



## Explaining and Preventing the Holocaust, Genocides, Politicides and Holodomors

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They are all genocides. Which begs the question of whether the Holocaust is unique, or one among over 50 geno/politicides in the twentieth century? (There have been 46 alone since WW II, I had first published the list of cases in 1988.)<sup>1</sup>

For Germans, some scholars and Holocaust survivors the uniqueness question of the Holocaust still is of elemental importance. Here I defer to and quote my friend and colleague Yehuda

Bauer, a Holocaust scholar of some distinction. He argues that “when one discusses unprecedented elements in social phenomena, the immediate question is, unprecedented in comparison with what? The very claim that a historical event is unprecedented can be made only when that event is compared with other events of a presumably similar nature with which it shares at least some qualities.”<sup>2</sup> And in a bold

statement he tells us that “the horror of the Holocaust is not that it deviated from human norms; the horror is that it didn’t.” Many comparative scholars argue (including myself) that by putting the Holocaust in the

context of other atrocities we create for it a permanent place in the annals of human history – not one likely to be forgotten when survivors, Jews, Germans and other affected peoples have died or prefer to forget what happened.

Of course Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term genocide, thought that what happened to the Armenians would surely happen again to other ethnic, racial, religious or those groups bound by common beliefs other than religion. He knew about the Soviet-induced famine that caused the death of an estimated 6 million Ukrainians and other kulaks between 1932 and 1933 (the Holodomor) and witnessed the Holocaust that took the lives of most of his family. Surely he would have not thought the Holocaust to be a case that defies

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Harff and T. R. Gurr, “Toward Empirical Theory of Genocides and Politicides: Identification and Measurement of Cases since 1945,” *International Studies Quarterly* vol. 37, no. 3, 1988, pp. 359-371.

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<sup>2</sup> Yehuda Bauer. *Rethinking the Holocaust*. Yale University Press: New Haven, CT and London, 2001, pp. 39, 42.

explanation. Although an empiricist by training, I have done case studies and some field research. I would argue that although detailed case studies tell us much about the circumstances of a particular case they tell us little of more general phenomena. If we want to know why genocides and other mass atrocities recur with some regularity we need to identify common characteristics, that is search for patterns.

Some scholars argue that one case may yield enough information to advance hypotheses that can be tested in other cases. Some empiricists in contrast want a known universe of cases to compare and contrast before suggesting any type of theory. Both sides have something to offer. Think we need solid cases studies, use them to compare and contrast, develop hypotheses and test against all known cases with plenty of controls—the process in part deductive part inductive. Of course we know the limitations of social scientific analysis. We acknowledge that human behavior has an element of unpredictability, thus our explanations are probabilistic not definitive. For me testing hypotheses using methods that are used in the hard sciences is ultimately preferable to expert opinion. Let us remind ourselves that experts did not foresee the downfall of the Soviet Union, the Iranian Revolution and many a genocide.

A bit of personal history: In 1981 I finished my dissertation (published in 1984) by arguing that humanitarian intervention was a legal norm that should be employed to stop genocide.<sup>3</sup> Little did I know when I began, that this debate started in the 1880s and that I had to read treatises by such legal

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<sup>3</sup> Barbara Harff. *Genocide and Human Rights: International Legal and Political Issues*. University of Denver, Graduate School of International Studies, Monograph Series in World Affairs, Vol. 20, Book 3, 1984.

heavyweights as Sir Hersh Lauterpacht and Julius Stone. This served me well considering today's debate about the legality and application of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine (R2P), something briefly touched upon later. It was then I realized that there was little information on other cases of ongoing or recent cases of genocides. We knew of the Armenians, the Hereros, Holocaust victims, the Cambodian victims of something called auto genocide, and a few post colonial cases in Central Africa. When after years of research, we knew that more people had been killed in genocides than in all other cases of violent conflicts since 1945, genocides studies with its interdisciplinary focus became a serious subject matter. Fast forward to the State Failure Task Force, now the Political Instability Task Force, established in 1994 at the request of Vice President Al Gore.

