

Of Guerillas, Gorillas, and Edward van Kloberg

Until a few months ago, newspaper readers would likely have believed that Rwanda's total population was 320, this being the estimated number of endangered mountain gorillas which inhabit that country's forests. The apes, made famous in "Gorillas in the Mist," the 1988 movie starring Sigourney Weaver as American researcher Dian Fossey, were the exclusive focus of virtually all news items on Rwanda prior to April of this year.

A Nexis search which cross-referenced Rwanda with "gorillas" vs. "guerillas" resulted in a rout by the apes, 1,123 to 138. And 91 of the references to the humans have come since April 6, when President Juvenal Habyarimana's plane was shot down outside Kigali.

Warfare has been waged in Rwanda since 1990, when rebels from the largely Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) invaded the country from neighboring Uganda. Their goal was to topple Habyarimana's repressive Hutu government, which was installed in a 1973 military coup and which is responsible for most of the massacres now in the headlines.

The fighting attracted the attention of Western journalists, who, while largely unconcerned with human suffering, expressed grave anxiety about the apes. A 1991 story in the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* provided little information on the war's political context, but cautioned that "observers fear the gunfire is disrupting [the gorillas'] routine and threatening [their] long-term welfare."

Human casualties mounted in 1992, with human rights groups reporting roughly 2,000 civilians killed in the fighting and hundreds of others raped or tortured. Western weaponry poured in, mostly from France but including \$2.3 million in arms bought from the U.S.

The media's focus remained unchanged. Anguish reached fever pitch in mid-year, when Weaver's co-star in "Gorillas in the Mist," Mrithi, a male silverback, became the first ape casualty of the war (apparently the accidental victim of an edgy guerilla patrol). *The Chicago Tribune* lauded the victim as "a magnificent, gentle animal with many human characteristics." *The Christian Science Monitor* ran an 800-word obituary on Mrithi, lamenting that the "needless snuffing of [the ape's] short, noble life leaves a void we will not soon see filled."

It was more of the same last year. A *Reuters* story in May was typical, leading with the news that 36 apes had been reported AWOL from the Virunga mountain region following an RPF offensive. The gorillas were also "threatened by land mines planted in the...civil war," said the story's author, who casually noted near the bottom of the article that "the conflict has made more than 350,000 people homeless and ruined the lives of close to one million."

The media's previous lack of interest in the human consequences of the war is now mirrored by the Clinton administration's *laissez-faire* approach to the crisis. *The New York Times* reports that the government has instructed its spokesmen to abstain from using the word genocide when discussing the

killings in Rwanda, though, with up to 400,000 people murdered, almost all Tutsi, that's precisely what's taking place.

Clinton fears that use of the word genocide might fan public passions, and increase pressure on his government to stop the carnage. "Some American officials acknowledge that the Administration's posture lacks candor," said the *Times*. "But many argue that the land-locked African nation has no ties to the U.S.—and no oil or other resources that would make American intervention worth the cost."

On the subject of Rwanda, it was no surprise to find that D.C. lawyer Edward van Kloberg has on several occasions represented that country in Washington. Generally recognized as the capital's most unprincipled lobbyist, van Kloberg's other clients have included Zaire, Burma, Iraq, Liberia and El Salvador. Van Kloberg also once sought to represent the German People's Alliance, a fictitious neo-Nazi group created by *Spy* magazine.

According to records on file at the Justice Department, van Kloberg in the fall of 1990 arranged the D.C. visit of then-President Habyarimana. In a series of activities, including a posh reception at the Grand Hotel, van Kloberg touted the stern but wise leader's great popularity among his country's masses. Unfortunately, the trip was cut short by the RPF's Oct. 1 invasion from Uganda.

With the war causing serious public relations difficulties, the Rwandan regime in late 1990 signed a one-month deal with van Kloberg. For the sum of \$11,000, the lobbyist was to help Ambassador H.E. Aloys Uwimana "counterbalance any negative influence [that human rights groups] might exert on U.S. policy." That's shorthand for covering up government abuses to assure the continued flow of U.S. assistance, which totaled \$9 million annually at the time.

Van Kloberg's contract also called for promoting "measures undertaken by the Government of Rwanda in the areas of environmental conservation and wildlife management." America's adoration of the mountain gorillas made this an especially clever strategy, and one which had helped Rwanda extract U.S. monies for conservation projects. That was the sole interest of President Habyarimana, whose own relatives were widely believed to be involved in the international trafficking of gorillas.

