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Chapter 6

‘Killing Them to Save Us’: Lessons from Politicide for Preventing and Countering Terrorism

by Clark McCauley

Abstract

This chapter reviews and extends the analysis of mass political murder advanced by Chirot and McCauley, then applies this analysis to understanding and countering terrorism. The justification for this application is that both politicide and terrorism target civilians in the context of asymmetric conflict. Three generalizations emerge. Politicide and terrorism cannot be understood or countered without (i) studying both sides in the conflict, (ii) separate studies of leaders, perpetrators, and mass sympathizers, and (iii) acknowledgment of the threats and grievances perceived by both sides. The chapter concludes with implications for fighting the war of ideas against jihadist and right-wing terrorists.

Keywords: genocide, mass murder, politicide, democide, terrorism, radicalization, asymmetric conflict, political extremism, right wing extremism, prevention, Islamist extremism, countering violent extremism (CVE)

In this chapter, I follow Chirot and McCauley¹ in focusing on the mass killing of civilians - political murder - as practiced both by stronger groups attacking weaker groups (genocide, democide, politicide) and weaker groups attacking stronger groups (terrorism). As explained in the first section of the chapter, I will refer to *politicide* when referring to the former. The premise of this chapter is that both politicide and terrorism aim to kill civilians. It is possible therefore to find parallels between the psychology of politicide and the psychology of terrorism. These parallels can offer us further suggestions about how to prevent and counter terrorism.

The chapter begins by expanding the United Nations (UN) definition of genocide to include attention to mass murder conducted against *political* enemies (democide, politicide). Special attention is given to mass murder in aerial bombings and mass murder in ungoverned spaces. A threat-based model of motivation for politicide is then introduced and applied to different actors involved in politicide: leaders, perpetrators, and the masses (general public). The second section examines possible predictors of politicide, followed by a third section that considers possible interventions against politicide, then a fourth section summarizing what we know about politicide. The sections five and six apply a novel understanding of politicide to better understanding and countering terrorism. The concluding section offers three generalizations about how to counter terrorism more effectively.

Mass Political Murder: Genocide, Democide, and Politicide

The UN definition of genocide is “acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group.” This definition emerged from negotiations and compromises among UN member states in ratifying the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.²

The UN definition applies to the Armenian genocide of 1915 and the Nazi genocide of the Jews during WWII. It applies also to Hutu killing Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994, but misses the many Hutu moderates killed by Hutu militants. It does not comprehend Stalin’s targeting of the kulaks, a prosperous peasant class. And it misses entirely the millions of “Cambodians with Vietnamese minds” killed by the Khmer Rouge between 1975 and 1979. In general, the UN definition excludes *political* groups killed in programs of political suppression.

Recognizing the limitations of the UN definition of genocide, Chirot and McCauley argue that the phenomenon of interest should be referred to as “mass political murder.”³ They assume that the psychologies involved in killing everyone in a village of a hundred are basically the same as killing millions of Armenians or Jews. The logic of this assumption is that millions are not killed in one day or in one episode of killing. Millions are killed in the summation of many episodes of killing hundreds or thousands, episodes that are spread geographically as well as in terms of duration.

¹ Chirot, Daniel and Clark McCauley (eds.), *Why Not Kill Them All? The Logic and Prevention of Mass Political Murder*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.

² United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, ‘Genocide,’ United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml>.

³ Chirot and McCauley, 2006, p. 13.

Rummel has advanced the term *democide* to refer to mass political murder. “Democide's necessary and sufficient meaning is that of the intentional government killing of an unarmed person or people.”⁴ Rummel explicitly excludes from this definition government execution of individuals for internationally recognized very serious crimes such as murder, rape, and treason. Unfortunately, Rummel’s definition of democide excludes mass killing in ungoverned spaces such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as described below.

Relatedly, Harff and Gurr have advanced the term *politicide* to refer to mass political murder:

“The essential quality of all these episodes is that the state or dominant social groups make a concerted, persistent attempt to destroy a communal or political group, in whole or in part. ...In genocides the victimized groups are defined primarily in terms of their communal characteristics. In politicides, by contrast, groups are defined primarily in terms of their hierarchical position or political opposition to the regime and dominant groups.”⁵

Politicide, like democide, goes beyond the UN definition of genocide to include mass killing of political enemies who are not defined by ethnicity or religion. Politicide, like democide, can include the Hutu’s killing of moderate Hutu, Stalin’s targeting of kulaks as an economic class, and Khmer Rouge’s killing of “Cambodians with Vietnamese minds.”

Unlike democide, however, politicide does not require, by definition, that a government is behind the killing. “In politicides, by contrast, groups are defined primarily in terms of their hierarchical position or political opposition to the regime *and dominant groups*.”⁶ In politicide, the targets are groups defined in terms of their political status, that is, usually their opposition to a ruling group.

This is a definition that can be applied to mass killings in ungoverned spaces. In this chapter, therefore, I aim to understand the psychology of politicide, as Harff and Gurr have defined it, and to apply this psychology to the context of terrorism, to better understand and prevent terrorism.

Here it is useful to emphasize an aspect of politicide that is key to psychological analysis: politicide is killing by category. The targets of politicide are not determined by any individual characteristics or individual behaviors but by their link or membership to a social group. The group is targeted as a category, making equally of old and young, male and female, politically active and politically inert targets. The psychology of politicide must make sense of killing by category.

⁴ Rummel, Rudolf J. (ed.), *Death by Government: Genocide and Mass Murder since 1900*. New York: Routledge, 1994, chapter 2. Available at: <https://hawaii.edu/powerkills/DBG.CHAP2.HTM>.

⁵ Harff, Barbara and Ted R. Gurr, ‘Victims of the State: Genocides, Politicides and Group Repression since 1945,’ *International Review of Victimology*, 1, 1989 p. 24. Available at: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.1023.4008&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

⁶ Emphasis added CM.

Mass Killing in Aerial Bombings

A salient but controversial example of killing by category is the aerial bombing of enemy population centers (for citations supporting the figures in this section, see McCauley⁷; for the history of the controversy over city bombing see Maier⁸). In WWII, Germans bombed English cities and the air forces of the UK while the US bombed German cities. English deaths from German bombs were about 40,000; German deaths from British and American bombs were about 400,000. In the war against Japan, the US firebombed 58 cities, killing about 900,000 Japanese civilians. The atomic bombs against Hiroshima and Nagasaki, dropped in August 1945, killed an additional 105,000 persons.

