

Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume E–5, Part 1, Documents on Sub-Saharan Africa, 1969–1972

228. Memorandum From Fernando E. Rondon of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), Washington, October 10, 1972 [1](#) [2](#)

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Washington, October 10, 1972

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

October 10, 1972

ACTION

MEMORANDUM

- FOR HENRY KISSINGER

FROM:

- Fernando E. Rondon

SUBJECT:

- Burundi Policy

As you recommended in your memorandum at Tab 2, the President agreed that relations with Burundi should be minimal but he added: "K—also see the Burundi Ambassador." The purpose of this memorandum is to get those instructions conveyed to State either orally, as we would suggest, or in written form as provided for in Tab 1.

In addition to informing State about our minimal relationship, the Department would be asked to call in the Burundi Ambassador and tell him that as a result of the systematic killings which took place in his country we cannot consider our relations to be normal. This line would anger the Burundi Government but probably not lead to a break in relations or to an ouster of our mission there. Such an ouster would not be in our interest because of our desire (State and CIA feel strongly about this) to monitor potential anti-Zairian activity in Burundi. (As African maps indicate, Burundi is the back door to the traditionally most restive part of Zaire (Congo). If the PRC or USSR wanted to stir up trouble in Eastern Zaire, Burundi would be the ideal basing point for rebels.) Otherwise, our interests in Burundi are minimal.

Some further thoughts on our future Burundi policy are contained in the brief paper written by our Ambassador to Burundi at Tab 3. The Ambassador agrees that we should have a minimal presence in Burundi but wants to have the leeway to make small gestures to the Burundi Government in order to: (1) encourage reconciliation, (2) lessen the risk that Burundi will think the West is

abandoning it—as Belgium slowly reduces its presence—, and (3) maintain our ability to monitor PRC and USSR activity, particularly if it is directed against Zaire.

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We recommend that as outlined at Tab 1 the President's instructions be conveyed orally to the Department of State, preferably by General Haig to Ted Eliot, to avoid any possible leakage of the President's feelings on this matter. If not, questions might be asked about why it took us so long to convey our outrage to Burundi. If you disagree, and want the record to show our reaction, a memorandum for your signature to the Secretary of State is at Tab 1.

RECOMMENDATION

That General Haig orally convey the contents of the memorandum at Tab 1 to Ted Eliot.

Agree [checked]. [handwritten note]

Disagree, I will sign the memo at Tab 1_____.

Concurrence - R. T. Kennedy

Attachments:

- Tab 1 - Proposed memorandum to the Secretary of State.
- Tab 2 - President's scripted instruction (on previous October 3 memo (HAK to the President)).
- Tab 3 - Ambassador Yost's comments on Burundi developments (Yost to Newsom memo of October 6), forwarded via Eliot to Kissinger memo, October 7.

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM

- FOR THE SECRETARY OF STATE

SUBJECT:

- United States Policy Toward Burundi

As a result of the mass murders which recently took place in Burundi, the President has directed that official relations with that state should be minimal. This is not meant to preclude our contributing to humanitarian assistance efforts providing they reach all segments of the population. Other forms of assistance (i. e., bilateral aid/cultural exchange funds, self-help funds) should, however, be discontinued.

The President has also directed that Burundi's Ambassador to the United States be called in. The Department should inform the Ambassador of the President's strong sense of outrage at the recent systematic killings in Burundi and indicate that American relations with Burundi cannot be considered normal until there is a clear change of policy with respect to human rights in that country.

Henry A. Kissinger

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October 7, 1972

MEMORANDUM

- FOR MR. HENRY A. KISSINGER
THE WHITE HOUSE

Subject:

- Burundi

The attached memorandum to Assistant Secretary Newsom reflects the current views of Ambassador Robert Yost on our policy toward Burundi. Ambassador Yost is currently in Washington on consultation.

The memorandum is forwarded to supplement the Department's memorandum of September 24 and to assist further in the President's consideration of our future posture toward this country.

Theodore L. Eliot, Jr.
Executive Secretary

Attachment:

- Memorandum 10/6/72.

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October 6, 1972

TO:

- AF - Mr. David D. Newsom

FROM:

- AF/C - Ambassador Yost

SUBJECT:

- Developments Affecting US Policy on Burundi

In view of the considerable current interest in the U.S. relationship with Burundi, I would like to make one or two comments for the record. They are made in the light of events since submission of Mr. Eliot's memorandum to Mr. Kissinger, dated September 24, 1972, and are of course purely personal.

1. Recent political developments in Burundi indicate a growth in the strength of the more moderate of the Tutsi factions comprising the cabinet. The Prime Minister can be said to head this faction, although it appears to have the general support if not guidance, of President Micombero. Such national reconciliation as may be possible in the coming months will, I believe, take place more easily under this group than under the leadership of the Simbananiye-Shibura-Rwuri faction. The

latter is more radical both on foreign policy matters and on the question of how to deal with the Hutu majority.

2. We have indications that the Belgians are seriously considering terminating their military assistance to Burundi over the next year or two. While multilateral and bilateral economic assistance to Burundi may remain at roughly recent levels, the prospect of losing Belgian military support is likely to have a disproportionate effect on the insecure Tutsi regime. In this atmosphere, any U.S. move vis.a.vis Burundi would be examined closely for its implications for total Western intentions toward that country. The GRB is lonely and will certainly seek alternatives if it thinks the West is pulling out.

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3. Chinese interest in economic [text illegible] in Burundi continues. PRC willingness to help fill the potential military gap cannot be ruled out, though a minority elitist government is not the most comfortable bedfellow for the PRC or perhaps—in the longer term—the most useful one. In any event, both the PRC and President Mobutu continue today to consider Burundi an important piece of real estate at the vulnerable eastern door to Zaire. If the Zaire rebels were given active support by a Burundi government, including the use of sanctuary and supply lines, the Zaire government would be faced with a substantially more serious dissident problem in the East. [text not declassified]

I therefore believe that it is in the interest of the U.S. to retain the greatest possible flexibility in Burundi, continuing our minimum presence during the current difficult period but leaving us free to make selected gestures toward the GRB if political and intertribal developments within Burundi make this useful and feasible.

1. Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 735, Country Files, Africa, Burundi, Vol. I. Confidential; Eyes Only; Nodis. Sent for action. Kissinger checked “Agree” and wrote “done” next to it. [↵](#)
2. Rondon discussed the President’s instructions on policy toward Burundi and how to convey them to the Department of State. He also forwarded Ambassador Yost’s memorandum on Burundi developments, which recommended retaining the greatest possible flexibility in U.S. policy toward Burundi. [↵](#)