The concept of state failure, now routinely used, defies easy definition. We, the Task Force, inherited the term from Helman and Ratner<sup>4</sup>, Robert Kaplan<sup>5</sup> and William Zartman<sup>6</sup>. In 1998 Ted Gurr writing for the Task Force suggested that members should think of state failure as something analogous to state collapse. He argues that “state failures usually occur in circumstances of widespread and violent civil conflict, often accompanied by severe humanitarian crises. These conditions may precede or follow the institutional collapse of the state; sometimes they are instrumental

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<sup>4</sup> Helman, G.B., and S.R. Ratner, “Saving Failed States,” *Foreign Policy* 89 (Winter 1993), pp.3-20.

<sup>5</sup> Kaplan, R.D. “The *Coming Anarchy*,” *Atlantic Monthly* (February 1994), pp. 44-76.

<sup>6</sup> Zartman, I.W., ed. *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*. Lynne Rienner: Boulder, Co. and London. 1995.

in causing it.”<sup>7</sup> The Task Force distinguishes between complete and partially collapsed states. We also differentiated among four types of state failure—regime crises, revolutionary warfare ethnic conflict and geno-politicide. We thought of them as an operational definition of state collapse or failure—not something written in stone. The term remains muddled—state failure—cause, consequence or process in the context of violent conflict?

From an international law perspective, I have problems with the notion of a state collapsing or disappearing in some fashion—even if empires disappear (see the Soviet Union) some inheritor state will accept and has to take responsibility for past performances. The former West Germany is an example of an inheritor state that willingly shouldered responsibilities for Nazi crimes—the former East largely ignoring its complicity. States continue to exist, even when boundaries and names change. In the 1950s and 1960s after decolonization new states emerged that were recognized as such by the international community using the same formula for acceptance used today. A state has to have people, a defined territory, effective government, sovereignty and de jure recognition by a majority of states, although the latter is somewhat optional—we all remember the tortuous China vs. Taiwan recognition dilemma. Where does this leave us?

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<sup>7</sup> Daniel Esty, Jack Goldstone, Ted Robert Gurr, Barbara Harff, Pamela T. Surko, Alan N. Unger, and Robert C. Chen, “The State Failure Project: Early Warning Research for U.S. Foreign Policy Planning,” in John L. Davies and Ted Robert Gurr, eds. *Preventive Measures: Building Risk Assessment and Crisis Early Warning Systems*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.: Lanham, MD, Boulder, CO, New York and Oxford. 1998.

I think of state failure as a question of a government’s effectiveness: can it provide for essential goods—such as security, basic welfare, education and jobs. In many states particular elites control resources, peoples, territory. In some situations elites have lost control to challengers for internal or external control. This is especially a problem for autocracies, less so in democracies where would-be challengers have a multitude of avenues to present their grievances, thus conflicts and state collapse are much less likely.

A closer look at the Task Force’s four types of conflict yields some important clues as to whether or not state collapse is process, cause or consequence of different types of conflicts.

I argue that state collapse is most likely during or in the aftermath of genocide, when typically new elites and institutions emerge, and sometimes boundaries change. Regime crises are situations in which the institutions of the polity are abruptly changed, usually to strengthen the power of the governing elite. Ethnic conflicts add yet another component: here oppressed minorities or majorities (see the Kurds in Iraq) demand to be heard and have their grievances addressed. Capacity strongly affects their bargaining position and behavior. In contrast, revolutionary challengers want to change the nature of a polity: its leaders promote adherence to identifiable ideologies, and seek to take control of the state.

Thus, in my opinion, state collapse or failure really means regime and institutional collapse. It is a process, accelerated as conflicts increase. Total collapse may happen depending on the severity of the conflict and its outcome. In these cases we may see a state with new and vastly altered institutions and/or new

boundaries. In extreme cases regimes are either forced into or voluntarily accept a form of international stewardship that is aimed at developing a new order. Typically the focus is on creating a different type of polity—usually resembling some version of democracy.

