

## **Expert refutes Bruguière claims that RPF shot down Rwandan President's aircraft in 1994**

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We may never know who was responsible for shooting down of the Mystère Falcon jet under cover of darkness in the skies over Kigali at 8. 25 pm on April 6, 1994. Two African presidents, Juvenal Habyarimana of Rwanda and the president of Burundi, Cyprien Ntaryamira were assassinated that night and almost immediately afterwards, as the plane lay smouldering in the presidential garden, there was a promise from the UN that an international enquiry would be held. There was an imperative to find those responsible. No international enquiry was ever held. The International Civil Aviation Authority (ICAO) did not consider the attack on the plane to be a part of its mandate. The aircraft was a state aircraft in its own territory and so was not covered by the ICAO international convention. Only a flicker of interest was shown at the ICAO, and only then at the request of Belgium. The attack on the plane was discussed by the ICAO council on April 25, 1994 and the minutes record that the council president suspended further consideration until Belgium could provide information. To this day, neither Belgium nor any other government has provided information. Instead the mystery has deepened. There has been a plethora of rumour and speculation about who planned the attack, who fired the missiles and how under the cover of darkness the assassins fled the scene.

One theory, that soldiers from the Rwandan army (FAR), downed the plane, was reported almost immediately. In the intelligence headquarters of the Belgian army (SRG), an enquiry was launched and in the days to follow, a series of secret reports from Belgian agents revealed how everyone seemed to believe that Colonel Theoneste Bagosora, who had taken control in the chaos afterwards, was responsible. This would support the current prosecution case at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), where last November 2005, Bagosora was accused directly of the missile attack. As a former commander of the anti-aircraft battalion, he had been familiar with the flight paths and the approaches of aircraft to the airport, the prosecutor had said.

The Belgian agents in Kigali in 1994 had two informers, one in contact with a former Rwandan minister and the other a high-ranking officer of the Rwandan armed forces. These informers claimed that Bagosora was behind the attack and in a report to headquarters the agents wrote: "everything points to the fact that the perpetrators are part of the faction of the Bahutus inside the Rwandan army, and this is strange .... [it] leads us to believe that there was no improvisation in the events." They also wrote that within half an hour of the crash and well before the official announcement of the assassination over the radio, "ethnic cleansing" had started inside the country, and was carried out brutally on the basis of pre-established lists. The group responsible for this was gravitating around the president's wife, whose brothers and cousins had become senior authorities or dignitaries in the regime. "These high dignitaries were involved in terror and money and it was difficult for them to give up their privileges and advantages," the report noted.

The US also had information. In a declassified US State Department document, dated

May 18, 1994, and addressed to Assistant Secretary of State, George Moose is the paragraph: “Who killed the president? The assassins of Presidents Habyarimana and Ntaryamira may never be known. The black box from the aeroplane has probably been recovered by Rwandan government officials, who controlled the airport when the plane was shot down, or, according to unconfirmed reports, by French military officials who later secured the airport and removed the body of the French pilot from Habyarimana’s plane after the crash.”

Information about the downing of the jet was also made available to the journalist, Colette Braeckman, the Africa Editor of Belgium’s *Le Soir* newspaper. In mid-June 1994, she received a letter from someone calling himself “Thadée”, who claimed to be a militia leader in Kigali. He told her that two members of the French *Détachement d’Assistance Militaire et l’Instruction (DAMI)* had launched the missiles on behalf the Hutu Power CDR party (*Coalition pour la Défense de la République*). Only four members of the CDR were involved. Those who fired the missiles had worn Belgian army uniforms stolen from the hotel *Le Méridien*. Members of the Presidential Guard spotted them leaving Masaka Hill from where the missiles were fired. The missiles had been portable, probably SAM, originally from the Soviet Union. Braeckman reported that in the three days after the missile attack, some 3,000 people living in the Masaka area were murdered. The French academic Gérard Prunier, an expert on the Great Lakes Region of Africa, has spoken of white men on Masaka Hill on the evening of April 6. Prunier has speculated that it might have been possible to hire mercenaries to shoot down the plane. If mercenaries were involved, Prunier believes that the French mercenary Paul Barril would know them.

The presence in Rwanda of a French mercenary, Captain Paul Barril, does add another dimension to the mystery. Barril was spotted in Kigali at the end of 1993, telling people that he had been taken on as an “advisor” to Habyarimana. A former number two of the French *Groupe d’Intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale (GIGN)*, police Special Forces, he helped to create an anti-terrorist cell in the Elysée Palace that answered only to President Mitterrand. Barril had his own private security companies and had worked for Habyarimana since 1989, when he reorganised the intelligence service which operated from within the Presidential Guard. Barril said he was in Kigali on April 7. He claims to be close to the French anti-terrorist judge, Jean-Louis Bruguière, whose recently published report in Paris contains claims from Rwandan exiles, claiming to be former RPF soldiers, who say they took part in the missile attack on the orders of President Paul Kagame.

Yet more hearsay evidence comes from Jean Kambanda in his fascinating confession to the ICTR. Kambanda, the prime minister in the interim government, says that President Sese Seko Mobutu of neighbouring Zaire, (now DRC) had warned Habyarimana not to go to Dar-es-Salaam on April 6. Mobutu said this warning had come from a very senior official in the Elysée Palace in Paris. There was a link between this warning, said Mobutu, and the subsequent suicide in the Elysée of a senior high-ranking official working for President François Mitterrand, an official who had killed himself on April 7 after learning about the downing of the Falcon. This was François de Grossouvre, a presidential advisor on African affairs.

One other notable episode comes in the night-time hours after the crash, with an approach to the Canadian Force commander of the UN peacekeepers, Lt.-Gen Roméo Dallaire, by

two officers from the French military assistance mission in Rwanda offering specialised help to investigate the missile attack. A French military and technical team was available immediately in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic, some six hours away, they told him. Dallaire declined the offer insisting there would have to be an international enquiry. That night Dallaire sent peacekeepers to the wreckage, but they were prevented by Presidential Guard from reaching it. Dallaire also sent peacekeepers to the place from where the missiles were probably fired. Nothing was found. It was May before the UN got access to the plane. Only later would Dallaire learn that RTLM, the Hutu Power radio station, had almost immediately broadcast that those responsible for the death of the president were from the RPF, and that Belgian UN troops had been in on the plot. This story had spread like wildfire and Dallaire would later describe how it was broadcast repeatedly. Nothing was done to counteract these broadcasts. In the morning of April 7, ten UN peacekeepers from Belgium were murdered, lynched by Rwandan soldiers who had been told they were part of the assassination plot.

More recently, a new and crucial witness has emerged who has never before been interviewed.

In May, 1994, Collette Braeckman met an air traffic controller who had been in the control tower on the night of the missile attack. This man gave her a graphic description of events about how the presidential jet had approached the runway and how three missiles had been fired from Masaka Hill. This information directly challenges Bruguière's Rwandan informants who claim that two missiles were fired. And according to the air traffic controller, he was the only person who knew the exact time the plane was to land, and that he had given this information to the airport commander, Cyprien Sindano, a member of the extremist Hutu Power, the CDR.

The continuing secrecy of western nations, the withholding of evidence and the failure to conduct an international enquiry is shocking.

There is much that might be learned from a serious assessment of available information. Instead we are left with hearsay, rumour, speculation and cover-up and we may never know what really happened that night.

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