

# Operation Support Hope: focus on emergency infrastructure

by Dean Andromidas and Michael Liebig

The mass death in eastern Africa may look like yet another of the giant tragedies which have become "typical" for Africa over the past two decades. However, a closer look reveals that the mass death is not an indigenous, "typically African" occurrence. Little happens in Africa which is not shaped decisively by the former colonial powers. So it happens that the French government backed, armed, and trained the "Hutu government" in Kigali, while British intelligence and British financial interests backed, armed, and trained the "Tutsi RPF" via neighboring Uganda. When the "Hutu government" was about to collapse, France staged a military intervention to keep it in power, and, when that failed, established a "security zone" in southern Rwanda. This French action ("Operation Turquoise") was a strictly military intervention, "to protect France's interests in Francophone Africa," as Prime Minister Edouard Balladur said in late June. French military bases were built up in eastern Zaire, to prevent the destabilization of Zaire's fragile Mobutu regime as a consequence of the events in Rwanda.

To understand the unspeakable horror in eastern Africa, one must go back to the early 1970s when, under the direction of then-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, the transatlantic policy establishment determined that there should be no economic-infrastructure development in Africa. Some exceptions were made in respect to strategic raw materials production. Then, some 25 years ago, Africa was written off. The policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, and declining raw materials prices, ensured the social-economic and political devolution in black Africa since. By 1985, Africa had become a net capital exporter.

The only qualification in that "write-off" policy was the continuing military-strategic importance of Africa for NATO. In case of a European war, Africa would be the West's key military-logistical hinterland. Africa as a whole, not just northern Africa, did play such a role during World War II for the Allied operations in the Mediterranean theater. Thus a little bit of economic input into Africa was still provided by the NATO countries. Moreover, the Soviet Union naturally was aware of this military-strategic role of Africa for the West. It therefore intervened heavily into Africa during the 1970s, as the cases of Angola, Mozambique, and Ethiopia demonstrate.

## From 'managed collapse' to genocide

This all ended after 1989, when the Soviet Union collapsed and Russia withdrew from Africa. The George Bush administration declared its strategic disinterest in Africa, relegating it permanently to a "zone of turmoil." The continent became the strategic playground for Britain, France, and certain Israeli intelligence and "business" interests. They worked together, as well as against each other, in expanding their "spheres of interest," while Africa collapsed into full-blown breakdown conditions.

The bloody events of the past years in Uganda, Zaire, Rwanda, Burundi, Angola, Liberia, and other black African states illustrate these neo-colonial maneuvers by Britain and France. However, this year, things got truly out of control in eastern Africa. The killings and epidemics escalated to such monstrous dimensions, that international attention could no longer ignore them. It seems that the French government realized during the past July that it had lost control over the situation in eastern Africa. France, with a significant military presence in central and eastern Africa, was about to be overwhelmed by the consequences of the genocide and epidemics in and around Rwanda. That goes both for the situation on the ground there, as well as what concerns "world public opinion."

## Clinton acts

In the second week of July, President Clinton spoke of the situation of the Rwandan refugees as the "worst humanitarian crisis in the world." And he acted. Faced with the prospect of hundreds of thousands of Rwandan refugees dying of cholera, Clinton ordered the American Armed Forces to conduct an immediate, large-scale relief operation. He described "Operation Support Hope" as "a race against time." He requested \$320 million from Congress for the operation, of which \$50 million was immediately released. Defense Secretary William Perry and Gen. John Shalikashvili, the chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, flew to Rwanda and to Goma in Zaire, where most of the refugees are concentrated.

It was quickly realized, that the most pressing, central task of the American military relief operation was the provision of clean water to the refugees, as the cholera epidemic was about to get out of control. On July 23, heavy water



*The C-5B Galaxy transport plane is loaded with construction and drilling equipment on Aug. 3, at the Rhine Main Air Base in Frankfurt, Germany, preparing for the trip to Goma, Zaire.*

purification equipment of the U.S. Army and the San Francisco Fire Department was loaded onto long-range, heavy transport aircraft in the United States and flown to Goma. In the evening of July 25, the water purification facilities began to produce approximately 200,000 liters of fresh water a day. Since then, together with German water purification equipment flown to Goma by the U.S. Air Force, the fresh water output has been increased to approximately 1.5 million liters per day. It is an indisputable fact, that this operation has saved the lives of at least 500,000 Rwandans, who would have died of cholera in the last week of July and the first days of August.