City bombing, especially in times of war, kills mostly civilians: women, children, and the elderly as military-age men are mostly on the front lines. City bombing thus fits the definition of politicide: mass killing of civilians targeted for their political status and opposition to the power that targets them. In World War II, city bombing was often referred to as “terror bombing” because many believed that the civilian suffering under aerial bombing (“terror”) would lead citizens to demand that their leaders surrender.⁹

It appears to have been easy to order young men to engage in city bombing. I could find no record of American British or German aircrews refusing orders to bomb cities, or even protesting against this kind of mission. No doubt it helped that city bombing was conducted from high altitudes, to avoid flak and enemy fighters. Flying miles above a city, the suffering brought by incendiaries and high explosives are lost from view.

The logic of killing enemy civilians is the logic of the modern nation state. Beginning with the French *levée en masse* in 1793, wars are fought by industrial states that conscript soldiers and organize every kind of production and technology for the war effort. The distinction between soldier and civilian has been eroding since 1793 and an end to this trend is not in sight.¹⁰ Erosion of this distinction has not been lost on those who challenge the state as terrorists.

Mass Killing in Ungoverned Spaces

In much of the traditional literature, politicide has been seen as government work. A group in possession of the instruments of the state attempts to eliminate a weaker group, either by pushing its members out of the country or by killing them directly. It is usually government power, government planning, and government organization that make mass executions, ethnic cleansing and mass deportations possible. One is tempted to say that the difference between a deadly ethnic riot¹¹ and a politicide is the steady application of government power.

⁷ McCauley, Clark, ‘Terrorism and the State: The Logic of Killing Civilians’; in: Forest, James J. F., (ed.), *The Making of a Terrorist: Recruitment, Training and Root Causes*. Westport, CN: Praeger/Greenwood, 2006, chapter 16.

⁸ Maier, Charles S., ‘Targeting the City: Debates and Silences about the Aerial Bombing of World War II,’ *International Review of the Red Cross*, 87(859) 2005, pp. 429-444. Available at: https://www.icrc.org/download/file/irrc_859_2.

⁹ Pape, Robert, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War*. Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1996.

¹⁰ McCauley 2006.

¹¹ Horowitz, Donald L., *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001.

In the 21st century, however, it has become clear that mass political murder can also occur in the absence of government power. Between 1997 and 2008, more than five million people died in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and millions more were displaced as internal or external refugees.¹² Like most reports from the DRC, the death toll is disputed - it may amount to “only” three million people.¹³ Many deaths in the DRC have been the result of malnutrition and disease among those displaced, especially children.

Violence in the DRC occurs at the intersection of civil war, tribal conflicts, conflicts over mineral resources, and interventions by armed actors from neighboring countries. Armed militants from one faction attack villagers of another faction - pillaging, raping, burning, and killing. In the welter of these complex conflicts, it is difficult to determine the motives,¹⁴ but there were signs at least of material gain, status, and security threats represented in reports of pillaging and rape, anger and revenge, as well as killings aimed at outright extermination.¹⁵ Notably the violence included a genocidal campaign by Bantu tribes against pygmy peoples in eastern DRC provinces. This particular campaign appeared to include elements of perceived ‘pollution threat’ insofar as the Bantu are said to see pygmies as not quite human.¹⁶

After years of violence in the DRC, the predominant motive for killing for some may simply be revenge.¹⁷ It appears that, in the absence of government authority, DRC suffers multi-sided politicides in which bands of armed men destroy the shelter and sustenance of those not killed outright. In 2019, mass killing in the DRC continued, both by government security forces and militias, and by many of the more than 140 armed groups operating in the eastern provinces of the DRC.¹⁸

Four Kinds of Perceived Threat that can Lead to Politicide

Many observers have pointed to perceived threat as a motive or justification for ethnic cleansing, genocide, and mass political murder. Drawing from this literature, Chirot and McCauley identified four types of threat associated with killing people by category:¹⁹

¹² Soderlund, Walter C., Donal Briggs, Tom P. Najem, and Blake C. Roberts, *Africa’s Deadliest Conflict: Media Coverage of the Humanitarian Disaster in the Congo and the United Nations Response, 1997–2008*. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2013.

¹³ Spagat, Michael, Andrew Mack, Tara Cooper, and Joakim Kreutz, ‘Estimating War Deaths: An Arena of Contestation,’ *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 53, 2009, pp. 934–950.

¹⁴ Alhindawi, Diana Z. & Jina Moore, Motive for mass killings in Congo is a mystery, but suffering is clear. *New York Times*, 28 April 2018. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/28/world/africa/congo-ituri-joseph-kabila.html>.

¹⁵ Soderlund et al, (2013), op. cit.

¹⁶ Penketh, Ann, ‘Extermination of the Pygmies,’ *The Independent*, 7 July 2004. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/extermiation-of-the-pygmies-552332.html>

¹⁷ Rendall, Rachel (2003). *Congo’s Killing Fields*. Documentary Film. Available at: <https://www.amazon.com/Congos-Killing-Fields-Rachel-Rendall/dp/B0749SJ771> .

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2019: Democratic Republic of Congo: Events of 2018*. Human Rights Watch, 2019. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/democratic-republic-congo>.

¹⁹ Chirot and McCauley 2006, pp. 19-44.

Material threat is the perception that another group blocks “our” economic progress; the convenient response is to eliminate the source of frustration. The US’ removal of the Cherokee from Georgia in 1838, for instance, occurred after gold was discovered on the tribe’s ancestral lands. Evicting the Cherokee from their homes and submitting them to a forced march through unfamiliar territory resulted in many deaths. In this and other cases, removal has been a powerful means of mass political murder.

Status threat is the perception that another group has challenged “our” superior status; anger and revenge are the likely response, as in the years 1904 to 1908, when German colonial military forces killed most of the Herero - about 60,000 people - after members of this tribe had overwhelmed a small German garrison in Southwest Africa.

Security threat is the perception that it is “them or us” Fear drives the violence, as was seen in the mutual massacres and expulsions of Serbs and Croats in the 1990s dissolution of Yugoslavia. Another example is Stalin’s extermination of the kulaks, who owned enough land to hire laborers and buy machinery. Stalin saw these small-scale capitalists as a mortal threat to his Communist Revolution. Soon, the operational definition of kulaks came to include anyone opposing development of state-controlled collective farms. In the 1930s, perhaps a million kulaks died in direct executions or in gulags or during and after deportations to Siberia.²⁰

Fourth and finally, *pollution threat* is the perception that another group is contaminating “our” ethnic, religious, or ideological purity. A well-known example is Hitler’s fear of Jewish pollution of the Aryan race. The distinctive emotion associated with pollution threat is disgust, which was represented in the Nazi’s descriptions of Jews as virus, lice, cockroaches, and rats. These epithets convey not just inferior animal essence, but disgusting animal essence associated with filth and garbage. The action tendencies associated with disgust are distancing and elimination; humans try to avoid viruses, lice, cockroaches, and rats, and to exterminate them if contact cannot be avoided.

