The second arena was Rome, which became the venue for secret bilateral talks between the Burundian government and the National Council for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD), then the principal armed rebel group. The third arena was Burundi itself, in particular its capital city Bujumbura, wherein over time there was established a fragile but important internal partnership between the Union for National Progress (UPRONA) and the Front for Democracy in Burundi (FRODEBU), the dominant Tutsi and Hutu political parties, designed to calm the political turbulence and set the stage for the negotiation of a new power-sharing arrangement and both political and military reform.

The third phase, which followed Nyerere's death toward the end of 1999, saw former South African president Nelson Mandela agree to assume responsibility for concluding the facilitation. Eight months later, on August 28, 2000, enormous pressure from Mandela and regional leaders resulted in the signing of the Arusha Peace Accords by all but a few of the nineteen delegations that had participated in the negotiations. This agreement notwithstanding, the peace process was still very much a work in progress, having left unresolved three of the most contentious and fundamental issues: Who would lead the thirty-six-month transition? How would the critical issues of army reform and integration of armed forces be handled? What would it take to get the CNDD's armed wing, the Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) and the PALIPEHUTU's armed wing, the Forces for National Liberation (PALIPEHUTU-FNL)—the two principal armed groups who were absent from the Arusha negotiations—to lay down their arms and participate in the newly established transitional institutions?

The first of these questions was resolved essentially by a Mandela fiat—former president Pierre Buyoya would preside for the initial eighteen months of the transition, and a Hutu president would take over for the final eighteen—but army reform and integration of the armed forces were more difficult. The transitional government was officially launched on November 1, 2001, but it was not until October 2002 that the CNDD-FDD agreed to lay down its arms and participate in the transitional government. The second rebel group, the FNL, agreed to suspend hostilities and enter into negotiations many years later, only after the transition had concluded, and a new democratically elected CNDD-FDD government was in place.

In February 2005, a new constitution was adopted and followed by the National Assembly's election of the CNDD-FDD's rebel leader, Pierre Nkurunziza, as Burundi president in August 2005. Since then, considerable political turbulence has been the norm, albeit with new lines of political cleavage and conflict. Recent years have been notable in the transformation of the historically polarized and volatile Hutu-Tutsi political discourse to a preoccupation with intra-Hutu divisions and rivalries.

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I turn now to examine these phases of the Burundi peace process. The scope of this paper does not permit a detailed history. My goal, rather, is to identify the most significant events, decisions, and factors that have helped shape the process and were most directly responsible for both its achievements and its shortcomings.

### **Phase I. The UN Steps In (1993–95)**

In the wake of the October 1993 Ndadaye assassination and the large-scale intercommunal violence that erupted afterward, the UN decided to intervene in Burundi, designating a distinguished diplomat, Amadou Ould-Abdullah, as the special representative of the secretary-general to Bujumbura. For two years, Ould-Abdullah labored valiantly to calm the political turbulence and end violence. However, new power-sharing arrangements negotiated between the Tutsi-dominated UPRONA and Hutu-dominated FRODEBU parties failed to satisfy either the extremist Tutsi elements or Hutu activists. An armed Hutu rebellion took root and began to operate in the countryside with increasing effectiveness. Within Bujumbura, extremist Tutsis launched a campaign of assassination and intimidation against all those associated with FRODEBU and even perceived UPRONA moderates. In his narrative account of his experience in Bujumbura, Ould-Abdullah captured the political mood:

The country is plagued by a culture of fear: Burundians, like Rwandans, live in permanent fear of murder, displacement, and mass exodus. . . . This atmosphere has not been generated by violence, alone, however. Rather, it is the product of violence and impunity. . . . Violence has become a catalyst for fear, which in turn aggravates violence. In a similar vicious circle, the culture of impunity and the culture of fear justify and perpetuate each other.<sup>9</sup>

The 1994 Rwandan genocide sharply accelerated these negative trends, greatly deepening ethnic polarization and intercommunal fears and insecurities within Burundi. Growing anxiety within the UN that Burundi could go the way of Rwanda led UN secretary-general Boutros Boutros-Ghali, at the end of 1995, to call for the contingent creation of a UN peacekeeping force poised to move into Burundi as necessary to avert further mass violence or genocide. This initiative, however, was met with little enthusiasm by UN members: no major power was willing to assume the lead role for mounting such a force, potential troop contributors were scarce, and some feared that planning for such an intervention might trigger the very explosion the proposed intervention sought to avert. In the months and years that followed, when it came to Burundi, the UN was to give new meaning to the phrase “risk averse”—with the Security Council and the UN Secretariat both reluctant to take the diplomatic lead, or to be proactive in developing peacekeeping modalities.

