

Kagame's Economic Mirage in Rwanda

An Interview with David Himbara

By [Ann Garrison](#) and [David Himbara](#)

Global Research, March 16, 2017

Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [History](#),
[Police State & Civil Rights](#)

The tiny East African nation of Rwanda has played a unique and prominent role in U.S. political ideation since the 1994 massacres known as the Rwandan Genocide. The West's so-called "failure to intervene in Rwanda" — and the Holocaust — became arguments for violating the national sovereignty of nations in the Global South to protect people from their own governments.

The 1994 bloodbath in Rwanda also became an argument for the suppression or even criminalization of speech. No one makes these arguments more fiercely and absolutely than Rwandan President Paul Kagame.

Kagame is now campaigning for his third formal term in office, though he has in fact ruled Rwanda since overthrowing its government with the covert assistance of the U.S. and U.K. in 1994, at the end of a four-year war. That four-year war began when Kagame's army invaded Rwanda from Uganda.

Kagame claims to have inspired Rwandans to rise from the ashes to build an economic miracle and example for all Africa, and no one reinforces these claims more than Bill Clinton and Tony Blair. In a new book, however, economist David Himbara says that Kagame's economic miracle is in fact an economic mirage. I spoke to David Himbara.

Ann Garrison: David Himbara, why do you call Kagame's so-called economic miracle a mirage?

David Himbara: Kagame has grossly exaggerated his social and economic accomplishments of the past 23 years. He says he has built an African economic lion — the Singapore of Africa. In reality Rwanda remains the poorest country in East Africa, except for Burundi. Its per capita income stands at \$697.3 versus Kenya's of \$1,376.7; Uganda, \$705; and Tanzania at \$879. Burundi is poorer than Rwanda with per capita of \$277. Rwanda receives \$1 billion a year in foreign aid, which is half of its annual budget of \$2 billion. This is hardly a spectacular success.

AG: And you held a unique position in Kagame's administration that enabled you to observe the so-called economic miracle, no?

DH: I was the president's principal private secretary for two years and head of strategy and policy, Office of the President, for four years. In the latter category, we made some good reforms in the first two years, but the last two years were frustrating.

Kagame was more obsessed with the looks of the capital city of Kigali than building national

systems to improve lives. He routinely manipulated statistics to exaggerate social and economic performance.

AG: Rwanda will be staging another election this year on Aug. 4. Since Kagame has in effect ruled since 1994, this will be his fourth term, though he's calling it his third, after having the Rwandan Constitution changed to make that acceptable.

In 2010, he awarded himself 93 percent of the vote, an improbable number in any real pluralist democracy, but none of the Western donors who provide half of Rwanda's budget withheld their support, as they have with neighboring Burundi, where President Pierre Nkurunziza won a third term with 64 percent in 2015. Kagame will no doubt claim to win another improbable mandate this year, but do you think there's any chance that the Western donors providing half of Rwanda's budget will finally turn away?

DH: The U.S. is the largest bilateral aid donor to Rwanda, while Britain is the second largest. American aid supports agriculture and health, while U.K. money goes into education.

A smaller portion of U.S. aid supports Rwandan troops who serve as peacekeepers. I doubt either of these two countries would cease supporting Rwanda. They have invested too much into Kagame to abandon him — unless he does something extraordinarily foolish like invading Congo again.

AG: In your book, you write that you fled Rwanda after Kagame asked you to misreport economic statistics. Could you give us the specifics of that?

DH: A confrontation convinced me to leave Rwanda. I questioned the annual economic growth of 11 percent in 2009 during the global financial crisis. Kagame became aggressive and abusive. I decided to leave Rwanda at the earliest opportunity, which was January 2010.

There are many examples of statistical exaggeration in Kagame's Rwanda. He says for example that Rwanda has achieved universal healthcare coverage, but there are less than 700 doctors in Rwanda and there are 12 million people.

In any event, when I moved to South Africa in 2010, it soon became apparent that I was not safe there either. That was the year that Kagame's former army chief of staff was almost assassinated in South Africa, where he was living in exile. Soon after that, the former intelligence chief — also in exile in South Africa — was assassinated. Kagame had turned South Africa into a hunting ground; that is what convinced me to move to Canada.

AG: Why do you think Bill Clinton and Tony Blair seem to be as committed to these misrepresentations as Kagame himself?

DH: These two former leaders support Kagame no matter what. The two have foundations in Rwanda.

The Americans and British also feel guilty because they stopped the U.N. from organizing an intervention in the Rwandan Genocide. Clinton and Blair seem to have overcompensated by becoming Kagame's ambassadors even when he does nasty things. When Kagame's proxy militia overran Goma in D.R. Congo in 2012, Blair in particular stood by his man.

AG: The United States and Britain never seem to acknowledge the human catastrophe

caused by Kagame's repeated invasions and plunder of the Democratic Republic of the Congo despite abundant documentation. Why do you think that is?

DH: Kagame has outlasted three American presidents – Clinton, Bush, and Obama – and now we will see if he outlasts Trump. Each of the first three American presidents had his reason for maintaining the status quo. Clinton simply looked the other way when Kagame invaded the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1996 and 1998.

Clinton was driven by guilt for preventing a UN intervention during the genocide. Kagame took advantage of this by his adventure and plunder of Congo.

“Kagame routinely manipulated statistics to exaggerate social and economic performance.”

President George W. Bush supported Kagame for different reasons – peacemaking operations. The American military establishment helped build Rwanda into a peacekeeping force in such places as Darfur, Sudan, South Sudan and Haiti. Meanwhile in Britain, the same pattern held, under both the Labor and Conservative governments.

The Obama presidency was different from previous American and British administrations. When Kagame's militia invaded the capital town of eastern DR Congo, Goma, Obama cut military aid to Rwanda — an action that other donors soon followed.

Donors either cut or suspended aid to Rwanda. The U.N. sanctioned a robust force comprised of South African and Tanzanian forces that defeated Kagame's militia. That is how Kagame met his defeat in Congo.

AG: Is there anything else you'd like to say?

DH: Regarding Kagame's economic performance, we have to give him his dues. Here is a man who mastered the “big lie” philosophy. As the infamous big lie reasoning goes, if you keep repeating a falsehood over and over again, people will sooner or later believe it.

And so Kagame relentlessly went on a global stage and repeatedly lied that he had built an economic powerhouse. He had a motive. He believed that if he convinced his international supporters that he was creating prosperity in Rwanda, they would tolerate his human rights abuses.

In other words, Kagame sold them a trade-off; he told them that Rwandan people are more interested in food and jobs than democracy and human rights. There was one problem though — Kagame delivered neither development nor democracy.

David Himbara holds a Ph.D. in political economy from Queen's University in Kingston, Canada. He is the author of “Kenyan Capitalists, the State and Development” and “Kagame's Economic Mirage.” In March 2017, he was awarded the [Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza Democracy and Peace Prize](#).

Ann Garrison lives in Berkeley, California and writes for the San Francisco Bay View, Black Agenda Report, Black Star News, Counterpunch, Global Research, and Pambazuka News, and reports for Pacifica Radio. She can be reached at anniegarrison@gmail.com. In March 2014 she was awarded the [Victoire Ingabire Umuhoza Democracy and Peace Prize](#).

[**Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page**](#)

[**Become a Member of Global Research**](#)

Articles by: [Ann Garrison](#) and
[David Himbara](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca
www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.
For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca