

Genocide

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July 17, 2003

**Commissioned by the
Human Security Centre**

Genocides and political mass murders are recurrent phenomena. Since WW II nearly 50 such episodes took place costing the lives of at least 12 million and as many as 22 million noncombatants, more than all victims of international and internal wars since 1945 (see table 1). Genocides cause instability in neighboring countries, induce huge refugee flows, disrupt economic relations, and inflame passions that fuel future conflicts. Despite these enormous costs neither regional nor security organizations, the United Nations or individual states were willing or capable of consistent actions to prevent the slaughters.

What accounts for this lackluster performance? Lack of response is partially due to an inability to anticipate crises before they evolve, and thus, policymakers are often faced with late and costly decisions to halt escalation. Lack of systematic analyses in the field of genocide studies made it nearly impossible to detect genocides in the making. Of course there are those arguing that there is no shortage of early warning but it is the political will that is lacking. We agree with the latter statement but not the former. There have been many warnings by area specialists or human rights groups, but none early enough and none that routinely scans the globe for signs of impending disaster. By “early” we mean months in advance not when killings are underway.

Below I sketch a theoretical model that enables us to do systematic risk assessment, as is now done routinely by the U.S. government. Briefly introduced are efforts that may well lead to true early warning, which essentially will allow us to say more precisely not only that there is a risk of genocide in the foreseeable future but when an episode is likely to begin. The progress made in detecting impending genocides should help us to focus more on how to prevent these horrendous episodes. From a pragmatic perspective, early action is highly desirable. Among today’s threats and challenges to international peace genocides rank on top. Thus, reactive policy-making is a formula doomed to failure as in Bosnia or Cambodia. What is needed are actions that make sense in particular situations and at a particular time. Early actions mean less costs in man and material. Early action does not mean necessarily deploying troops, rather it means using tools of accepted conflict prevention and resolution. The

last part of this contribution lists a number of options that are at the disposal of international policymakers, to prevent the escalation of civil conflict into genocide.

What is Genocide and How to Detect it?

Genocides are deliberate and sustained effort by authorities aimed at destroying a collectivity in whole or in part. In my view genocides and political mass murder (politicide) are aspects of the same phenomena and need no separate theoretical explanations. The Cambodian episode (1975-79) is a case in point. Most victims were ethnic Khmers and so were the perpetrators—thus the Genocide Convention of 1948 makes it impossible to classify this case as a genocide. Why? The Convention identifies ethnic, racial and religious groups as potential victims and imputes motive that implies that “others” commit mass murder. In the aftermath of the Holocaust little attention was paid to political victims of the Nazi regime, and with the Soviet Union as arbiter the Convention eliminated all mention of political victims. Part of the argument was that political groups are fluid—that one can move in and out of these groups, whereas membership in ethnic groups is permanent. Of course that defies logic, given that religious groups were included in the definition. Although not the original intent, political victims were excluded “from the universe of obligation” precisely because the Soviet Union would have come under attack for killing political opponents. Thus, in the case of Cambodia only ethnic Chinese, Vietnamese and Chams could properly be considered victims of genocide whereas one million “others” would have been the forgotten victims of yet another human tragedy. For my purposes I include all political victims whether or not they have ethnic or religious identities. What matters is that they had been victimized because of their political beliefs, actions, or membership in opposition groups that were threatening to the regime in question.

As mentioned before theoretically it changes little, to thus broaden the definition of genocide. Consider the explanatory factor of exclusionary ideology. Repeatedly perpetrators have invoked the specter of political, ethnic, and

religious victims as enemies of the state or regime. The labels applied range from heretic and counterrevolutionary to class enemy and “splittists”—the Chinese Communist term for Tibetans, Uighers, and other ethnies who seek autonomy. In some cases it was enough to be labeled as undesirable, asocial or standing in the way of “progress” for a group to be deemed expendable. Examples of ideologically inspired genocides occurred in China during the Cultural Revolution (1966-75), in Chile after the overthrow of the leftist Allende regime in 1973, and in post revolutionary Iran after Khomeini consolidated his power.

Genocides and politicides almost always occur in the context of or immediately following violent political instability. The hard part is to differentiate between generic conflict phenomena and genocide, and to determine which factors contribute to both or are specific to one or the other. Definitionally, civil wars end when one or the other side is defeated, whereas genocides continue until the group ceases to exist as such. Politicide may end with the defeat of the group in question, but in contrast to civil wars, civilians are systematically targeted and killed. Motives vary in civil and ethnic wars, ranging from repression of political expression to preventing secession. In genocides and politicides the goal is to silence opposition at all costs or eliminate (annihilate) in whole or part groups and movements, so that neither are recognizable entities for the foreseeable future.