While completely bereft of moral principle, van Kloberg is ranked by *Washingtonian* as one of D.C.'s 50 top lawyers. "One of lobbying's true characters," said the magazine in its 1993 survey, "his dinners for legislators and opinion-makers at the jockey club are legendary for their goofiness, with van Kloberg acting both as social director and salesman."

A former congressional staffer who worked on African affairs says that van Kloberg's high standing in local social circles rarely helped his clients. "He tries to be suave and debonair, but comes across as paternalistic and patronizing," she recalls. "His views on Africans were offensive and racist. I could never figure out why anyone would hire him." •

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Lawyers, Guns, and Money

Predicting that Bill Clinton would renew China's most favored nation (MFN) status, as *Counterpunch* did a few issue back, was not a terribly risky step. Annual bilateral trade of \$43 billion and direct U.S. investments in China of \$4.8 billion, up from \$548 million in 1991, ensured that the decision would go Beijing's way. With Seattle-based Boeing Co. on the verge of signing a \$5 billion deal with China, even Rep. Jim McDermott (D-Wash.), sponsor of single-payer health care legislation, pressed hard for extending MFN.

Important cover for Clinton was provided by a number of other liberals, including Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.). He pled China's case in an impassioned speech to his colleagues a few weeks before the decision was announced. Kerry's address was almost certainly coordinated with the White House, which was besieged by corporate lobbyists pushing for MFN renewal. "[China's backers] lined up support from domestic and foreign business groups," says a congressional staffer. "It was major, major pressure."

Clinton was obliged to argue that extending MFN marked a huge triumph for human rights, a tactic which was echoed by business leaders. "Trade is part of the solution—not part of the problem," said Calman Cohen of the Business Coalition for U.S.-China Trade. "[As] the U.S. business presence in China grows, so will the attendant human rights of the Chinese population," D.L. Burnham of Abbott Laboratories said in a note to the president—one of more than 800 letters corporate leaders sent to Clinton on Beijing's behalf.

Of course, most U.S. business leaders don't give a wit about human rights, in China or anywhere else. Given the opportunity, many firms would surely make use of Chinese prison labor, with corporate p.r. departments boasting of the increased serving size and high nutritive content of company vis-a-vis state chow.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) urged 60 major American firms to pressure China for greater political freedom, a request which was greeted with a decidedly tepid response. "We would find that very onerous," Tracy O'Rourke, president of the National Association of Manufacturers, said of the HRW's call for business leadership on the human rights front.

Dozens of top Washington lobbyists and consultants have been assisting U.S. firms seeking to do business in China. These players include:

- Republican campaign consultant Ed Rollins, last seen domestically in New Jersey's gubernatorial election, who recently signed a lobbying deal with three Chinese regional development agencies.
- Former Secretary of State Al Haig, head of Worldwide Associates Inc., a D.C. consulting firm, who has helped United Technologies win contracts in China. In a recent TV interview, Haig defended the crackdown at Tiananmen Square and said protestors there were seeking higher wages, not political liberties.
- Former Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger and ex-White House chief of staff Howard Baker, who led a group of U.S. business executives to China in February. The Chinese are especially fond of Eagleburger, who traveled to Beijing for a pleasant round of high-level meetings shortly after the Tiananmen massacre.

- Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who serves as a consultant to many U.S. businesses operating in China.
- Former Sen. Gary Hart, who late last year visited China on behalf of US West and other major firms.
- Carla Hills, Dennis Whitfield, Joseph Massey and Erin Endean, all whom have parlayed past stints at the Office of the United States Trade Representative into lucrative business consulting careers.

The media was nearly unanimous in supporting an extension of MFN, in part due to journalists' overwhelming reliance on highly biased sources, including many of the figures cited above. Earlier this year, *The Washington Post's* Thomas Lippman reported that "much of the American foreign policy establishment" believed that denying MFN to China would be "counterproductive, harmful to larger U.S. interest in Asia, unacceptable to China and probably doomed to failure."

Lippman failed to mention that several of his key sources, including Kissinger and Eagleburger, make money promoting business in China. It's as if a news story touting Microsoft products heavily quoted Bill Gates without identifying him as company chairman.

Journalists endlessly repeated many of the self-serving myths offered up by the China lobby. One of the most ridiculous is the notion that the U.S. simply had no leverage to pressure Beijing, which, went the argument, would have simply turned to Germany and Japan if restrictions were placed on its MFN status.

The Chinese have a \$23 billion annual trade surplus with the U.S., which takes in 38 percent of Beijing's exports. Replacing such an important commercial partner is no simple matter, a fact that would have given the Clinton administration plenty of negotiating strength if it had truly wanted to press Beijing. •

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