Perception of a bad essence is a deep form of dehumanization. A bad essence cannot be reformed or re-educated; it can only be eliminated. All those who share the bad essence become legitimate targets, as all cockroaches are a target - large and small, old and young, whether they have raided our pantry or not. Pollution threat rationalizes killing by category.

The four types of perceived threat often overlap. Whites in the state of Georgia wanted Cherokee lands but were also disturbed by rising Cherokee education and prosperity and by beginnings of intermarriage between Cherokee and white settlers. That is, white Georgians felt not only under a material threat, but also a status-inversion threat, and a racial pollution threat.

Similarly, the German Nazis felt material threat in the commercial success of Jews in business and banking, and felt a status threat from Jewish success in universities and the arts. Once mass killing of Jews had begun, Nazis also felt a security threat: Jews and their sympathizers would surely seek revenge if the Final Solution faltered.

For Stalin, the kulaks represented a material threat (they resisted grain requisitions), a status threat (they competed with Communist Party officials for influence in rural areas), and a pollution threat (they spread capitalist ideas; some even tried to join the Communist Party).

²⁰ Figes, Orlando, *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007.

Thus, although the four motives for politicide can be distinguished, and any given episode of mass killing may emphasize one motive more than another, it appears unlikely that any politicide can be explained in terms of response to only a single motive, a single form of threat. The four kinds of threat are usually mutually reinforcing; pollution threat in particular eases the way to killing by category. Finally, it is important to recognize that the four kinds of threat are associated with strong emotions, notably including fear, anger, and disgust.

Perpetrators, Leaders, and Masses

It is easy to talk about the motives of those who perpetrate mass killing, but who specifically are the perpetrators? Studies of politicide have found that many of the perpetrators of violence have joined in the killing for personal reasons that had nothing to do with intergroup threat.²¹ Some join out of habitual obedience to authority and fear of punishment if they did not join. Some join for the status and power that came from having a gun in their hands. Some join for salary or loot, for access to alcohol and rape, for comradeship, or to escape problems at home or with the law. The killers may indeed perceive a threat toward their own people. Presumably many of their people feel the same threat - but only few are taking part in the killing.

The Khmer Rouge forces that took Phnom Penh in 1975 numbered about 75,000 - about four percent of the 1.8 million Khmer Cambodian males between the ages of 15 and 64 in 1975.²² Although relatively few, the Khmer Rouge in 1975 controlled a nation of 7.5 million and in three years killed at least 1.6 million people.²³

Rwandan genocidaires numbered about 200,000, about 17 percent of Hutu males between the ages of 18 and 54 in 1994.²⁴ In 100 days, the genocidaires killed at least 500,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu.

For the deaths of about six million Jews, Roma, Slavs, and Nazi opponents during WWII, it is not easy to define perpetrators or estimate their numbers. The following quotation offers the only numerical estimate I could find. "Dieter Pohl of the German Institute for Contemporary History estimates that more than 200,000 non-Germans - about as many as Germans and Austrians - 'prepared, carried out and assisted in acts of murder.'"²⁵ If German and Austrian perpetrators were

²¹ Fielding, Leila, *Female Génocidaires: What was the Nature and Motivations for Hutu Female Involvement in Genocidal Violence Towards Tutsi Women During the Rwandan Genocide?* Ph.D. Thesis, Manchester Metropolitan University Business School, 2012. Available at: <https://www.grin.com/document/199827>; Loyle, Cyanne E. (2009). 'Why Men Participate: A Review of Perpetrator Research on the Rwandan Genocide'. *Journal of African Conflicts and Peace Studies*, 1(2), pp. 26-42.

²² The Telegraph, 'Pol Pot Obituary,' The Telegraph, 7 April 1998. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), *World Population Prospects 2019*. UN DESA, 2019. Available at: <https://population.un.org/wpp/DataQuery/>.

²³ Charny, Israel W. (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Genocide*. Vol.1. St. Monica, Cal.: ABC-CLIO, Inc. 1999, p.132.

²⁴ Straus, Scott, 'How many perpetrators were there in the Rwandan genocide? An estimate,' *Journal of Genocide Research*, 6(1), 2004, pp. 85-98.

²⁵ Der Spiegel, 'The Dark Continent: Hitler's European Holocaust Helpers,' *Der Spiegel*, 20 May 2009. Available at: <https://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/the-dark-continent-hitler-s-european-holocaust-helpers-a-625824.html>.

400,000, they would amount to two percent of 24 million German/Austrian men between the ages of 15 and 65 in 1939.²⁶

The numbers for perpetrators - Khmer Rouge, Hutu, German/Austrian - are at best approximations that can be contested, but their general magnitude in relation to population numbers is revealing. In each case, the perpetrators represent only a small percentage of male adults who might have been perpetrators: two percent of Germans/Austrians, four percent of Cambodians, 17 percent of Rwandan Hutu. Similarly, the 600,000 men who served in US Army Air Force bombers in WWII, a maximum estimate of those who joined in city bombing, totaled only about two percent of US male adults.²⁷

These small percentages indicate that perceived threat may be necessary for joining in mass killing, but it cannot be sufficient. The great majority of adult males who perceive an enemy threat never join in mass killing of the enemy. Perpetrators of politicide are a small minority of the people they claim to be defending.

If threat is not a sufficient explanation for the perpetrators, whose contribution to politicide is explained by perceptions of the four kinds of threat? The obvious answer is that the elites and leaders behind the perpetrators believe that they and their people are threatened with material loss, status loss, security loss, and "pollution." The pronouncements of Turkish leaders, Hitler, Pol Pot, and the Hutu Radio Milles Collines make clear that those directing the Armenian, Jewish, Cambodian, and Rwandan politicides saw their victims as mortal threats to their own power and to the survival of their people. With regard to the perceptions of these leaders, only the Turkish case remains controversial (but see Akcem).²⁸

What about those who are neither perpetrators nor leaders? Do they perceive the same threats as their leaders do? Do they support the violence that their leaders organize in the name of group survival? Polling data from before and during a politicide are difficult to come by. This is a research issue for the future. If politicide is perceived as likely, or even just begun, it may be possible to complete at least an internet poll to take the temperature of the general population of the stronger side, to determine the attitudes of the stronger toward the weaker and perhaps even the extent of support for cleansing or killing the weaker.