*EIR* had an opportunity for a first-hand view of the American relief operation in and around Goma on Aug. 2-6. We were able to participate in a press tour organized by the U.S. Air Force Joint Information Center, based at the Rhine Main Airbase in Frankfurt, Germany.

Operation Support Hope is a combined Army, Air Force, and Navy operation, which is being executed with exceptional, quasi-wartime urgency and *esprit de corps*. It is being run directly out of the White House, while drawing on the worldwide resources of the American military. The military's mission, as defined by President Clinton, is to conduct a humanitarian relief effort, and not to get involved in a United Nations-style "peacekeeping" or "peacemaking" mission, as was done in Somalia.

The mission has two major tasks or phases. Phase one is to stop the dying and misery of the refugees in and around Goma. As mentioned, the most crucial task has been to provide clean fresh water, the only way to stop the mega-killer,

cholera. In addition, large amounts of food and medical supplies, as well as heavy engineering equipment, have been airlifted to the region. The second phase is to create conditions to allow the refugees to return home to Rwanda. The administration has made clear that this will not involve any form of coercion, but must be based on the individual decisions of the refugees themselves to return when they feel safe. Unlike Somalia, where military operations were conducted as a means to provide security for a relief operation, it is hoped that through this humanitarian effort, a psychological and political basis would be formed for stability. The Clinton administration is presently engaged with the Rwanda Popular Front government in Kigali, strongly advising them to refrain from a policy of retribution.

Operation Support Hope is being implemented by some of the most senior U.S. commanders in western Europe. Overall command lies with Gen. George Joulwan, Supreme Commander of U.S. Forces in Europe. His deputy, Lt. Gen. Dan Schroder, operating out of Entebbe, Uganda and Mombasa, Kenya, is the regional operational commander. General Nicks, commander of U.S. forces in Italy, is in command in Goma itself. The operational headquarters for Support Hope is based at the United States European Command at Patch Barracks, Stuttgart, Germany. This is the unified command of all forces of the U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force in Europe. It is here that the operational planning and coordination are being conducted.

Phase one of the operation can be broken down into two parts: first, transportation from the continental United States and western Europe to eastern Africa. This is primarily the

responsibility of the Air Force and Navy. The second concerns the buildup of a relief infrastructure which is primarily the responsibility of the Army, whose engineering, medical, motor transport, and escort units are playing crucial roles.

### **Transcontinental logistics**

Our tour started at the beginning of the transport pipeline, Rhine Main Air Base, which is adjacent to Frankfurt International Airport. Here the U.S. Air Mobility Command operates huge C-5B Galaxy and C-141 Starlifter jet transports and smaller C-130 propjet transports. The base has been beefed up by additional aircraft from the United States. On the morning of Aug. 3, our Air Force press escort, who accompanied us throughout the tour, took us to our aircraft, a giant C-5B Galaxy. This enormous aircraft, similar to the Boeing 747 in size, can carry 120 tons of cargo at a speed of 500 miles per hour, for over 5,000 km. Through two huge doors in the front and rear of the aircraft, we saw one full-size bulldozer, a road grader, and a "Unimog" truck for well-drilling. In addition, large pallets filled with various supplies including fuel, food, and bottled water were loaded into the aircraft's cavernous hold. Besides ourselves, two other civilian journalists, Klaus from Austria and Mathias from Germany, a military TV crew, and other military personnel—altogether around 30 passengers—boarded the aircraft. We were lodged in the C-5B's upper passenger compartment, which has seating for some 70 people.

From Frankfurt our flight route was Switzerland, Sicily, Egypt, Sudan, Uganda, and into Goma, some 3,500 miles away, just south of the equator. The ten-hour flight, although noisy, was far from boring. Midway over the Mediterranean we were brought up to the pilot's compartment to see the inflight refueling. The mid-air refueling was necessary because ground refueling in Egypt was not possible. Although this huge aircraft is merely a speck in the sky at 20,000 feet over the Mediterranean, we had no problems making our rendezvous with the tanker aircraft, a KC-135, which is based on the airframe of a Boeing 707. This aircraft flew from its base in England, over 1,000 miles away. The refueling operation was spectacular to witness. From underneath, the C-5B approached the tanker to a distance of just 15 meters or less, when the fuel link, descending from the tanker's tail, locked into our plane just above the cockpit. The refueling lasted some 20 minutes as the two huge aircraft flew along in tandem, at that minuscule distance from each other. Although it was routine for the crew, it was not without its tense moments. From there, it was another five or six hours before we reached Goma.