### **Phase II. Nyerere as Facilitator (1996–99)**

The activity during Nyerere’s time as facilitator fell across three venues: the first being Arusha, in Tanzania, the location of the multiparty talks; the second the Rome-based Catholic lay order of Sant’ Egidio; and the third the internal partnership inside Burundi between the government and the National Assembly.

#### ***Arusha***

In 1995, sharing the concerns of the UN about the regional consequences of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, the new chairman of the Organization of Africa Unity (OAU), Ethiopian prime

minister Meles Zenawi, and OAU secretary-general Salim Salim began to encourage former Tanzanian president Julius (Mwalimu) Nyerere to become involved in an effort to defuse the deepening Burundi crisis.<sup>10</sup> Following two gatherings of regional leaders representing Zaire, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi, and consultations with UN officials, Nyerere agreed to help “assist the people of Burundi in finding means to achieve peace, stability, and reconciliation,” including “the resolution of fundamental problems relating to the access, control, and management of power, so that either the ethnic or political minority is reassured.”<sup>11</sup>

Initially, Nyerere was welcomed as a facilitator not only by the subregion but also by the United States and the wider international community. First, no country outside Africa wanted to assume the lead role in efforts to resolve the Burundi conflict. Second, the willingness of regional leaders to step up and identify one of their own to guide the peace process was seen as a significant and positive development. Moreover, few African leaders enjoyed the iconic stature of the former Tanzanian president. A world statesman, a charismatic leader of Africa’s anti-colonial struggle, a pan-Africanist who played a key role in the liberation movements of southern Africa, the first president of an independent Tanzania—Julius Nyerere was the George Washington, the Abraham Lincoln, and the FDR of Tanzania (and much of the African continent) all rolled into one. Brilliant, articulate, passionate in his convictions and advocacy, Nyerere enjoyed a moral stature comparable to that of Nelson Mandela—the kind that would be difficult for any of the belligerent Burundian parties to challenge. In addition, probably no African leader was more knowledgeable about Burundi’s volatile political dynamics.

From a process standpoint, however, the choices of Nyerere as facilitator and Arusha as the negotiating venue were problematic. Not only did much of Tanzanian society ideologically identify with the underdog Hutus but, since 1972, Tanzania had become home to hundreds of thousands of Burundian Hutu refugees. The refugee camps would shortly emerge as a principal recruiting ground for the armed rebellion, and, in the months ahead, Burundi-Tanzania relations—and the Arusha peace process itself—would be constantly strained by virtue of Tutsi complaints that Tanzanians were complicit in recruiting, training, and arming the rebellion.

Significantly, the selection of the former Tanzanian president was fundamentally a decision not of Burundians (who were never formally invited to consider this question) but of the regional leaders. Burundian Hutus were generally quite supportive of the selection of Nyerere as facilitator and, later, of Arusha as the negotiating venue, but Tutsi reaction was ambivalent, at best. On the one hand, because of Nyerere’s participation decades earlier in the establishment of UPRONA, the initially multiethnic nationalist Burundi political party, the former Tanzanian president enjoyed considerable respect among many key Tutsi figures. Moreover, Nyerere was the only regional leader to vigorously condemn the 1994 Rwandan genocide of Tutsis, in sharp contrast to other heads of state, who had effectively turned a blind eye. On the other hand, for the reasons indicated, Tutsis perceived Tanzanians generally to be pro-Hutu.

The neutrality and credibility of the Arusha peace process was therefore under challenge from its inception. In effect, by making Nyerere the facilitator and Tanzania the negotiating venue, a weapon was handed to Tutsi extremists, who were deeply suspicious of Tanzanian motives. Later, when the Tutsi-dominated army returned Pierre Buyoya to power in July 1996, he would be sharply criticized by many Tutsis for acceding to a Tanzania-dominated negotiating framework. In their view, the agenda of regional leaders was not a negotiated political settlement, but a Hutu government. From the standpoint of Tutsi hard-liners, Buyoya had fallen into a trap that would ultimately prove fatal to Tutsi interests and security.

