

Early Warning

By Dr. Gregory Stanton
Encyclopedia of Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity,
Thomson-Gale, 2005, pp. 271 – 273

The genocides in Rwanda in 1994 and in Bosnia in 1992 – 1995 were alarming evidence of the failure of the United Nations Security Council and its members to prevent genocides and other crimes against humanity. Studies by U.N. Commissions of Inquiry concluded that four institutional reforms are needed to prevent such crimes: institutions for early warning, programs for prevention, ready capacity for rapid response, and courts for punishment. Political will by leaders to use these institutions is necessary to render them effective. Public pressure is needed to motivate leaders to act.

One of most common false assumptions about genocide is that it is the result of conflict, which if resolved would prevent genocide. Most genocide does not result from conflict. Genocide is one-sided mass murder. Empirical research by Helen Fein, Matthew Krain, Barbara Harff, Benjamin Valentino and others shows that genocide is most often committed by elites that are attempting to stay in power against perceived threats to their dominance. Fein and Harff find that likelihood of genocide is most often increased by six factors: prior genocide in the same polity, autocracy, ethnic minority rule, political upheaval during war or revolution, exclusionary ideology, and closure of borders to international trade.

Complementing these statistical models, Gregory H. Stanton has developed a processual model of the stages of genocide. The eight stages of genocide are classification (us vs. them), symbolization, dehumanization, organization (hate groups), polarization, preparation (identification, expropriation, concentration, transportation), extermination, and denial. Stanton's model is designed so that policy-makers can recognize early warning signs and plan specific counter-measures to prevent genocide.

Who should be warned of the likelihood of genocide? Members of the victim group should surely come first, so they can prepare to flee or defend themselves. Others should include moderates, religious and human rights groups, and opposition forces who might oppose the genocide within their own country. If genocidal plans are not being made by the government itself, it should be called upon to intervene to protect its citizens. (This approach has halted ethnic and religious massacres in Indonesian Kalimantan, Sulawesi and the Moluccas, and in Nigeria.) But since most genocides are committed by governments, either directly or indirectly through militias, regional and international leaders must be warned as well, so they can bring pressure to bear on the government planning the genocide. In democracies, leaders seldom act without public pressure, so early warning must reach the press and groups that can organize campaigns for action.

How early must warning come for it to trigger action to prevent genocide? The answer depends on the action sought. For long-term policy, the warning should come as early as possible. Because structural factors such as totalitarian or autocratic government and minority rule correlate highly with genocide, long-term policies for genocide prevention should promote democracy, freedom, and pluralist tolerance. Rudy Rummel's meticulously documented conclusion that democracies do not commit genocide against their own enfranchised populations has often been challenged, but never refuted. Protection of democracies requires warning as early as possible of threats by extremist, military or totalitarian movements to overthrow them.

Freedom House counted 121 electoral democracies out of 192 countries in 2003, leaving seventy-one non-democracies. Ted Robert Gurr has pointed out that transitions to democracy from autocracy can be particularly dangerous periods, when minority elites attempt to hold onto their power, and are willing to commit mass murder to do so. Foreign policies for these countries should promote peaceful transition to democracy, but must avoid mortal threats that would set off genocides by elites determined to maintain their power.

Rwanda was a case when early warning failed. In 1992, the Belgian Ambassador warned his government that Hutu Power advocates were "planning the extermination of the Tutsi of Rwanda." In April, 1993, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Summary, Arbitrary, and Extrajudicial Executions said massacres of Tutsis already constituted genocide. In a cable on 11 January 1994, General Roméo Dallaire, Commander of the U.N. Assistance Mission in Rwanda warned the U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations, headed by Kofi

Annan, of Hutu extremist plans to exterminate Tutsis. The U.N. denied Dallaire permission to confiscate 500,000 machetes shipped to Rwanda for Hutu militias. Both early and late warnings of the Rwandan genocide were ignored by policy-makers who denied the facts, resisted calling the genocide by its proper name, refused to consider options for intervention, and finally refused to risk any lives of their citizens. Instead they withdrew 2000 UNAMIR troops and sacrificed the lives of over 500,000 defenseless Rwandans.

There was a similar failure of early warning in Cambodia in 1975, when reporters and diplomats predicted a Khmer Rouge bloodbath. Leftists refused to believe the warnings, and denied the mass killing while it was underway. Tired of the Indochina wars, the U.S. and Europeans were unwilling to intervene to overthrow the murderous Khmer Rouge. The U.N. General Assembly even condemned Vietnam for doing so.

Successful cases of early warning that resulted in response to prevent or stop genocidal massacres and crimes against humanity include Macedonia in 1992 and 2001, when several hundred U.N. peacekeepers prevented the Balkan wars from spreading, East Timor in 1999, when coordinated warnings by human rights groups and Australian intervention stopped massacres by Indonesian troops and militias after East Timor voted for independence, and Côte d'Ivoire in 2002, when warnings by the Belgian organization, Prévention Génocides, followed by French military and diplomatic intervention, helped stop massacres.

What steps have been taken to develop early warning systems?

Early warning of threats to national interests has long been a job of the intelligence agencies that advise national policy-makers. Threats of genocide were added to that task by the C.I.A. in 1994 in its "State Failure Task Force," which included analysis of the factors that predispose states to genocide. Efforts by think-tanks and universities have also been funded by governments in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, and Germany.

At the United Nations, a Framework for Coordination was established in the Department of Political Affairs to convene high level planners from U.N. departments and agencies to discuss and plan responses to crises. On 7 April 2004, the Secretary-General announced he would appoint a Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide.

Non-governmental organizations and universities in Europe and the U.S. have also focused on early warning, notably the International Crisis Group, the Forum on Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER), Genocide Watch and the International Campaign to End Genocide, a global coalition of organizations dedicated to preventing genocide.

Early warning is insufficient without early response. But early warning is the necessary first step toward prevention. World leaders must never again have the excuse that they "didn't know."

Early Warning: Bibliography

Fein, Helen (1993). "Accounting for Genocide after 1945: Theories and Some Findings." *International Journal on Group Rights* 1: 79-106.

Gurr, Ted Robert (2000). *Peoples versus States: Minorities at Risk in the New Century*. Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace Press.

Harff, Barbara (1998). "Early Warning of Humanitarian Crises: Sequential Models and the Role of Accelerators." In *Preventive Measures: Building Risk Assessment and Crisis Early Warning Systems*, ed. L. Davies and T.R. Gurr. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

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

Krain, Matthew (1997). "State-Sponsored Mass Murder: The Onset and Severity of Genocides and Politicides." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41: 331-360.

Rummel, Rudolph J. (1995). "Democracy, Power, Genocide, and Mass Murder." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 39: 3-26.

Stanton, Gregory H. (2004). "Could the Rwandan Genocide Have Been Prevented?" *Journal of Genocide Research* 6(2): 211-228.

Valentino, Benjamin A. (2004). *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the Twentieth Century*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.