So how does a perceived threat make politicide possible? Threats perceived by leaders, not only to the welfare of their people but to their own power and status must surely count, or government power could not be organized for mass murder. Threats perceived by the actual killers is likely - not least as justification for their killing, but more personal motives are required to mobilize the few killers from among the many who feel the threat posed by a minority group. For the great majority of the stronger side who are neither leaders nor killers, we simply do not know the extent to which they supported the killing. There are always a few righteous men and women - true heroes

²⁶ Feldgrau, 'WW2 Germany Population, Statistics, and Numbers,' *Feldgrau German Armed Forces Research 1918-1945*. Available at: <https://www.feldgrau.com/WW2-Germany-Statistics-and-Numbers>.

²⁷ Air Force Magazine, 'The US Army Air Forces at War: A Statistical Portrait of USAAF in World War II,' *Air Force Magazine*, 78(6), June 1995, p. 36. ; White, Jeremy, 'What percent of men in America fought in World War 2 out of the entire population of men in America?' Quora, 2015. Available at: <https://www.quora.com/What-percent-of-men-in-America-fought-in-World-War-2-out-of-the-entire-population-of-men-in-America>.

²⁸ Akcam, Taner, 'When Was the Decision to Annihilate the Armenians Taken?' *Journal of Genocide Research*, 21(4), 2019, pp. 457-480. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14623528.2019.1630893>.

- on the stronger side who risk their lives to save some of the weaker. How many disapprove of politicide but are not ready to risk their lives as rescuers, we do not know.

An important implication here is the realization that “they” are not all killers, they are not all alike. It is misleading to say that the Turks committed genocide against the Armenians, that the Germans committed genocide against the Jews, that the Hutu committed genocide against the Tutsi - accuracy requires less generalization and more specificity.

More specifically, the Young Turks political party committed politicide against the Armenians, including encouraging Kurds to attack Armenians. Hitler and the Nazi party committed politicide against Jews, Roma, Slavs, political opponents, and the disabled. A party of Hutu extremists committed politicide against Tutsi and moderate Hutu. The Khmer Rouge, a political party and its army, committed politicide against minority ethnicities (Chinese, Cham, Vietnamese) and against “Cambodians with Vietnamese minds.”

The important point here is that whole-group generalizations cannot be correct, there is always variation with a population as large as an ethnic or a national group, or even within a political party as large as the Nazis or the Khmer Rouge. To indulge in whole-group attributions is to misunderstand the problem of politicide and to throw away the possibilities for preventing politicide that come with recognition of divisions within the group in whose name mass murder is accomplished.

Forecasting Politicide

It is easy to notice two factors in common among the greatest politicides of the 20th century. These cases include Turks killing Armenians; Nazis killing Jews, Roma, Slavs, and political opponents; Khmer Rouge killing “Cambodians with Vietnamese minds” and ethnic minorities; Hutu killing Tutsi and moderate Hutu; and the back-and-forth killing in the DRC.

In each of these cases there was war, interstate war, or civil war, when mass killing occurred. War strengthens popular support for government, strengthens government control of news and information of every kind, raises the specter of “the enemy within,” and desensitizes citizens to death. If our own people are dying, how much can we care about the deaths of those who threaten our people?

In each of these cases, there had been earlier examples of killing by category on a smaller scale, that is, targeting people on the basis of who they were rather than because of anything they had done. Turks, Germans, and Hutu had killed Armenians, Jews, and Tutsi in various episodes years before large-scale mass killing began. In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge began forcible removal of town and city populations to rural labor camps in 1973-74, months before winning and emptying the capital Phnom Penh in 1975.²⁹ As already noted, mass killing in the DRC followed years of back-and-forth attacks on villagers. Past and recent killing by category is a warning of more to come, consistent with the well-worn psychology that “the best predictor of future behavior is previous behavior of the same kind.”

²⁹ Kaufmann, Frank (Ed.) (2009). *New World Encyclopedia*. Pol Pot. Available at: https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Pol_Pot

A third factor next to war and historical antecedents contributing to politicide is political and material support from another country. Germany supported the Young Turks; China supported the Khmer Rouge; France supported Habyarimana's Rwandan Hutu government, even sending French troops to help fight the invading Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). Rwanda and Uganda have supported militant factions in the DRC. Only the Nazi politicide did not need outside support.

War, previous politicide, and foreign support are relatively nonspecific warning signs for politicide. Verdeja reviewed efforts to predict genocide and mass atrocities, and brought together a list of 15 early warning signs that have been suggested as short- or medium-term predictors.³⁰ Here I reorder and categorize his list to show the psychological significance of the predictors. I also note how 14 of Verdeja's 15 predictors apply to the politicide in Rwanda (see Human Rights Watch, 1999, for facts cited below about the Rwanda case).³¹

Threat Perception

1. *Public commemorations of past crimes or contentious historical events that exacerbate tensions between groups.* Belgians had used Tutsi to administer their colony; after independence the Hutu-dominated school system taught a history which portrayed Tutsi victimizing Hutu.
2. *Public rallies and popular mobilization against vulnerable groups.* The "Hutu Ten Commandments" were published in a Hutu Power newspaper in Kigali in 1990; the commandments forbade romantic or business relations with Tutsi and demanded that all important positions in Rwanda be held by Hutu.
3. *Increased hate media, which may sanction the use of violence against already vulnerable civilian groups.* Radio Mille Collines harped on the Tutsi threat represented by RPF incursions from Uganda that began in 1990, and on the Tutsi slaughter of Hutu in neighboring Burundi, calling for attacks on Tutsi both in vengeance and self-defense.
4. *Rapid increase in opposition capacity, raising their perceived threat, or conversely a rapid decline in opposition capacity, which may serve as an opportunity to destroy them and their "civilian base".* In February 1993, the RPF showed new strength in a broad advance against the Rwandan army. A truce followed that led to the Arusha Accords and significant political gains for the RPF. Civilians - mostly Hutu - displaced by the fighting streamed south with stories of RPF brutality.
5. *Spillover of armed conflict from neighboring countries.* Tutsi killed thousands of Hutus in neighboring Burundi in 1972, 1988, and again in 1991. Hutu in Rwanda feared similar treatment by the Tutsi-dominated RPF invading from Uganda. In October 1993, Tutsi officers in Burundi killed Hutu President Ndadaye and thousands died in the ensuing ethnic conflict; Hutu refugees from this conflict living in Rwanda were easily recruited to kill Tutsi.

³⁰ Verdeja, Ernesto, 'Predicting genocide and mass atrocity,' *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal*, 9(3), 2016, pp. 13-32. Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1314&context=gsp>.

³¹ Human Rights Watch, *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda*. Human Rights Watch, 1999. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/rwanda/index.htm#TopOfPage>.

6. *Upcoming elections, which may be perceived as threatening to ruling elites.* The Arusha Accords, which called for RPF participation in a transitional government, and for general elections after 22 months, were a direct threat to Hutu elites dependent on the governing party led by President Habyarimana.