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*The first president of an independent Tanzania—Julius Nyerere was the George Washington, the Abraham Lincoln, and the FDR of Tanzania . . . all rolled into one.*

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### First Gambit

Toward the end of April 1996 and again early in June of that year, Nyerere brought FRODEBU and UPRONA representatives together in Mwanza, Tanzania, but made little progress in defusing political tensions. In particular, UPRONA, the party that despite its initially inclusive character had come to represent Tutsi hard-line interests, rejected Nyerere's suggestion that representatives of the armed rebels be invited to join the talks.

The situation appeared increasingly desperate. Eighteen members of parliament had been assassinated. Tutsi youth militias were wreaking havoc within Bujumbura which was being ethnically cleansed of Hutus. Violence was mounting in the countryside. The capital was rife with rumors of a pending coup. Within the American government, National Security Advisor Tony Lake was talking directly with the prime minister and the minister of defense, urging that they join in condemning attacks on civilians, warning that the United States would work to isolate any regime that came to power by force or coup, and insisting that there was no military solution to Burundi's problem. American policy in this period was to support a Nyerere-led Burundian dialogue that would seek to arrive at a power-sharing agreement centered on democratic principles and the protection of minority rights.

After the second Mwanza meeting failed, the Burundian minister of defense pleaded with the UN representative to telephone Nyerere and urge him not to give up hope. The minister acknowledged that UPRONA had been intransigent in Mwanza, but said that it would be different next time. But there was to be no next time. A frustrated Nyerere asked that Ugandan president Museveni convene a summit of regional leaders to decide on appropriate next steps.

### Request for Peacekeeping Force

Then, at the June 1996 summit, with Kenya and Ethiopia joining the five states that participated in the original Cairo and Tunis summits of regional leaders, Ugandan president Museveni managed to secure from Burundi's Hutu president Ntibantunganya and Tutsi prime minister Ndiwayo a joint request that a regional peacekeeping force be established to help calm the situation in Burundi. This was wholly unanticipated, given the long-standing fear among Tutsis that an international military intervention might neutralize the Tutsi-controlled Burundian army—which Tutsis considered their last defense against the threat of Rwanda-style Tutsi annihilation. It is possible that elements of the Tutsi leadership may have seen a regional peacekeeping force as heading off the more feared alternative of a UN peace enforcement mission.

Whatever the motivation, the request was welcomed by the United States and the international community. Washington recognized that the UN secretary-general's proposal for a standby UN force was going nowhere, and saw the regional initiative as the only viable alternative. One of my first tasks as special envoy was to make clear American support for this regional initiative and consult with Burundians and regional leaders on the ways in which the United States might provide appropriate technical assistance.

Unfortunately, this conception of a regional peacekeeping force was short-lived. Almost immediately, the prime minister and president began feuding over what they and the regional leaders had agreed on. The more extreme elements of the Tutsi community, who found the prospect of a regional force threatening, reacted sharply and violently. The prime minister had apparently not adequately prepared the UPRONA hard-liners for the intervention, and had begun to retreat from the agreement he and the president had reached with regional leaders. Moreover, although Hutu leaders inside Burundi strongly supported the intervention, CNDD



leader Leonard Nyangoma also opposed it, fearing that it would pressure the rebellion to disarm before its political demands had been met.

The political and security situation inside Burundi rapidly deteriorated. In a gruesome act of violence, Hutu rebels slaughtered more than three hundred Tutsi civilians at Bungendana. At the funeral service that followed, President Sylvestre Ntibantunganya was forced to flee for his life. Then, on July 25, 1996, the Burundian army declared Pierre Buyoya—who, three years earlier, had guided Burundi into a democratic election he then lost to Melchior Ndadaye—as Burundi's new president. The request for a regional peacekeeping force was immediately withdrawn.

