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## THE RWANDA GENOCIDE: HOW, WHY AND WHAT

Remarks to the Pell Center  
for International Relations and Public Policy

February 9, 2006



I thank Senator Pell, Sister Therese and the Pell Center for inviting me, and congratulations to the students for putting such an important topic such as genocide on the table in the course of your studies this semester.

I am very impressed to see so many of you here on a cold evening. It's finally winter in Rhode Island, I guess.

I'm here because I consider the Rwanda genocide to have been a test of American leadership at which we failed miserably. And I think that we are going to continue to fail, as I look at Darfur and I look at what is happening in Eastern Congo, unless we begin to consider what kind of leadership we want to exercise in the world. I feel strongly that it's time that people like you and me start talking about what are American values that we want to represent to the world and what kind of leadership do we want to exercise, not just in parts of the world, but in all of the world? Two years ago, as you know, people commemorated the tenth anniversary of the Rwanda Genocide. There were lots of discussions, there were lots of reports, there were lots of leaders saying, "I'm terribly sorry." There were lamentations and there were at least two movies. And the recollection of what happened was as appalling to me as the events themselves. Many people, I came across, wondered why they didn't know there was such a thing going on in 1994 and wondered why it is, why it was, that the United States government didn't do more. I heard lots of world leaders saying, "never again." I don't doubt their sincerity, but when I look at Darfur and I look at Eastern Congo and I look at other places, I see a squandering of opportunities again and again and again. So I think we need to think about how we're going to make a difference. Do we do it all ourselves? And if we're not going to do it all ourselves, what are we going to do?

Those are thoughts that I would like to share with you tonight. But before I do, let me briefly go back, to offer a brief thumbnail sketch on what happened in Rwanda so that we are all on the same page. How many of you know in details about the genocide? [Pause] Well, certainly my husband does.

Rwanda, as you know, was administered by the Belgians from the end of World War I until the late 50s, early 60s and they used existing power structures in which the minority Tutsi population ranked higher than the majority Hutu population. The Belgians were the only colonists in Africa who institutionalized ethnic differences by stamping the ethnicity on the identity card of every person. Never mind that people had been marrying one another and had been co-existing and a lot of the differences were actually very artificial. At independence, things changed and the Hutus had a revolution, the so-called “Hutu Revolution.” Thousands of Tutsis were killed and thousands more fled the country, many of them going to the bordering country of Uganda where they remained as refugees. A small Hutu elite took power, stayed in power, and consolidated power through a one-party system until the late 1980s, early 90s when pressure from donors forced this government to share power and to allow new opposition political parties to form. At about the same time, the sons and daughters of the people who had fled, the Tutsis who had fled to Uganda, came over the border in 1990 under the umbrella organization the “Rwanda Patriotic Front”—the RPF—and invaded the country. So, here you have a small group that has been in power, and liking it for a good number of years, now being threatened by three different forces. One is military, the Tutsi refugees, the Rwanda Patriotic Front; number two: opposition parties; and number three: the dissatisfaction of a lot of Rwandans because, like many people who stay in power too long, the government had become a bit too corrupt and a bit too inefficient.

How are you going to consolidate your power again when it is seeping away? The



fear card. Yes, we've seen it time and time again. And this small group of people unleashed a virulent and violent campaign of fear, branding all of the resident Tutsis, not the ones who came over the border, but the people who had been living there for

years, branding them as collaborators and the enemy. The violence didn't stop throughout the war and it didn't stop when under pressure from donors, the two sides, the military and the government of Rwanda and the Tutsi Rwanda Patriotic Front met in Tanzania to talk about peace accords. Even while the government of Rwanda was talking peace, a coalition of radical Hutus was continuing to bring in arms, including machetes, continuing a campaign of violence, continuing to foment mistrust, and continuing to blame everything on the Tutsis. When the president of Rwanda was forced, again by foreign donors, to sign the peace accord, this group was already planning a genocide.

I was in Washington. I had among many other portfolios, the Rwanda portfolio. Did I know that people were planning a genocide? Absolutely not. Did we see signs of violence and negative behaviors? Yes, we did. But you know what? We were so focused on the peace accords as the means by which Rwanda would not only come to peace with itself, but also become a democracy, that we didn't heed the signs. And that's a very important policy lesson for me. That you get so caught up with what you want to have happen that you just don't pay any attention to whatever the negative signals are.