Means

7. *Increase in weapons transfers to security forces or rebels.* In 1993, the Rwandan government and some of its well-to-do supporters bought machetes and small arms for the Interahamwe, a militia organized by the governing Hutu party. On the rebel side, the Ugandan government armed and supported the Tutsi RPF from its first incursion into Rwanda in 1990.
8. *Deployment of security forces against previously targeted civilian groups.* The Interahamwe were first put to killing Tutsi in Bugesera in March 1992.
9. *Nowhere for targeted civilian groups to flee as violence escalates.* Once killing began, the Rwandan army set up roadblocks on major roads, and the Interahamwe set up roadblocks on smaller roads to prevent Tutsi from fleeing.
10. *Physical segregation or separation of the targeted group from the broader population, forced removal or settlement of populations.* Rwandans had government-issued identity papers that specified Hutu or Tutsi beneath their picture - a Tutsi identification card (in practice lack of a Hutu identification card) was a death sentence for those stopped at roadblocks.

Opportunity

11. *Natural disasters, which may overstretch already weak state capacity and embolden opposition groups.* Beginning in the late 1980s, Rwanda suffered economically from drought as well as a sharp drop in world prices for coffee and tea (Rwanda's major exports), and from limits on government spending imposed by the World Bank.
12. *Rapid change in government leadership, such as through assassination or coup, which can create a power vacuum and result in violent contestation for political power.* Rwandan President Habyarimana and Burundian President Ntaryamira, both Hutus, were killed when a surface-to-air missile hit their plane as it prepared to land in Kigali.
13. *Commencement/resumption of armed conflict between government forces and rebels.* The RPF resumed its offensive from Uganda, suspended in the ceasefire that led to the Arusha Accords, immediately after President Habyarimana's plane was shot down.
14. *Arrest, torture, disappearance or killing of political, religious, or economic leaders.* The beginning of politicide in Kigali was the targeted assassination of Hutu opposition leaders and their families. Loss of moderate Hutu leaders gave Hutu extremists within the government a free hand to lead fearful Hutu against their Tutsi neighbors.
15. *Sharp increase in repressive state practices, including removal of political, religious, civil and economic rights, stripping of citizenship. Shift from selective to widespread patterns of repression.* From 1975 to 1990, President Habyarimana controlled Rwanda as the leader of a one-party state. In 1990 he was forced to allow competing political parties. Thus, the

years immediately before the politicide saw what appeared to be political liberalization rather than increased repression.

The first thing to notice about this list is that the Rwanda politicide was heavily over-determined, with all but one of the 15 warning signs present (all but number 15).

The second thing to notice is the distribution of warning signs across categories - six are signs of increased threat perception, four are signs of increased capacity for killing (means), and five are signs of increased opportunity for killing. Psychological analysis of mass killing usually focuses on motives - why perpetrators and those who direct or support them feel that killing is justified. Indeed, my identification of four kinds of threat that can lead to politicide is just such an analysis of motives. Against the usual focus on motivation, Verdeja's list is a useful corrective. It reminds us that killing requires not just motives, but also means and opportunity. Particularly for mass killing, means and opportunity are crucial predictors.

Intervening Against Politicide

A number of outside actions have been proposed to deter politicide. Suppressing the communications, including radio and TV, of the stronger side is one possibility, economic sanctions are another, and arming the weaker yet another. A more expensive action is direct military intervention to prevent or stop mass killing. It is difficult, however, to muster international agreement to implement such interventions – which is a political problem beyond the scope of this chapter.

In any case, these are interventions based on rational choice theory, specifically deterrence theory. Such interventions aim to present leaders and elites of the stronger side of a conflict with costs that are greater than the perceived benefits of mass killing. But these interventions do not address the emotions behind mass killing: fear, anger, and disgust. Rational choice calculations may not succeed in a competing context of strong emotions.

Perhaps a more promising approach is to dissuade other countries from supporting the stronger side, especially after episodes of killing by category have begun. A success story of this kind is the campaign to brand the 2008 Olympics in China as the “Genocide Olympics” because of China's support for the Omar al-Bashir government in Khartoum that was fomenting mass killing in the Darfur region of Sudan. To save its Olympics, China reversed its opposition to UN peacekeepers in Darfur and the killing was reduced, if not eliminated.³²

It is critical to recognize, however, that outside interventions to dissuade the stronger side from attacking the weaker become much less effective once mass killing has begun. Now the perpetrators of politicide feel the kind of desperation that terrorists feel. They must succeed in eliminating the weaker side or the weaker party will take their revenge. Only a major military intervention can halt mass killing once it has begun.

³² McDoom, Opheera, ‘China presses Sudan over Darfur Peacekeepers,’ *Reuters*, 24 February 2008. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sudan-darfur/china-presses-sudan-over-darfur-peacekeepers-idUSL2454337120080224>.

Some idea of what a major military intervention can mean is provided by the NATO peacekeeping mission in Kosovo (KFOR). In 1999, KFOR entered Kosovo with about 50,000 troops from 39 countries; in 2019 KFOR numbers were still about 3,500 from 28 countries.³³ The population of Kosovo is about 1.8 million, so KFOR at its peak strength amounted to about one soldier for every 36 locals. The population of Rwanda is about 12 million - the same 1 to 36 ratios would require about 300,000 soldiers. The implication of this calculation is that, once politicide began in Rwanda, effective intervention from the outside would have required something like 300,000 troops, perhaps 20 divisions. Once violence has begun, peacekeeping is difficult and expensive.

A similar lesson emerges from the UN's efforts against violence in the DRC. The UN mission, known as MONUSCO, has been in the DRC since 1999. In 2019 the MONUSCO mission numbered about 20,000, including military troops, observers, and civilians. The 2019 UN budget for MONUSCO was over one billion dollars; the total cost to UN donor countries since 1999 has been almost 18 billion dollars.³⁴ MONUSCO casualties up to July 2019 included 176 deaths.³⁵ In sum, MONUSCO has been expensive, in both dollars and lives, in a mission that has lasted over 20 years without putting a serious dent in the mass killing in the DRC.

It is possible to argue that the moral case for UN peacekeeping missions should not be affected by cost, or even by effectiveness. One can say that there is a moral case for *trying* to stop the killing, whatever the effectiveness may be. But no one should doubt that, once mass killing begins, it is difficult and expensive to stop.

Some Observations about Politicide

Following the discussion above, it is possible to put together some generalizations emerging from studies of politicide.

1. Politicide is a form of asymmetric conflict, in which the stronger side attacks the weaker.
2. Understanding politicide requires analysis of both sides of the conflict, the weaker as well as the stronger.
3. Perceived threat - including material threat, status threat, security threat, and pollution threat - is an important part of the motivation of mass killing.
4. These threats are associated with strong emotions, including fear, anger, and disgust.
5. Means and opportunity are also important predictors of mass killing.
6. The psychology of support for mass killing appears to be importantly different for perpetrators, leaders, and the mass of those they claim to represent.
7. The actual perpetrators of mass killing are usually few, seldom more than a few percent of adult (largely) males in the stronger group.