### **Logistics in the Goma disaster area**

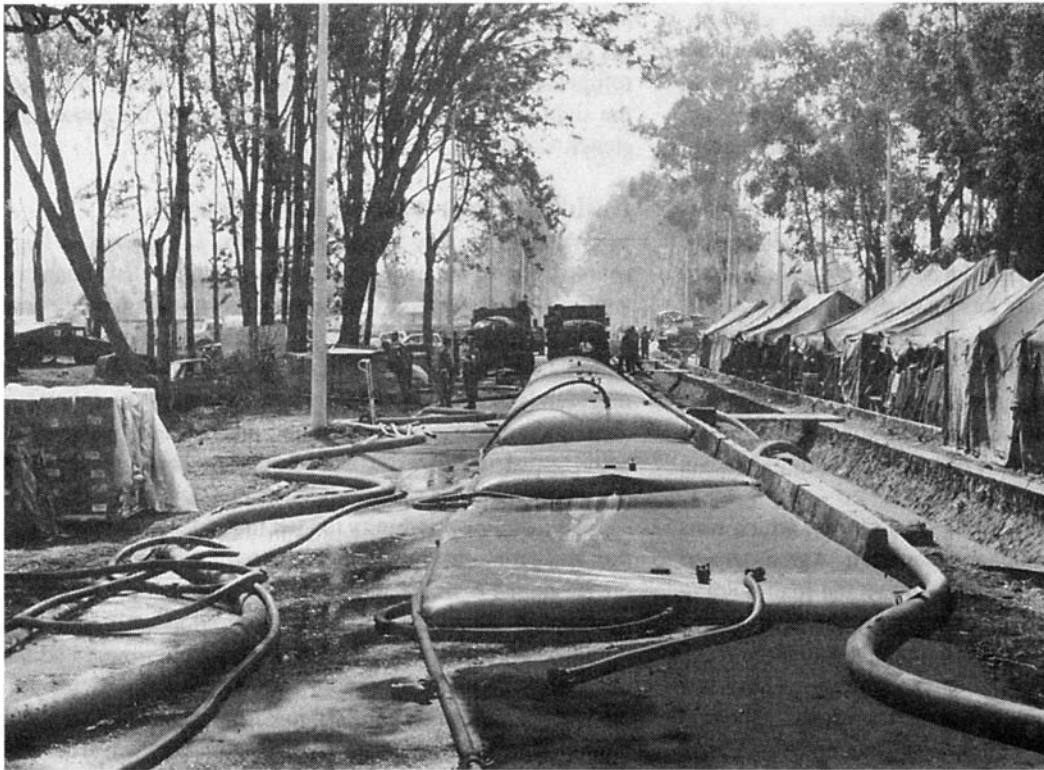
Goma is a town bordering Rwanda on the extreme eastern edge of Zaire. It is a desolate place of depressing poverty, even without the refugee disaster. The area around Goma is a volcanically active region between 1,000 and 1,400 meters

elevation; the ground is mostly volcanic ash from the region's five active volcanoes. It has a mild highland climate (with rather cold nights), and sufficient rainfall. Goma is located directly on Lake Kivu, the major source of water, now badly polluted. Provided there were some infrastructure, the Goma area could potentially be a rich agricultural region, growing coffee, grain, potatoes, and vegetables. A century of Belgian colonialism and three decades of Zaire's independence under International Monetary Fund conditionalities and neo-colonial manipulations, have left the region shockingly impoverished. Agricultural production methods are primitive and unproductive, and the small agricultural surplus is traded in tiny quantities by large numbers of mini-traders. Production and employment in small to medium-sized industry is zero. Infrastructure investment, except some paved roads, is nonexistent. Some electricity and running water systems did exist in Goma, but they are presently collapsing. There is no telephone service.

