

Rwandan President Kagame Accuses France of Involvement in 1994 Genocide

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Two decades later Paris refuses to attend ceremony in Kigali

Rwandan President Paul Kagame has once again escalated conflict with the government of France by accusing the European country of playing a critical role in the mass extermination of people inside the country twenty years ago.

In an interview with a leading French publication *Jeune Afrique*, Kagame condemned what he described as the “direct role of Belgium and France in the political preparation for the genocide”. France had military forces stationed inside Rwanda as part of a peacekeeping force along with Belgium.

France trained Rwandan troops under the government of President Juvenal Habyarimana and the presidential guard was accused of initiating the mass killings of Tutsis along with the militia groups known as the Interahamwe. Even the shooting down of the presidential jet which sparked the fighting has been often attributed to France and Belgium.

Several Belgium troops were kidnapped during the period leading up to the April 6 downing of the jet. These troops were later tortured and killed prompting the withdrawal of the soldiers from Rwanda.

Kagame told the publication that “Twenty years later, the only thing you can say against them [the French] in their eyes is they didn’t do enough to save lives during the genocide. That’s a fact, but it hides the main point: the direct role of Belgium and France in the political preparation of the genocide and the participation of the latter in its very execution.” (April 6)

Two decades ago the world was deeply shaken by the mass killings which took place for over three months in the Central African state of Rwanda. It has been estimated that between 500,000-1,000,000 people died when Hutu militia groups tortured and executed members of the minority Tutsi population.

On April 6, 1994, a jetliner was shot down near the capital of Kigali killing the presidents of both Rwanda and neighboring Burundi who were returning from a regional meeting designed to resolve the civil war that had been escalating since 1990. The-then Rwandan President Habyarimana and Burundian President Cyprien Ntayamira were killed in the crash triggering the mass killings of Tutsis along with Hutus who would not go along with the extremist elements.

A civil war began in Rwanda in 1990 when the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) took up arms against the government in Kigali. As a result of regional negotiations, the Arusha peace accord was signed in 1993 bringing about a ceasefire.

Efforts aimed at consolidating the ceasefire and working towards national reconciliation was opposed by elements within the power structure inside the Rwandan government that was dominated by the majority Hutu population. The shooting down of the presidential flight provided the impetus for the destruction of the peace agreement and the offensive launched by the RPF resulting in their eventual declaration of victory in early July of the same year.

France and Belgium in Rwandan Colonial and Neo-Colonial History

At the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, where European colonial powers carved up the African continent based upon its own imperialist interests, Rwanda was conceded to Germany. After the collapse of the German colonial empire during World War I, the Belgium monarchy took control of the territory.

A system of racial segregation and inter-ethnic rivalry was deliberately established in Rwanda. Although this policy of divide and rule was instituted by the Germans it was continued by the Belgian colonial authorities.

Identity cards were assigned to Africans based upon their ethnic affiliation. Historical myths of the purported distinctiveness and superiority of the Tutsis was deliberately advanced in order to institutionalize these divisions.

Tutsis were said to have been from areas outside the colonial boundaries drawn by the Berlin Conference. By 1959 the first outbreak of ethnic tensions arose forcing many Tutsis into exile in the neighboring states of Uganda, Tanzania, Congo and Kenya.

The Role of France, Belgium and Washington Since 1990

By 1990 many within the Tutsi population in Uganda had developed a solid alliance with the National Resistance Movement/Army of Uganda headed by President Yoweri Museveni. Paul Kagame had held rank within the Ugandan military and was sent to the United States for military training.

During the late 1980s and 1990s under Museveni, Uganda became a key player in U.S. foreign policy initiatives in Central and East Africa. Kampala became one of the first countries in Africa, along with Ghana in the west, to adopt the so-called "Structural Adjustment Programs" (SAP) which imposed austerity on continental states.

The SAPs resulted in the large-scale downsizing of the civil service, the slashing of social services and the weakening of public and higher education. Loans which were granted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, two U.S.-based financial institutions, set terms for the issuance and repayment of credit which proved to be extremely disadvantageous to the workers, farmers and youth.

In order to maintain these payment schedules and control over the political direction of post-colonial African states, a military partnership was established with Uganda and eventually Rwanda. Both Ugandan and Rwanda served as ground troops in the western-backed invasion of the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo in 1998 leading to a war that

continued for five years.

Today Uganda has intervened in the Republic of South Sudan, another state that came into being with the full political backing of U.S. imperialism and its allies. Rwanda is playing a role the Central African Republic (CAR) where France also maintains a presence of 2,000 troops.

Since 2008 with the formation of the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), the continent has been the target of large-scale military interventions under the guise of fighting terrorism. Even though Rwanda has attacked France for its role in the 1994 genocide it is still being exploited by the U.S. as a surrogate for Pentagon and Wall Street in Africa.

African states can move between alliances with France, the U.S. and other European imperialist states, but genuine political and economic independence can only be achieved through inter-continental unity based upon protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the continent and its people. No African state is safe as long it is dependent upon the economic, military and diplomatic support of the world capitalist system.

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