³³ KFOR, 'History,' KFOR. Available at: <https://jfcnaples.nato.int/kfor/about-us/history>.

³⁴ United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, 'Fifth Committee Reviews Budget Proposal for Mission in Democratic Republic of Congo, Draft Resolution on Financing Interim Force in Lebanon also Introduced,' United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, 22 May 2019. Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/gaab4324.doc.htm>.

³⁵ United Nations Peacekeeping, *Fatalities by mission and appointment type, up to 31 Jul 2019*. United Nations Peacekeeping, 2019. Available at: https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/statsbymissionappointmenttype_3_24.pdf.

8. Individual-level rewards and punishments are often important for recruiting perpetrators.
9. Once begun, mass killing is difficult and expensive to stop.

In the two sections that follow, I begin with these generalizations and offer suggestions toward preventing and ending terrorism.

From Understanding Politicide to Understanding Terrorism: Looking at Both Sides of the Conflict

Politicide is mass murder by the powerful side of an asymmetric conflict - the stronger side waging war on the weaker. Terrorism is the warfare of the weak, who is only during an attack locally and temporarily superior to the stronger. Thus, the first conclusion of this chapter is that neither politicide nor terrorism can be understood by looking only at the side of the perpetrator - every asymmetric conflict has two sides and it is the interaction of the two sides over time that produces the violence of politicide and the violence of terrorism.

For politicide, attention to both sides can be impeded because attention to the weaker side can be seen as blaming the victims. Nevertheless, this attention is necessary for understanding the history of the conflict. It is often a history of threatened or actual status inversion.

Thus, we cannot understand the Armenian politicide without noticing Christian Armenian success in business and education that reversed their low status as a minority group under Muslim Ottoman authority, and noticing as well that many Armenians, including some from Ottoman lands, volunteered to fight with Russian forces against the Turks in the First World War. Similarly, we cannot understand Nazi killing of Jews without noticing Jewish success in business, education and the arts that reversed their low status as a minority in Germany and Austria. We cannot understand Khmer Rouge killing Vietnamese and “Cambodians with Vietnamese minds” without noticing that Vietnam and Cambodia had centuries of conflicts, and that anti-Vietnamese sentiment was high among Cambodians during the US-Vietnam war, including mass killing of ethnic Vietnamese by Lon Nol’s “anti-Communist” forces.³⁶ We cannot understand Hutu killing Tutsi without noticing how the Belgians had used the Tutsi minority to control the Hutu majority in Rwanda, and without noticing as well the Tutsi killing of Hutu to maintain control of a Hutu majority in neighboring Burundi.

In short, normal human beings are usually not eager to engage in mass killing. Few want to work in a slaughterhouse; killing and the results of killing are disgusting. There is always a history of intergroup conflict, often a history of threatened or actual status reversal, that is used to justify mass killing.

Like politicide, insurgent terrorism is a form of asymmetric conflict, and the same conclusion applies: terrorism cannot be understood without looking at both sides of the conflict. Terrorists are the weak attacking the strong, a non-state force challenging the power of a state. In this case, it can be difficult to attend to the actions of the state and its citizens, because again to do so seems to be blaming the victims. Nevertheless, this attention is necessary for understanding the history

³⁶ Kiernan, Ben, *Blood and Soil: Modern Genocide 1500-2000*. Melbourne: University Press, 2008, p. 548.

and evolution of the conflict from which terrorism emerges. It is often a history of threatened or actual status inversion.

Thus, we cannot understand Islamist terrorism without noticing the grievances of many Muslims against Western countries, especially against the US. These grievances are a familiar litany to scholars of terrorism but not always obvious to government security officials and the citizens of Western countries. A prominent form of grievance is Western support for authoritarian governments in predominantly Muslim countries. Muslims point to the speed with which Western governments in 1991 recognized a military coup against an Islamist election victory in Algeria, and similarly recognized the military coup against an elected Islamist government in Egypt in 2013.

Another prominent grievance is the presence of US troops in predominantly Muslim countries, including 14 Middle Eastern and North African countries.³⁷ US military operations in these countries bring civilian casualties - collateral damage - that can appear frequently in horrifying internet videos. A long-term grievance is continuing US support for Israel in its conflicts with Palestinians and neighboring Muslim countries.

These grievances can be understood as including material, status, and security threats to Muslims. Some Muslims also feel a contamination threat as Western individualist, corporate culture moves into Muslim economies and media streams. We do not need to agree with these grievances to recognize that they are part of the conflict and part of what moves some Muslims to justify or engage in terrorism.

Similarly, we cannot understand right-wing terrorism in the US without noticing the grievances of blue-collar (largely) white Americans. Economically, their wages have stagnated - even two-earner families can barely keep up. Culturally, they have been diminished in a global, information-based, status order that depends on elite education. Even as they are diminished economically and culturally, they see the agencies of government, especially the federal government, supporting the rise of immigrants, refugees, LGBT groups, white-collar government workers, and international corporations.

Opposition to immigrants and refugees in particular is expressed in the slogan “You Will Not Replace Us” (prominent in the Unite the Right rally, Charlottesville, VA, August 2017). At least in the United States “Replacement Theory” has a certain basis in fact; white Americans are in fact being demographically replaced by minorities. In 2018, non-Hispanic whites were for the first time less than half the US population under the age of 15.³⁸ Non-Hispanic whites are expected to become a minority of the US population in 2045.

To sum up, perpetrators of terrorism are like perpetrators of politicide: both see threats to their group that are used to justify killing enemy civilians. We do not have to accept that the threats are real to acknowledge that the threats look real to them.

³⁷ PRESSTV, ‘American military bases in Middle East. Why does US have them?’ PRESSTV, 30 January 2018. Available at: <https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2018/01/30/550726/How-many-military-bases-US-has-in-Middle-East>.

³⁸ Frey, William H., ‘Less than half of US children under 15 are white, census shows.’ *Brookings*, 2019. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/less-than-half-of-us-children-under-15-are-white-census-shows/>.

From Understanding Politicide to Understanding Terrorism: Looking Separately at Leaders, Perpetrators, and the Mass of Those They Claim to Represent

Mass killing requires a substantial organization. It follows that there are usually big differences between the top of the organization and the bottom, between leaders and perpetrators of violence. The differences are even greater when the perpetrators of mass killing are part of a military or paramilitary organization. Some of these differences are obvious. Leaders order killings but seldom carry out any violence themselves (except perhaps suicide, like Hitler, if the enemy is winning). Leaders face an enemy threat different from perpetrators: loss of status and power if the enemy wins. Leaders are usually older and better educated than perpetrators.