### Condemnation and Sanctions

The regional response to the Buyoya coup was swift. On July 31, 1996, the Second Regional Summit on Burundi was convened in Arusha, this time without the consent or the participation of the Tutsi-controlled Burundian government. The summit issued a harsh condemnation of the coup, announced comprehensive economic sanctions against Burundi, affirmed the support of regional leaders for Nyerere to serve as Burundi facilitator, and spelled out three demands: the unbanning of the proscribed political parties, restoration of the suspended National Assembly, and immediate and unconditional negotiations with all political parties and armed groups.

Significantly, the communiqué did not demand that the deposed Hutu president, Sylvestre Ntibantunganya, who had taken refuge in the residence of the American ambassador, be restored to power. As Nyerere subsequently explained, this omission was intended as a signal that the region could live with Buyoya as a transitional leader. Strongly condemning the military coup as wrong in principle, Nyerere noted an important upside to Buyoya's return to power. As he put it, the situation was now "clarified"—there could no longer be any doubt that the Tutsi-controlled army was effectively in control of the Burundian government. This was why, at the last moment, a sentence was added in the final communiqué, that the coup of July 25 was but the culmination of a process that had begun in October 1993 (referring to Ndadaye's assassination). Regional leaders wanted to signal their impatience with long-standing Tutsi hegemony and continued Tutsi reliance on extraconstitutional means to hold on to power. The region was placing itself squarely behind the Hutu struggle for fundamental regime change in Burundi.

From its inception, the Arusha peace process was plagued by a host of difficulties—some the result of the complexity of the Burundi conflict, others of the multiplicity of actors that came to play a role in the political settlement. It would be almost two years before the first all-party negotiations would be launched on June 15, 1998. Everything before that time can best be characterized as talks about talks. The Arusha process was, to all intents and purposes, a process imposed by the region and unfolding in a country perceived as pro-Hutu. Other elements further complicated the situation.

### Nyerere as Enforcer

The decision to impose comprehensive economic sanctions against the government of Burundi was reportedly the most contentious issue discussed at the Arusha summit of July 1996. The regional leaders presented a united public face, but Nyerere later acknowledged their uncertainty about what they would do in practice.

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In the private deliberations that produced the final summit communiqué, Ugandan president Museveni had taken the hardest line. He wanted to demand that the Burundian army relinquish power immediately or face a regional military intervention. As he explained to his colleagues, the coup had taken the putchists only a few hours; it should take no longer for them to step down. Museveni's position reflected his fundamental contempt for the principal actors on both sides of the conflict. In his view, there were no patriots in Burundi—no leaders motivated by the country's national interest rather than personal interests or those of a narrowly defined group. Moreover, in Museveni's view, the principal contestants for power were all killers, and a sustainable peace would never come from a negotiation among killers.

But others pressed for a more pragmatic approach. Zairean prime minister Kengo, in particular, urged that the regional leaders not overreach, arguing that their credibility would suffer if a deadline for Buyoya to step down were established and no regional response should he fail to do so.

All, however, were agreed on the need to exert maximum pressure on the putchists. It was Nyerere, who had advocated the imposition of comprehensive economic sanctions against Burundi even before the Buyoya coup, who most forcefully articulated the pro-sanctions case. In Nyerere's first meeting with Buyoya after the coup, the Burundian president had claimed that he enjoyed the full support of the army and of the Tutsis, that he wanted to talk with the rebels but he needed some time. "Time for what?" Nyerere had asked. He did not want Buyoya to use this period to strengthen the Burundian army. Nyerere believed that Buyoya's professed commitment to a negotiated solution to Burundi's conflict was nothing more than lip service and that the Tutsi leadership remained committed to a military solution. Nyerere was particularly troubled by Buyoya's announcement, immediately on his return to power, of an intention to significantly expand the size and capability of the Burundi army. As the peace process was being launched, Nyerere remained deeply skeptical of Buyoya's intentions and capacity to deliver a peaceful settlement. "I don't believe that the Buyoya regime is a reformist regime," he said, "but a regime trying to establish a lasting Tutsi authority." In Nyerere's view, Buyoya needed to be told: behave or else. A Tanzanian advisor to Nyerere expressed the fundamental mistrust of Tutsi intentions even more starkly: "The region's reaction," he said, "will depend on a real response from Buyoya, not an arrogant response. The Tutsis have an absolute belief in their power, in their God-given right to rule. They see themselves as people of intellect. To change their mentality, you need shock treatment."<sup>12</sup>