When both parties to the war, after the peace accord, came to the United States saying, "We want to disarm, we want peace, we need a peacekeeping mission to which to

disarm because we don't trust one another enough to disarm to one another," I believed them completely. Now this was 1993 and, within the Washington inter-agency, peacekeeping was getting a very bad odor. Remember Somalia? *Black Hawk Down*? We didn't like it. Lots of peacekeeping missions were going on in Africa and around the world. We were paying 31 percent of peacekeeping mission costs. We didn't like that, either. Rwanda? Where in the world is Rwanda? And why should we engage in yet another peacekeeping mission when we're in the process of coming up with criteria for peacekeeping which is pretty much going to guarantee that peacekeeping may come to Newport, but sure isn't going to come to any country in which there is a risk? [Note: Bushnell is referring to Presidential Decision Directive 25, which President W. J. Clinton signed on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1994, which nominally addressed U.S. Policy on Reforming Multilateral Peace Operations (specifically United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. Although a classified document, its contents are widely known. PDD-25 is frequently considered as a template, due to its heavy restrictions on U.S. involvement in multilateral operations, for "non-involvement."]

So although many of my colleagues around Washington were less than enthusiastic about peacekeeping, the United Nations took a very different view. They desperately needed a success. They were reeling from Somalia. They believed the parties who came from Rwanda and said we want peacekeeping and they thought that this could be a fairly easy, cheap and successful way of getting the whole notion of peacekeeping redeemed. So the Security Council voted a small peacekeeping mission.

Some people think that everything might have worked, that the peace accords really did have a chance, had two things not happened. One, in neighboring Burundi, which is the demographic twin of Rwanda, a majority Hutu population, a minority Tutsi population, Tutsi military killed the first democratically elected Hutu president and slaughtered

thousands of people. The radicals Hutus in Rwanda said, “See, see what happens? You can’t trust these people.” So the coup and the assassination in Burundi had huge reverberations in Rwanda. That was in the fall of ‘93. [Note: Estimates place the number of civilian deaths from October 1993 violence in Burundi at 50,000.] Then on April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1994 the plane that was carrying both the new president of Burundi and the president of Rwanda who had been forced to sign the peace accord was shot out of the sky--- and do you know that to this day we have no idea who did it.

Within hours, the radical Hutus, who had been planning the genocide, were sending out military people to go down the list of opposition people and kill them. Roadblocks were set up in the city of Kigali; anybody who fled was taken and killed. A systematic genocide had begun. What we saw was absolute chaos because in response to the systematic killings, the Rwanda Patriotic Front started the war again. They weren’t about to sit there as their fellow Tutsis and Hutu countrymen were being slaughtered. How did we react? Like the rest of the international community, we got out. We evacuated our citizens and we closed, temporarily, our embassy. What a gift to these Hutu radicals because now the eyes and ears of the international community are gone and all you are left with are the peacekeepers.

Within two weeks, the UN Security Council had talked about what to do with the peacekeepers. And with the support—I dare say pressure—of the United States voted to withdraw all but a very few number of peacekeepers. Why? Here are the reasons we gave:

- Peacekeepers are there to keep the peace. There’s no peace in this country, there’s a war breaking out, so why should we have peacekeepers?
- Belgian peacekeepers, ten of them, had been brutally murdered within the first twenty-four hours of the plane crash---which seemed to be Somalia all over again. The Belgians want to leave. They threaten to nationalize and withdraw. They want protection, they want cover and we want to give it to them, so let’s just pull them all out.

- There is no peacekeeping mandate that allows peacekeepers to shoot anybody except in self-defense. Peacekeepers don't have either sufficient numbers or the resources. Remember, this is peacekeeping "on the cheap," so let's just take them out.

These discussions, to say nothing of the removal of the peacekeepers, allowed this small coalition of Hutu radicals to gain control of the military, the government administration and militias they had been training.

It is not that everybody in Rwanda wanted to commit genocide. There are a lot of people who were given no choice. You kill or you get killed. Over the next few weeks, while human beings were being slaughtered at the rate of 8,000 a day, and not just slaughtered with sophisticated weapons, grenades and guns, but slaughtered by people using machetes and farm implements, my colleagues and I were meeting in Washington to talk about what we could do to stop the killings under impossible policy parameters, which were: "No troops. Don't even think of American intervention. No troops from anywhere else. No money. No intervention. No resources. Other than that, go for it." So I went on international radio. I telephoned the perpetrator of the genocide, the genocidal chief of staff. I would set the alarm for 2 in the morning, because it was 8 o'clock in the morning Rwanda time, and I would get up and I would tell him to knock it off and at one point said, "If you don't stop it, President Clinton is going to hold you personally accountable." Well, guess what? The president never said that and I never went beyond my brief again in my Foreign Service career, but I figured that Bill Clinton wouldn't mind if I used his name. And I'm happy to say that, that man with whom I was having these absolutely bizarre conversations is now being tried under the International Tribunal.