These differences are less likely in a terrorist group, which is often so small that leaders share the same life and the same risks as other group members. Status and demographic differences are likely to be smaller in a terrorist group, and leadership is likely to depend more on personal relations and group dynamics than on the authority of official ranks. Importantly, leaders in a small terrorist group usually also take part in armed combat. Thus, in a small terrorist group, the distinction between leader and perpetrating followers becomes small, sometimes near to vanishing. This was the case for 1970s leftist terrorists in the US, Italy and Germany (Weather Underground, Red Brigades, Red Army Faction respectively), most of whom had some university education.

Of course, there are larger terrorist groups in which leaders and perpetrators are very different people. Shining Path in Peru was founded and led by a philosophy professor, whereas most of the perpetrators of violence were recruited from rural youth. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) had commanders and “active-service volunteers” in an explicitly military model. In larger terrorist groups, there are specializations that distinguish not just leaders and perpetrators, but organizational roles such as intelligence, bomb-making, logistics, finance, and public relations.³⁹

Despite the differences resulting from group size, there are basically two ways to become a member of a terrorist group. The first way is to volunteer to join an existing terrorist group. This was the case for individuals traveling to Iraq and Syria to join Islamic State, or to Somalia to join al-Shabaab. The second way is a gradual escalation of radicalization and violence as a terrorist group spins off from some larger movement or protest group. This was the case for many of the 1970s leftist terrorist groups, which spun off as the extremes of university-based anti-war protest groups (e.g. the Weather underground in the US).

Looking at terrorist case histories from different continents and centuries, McCauley and Moskalenko identified three mechanisms of group dynamics that can move a whole group to terrorism.⁴⁰ The three mechanisms of group dynamics are *extremity shift* after group discussion among like-minded individuals, radicalization from *intergroup competition*, and the multiplication of these two dynamics that comes from *group isolation*. These three mechanisms help explain how

³⁹ Altier, Mary Beth, John Horgan, Emma Leonard, and Christian Thoroughgood, *Report on Roles and Functions in Terrorist Groups as They Relate to the Likelihood of Exit* International Center for the Study of Terrorism, April 2013. Available at: https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/OPSR_TerrorismPrevention_Disengagement-Roles-Functions-Report_April2013-508.pdf.

⁴⁰ McCauley, Clark and Sophia Moskalenko, *Friction: How Conflict Radicalizes Them and Us*. 2nd edn. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017, pp 95-148.

a whole group can move together from protest to terrorism, as occurred with 1970s leftist terrorist groups.

Turning now to those who volunteer for an existing terrorist group, McCauley and Moskalenko identified six individual-level mechanisms of radicalization.⁴¹ The obvious one is group grievance, as already described. The other mechanisms include *personal grievance* (“they mistreated me or mine”), *love* for someone already in the terrorist group, *slippery slope* (slow escalation of support for the group to the point of joining), *risk and status seeking*, and *escape* from personal problems, including loneliness.

Except for group grievances, the individual mechanisms depend more on self-interest than group interest. Indeed, these mechanisms show considerable overlap with the self-interested motives mentioned in relation to joining in mass killing. To repeat, some join out of habitual obedience to authority and fear of punishment if they don’t join. Some join for the status and power of having a gun in their hands. Some join for salary or loot, for access to alcohol and rape, for comradeship, or to escape problems at home or with the law.”

It is encouraging to see this convergence of research on perpetrators of politicide and research on perpetrators of terrorism. Both do violence for a group cause, but more self-interested motives appear important for both kinds of perpetrators. Most individuals who join a terrorist group will learn the group’s rationale of grievance after joining, but, as with politicide, grievance and group threat cannot explain why perpetrators are few compared with the many who share the grievance.

What about the mass of those who are neither leaders nor perpetrators of violence? Here is where terrorism research has better data than politicide research. Leaders and perpetrators of politicide claim to represent the whole of the stronger side, but mass opinion is largely unknown. How many justify the violence of politicide is difficult to ascertain; polling of the stronger side before and during politicide is not available. But polling of the group supposedly represented by terrorist leaders and perpetrators is often available.

McCauley reviewed opinion polls of US and European Muslims since the 9/11 attacks.⁴² Contrary to those who cite discrimination against Muslims in Western countries as the source of terrorist attacks from among these Muslims, poll results consistently showed the importance of Western foreign policies. In round numbers, about 40percent of Western Muslims feel that the war on terrorism is a war on Islam. About ten percent say that suicide bombing against civilians is often or sometimes justified in defense of Islam.

These are the ideas that must be targeted in the war of ideas against Islamist terrorism. Broadly held Muslim sympathies for terrorist causes, and justifications of suicide bombing, are what allow a few gullible young Muslims among them in the West to feel that violence will move them “from zero to hero.” To target these ideas, it is necessary first to recognize their importance.

Similarly, for right-wing terrorism, polling data can tell us about the many sympathizers and supporters who themselves are not involved in violence. Here is a poll item that taps sentiment toward immigrants: “Do you think the number of immigrants from foreign countries who are

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 13-94.

⁴² McCauley, Clark, ‘Explaining homegrown Western jihadists: The importance of Western foreign policy,’ *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 12, 2018, pp. 1-10. Available at: <http://www.ijcv.org/index.php/ijcv/article/view/643/pdf>.

permitted to come to the United States to live should be increased a little, increased a lot, decreased a little, decreased a lot, or left the same as it is now?” Respondents saying decreased a little or a lot were coded as anti-immigrant, and results for 2008 showed that the anti-immigrant percentage ranged from 63 percent in Arizona to 34 percent in California.⁴³

Evidently there is broad and substantial support in the US for the right-wing antipathy to immigrants. The slogan “You will not replace us” is likely to have increased appeal as more citizens learn what demographers and right-wing terrorists already know: non-Hispanic whites will soon be a minority in the US.

The next section discusses what can be done to counter terrorism after recognizing that terrorists, like mass killers in politicide, have grievances that cannot be suppressed or ignored.

From Understanding Politicide to Understanding Terrorism: Countering Political Violence and Terrorism

An old adage has it that “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Recognizing grievances before terrorism begins can be the ounce of prevention.

Few groups move to terrorism as their first political expression. Peru’s Shining Path came close to this kind of start; it spent nearly a decade recruiting quietly in rural areas before its first terrorist attack in 1980. But the usual pattern is a longer period of escalating protest, activism, attacks on property, and attacks on security forces and government officials before moving to attacks on civilians. This was the trajectory of 1970s student-based movements in the US, Italy, and Germany that protested against the Vietnam War.

