

Item Subject: Plane Crash

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April 6, 1994

Rwanda

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TO: The Secretary
THROUGH: P - Mr. Tarnoff
FROM: AF - Prudence Bushnell
SUBJECT: Death of Rwandan and Burundi Presidents in Plane
Crash Outside Kigali

SUMMARY

A plane crash near Kigali has apparently resulted in the death of the Presidents of Rwanda and Burundi. There are unconfirmed reports that the plane was shot down by unknown attackers. The UN special representative in Rwanda has organized a meeting between the military and Western diplomats at the U.S. Ambassador's residence at 9:00 AM tomorrow to discuss the transition.

DISCUSSION

According to reports from Kigali, the Rwandan military has reported that the private plane of Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana was shot down prior to landing at the Kigali airport sometime prior to 9:00 PM local time (3:00 PM Washington time) today. Military officials have reported that both President Habyarimana and Burundi President Cyprien Ntaryamira were killed in the subsequent crash. The two Presidents were returning from a one-day regional summit in Dar Es Salaam on the Burundi crisis; the Burundi President had reportedly asked to fly back via Kigali with President Habyarimana.

The UN peacekeeping operation, UNAMIR, travelled to the crash site, but the Rwandan military prevented the UN from inspecting the site. The Rwandan military also reportedly disarmed the UN (Belgian) peacekeepers stationed at the airport.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: HARRY R. MELONE
DATE/CASE ID: 5 MAY 2000 199501642

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The Rwandan Ambassador to Washington confirmed President Habyarimana's death in a phone conversation with AF/C, but there has been no official announcement of the deaths over

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Rwandan radio as yet. In Burundi, the President of the National Assembly (next in line of presidential succession) appeared on television at 11:30 PM local time, along with the UN special envoy to Burundi Ahmedou Abdallah, the Minister of Defense and the Army Chief of Staff. The Assembly President confirmed that the Burundi President was travelling with the Rwandan President and that there had been some problem with the plane. There was no confirmation of any deaths.

The succession question will be difficult in Rwanda. The Arusha accords provide that the President of the Transition National Assembly assumes the presidency on an interim basis. However, the Assembly has not yet been installed. An armed forces delegation told UN special envoy Booh Booh that the military intended to take over power temporarily. Booh Booh encouraged the delegation to work with existing authorities and within the framework of the Arusha accords; however, the military was very resistant to working with the current (interim) Prime Minister, Agathe Uwilingiyamana. The delegation is to meet with Booh Booh and Western diplomats at the U.S. Ambassador's residence tomorrow morning at 9:00 AM. The military assured Booh Booh that forces will remain in the barracks.

Both our Embassies in Kigali and Bujumbura report that the cities are relatively calm, although an increase in sporadic gunfire and grenade explosions was noted in Kigali. Both posts have instructed the American community to stay at home until further notice. All Americans are believed safe. There are no Peace Corps volunteers in either country.

If, as it appears, both Presidents have been killed, there is a strong likelihood that widespread violence could break out in either or both countries, particularly if it is confirmed that the plane was shot down. Our strategy is to appeal for calm in both countries, both through public statements and in other ways. We are also in close contact with the French and Belgians. The White House has requested that we prepare a presidential statement expressing condolences and urging calm.