I can't say that any of my efforts did any good at all and the genocide really didn't stop until the Rwanda Patriotic Front had a clear military victory. And in those 100 days that it took them to get a military victory, 800,000 people had been slaughtered, over 100,000

children had been left orphaned and 250,000 to 500,000 women had been systematically raped in an effort to spread HIV/AIDS and many of these women were looking to give birth to babies who were HIV positive.

But the story is not over. The government of the radical Hutus who had lost, fled the country, taking with them the treasury, the computers and the kitchen sink—and one million refugees. Over the



border they came to neighboring, then Zaire, now Congo, and on volcanic slopes and they sat down with their structures intact and they maintained their intimidating control over the people in the refugee camp. They took the food. They would not allow people who wanted to go back to Rwanda to go back. They intimidated the aid workers and they continued incursions into Rwanda to keep up the killings. The new government of Rwanda, the Rwanda Patriotic Front, that had won the battle, said to the international community “You’d better do something and if you don’t, we will.” We didn’t and they did.

And that touched off two different wars in Eastern Congo which at one point involved seven African nations and a host of armed groups, has resulted in the death of over four million people, continues to this day at the rate of about 30,000 deaths a month and is under the so-called protection of a tiny UN peacekeeping force of 17,000 troops trying to control a mountainous and forested territory the size of the Eastern Coast of the United States. All this because we did not think it was in the interest of the United States to do anything when the plane crashed and the genocide began in Rwanda.

In Darfur, meanwhile, 400,000 people have died due to the conflict that the US labeled a genocide two years ago, in 2004. Millions of people have been displaced, and the

war may be spreading. African Union peacekeepers are there. There's 7,000 of them for territory the size of Texas. They don't have enough equipment; they don't have enough manpower; they don't have enough resources to do the job. And there are discussions going on to turn them over to United Nations peacekeepers, to turn them into a UN peacekeeping force and to augment the numbers so that perhaps something better could be done.

Meanwhile, people are still getting killed and peace talks are still going on.

So what's changed from Rwanda 1994 to Darfur—which we say is genocide—to Eastern Congo, where millions of people are dying but we haven't labeled it—and I don't know that it is—a genocide. So what has changed? Well, both a lot and not very much. The United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan, proposed a blueprint that includes the following five criteria for action: 1) preventing the conflict which gives the context in which genocide can take place; 2) protecting civilians; 3) crowning a high-level person the czar of genocide prevention at the UN. (I'm not sure what that does, but that's okay.); 4) creating mechanisms to end impunity for people who are practicing genocide and 5) insuring a swift, decisive action should genocide occur.

Of these five criteria, if you look at Darfur against such a baseline, well, we weren't able to prevent the conflict; we haven't been able to protect the people. (Whether there's a "czar" at the UN, I have no idea who that poor person may or will be.) Swift and decisive action? Well, there are some African peacekeepers that are there, but they didn't get in swiftly nor have their actions been decisive. The latest I've read is that when we turn the African Union peacekeepers into United Nations peacekeepers it's going to take a year before anybody gets there.

We have, I will say, made "steps" on issues of impunity. The Rwanda International Tribunal was established and is holding accountable the people who perpetrated the



genocide in Rwanda. We've established—we the international community—the International Criminal Court, although the United States is not a party to it at this point in time. And Congress recently has been talking about the Darfur Protection Act

which would single our perpetrators and impose selective sanctions. That hasn't become legislation yet, but it is out there for discussion.

So what's the problem? If we have the blueprints, if we know what has to be done, why aren't we doing it? Well, in my estimation, we're not doing it because it's too hard, it's too expensive and it's not deemed to be in our national interest. Rwanda was not deemed to be in our national interest. And this is not sufficiently important to our national interest to really do something. So what does that say about our leadership in the world? And what kind of a world are we passing on to our children? If we're saying, we the United States, are the superpower and are the leader of the world and this leadership is all about us and we will exercise on leadership, our values, when and where we think we should exercise our values and our leadership, then I'm not sure we should be calling ourselves a leader

That's what I want us to start talking about. As I was going through and writing my remarks, and I have to say that this is the first time that a) have been unshackled – because I left a very meaningful career in the public service in October and b) this is the first time I've really had an opportunity to reflect on what happened in Rwanda and what the real lesson for me is.

And one of them is that if we, the United States, keep clinging to the notion that if it doesn't affect us directly in the short-term, we're not going to do anything, then we're going

to see a lot of people die. So I have an idea, as a result of doing some reading and here's my idea: What if we started to consider the conjunction between our national interest and global interests? Global warming is a global interest. Isn't it in our interest? Terrorism is a global interest. Genocide is a global interest. Why can't we start looking at national interest through the prism of global interests and see what we find? Secondly, how about not just talking about national security, but talking, seriously, about human security? If we can keep human beings safe all over the world, doesn't that make us safer? These were my two thoughts. And as I looked at them and began to brainstorm with myself. I asked what would unfold if we were to put on these different lenses—global lens first—and focused human security? What would we get if we looked at the context of genocide? Would new ideas come up?

