

U.S. Backed U.N. General Despite Evidence of Abuses

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UNITED NATIONS -- The Bush administration's support for the appointment of a Rwandan general to a top U.N. peacekeeping job in Sudan last year came despite a warning from the State Department human rights bureau that there was "credible evidence" linking the officer to human rights abuses in Rwanda in the 1990s, according to internal U.S. government documents.

The U.S. decision to back Maj. Gen. Emmanuel Karake Karenzi as the deputy force commander of the joint U.N.-African Union mission in the Darfur region of Sudan may have violated a provision of a 1997 U.S. law known as the Leahy Amendment, according to two State Department bureaus that opposed Karenzi's appointment. The law requires the State Department to vet the human rights records of foreign military units receiving U.S. assistance.

Karenzi's nomination last year opened a deep rift within the administration between officials who argued that a tainted record on human rights should disqualify him and those who feared offending the Rwandan government, which has threatened to pull its forces from peacekeeping operations in Darfur.

But the U.S. assistant secretary of state for African affairs, Jendayi E. Frazer, short-circuited the debate, assuring African Union officials in a Sept. 7, 2007, meeting that a U.S. inquiry had found no evidence of Karenzi's role in atrocities and proposing that he receive the job, according to a U.S. cable describing the meeting. Four days later, the United Nations approved Karenzi for the post.

In February, a Spanish judge charged Karenzi and 39 other Rwandan officials with the mass killings of Rwandan civilians and of several Spanish and Canadian missionaries and relief workers. Nevertheless, the United States, [Britain](#) and Rwanda have urged U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to renew Karenzi's contract when it expires next month, according to U.S. and U.N. officials.

The initial dispute within the State Department centered on whether Karenzi was responsible for the killings of hundreds of civilian ethnic Hutus by his troops during a counterinsurgency campaign in Rwanda in March and April of 1998. The United Nations and Human Rights Watch have since linked Karenzi's troops to rights abuses in eastern Congo between 1994 and 2000.

A 1998 State Department report said that Rwandan troops in armored vehicles opened fire on civilians trying to escape a battle with armed opposition fighters. The report also found that Rwandan forces engaged in an unspecified number of reprisal killings and killed 334 people in the Ruhondo and Cyere communes in Ruhengeri province in northwest Rwanda. The report did not name Karenzi, but the department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research later established that he commanded Rwanda's 408th Battalion in Ruhengeri, which allegedly carried out those crimes, according to the documents.

In light of those findings, the State Department's Bureau of International Organization Affairs (IO) and its Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) recommended that Karenzi be disqualified for the peacekeeping post, as detailed in a September 2007 confidential memo written by Kristen Silverberg, then head of the international organization bureau, to R. Nicholas Burns, then undersecretary of state for political affairs.

Silverberg wrote that Karenzi's links to troops responsible for the killings in Ruhengeri amounted to

"credible evidence" of human rights violations "in the context of the Leahy amendment vetting requirements."

"Numerous open source allegations of gross human rights violations against [Karenzi] should disqualify him from a leadership role in UNAMID," Silverberg wrote. "While we have no evidence that he ordered the actions that took place, DRL believes the fact that they occurred under his command makes it impossible for the department to support his candidacy for policy reasons and in light of legal considerations."

"IO is aware of the political complications that would ensue from US and/or UN rejection of [Karenzi] and that he is not among the worst human rights abusers from Rwanda," Silverberg wrote. "Nevertheless, taking into account public credibility as well as the potential legal issues, we have doubts that he is the best candidate."

The Washington Post obtained the State Department documents from an anonymous source who was critical of U.S. support for Karenzi. Their authenticity was confirmed by U.S. officials familiar with the internal debate.

Frazer's spokesman, Russell Brooks, declined to comment on Silverberg's memo. But he said the State Department complied with its obligations under the Leahy Amendment. "The general was vetted through a variety of agencies within the U.S. government, and they concluded that there was no evidence that he was involved in those allegations," he said.

The Rwandan government says the charges are baseless, and President Paul Kagame warned Frazer on July 15 that he would withdraw his troops from Sudan if Karenzi was forced out. "For me, it's very clear," Kagame said in an interview this month with the Congolese publication La Conscience. "If Karenzi goes, the entire Rwandan contingent will leave Darfur -- the same day."

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has recently rallied behind Frazer, a former student of hers at Stanford University, instructing U.N. envoy Zalmay Khalilzad to urge the U.N. leadership to keep Karenzi in the peacekeeping post.

Meanwhile, the U.S. deputy ambassador to Rwanda, Cheryl Jane Sim, oversaw the delivery of more than \$20 million worth of peacekeeping equipment -- including military trucks and radio communications kits -- to Rwanda this month, in a ceremony Karenzi attended.

The case against Karenzi dates to Rwanda's troubled past. In 1994, Rwandan Hutu extremists linked to the government killed more than 800,000 ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Africa's bloodiest genocide. Kagame's Tutsi-dominated rebel army drove the government from power. The Rwandan leadership considers Karenzi, who served as military intelligence chief from 1994 to 1997, a war hero.

But Karenzi's appointment to the peacekeeping post immediately sparked criticism from rights groups, which link the general to the indiscriminate killing of hundreds of Congolese civilians in 2000. The deaths occurred during a battle between Rwandan and Ugandan troops for control of the city of Kisangani, according to a U.N. inquiry.

A December 2000 U.N. report found that troops on both sides had committed "systematic violations of international humanitarian law and indiscriminate attacks against civilians," including killing more than 760 civilians, wounding 1,700 and driving 65,000 into hiding.

Karenzi told the Associated Press at the time: "I am not proud of this. But we were fired at."

The State Department questioned human rights advocates and representatives of the Rwandan and Spanish victims. But the matter was still unresolved when Frazer traveled to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to press African Union Chairman Alpha Oumar Konare to speed the deployment of peacekeepers in

Darfur.

During the Sept. 7, 2007, meeting, Frazer assured Konare that the United States "had done vetting and would like to see the appointment confirmed," according to a U.S. government cable describing the meeting.

The United Nations defended its decision to hire Karenzi, saying it had insufficient evidence to prove that he had committed crimes against humanity. But the group later reversed course and pressed Rwanda to replace Karenzi after his indictment by the Spanish magistrate, D. Fernando Andreu Merelles. The indictment cites several criminal charges against the general between 1994 and 1997, including the assassination of political opposition figures and the approval of massacres of ethnic Hutus in the provinces of Ruhengeri, Gisenyi and Cyangugu.

Rwanda's U.N. ambassador, Joseph Nsengimana, dismissed the U.N. appeal, responding in a letter to the organization that the allegations are groundless.

Nsengimana did not respond to requests by e-mail and phone for comment. Karenzi declined to comment.

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