

State Department's 'Nickel Politics'



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DESPITE the deliberate slaughter of thousands of tribal rivals by the Burundi government, the Nixon Administration has quietly started normalizing relations with the Central African state.

The thaw coincides with the discovery of vast nickel deposits in Burundi, worth an estimated \$14 billion.

Until this past January, the United States pursued a policy of "minimal relations" with Burundi. But since the nickel strike, agents representing U.S. corporations have swarmed into the tiny nation and overnight the repressive Burundi government has become a courted friend.

The administration's sudden change of attitude toward Burundi is spelled out in classified State Department documents, which we have seen.

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A RECENT State Department memorandum to the White House, written by top official Thomas Pickering, now ambassador to Jordan, argued that "normalization" of official relations would provide "opportunities for American corporations that are interested in exploiting the major new mineral discovery."

American businessmen also smell oil in Burundi. As Pickering put it, the resumption of U.S. aid and cultural programs might also earn "concessions for American companies who believe there may be hydrocarbon deposits (oil) on the eastern shore of Lake Tanganyika . . .

"In view of the foregoing," concluded Pickering, "the Department requests NSC (National Security Council) concurrence in the normalization of relations with Burundi."

The White House responded in a secret memo, dated Jan. 29, 1974, from Major General Brent Scowcroft, who is Henry Kissinger's chief deputy in the White House: "President Nixon has authorized Department of State to begin the normalization of relations . . ."

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THE NEW Burundi policy, which some State Department insiders irreverently refer to as "nickel politics," restores official U.S. blessings to a government which, over the past two years, has engaged in mass genocide on a scale the world has not seen since Adolf Hitler tried to wipe out the Jews during World War II.

Footnote: A full report on the effect of "nickel politics" on U.S. policy toward Burundi will be published in the April issue of Progressive magazine. The author, Roger Morris, a former Kissinger aide, is rapidly becoming the Ralph Nader of foreign affairs. As a program director for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Morris recently co-authored "Disaster in the Desert," an investigative report which described how the United States and the United Nations have bungled food relief to the drought-stricken countries of Western Africa.