Here are options that came to my mind. We could actually, the United States of America, could galvanize the world, just like we're galvanizing the world in the case of Iran and nuclear power, we could galvanize the world and other governments around looking at what are in global interests—which is what human security is all about—and what can we, collectively, do as a world community to promote both. We could have some real serious conversations with other nations saying “Why do we always have to do it, the United States? Why is it that if we don't do it, it never gets done? If we're going to be looking as a community at world, global interests, how about you all doing something now and then? So that we don't always have to pay for it and assume responsibility for it.” We could begin having conversations about what the role of military forces are. What's the role of a national force? What's the role of a regional force? What's the role of a UN force? What's the difference between what NATO does and the African Union does, the US military does and the UN peacekeepers? How about sitting down and saying “Okay, let's talk about this and

maybe we can share and complement one another.” Does this sound a little too common sensical? Does it? Is it time females started taking over the world? I don’t know. [Laughter].

We could start thinking about, globally, how we promote peace. Because every action we have taken over the past centuries has been to attempt to prevent conflict. Yet, you can’t prevent conflict among human beings. We *are* conflict. As I pointed out to an audience last night at Yale, my beloved husband of over thirty years and I sometimes engage in conflict. That doesn’t mean we’re violent with one another. Conflict can be really good.

It’s violent conflict we haven’t prevented. So why not just switch the prism and say “You know what, we’re going to promote peace and you know how we’re going to promote peace? We’re going to start looking at the peacemakers and all of you guys, mostly guys, some gals, who are out there fomenting violence, out of the spotlight. This is not about you anymore. This is about promoting peace. What kind of options would we come up with that? So I think, if we were to start looking at brand new twenty first century world views instead of twentieth century world views for twenty-first century issues, maybe we would find some innovation.

Let me end this with some personal lessons that I learned directly as a result of Rwanda and I will say that my tour in Washington at the time was my first tour in the Department of State. It was a painful time to learn lessons. Here’s what I learned.

What interests senior political leadership in Washington, DC, interests everybody else in Washington, DC and actually around the world and what doesn’t interest senior political leadership doesn’t interest anybody else. Rwanda didn’t interest senior political leadership. Period. So even if it’s a genocide, if you don’t get to the people at the top and get their attention, not a whole lot is going to happen. Now, what is it those people at the top want? Political power. That means they’re very sensitive to important constituent groups and

the media and the stock market. Tony Lake is quoted as saying, during the Rwanda Genocide, when talking to Human Rights Watch, “I hear you, but the phones aren’t ringing.”

What does that say to me? That if I sit back and I wait for my leaders to lead, I may be waiting for a very long time because sometimes they’re just too focused on other things and the phone isn’t ringing. Now, I’m not at all sanguine that the US political leadership right now is going to begin engaging in discussions about new ways, innovative ways to dealing with twenty-first century problems. So that means that if I don’t start doing something and discussing; if I sit and wait for the folks at the top, I may be waiting a very long time and I may be seeing more genocides in the future and that’s just not acceptable.

I learned that it is easy and even comfortable to feel very powerless. Well, if it is only the top that can do anything and here’s little old me, shoot, why even try? More importantly than learning what it’s like to feel powerless, I learned how important it is to “get over it.” Because as long as we’re powerless, we don’t do anything and if we don’t do anything; nothing gets done.

So even though my actions during the Rwanda genocide didn’t do a whole lot, I can’t tell you how important it was for me and my soul to know that I tried. I really did do my best.

On the other hand of the ledger, I also learned that one person really can make a difference. You’re going to meet General Dallaire in March when he speaks at the Pell Center. That *one* man, who stayed with a small contingent of peacekeepers in Rwanda, made a difference. He will tell you stories about others who made a difference.

We are the nation of Rosa Parks. Did this woman say, “Well, jeez, I’m really powerless to do anything?” So, if you can have people who say, “Well maybe I’m powerless,

but , you know, I never know if I'm powerless until I try to use power," maybe, maybe, one person can make a difference.

Lastly, I learned the incredible and sustaining power of hope, in getting me up in the morning and in persevering against very, very difficult odds. Because hopelessness didn't get me anywhere. So what was the point? When I translated my hope into action, I learned that I was fulfilling my worth as a human being and my principles as an American. So I'm going to continue to hope that we'll figure it out; that we're in the twenty-first century, people, and you know using what worked in 1940 will not work today. I am going to continue to hope. I want to say that what I wish for you is hope as well.



Photos by Andrea Hansen