Why do genocides typically occur during or in the aftermath of other conflicts? The easy answer is that war provides a perfect cover for ill intentions. The decision calculus for planners of genocide includes a rational choice to eliminate rather than accommodate perceived challengers to the regime. We also think that past genociders can become habituated to the use of extreme violence, thus when elites are weak or feel threatened or conversely feel that they can get “away with it” and have the means to act, they may choose to do so.

The international community, through inaction or threats without muscle, has sometimes set fire to the fuel. International engagement can at times

prevent imminent genocides as in Kosovo (1999) or Timor (1999). More often, inaction and grandstanding encourages would-be genociders as in Rwanda and Burundi. We also have found that membership in international organizations and economic connectedness may prevent or at least curtail abusive practices. It appears that exposure to democracies and the desire to be accepted by the international community act as dampers on repressive behavior.

Ethnic and religious cleavages in and of themselves do not necessarily contribute to genocidal violence. The key to understanding how ethnic animosities can be inflamed lies in understanding who and what mobilizes regimes. The 1987 al Anfal campaign against the Kurds in Iraq is a case in point. Iraq's autocratic leadership (Saddam Hussein) allows for no political opposition, is guided by an ideology (Baath) that does not accept ethnic separation and furthermore the leadership consists of members of a religious minority (Sunni). Although originally secular, socialist and pan-Arab, Baath ideology became whatever Hussein's clan decided was necessary to consolidate its power. Kurdish political aspirations had no place in these calculations. The fact that Kurds were an ethnic minority was of lesser importance. At times Saddam placated one leader or conversely inter Kurdish rivalries led to cooperation with Saddam. Thus, the Anfal campaign had everything to do with quelling the separatist aspirations of the Kurds and was not aimed at eliminating all or most Kurds.

This sketch also shows that perpetrators are often members of a regime that represents one ethnic or religious group in a heterogeneous society and more often a minority. Idi Amin and Milton Obote of Uganda were such leaders who used their power to commit genocide. Most genocides are committed by autocracies in societies with little or no exposure to democratic norms and institutions. But they also can happen in democratic countries such as Sri Lanka when long standing threats lead to repressive practices. Democracy may not be the panacea for all deadly conflicts, but there are checks on executive powers and fewer chances for political exclusion, thus accommodation not elimination is the norm.

Risk Assessment

These are key results of the author's empirically tested model that explains why genocides have occurred. The U.S. intelligence community routinely does global risk assessment using this model. This makes it possible to identify hot-spots where a geno/politicide is a real possibility in the near future. When exactly this will happen is not known, but we are presently monitoring these situations, using another theoretical model (also developed by this author) and briefly introduced later. The risk assessment is "structural" because it refers to enduring characteristics of regimes and societies that are less time dependent than the factors used for the early warning model. Theoretical arguments abound in genocide studies about what causes such episodes. We sought to test alternative arguments for which data were available since 1955. Where data were missing on key variables we coded them from historical sources. Why 1955? Many genocides happened in newly independent countries, and de-colonization started in earnest in the 1950s. The best-fit model was estimated using a limited set of variables, with other alternative theoretically relevant variables tested in efforts to improve on the results. The final model, the result of a long process of estimation, includes these variables. This model identifies six causal factors that jointly differentiate with 74 % accuracy 35 serious civil conflicts that led to episodes of genocides and political mass murder (politicide) between 1955 and 2001 and 91 that did not. Accuracy would increase to 89% if temporal inconsistencies in the data were taken into account.

Political Upheaval: The greater the magnitude of internal wars or regime crises over the preceding 15 years, the more likely that a conflict situation (here referred to as state failure) would lead to geno/politicide.

Prior Genocides: The risk of a new geno/politicide is three times more likely when state failure occurred in countries that had prior case.

Elite Ideology and Regime Type: Countries in which regimes adhered to an exclusionary ideology were two and a half times more likely to have state failures

leading to genocides than those with no such ideology. Failures in autocratic regimes were three and a half times more likely to lead to geno/politicide.

Ethnic and Religious Cleavages: The risks of geno/politicide were two and a half times more likely in countries where the political elite was based entirely or mainly on an ethnic minority.

International Interdependencies: Countries with low trade openness had two and a half times greater odds of having state failure culminate in geno/politicide. Low economic development (measured by infant mortality—using the reported deaths of infants under one year per 1,000 deaths) is a contributing factor, but does not add to the accuracy of the model.

How To Use the Model

The data used to develop and test this model--annual data on more than 100 indicators from 1955 to 2001--are available on a University of Maryland website (<http://www.bsos.umd.edu/cicdm/inscr/statefail>). Future analysis needs little more than an update of the six variables on an annual basis.

What Can Be Learned From This Analysis: Aside from the obvious, that we are now able to do the kind of risk assessment that is necessary to take preventive action, the analysis has these implications.