Goma Airport was capable of dealing with no more than 10 aircraft a day, with no possibility for maintenance or refueling. Loading and unloading of freight were done by hand. Here we began to encounter the formidable infrastructure problems facing the current East African relief operation. Railways from the Indian Ocean ports to Rwanda or eastern Zaire do not exist. The roads are in no condition to sustain continuous, heavy traffic, not to speak of the time factor involved in road transportation in Africa. Thus, aircraft are the only possible mode of transportation into Goma, as well as Rwanda.

In seeking solutions to these problems, the U.S. Air Force first put Goma Airport on a 24-hour operational footing. The French military, which uses Goma Airport as a major logistical base for "Operation Turquoise," had put up radar equipment, allowing a denser schedule of French military supply flights. The U.S. Air Force flew in heavy engineering equipment, fork lifts, and heavy trucks. The daily throughput of Goma Airport was increased to 30 aircraft a day, which includes French military supply flights, chartered (often Russian) aircraft of relief organizations, the U.S. Air Force, and a number of military transport planes of other nations, notably Germany and Israel. The parking space at the airport is very limited; not more than five or six aircraft can park at a time. The proximity of ground movements of aircraft, together with the traffic of trucks, fork lifts, and people on the airfield, make one wonder that no collision has occurred yet. Large numbers of refugees are steadily walking along and across the runway, even while aircraft are landing or taking off.

Because of the congestion at Goma Airport, the command for Operation Support Hope wants to open the airport of the Rwandan capital Kigali, some 60 miles away. An important factor in the U.S. airlift to Goma is the airport at Entebbe, where some 400 U.S. military personnel and about a dozen U.S. military aircraft are stationed. The American



*Water storage tanks in Goma are being filled at a U.S.-run water purification station. The most pressing task of the relief operation is to provide clean water to the refugees.*

personnel running the operation in Entebbe are staying in tents and hangars; the pilots are sleeping in their planes. Initial plans to turn Entebbe into an air hub had to be set aside. C-130s operating under the Air Combat Command are conducting shuttle flights out of Entebbe into Goma, Kigali, and Mombasa. Long-range American aircraft coming from Europe or the United States to Goma must carry enough fuel to continue the flight to Mombasa at the Indian Ocean, where they can park and refuel. But there is an acute jet fuel shortage in Mombasa as well.

Our aircraft was scheduled to land at midnight Aug. 3 in Goma, unload, and take off for Mombasa, where it would refuel for the return flight to Germany. At 1:00 a.m. on Aug. 4, the C-5B made a remarkably smooth landing in Goma, a runway which, on a rating of 1 to 10, was rated a 2 by our pilot. Within minutes of landing, the huge cargo doors, both front and rear, swung open for waiting Air Force personnel with fork lifts and trucks. The huge bulldozer and the two trucks rolled out on their own power. In less than half an hour, the entire plane was off-loaded. Although the aircraft was supposed to leave immediately, there was a four-hour delay before it could take off again for Mombasa.

### **Apocalyptic conditions**

In a nocturnal tour of Goma Airport, we quickly realized that the airport functions as a rather major French military base, with two tent camps, lots of military vehicles, a field hospital, and four "Super Puma" helicopters. There are two

American encampments on the airfield, one of the Air Force and one of the Army. The camps and part of the airfield are secured by barbed wire and guarded by soldiers. Although everything seems peaceful and the airport is still controlled by the Zairean authorities, French paratroopers armed with assault rifles and truck-mounted heavy machine guns patrol the airport and downtown Goma. During our night-time inspection, we encountered two Germans at a huge Russian IL-76 transport. We learned that they were from the German Technical Aid Organization (THW). They flew in with metal pipes and pumps in order to connect the water purification equipment to water distribution points.

Following two hours of sleep atop loaded pallets, we decided to enter Goma at dawn and tour the refugee camps. Such a tour would have been difficult without the help of Mathias, the young German freelance journalist who had spent two years near Goma at a technical school run by the Protestant Church. For the five kilometers from the airport to downtown Goma, a taxi fare of \$200 was demanded. Mathias, speaking Swahili, was able to negotiate a \$20 fare. Leaving the airport, we got our first shock. Alongside the road there was a scene of devastation: All trees had been cut for firewood; mass graves were cordoned off with red and white plastic bands. Not too many refugees were still camping in the fields near the airfield, but, in the dawn, tens of thousands of people were walking down the road carrying old petrol canisters. They walk to the water distribution points to get a daily ration of water. Everybody still able to walk does so;

only the weak and sick stay behind in the fields.