Nyerere saw the sanctions against Burundi much as he and a number of international actors had seen those against the apartheid South African regime. They were a way of making it clear to the Tutsi elite that attempts to retain their monopoly of power would, in the end, be far more costly than a negotiated political settlement with the majority Hutu. He argued, in addition, that the imposition of sanctions would be an important message to the Hutu rebels—that the international community was not abandoning their cause and that means other than military force were available to bring the Tutsi-dominated regime to the negotiating table. Because Burundi was effectively landlocked, Nyerere argued, Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya had it within their power to make sanctions work. "For once," he told the special envoys, "we can do without the rest of the world." Later, in an interview with *Le Monde*, Nyerere publicly affirmed his confidence that sanctions would be effective: "As to sanctions I would simply like to remind you that they succeeded in South Africa, which is a far stronger country than Burundi. They take effect more slowly than bullets but they work."<sup>13</sup>



Although Nyerere had minimal confidence in Buyoya, he was even more mistrustful of the people around the Burundian president. Nyerere reported that he had told Buyoya in his first postcoup encounter, “I’m not going to assume you are completely in control. I don’t think we can help you by being nice to the others around you.” In explaining his approach to Buyoya, Nyerere used the analogy of a minister of finance who knows that tough decisions have to be made even though others within the government may resist what is required and recruits the IMF to play the role of the bad cop, to make it clear that there is no alternative, no way out unless certain conditions are met. In Nyerere’s view, sanctions were intended not to box Buyoya into a corner, but to provide the “necessary shock therapy” to hard-liners around Buyoya.

Giving Buyoya the benefit of the doubt as to his professed commitment to negotiations, Nyerere argued that the Burundian president would need this external pressure so that the Tutsis around him would realize that they had to do something. Again, he compared the Burundi situation to that of South Africa: the sanctions against the South African regime were directed not so much at the reputed reformer De Klerk as they were at his core Afrikaner constituency whose resistance to change had to be overcome.

Further driving Nyerere’s insistence on the imposition of comprehensive economic sanctions was his anger with Buyoya’s declaration, immediately following his coup, that “Arusha was dead.” Nyerere had seen this declaration as defying the regional leaders who, at the earlier Arusha summit in June, had agreed to respond to the request of Burundian leaders for a regional peacekeeping force.

From the day the regional leaders announced the imposition of sanctions against Burundi, it was clear that Nyerere would call the shots on the management of the sanctions regime. Whatever the personal misgivings of some regional leaders—and, with time, these were to become more manifest—when push came to shove they would be reluctant to challenge the person they had asked to assume the onerous task of facilitating the process. The facilitator had, in effect, become also the sanctions enforcer—with profound consequences both for how Nyerere would be perceived by Burundi’s Tutsi elite and the Arusha peace process.

Nyerere recognized that his identification with the sanctions regime undercut his credibility with his Tutsi interlocutors. On one occasion, he apologized to the Burundian minister of defense for public comments he had made in defense of sanctions. On another, he agreed with my urging that he needed to remove himself from the public discussion of the sanctions issue.

But Nyerere had great difficulty in restraining his public comments, which constantly fueled Tutsi extremist claims that he was anything but a neutral facilitator. Although he had a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of Burundian political dynamics, sensitive to the need to address Tutsi fears of annihilation at the hands of the more numerous Hutus, it was clear that Nyerere emotionally identified with the struggle of the majority Hutu to overcome their history of subordination and discrimination.

The intensity of Nyerere’s conviction that external pressure was essential to secure the Tutsi elite’s acceptance of real power-sharing was made particularly clear eighteen months later, at the summit of regional leaders held in Kampala on February 21, 1998. By this point, the effectiveness of the regional sanctions regime was being called into question not only by the international community but also by a number of regional states. On the eve of the summit, regional foreign ministers meeting with OAU secretary-general Salim Salim unanimously agreed to recommend to their heads of state that the sanctions be suspended. But, following a private meeting between Nyerere, Tanzanian president Mkapa, and Ugandan president Museveni, the heads of state agreed to ignore their foreign ministers and maintain the sanctions. Nyerere

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