- 1) Any type of prolonged conflict carries the seeds of genocide.
- 2) Autocratic regimes have to overcome few internal obstacles when deciding on a course of genocide than their democratic and quasi-democratic counterparts.
- 3) Ethnic cleavages by themselves are no prescription to disaster, but ethnic and religious intolerance are, and countries that are ruled by ethnic/religious minorities especially prone to abuse other ethnies.
- 4) Minority elites armed with exclusionary ideologies often use ideology as a motivating and mobilizing factor against perceived opponents of the

- regime. Exclusionary ideologies are defined as including (a) strict versions of Marxism-Leninism, (b) states governance on the basis of Sharia'h (Islamic law), (c) rigid anticommunist doctrines, (d) advocates of doctrines of ethnonationalist superiority, and doctrines of (e) advocates of strict secular nationalism.
- 5) Lack of economic development, measured by quality of life indicators such as infant mortality is an enabling factor, meaning genocides are more likely to happen in poor countries, but not necessarily so. Geno/politicides also have happened in relatively prosperous countries—Chile and Argentina in the 1970s, Yugoslavia/Serbia in the 1990s. Despite the debate whether or not globalization leads to more underdevelopment or not, our results show that if a country is economically “connected” to the international community of nation-states it is more likely to adhere to international norms of behavior. Whether regimes try to pacify creditor states or because they need development assistance is really immaterial. In the best of worlds international trade openness should lead to greater benefits for all countries and peoples.

How to Combat Geno/Politicides: Early Warning Efforts

The early warning model identifies factors and events that help us say when, within months, a genocide is likely to begin. By tracing factors that lead to escalation of conflict into genocide, we hope to take steps to alleviate this worst kind of human tragedy.

By monitoring we mean near real-time coding of hundreds of pieces of information in a systematic fashion. Soon this coding will be done a fully automated system that enables us to process thousands of pieces of information in minutes. Prior to coding we identify all potential identity groups that are possible targets of government oppression. Furthermore, each category described below includes more finely tuned indicators (specific types of events) that allow us to do more detailed analysis. The analytic results are promising but

not final--meaning that a full fledged early warning system is not yet available.

The factors we monitor include:

Increases in refugee flows

Acts of political opposition by kindred groups in neighboring countries

Increases in external support for politically significant opposition groups

Threats of external involvement against governing elites not backed by international action

Increases in size and cohesion or militancy of targeted groups

Aggressive posturing or actions by targeted or opposition groups

Negative government responses to actions by targeted or opposition groups

Discriminatory or restrictive actions by the government against opposition groups

Life integrity violations by government or by government-supported groups against targeted groups

Increases in capacity of opposition groups

Deterioration of government capacity

Some Findings:

Initial analyses show some distinctive patterns. In most politicides governments have relatively strong capacities, but feel threatened by actions of the opposition—see Rwanda. Armed with exclusionary ideologies that increase in veracity during the latter stages of conflict, they often arm bands of roving youth or create new militias. What happens to kindred people in neighboring countries affects both opposition and regimes. Increases in refugee flows exacerbate existing conditions. Empty posturing by the international community has the effect of accelerating serious abuses by regimes that think they can act with impunity. Any increases in the relative power (cohesion/arms/verbal support/or actions) of a regime's and opponents may have dire consequences,

leading to greater oppression. Some one-time events such as natural disasters or the killing of a significant political leader may trigger serious escalation. Conversely continue meaningful engagement by the international community on all levels may prevent escalation.

What To Do:

We think that lack of political will can be overcome if governments are provided with an array of workable solutions that are cost-efficient in manpower and material, and contribute to solutions in situations such as Congo-Kinshasa, Burundi, Sierra Leone, Algeria, Colombia, Nepal, Indonesia and Zimbabwe, to name a few risky situations. Although solutions are in some cases culture dependent in other cases they are not.

These are some policy guidelines. The arming of unstable, previously abusive regimes and their opponents is counterproductive. Finding the one palatable leader who could stabilize a country (see Congo-Kinshasa) may be the only real alternative, short of military solutions, in situations in which escalation approximates genocide. In most cases military solutions are not necessary. Strengthening democratic forces overtly may help to alleviate abuses but conversely, autocrats sometimes are equally capable of providing stability and prosperity to newly developing states. International condemnation of abusive practices irrespective of national interest of course is a prerequisite to effective action. Exposure to democratic norms and practices (via mass communications for example) is highly desirable. Sustained economic assistance on the ground rather than through official channels is of further use. Refugee situations need to be closely monitored, especially for arms flows and regrouping of militant elements. Of course the key to implementing these policies is long term international engagement on all levels.

Reference:

Barbara Harff, "No Lessons Learned from the Holocaust? Assessing Risks of Genocide and Political Mass Murder since 1955," *American Political Science Review* Vol. 97, No.1 (February 2003), pp. 57-73.