In downtown Goma we met Mathias's friends from the Protestant Church, who were quite astonished to see him. A car and driver were arranged and we were soon on our way. We were taken to the local hospital run by the Baptist Church. The hospital, which has barely any resemblance to what one normally associates with a hospital, was full of cholera victims. There are only a few mattresses; most patients lie on the ground, many in the courtyard. The hospital did get a delivery of infusions, so that patients have a chance to survive. But words cannot describe the scene. At six o'clock in the morning, downtown Goma is packed with people, refugees and locals, searching for water and "trading" small amounts of food and wood. In the middle of one of the town's squares lies a dead body; people hurry past. There is a nauseating stench in Goma and much of the surrounding area.

We took the road out of downtown Goma, which runs one to two kilometers parallel to Lake Kivu. Again, tens of thousands of refugees march up and down the road holding plastic containers, going to or coming from the water distribution points. The refugees camp on both sides of the road. Occasionally we saw some tents, but most refugees have just some tarps or plastic sheets or have built traditional, spherical huts made of tree branches. Again and again, "bundles," corpses wrapped in straw mats, lie on the roadside. The infected people out in the fields do not have infusions, and the cholera kills them fast. The refugees do not seem aggressive, but rather fatalistic. But among them there are many men in uniform and armed soldiers of the defeated army of the former government in Kigali. They seem rather healthy,

and they are aggressive. One such uniformed person pulls his AK-47 gun at us when we try to photograph a group of refugees. We drive for seven or eight kilometers on that road; the sight along the road barely changes; only the nauseating stench varies.

### **Building fresh water infrastructure**

Water is the key to life and death. Lake Kivu, a huge source of fresh water, was polluted early in the Rwandan crisis. To drink water from it is to drink poison. Even now, there were refugees drawing water from the lake. The American command identified the solution to the water disaster as the most fundamental task of Operation Support Hope. It became clear that only once sufficient amounts of fresh, clean water could be distributed throughout the region, could related relief operations, such as clinics and feeding stations, function.

We had the opportunity to visit the central water purification and pumping station. It is located in downtown Goma, on the banks of Lake Kivu. The station was set up and is operated by the U.S. Army, in cooperation with American volunteers from the San Francisco Fire Department and the German THW. French military tanker trucks participate in the water distribution. The equipment was airlifted from the United States, from Germany, and from Diego Garcia, the U.S. island base in the Indian Ocean. The station includes two water purifiers, several chlorinators, and a maze of hoses and rubber tanks. We were surprised to find the main pump was in fact a fire truck, airlifted from northern California. It is operated by a group of Californian rescue workers who use the same truck fighting forest fires in the mountains of



*A French Army tanker truck draws water from the American Army-run water purification station in Goma, Aug. 4, 1994.*

northeast California.