There may be some exceptions; it is possible that regime and institutional collapse cause armed conflict. Reasons abound: externally imposed sanctions often create intolerable conditions for the masses, rarely the elites. A world-wide recession or natural catastrophes can sap resources of regimes, allowing for challengers to establish fiefdoms within state boundaries.

Now to explanations of genocide and politicide: I coined the latter term to include members of political groups among the victims—originally so intended by Lemkin in 1944. But neither the Soviets nor the West were eager to include political groups. Think of Stalin's crimes and anti-Communist hysteria in the West. The inclusion of political groups allows us now to account for many victims of ideologically motivated atrocities, as in Indonesia, Argentina, El Salvador, Cambodia and many more.

How did we begin? We systematically tested most explanations identified in the relevant literature—except hypotheses offered by psychologists. For sociologists and political scientists, explanations focusing on individuals as the unit of analysis leave too much to be explained. Group-specific analysis was limited but not excluded. Our analysis was state centric because typically states were perpetrators of genocide and politicide. There are a very few exceptions. It is possible for groups not affiliated with governing elites to commit genocide; see genocide by revolutionaries in Congo-

Kinshasa and by Bosnian Serbs. This may happen during civil wars in which regimes only control part of their territory.

Our findings: Six antecedent conditions enabled us to “explain” close to 80% of all historical cases: our percentage would have gone up if we had included cases that did not fully meet the definitional criteria—our false positives. These were astonishing results. We were able to identify the common preconditions of genocide—most solidly anchored in the literature. I had to compromise—at times my favorite “cause” had to be dropped for lack of data—and at other times data needed to be coded. I directed the coding of two theoretically significant variables, exclusionary ideologies and polarized elite ethnicity for all countries from 1955-2002. Recoding by another research team confirmed the reliability of the results.

The model: The best-fit six variables model was reported in my 2003 APSR article. Later analysis substituted two variables yielding even better results. These findings allow us to do solid global risk assessment. The basic procedure used to estimate the risk model was the case control research design. Case control studies match problem cases—peoples or countries affected by a disorder—with a set of controls that do not have the disorder. In the analysis of risks of genocide, the universe of analysis consisted of all countries in “state failure”—regime crisis, revolutionary or ethnic war—at any time in the last half century. The dependent variable represents the conditional probability (risk) that a genocide or politicide will begin one year after the onset of failure in a country. There were 129 episodes of state failure during the

period studied from 1955 to 2002, of which 37 led to episodes of geno/politicide.<sup>8</sup>

*Results: The Antecedents of Genocide:*

*Political upheaval:* We found that high magnitudes of previous internal wars and regime crises over a period of 15 years increased the risk of genocide during or after a new state failure by nearly two times.

*Prior Geno-Politicide:* The risk of new episodes during or after a state failure was more than three times greater when state failures occurred in countries that had prior geno-politicides.

*Elite Ideology:* Countries in which the ruling elite adhered to an exclusionary ideology were two and a half times more likely to have a geno-politicide.

*Regime Type:* Failures in states with autocratic regimes were three and a half times more likely to lead to geno-politicide than failures in democratic regimes.

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

*International Interdependence:* The sixth variable is a substitute for what I had called international connectedness (the extent of economic and political linkages) and it proved to be a powerful predictor. Countries with low trade openness had two and a half times greater odds of having state failures culminating in geno-politicide.

A young German diplomat asked me last June, during my presentation at the Raphael Lemkin seminar for genocide prevention at Auschwitz: If we could stop conflicts we could stop genocides, because

most genocides typically happen during conflicts. So obvious, but? What is wrong with that scenario? We looked at all cases of state failure—as defined operationally by the Task Force—and observed that there were three times as many as there were genocides. Thus only a fraction of serious conflicts lead to genocide. And, there were a couple of geno/politicides that started as such, i.e. were not imbedded in other conflicts. But the idea is not so far-fetched—more effective conflict prevention means fewer genocides. Which brings me to the last part of my presentation. How can we use risk assessment and early warning to forestall genocide?

