

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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June 26, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR: HENRY A. KISSINGER *HK*

FROM: MELVIN H. LEVINE *ML*

SUBJECT: Burundi: Kennedy Criticizes Administration

Senator Kennedy has used the tragedy in Burundi to accuse the Administration of suppressing information on events there. In a statement reported in Sunday's New York Times, Kennedy claims that State said things were quiet in Burundi when they were not. State officials deny that they said any such thing. Kennedy's aides have also given the Times leaked cables from our Embassy in Burundi which present some grisly details, but do not seem to provide ammunition for charges embarrassing to the Administration.

We have been in something of a dilemma over what to do about Burundi. On the one hand, the slaughter is systematic and extensive, probably involving upwards of 100,000 victims. There are strong humanitarian reasons for trying to halt it, as well as the prospect of increasing political criticism -- like Kennedy's -- if we don't act. On the other hand, there's not much we can do realistically. Our leverage in the country is miniscule. We could contemplate a public statement denouncing events, but this would have little or no positive effect in Burundi, except to subject our Embassy to official wrath -- perhaps including closure of the Mission -- and would result in African accusations that we are meddling in their affairs. For these reasons, a public statement would be contrary to our policy of avoiding quixotic moral posturing.

Within these narrow limits, however, we have not been indifferent to the situation, as the record shows. At the outset, our Ambassador to Burundi expressed our readiness to give humanitarian assistance. We were, in fact, the first to do so and have, so far, disbursed \$72,000 for food, medicine, blankets, clothing and ambulances. On the diplomatic front, our Ambassadors to Zaire, Ethiopia and Rwanda briefed those governments on events in Burundi in the hope that neighboring or influential

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African countries would take the lead. We also raised the issue with the Organization of African Unity, which, however, has shown itself steadfastly uninterested, in keeping with the consistent OAU position that tribal problems are strictly the internal affair of the country where they occur. In addition, on May 30, we supported a diplomatic initiative in Burundi led by the Papal Nuncio, with which the Belgians, West Germans, Swiss, British, Dutch and Zairians also associated themselves. None of the foregoing has helped visibly. More international expressions of concern with the issue could result from a United Nations relief mission now touring Burundi.

I call these facts to your attention because the dimensions of this continuing atrocity may break more sharply into the public view than has thus far been the case.

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