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The Beginning of the End for Kagame?

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Rwandan President Paul Kagame (L) shakes hands with former U.S. President George W. Bush during a meeting in Washington, D.C., May 31, 2006.

The evidence of these massacres is irrefutable. In standard accounts of the genocide, including the basic Human Rights Watch book "Leave No One to Tell the Story" by Alison Des Forges, massacres by the RPF are presented, though no estimates are given on their scale. A famously buried report by U.N. investigator Robert Gersony, which has since surfaced, estimated the scale to be in the tens of thousands during the civil war. Some of the largest, and best documented massacres by the RPF occurred after they had already won the war - the worst and most infamous being the Kibeho massacre of April 1995.

Scholar Gerard Prunier, who wrote one of the standard accounts of the Rwandan genocide and one of the major books on the Congo wars, "Africa's World War," was a long-time friend of the RPF since before the Civil War. In his book, he expresses considerable understanding and empathy for the RPF, arguing that RPF violence "had to be seen in the context of the war and of the genocide," that there were going to be some "unavoidable revenge killings." But when one of the few Hutu members of the RPF, Seth Sendashonga, also a friend of Prunier's, tried and failed to stop the Kibeho massacre, after sending 400 memos over 13 months to Kagame to try to stop these killings (memos to which Kagame studiously avoided replying in writing), Prunier was forced to start changing his mind. Sendashonga went into exile and was assassinated in Kenya in 1998 — Prunier reports this murder as causing his final break with the RPF. Prunier called the RPF's campaign of killings "coherent," with their "focal point" being "undivided political control." Targets included "friends and family of genocidaire, educated people, PARMEHUTU (from the Hutu political party), and opponents" — a broad and ever-expanding pool of potential victims. The RPF, Prunier wrote, viewed the Hutu majority population, whether they were involved in politics or not, whether they had anything to do with the the genocide or not, as a "permanent danger" to be kept at bay with "random mass killings to instill fear and defanged by neutralizing real or potential leaders."

Merelles's indictments are based on testimony by ex-RPF soldiers, like the [2014 BBC documentary](#) that stirred so much controversy. The 182-page legal document outlines specific charges against specific commanders for specific massacres in different parts of Rwanda. Like the BBC documentary, it has generated enraged responses from Kagame's supporters, both in Rwanda and in the West. The standard enraged response is to counter-accuse, and attack the source as being "pro-genocide." The idea is that Interpol and a Spanish judge are, in 2015, working on behalf of the Hutu forces that committed the genocide and were militarily defeated, scattered, hunted, and slaughtered by the RPF (along with hundreds of thousands of perfectly innocent civilians) two decades ago, during which some of their leaders were also convicted at the International Criminal Court.

The explanation might be somewhat simpler - that, according to this judge, the fact that Kagame and the RPF fought against a government that killed hundreds of thousands of civilians did not grant them the right to kill hundreds of thousands of civilians.

Merelles's 2008 indictments are not the only documents sitting out there in the public domain that contain enough evidence to condemn Kagame and the commanders around him to jail. There are also a number of United Nations reports, including the U.N. Mapping Report on the Congo and a series of reports on the **Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources in the Democratic Republic of Congo**. There are also indictments from another judge, Jean-Louis Brugiere of France, from 2006. Most who know about Kagame's crimes assumed that these documents would mainly collect dust.

But slowly over the past five or so years, and especially since the BBC documentary was aired last year, even as Kagame seeks to change the constitution to remove term limits and stay in office beyond 2017, it does look like something has changed in the West's treatment of him. The automatic smear that anyone seeking accountability for the RPF's crimes must be a "genocidaire" is not sticking as well it used to. The evidence that Kagame and the RPF are responsible for assassinations and massacres in Rwanda and Congo, as well as plunder and occupation in the Congo, is overwhelming and hard to ignore, as hard as Kagame's supporters try. The idea that the 1994 genocide gives Kagame and the RPF impunity to commit crimes against humanity holds so little weight that no one is willing to say it out loud. Now his spy chief has been arrested in one of the countries, the U.K., that has supported Kagame the most unconditionally. If the U.K. is not safe for a war criminal, then where in the West is?

If Kagame can't shake off the stench of crimes against humanity, he may find himself becoming another one of the West's dispensable dictators. Joseph Kabila has, after all, demonstrated that he can fulfill Western interests in the DR Congo directly, without the need for Rwanda's middle-management - especially if the U.N. continues to provide soldiers to do it.

Kagame and his once-patron, Museveni of Uganda, were once touted by the U.S. as the "New African Leaders." But perhaps they are approaching their shelf life. If so, they may suddenly be ushered off stage and replaced some time soon. If the West remains the arbiter of what happens there, the people of the region can have little to hope for from their replacements.

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