Our risk assessment is global and based on hard data and formal analysis. But a structural model (which mine is) does not tell the whole story—it cannot tell us exactly WHEN a genocide is to begin. That is the role of early warning. Our structural model can tell us that risk of genocide is high, medium or low. Early warning requires monitoring high-risk situations on a daily basis using a different type of theoretical model that would typically use event data. This narrows the time frame in which we should forecast the onset of genocide or political mass murder. I developed such a system and the US intelligence community tracked under my guidance on average a dozen countries each for a couple of years. Not cost effective, it was abandoned but yielded some important information—that is which events are most likely to accelerate or de-accelerate escalation to genocide. FAST (the FA stands for Frühanalysen) of the Swiss Peace Foundations effort using systematic analysis was to pick up where I left off. They tracked events using country coordinators and field monitors, storage into a database, and quantitative and qualitative analysis to warn of escalation. I had worked

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<sup>8</sup> 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.

with them in the past specifically to add a genocide component and provide risk assessment—but unfortunately the EU very recently shot down funding their proposal. They made the finals even ahead of the International Crisis Group (a very good organization) and lost out to International Alert—a group that does not use systematic analysis.

So what does risk assessment do for prevention? Remember that the label genocide carries special obligations—in particular the legal responsibility to act, further bolstered by obligations under the doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect. With the ability to identify high risk countries we are also able to suggest the likely path that leads from isolated massacres to genocide. Knowing which factors contribute to escalation may make it possible to reduce tension and/or stop perpetrators along the way. Two examples from the structural model, Trade sanctions or selectively increase aid (stick and carrot approach), coordination with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund are highly desirable. Regimes that espouse exclusionary ideologies need to be closely watched. Any increase in hate propaganda targeting specific groups needs to be addressed by the international community. Here are some examples learned from monitoring high risk countries using an events driven EW model. I had identified both international conflict prevention efforts and events that lead to conflict acceleration—some 70 indicators partially anchored in the literature on conflict prevention, genocide and EW. Thus, we learned that sponsored dialogues, peace conferences, cease fires, the sending of diplomats, monitoring elections, and securing borders add to peace-building. Whereas internal dislocation, refugee flows

across borders, arming rebels, not monitoring refugee camps, adding to capacity of dictatorial regimes, or not countering hate propaganda lead to conflict escalation.

Last, R2P is really not a new doctrine—see some of the classics on humanitarian intervention.<sup>9</sup> Let us revisit HI for a moment. Does state sovereignty supersede the rights of individuals residing within its borders? Are HI or R2P legal norms fully accepted as part of international law or not, or at least desirable—a moral obligation? If they are, then we are obliged to promote intervention on behalf of oppressed peoples—in other words states have now to account for their actions to both their citizens and the international community. But, who is to curtail unacceptable behavior? The UN, or regional organizations? Should we believe that this would happen? For the moment the African Union seems to be the most enlightened, arguing that sovereignty in principle is not sacrosanct. If we are serious, then we need to decide who should intervene, when, and how. Subordination of states' interest to the common good is desirable but utopian. Even if states are willing to go it alone—is it legal? More often states lack capacity, the political will and/or trust to act on behalf of the international community.

We really need to think about what we mean by R2P—I think it means that we can secure peace through force and are willing to take sides, that is abandon neutrality in situations such as Rwanda and Darfur. Key, we have to make sure that force is only used to halt conflicts that are likely to accelerate to genocide and related atrocities. On a much less ambitious scale I think that coordinated

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<sup>9</sup> Ellery C. Stowell. *Intervention in International Law*. John Byrne: Washington D.C. 1921.

international actions that have clearly stated goals, defined responsibilities and exit strategies, and follow-up support—and are sensitive to local needs and culture—a ultimately a recipe for success in ending cycles of repression and mass murder.