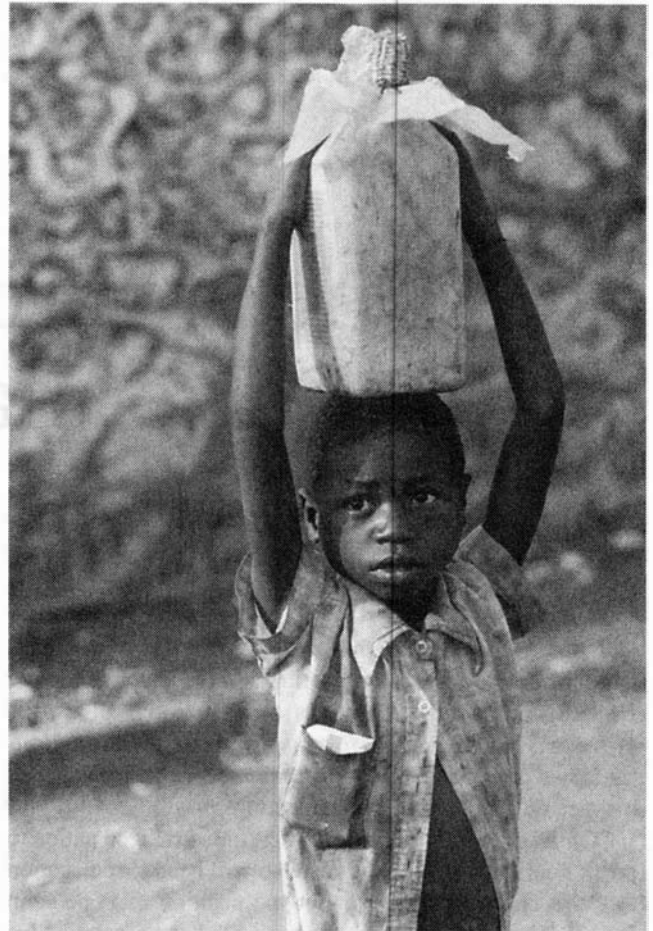
One of the volunteers, a doctor, briefed us on the operation. The purification equipment on Aug. 4 produced more than 100,000 gallons of water a day. From the pumps it is transferred to plastic/rubber storage tanks and then loaded onto tanker trucks. The tankers supply the refugee camps farthest away from Goma; some large camps are up to 30 km away. But, there is still a dramatic deficit of tanker trucks. The German THW, with its special piping equipment, had already installed a 5-km pipeline into Goma City, and another one was in the process of construction directly into a refugee camp. Once the pipelines are installed, the water throughput will increase dramatically. They will also serve as the bases for the necessary infrastructure for the establishment of a network of emergency clinics and feeding stations along the length of pipeline.

"Once we got this pure water flowing," the California doctors explained, "the death rate dropped way down. . . . Once we beat the cholera, the next fight will be dysentery, measles, yellow fever, and diseases due to malnourishment." Indeed, a fight it is. In fact, the water station is flanked by rows of U.S. Army tents, military vehicles and equipment, and armed guards. This attests to the warlike conditions under which Operation Support Hope is being conducted.

### **The precondition for humanitarian aid**

We saw numerous relief agencies operating throughout the Goma region, including the Red Cross/Red Crescent, the U.N. High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), Oxfam, and the World Food Program. The Israeli Army is operating a quite extensive field hospital near Lake Kivu. But, the ability to save lives without a basic emergency infrastructure is extremely limited. The disaster in Goma proves that any efficient relief effort anywhere has to have a functioning basic infrastructure as its precondition. Survival in disaster areas is not possible by handing out, even in very large quantities, bottled water, food, or medicine. Only the buildup of an emergency infrastructure assures short-term survival, and it provides the basis for a mid-term social-economic stabilization. Although it is clear that much more can be done, Operation Support Hope, with its emphasis on emergency infrastructure, is making a decisive difference in comparison to previous disaster relief operations.

It is the devastating absence of a basic infrastructure in Africa which blocks economic development. Economic development depends on roads, railways, fresh water, electrical energy, and communication systems. The lack of infrastructure and economic development is the principal source for the worsening poverty and social-political instability in Africa, which expresses itself in ethnic strife and civil and other wars. Africa's lack of infrastructure and poverty create the breeding ground for conditions there today which increasingly resemble those in Europe during the Hundred Years' War or the Thirty Years' War.



*A child from Goma (not a refugee) carries water for his family. Every day, tens of thousands of people have to walk to water distribution points for a daily ration.*

In spite of all its limitations, Operation Support Hope, with its emphasis on emergency infrastructure measures, may indicate the potential for a broader policy shift of the United States toward Africa. Already last year, there were some indications that the Clinton administration would not continue the Bush administration's policy of simply abandoning Africa. The firm American backing for the Nelson Mandela/F.W. de Klerk "historical compromise" in South Africa is indicative of such a policy shift. It seems that Clinton wants to reestablish some constructive, strategic role and presence within Africa for the United States. The new attitude toward Africa in Washington is still cautious, still fragile. But Operation Support Hope is a crucial step in the right direction. An emergency infrastructure buildup under disaster conditions must be followed by a general infrastructure reconstruction strategy for Black Africa. Without such a policy shift, without dumping the West's British-instigated policy axioms of the past quarter-century vis-à-vis Africa, one thing is certain: There will be many more Gomas all over Africa in the near future.