The time to prevent terrorism is early in the escalation of intergroup conflict. In her history of Italy’s Red Brigade and Germany’s Red Army Faction, Della Porta emphasized the escalation of violence between police and protesters.⁴⁴ With each escalation, some protesters gave up radical action but others, outraged by their own injuries and arrests or those of their friends, escalated their violence against police and government officials.

The first step in avoiding escalation is treating protesters with restraint and careful observance of their rights as citizens. And the foundation for restraint is recognizing protester grievances. Rather than treating protesters as traitors or ‘crazies’, authorities should treat them as citizens with a grievance they are entitled to express. This can be difficult when protesters are insulting the police, spitting at them, making fun of them. But difficult is not impossible.

Sometimes, as in authoritarian states, protests can be crushed, but in most Western countries, norms of rule of law and procedural justice will generate new sympathy and new recruits for protesters who are suppressed. The most successful recruitment tool for the IRA was Bloody Sunday, when British soldiers shot 26 unarmed Irish civilians participating in a protest march.

⁴³ Butz, Adam M. and Jason E. Kehrberg, ‘Estimating anti-immigrant sentiment for the American states using multi-level modeling and post-stratification, 2004–2008,’ *Research and Politics*, April-June 2016, pp. 1-7.

⁴⁴ Della Porta, Donatella, *Clandestine Political Violence*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

The War of Ideas against terrorism should begin before, not after, the first terrorist attack. A social movement or political movement that attacks particular government policies - or after escalation, attacks the legitimacy of an entire government - can be countered in one of two ways.

The first and most obvious, the default response to those who challenge government policies, is to defend these policies. The protesters are wrong, the government is right. The protesters are victims of propaganda and misinformation.

Thus, the US reaction to Islamist extremism has been attacks on Islamist groups. The US State Department's "Think Again, Turn Away" program, initiated in English in 2013, seems to have tweeted more about what's wrong with ISIS and its supposedly idyllic state than about what's right about US foreign policy.⁴⁵ Google's Redirect program, which began in 2016, sends users seeking Islamic-State-related content to anti-ISIS YouTube videos.⁴⁶

Reaction to right-wing extremism has been similar. In 2019, Facebook initiated a ban on "white nationalist" and "white supremacist" content. Users seeking or posting such content will be directed to a nonprofit group's website that aims to help people leave hate groups.⁴⁷

The reaction to both Islamist and right-wing extremism have this in common: to try to suppress extremist messages and show the negative sides of extremist groups. Notably absent is anything like an explicit rebuttal of extremist grievances; there has been no defense of US foreign policy in Muslim lands, no argument why white decline in Western countries is not a threat.

Unfortunately, it does not appear that suppression and denial are working. It has been 19 years since the attacks of September 11, 2001. The US military, as already noted, is involved in fighting terrorism in numerous, predominantly Muslim, countries. Trillions of dollars have been spent on the war on terrorism and for US homeland security. But Western Muslims were still trying to join Islamic State until it was vanquished as a military force in 2018-2019. A trickle of Muslims, mostly second and third generation immigrants, continue to attempt terrorist attacks in North America and Northern Europe.

In short, the War of Ideas is not working. So long as 40 percent of Western Muslims see the war on terrorism as a war on Islam, so long as ten percent justify suicide bombing in defense of Islam, so long will a few individuals and small groups rise in what they understand as retributive and liberating violence.

A second and more promising approach to the War of Ideas against Islamist terrorism is to admit that Muslims have real grievances and move the argument to whether violence is a useful response to these grievances. This approach can be found in the UK.⁴⁸

Deradicalization (de-rad) of individuals convicted of terrorist offenses in the UK is in the hands of probation officers, often working with community groups that try to provide support and

⁴⁵ Katz, Rita, 'The State Department's Twitter War with ISIS Is Embarrassing,' *Time*, 16 September 2014. Available at: <https://time.com/3387065/isis-twitter-war-state-department/>.

⁴⁶ Greenberg, Ted, 'Google's Clever Plan to Stop Aspiring ISIS Recruits,' *Wired*, 7 September 2016. Available at: <https://www.wired.com/2016/09/googles-clever-plan-stop-aspiring-isis-recruits/>.

⁴⁷ Matsakis, Louise, 'Will Facebook's New Ban on White Nationalist Content Work?' *Wired*, 27 March 2019. Available at: <https://www.wired.com/story/facebook-ban-white-nationalism-separatism-hate-speech/>.

⁴⁸ McCauley 2018, pp. 1-10.

mentoring for probationers. Sara Marsden has interviewed more than 30 of these frontline de-rad workers to learn what they do and what they think works. The results are interview excerpts rather than statistics about success and failure.

The radicalizing issue for many probationers is foreign policy. Here is a senior probation officer talking:

“Social exclusion, racism, things like that, you know, diversity’s a big part of it, foreign policy, perceived injustice, and grievance... grievance is an important part, foreign policy, it’s about the impact factors, that people are seeing Muslim children dying on the TV, these can have big impacts on people”.⁴⁹

A notable finding of the interviews Marsden conducted is that probation officers and community mentors report some success with interventions that do not directly challenge jihadist ideas. Instead, interventions aim for disengagement and desistance by debating not the grievance, but the violent response to grievance. Here is a community mentor talking:

“... if they want to talk about foreign policy, we’ll just join their argument, you know, I think you’re right about Afghanistan or Iraq, why should other people go into Afghanistan or Iraq and kill innocent people, they’ve no right to go there - yes, you’re right. So, then these people start thinking, well hang on we’ve got the same views, at the end then, when the conversation finishes on that particular subject, what we have both agreed is that, yes, we don’t like it what’s happening, but what is the action we can take, to stop that from happening?”⁵⁰

This kind of intervention may be particularly helpful with individuals who strongly empathize with the suffering of others. Rather than insist the probationer deny Western victimization of Muslims, or deny that this suffering justifies violence in return, the debate turns on whether violence or support for violence is the most effective response to Muslim grievances.

Here, a probation officer reflects on the limits of the possible in deradicalization:

“He’s always going to have strong political beliefs, that’s the way he is, and he’s got a really strong sense of injustice, but I think what he’s learned now, is that he can’t channel those in the way he was.”⁵¹

It seems that UK probation officers have discovered a way to get beyond the suppression and denial that is not working in the War of Ideas against Islamist terrorism.

Something similar may be useful against right-wing terrorism in the US.

Consider the attack targeting Hispanics in El Paso, Texas, on 3 July 2019. The attack killed 22 persons and injured 24 others. The killer left a manifesto citing the “Great Replacement,” to say that he was defending against foreign invasion. The response of many US politicians has been to say that the attack is “senseless” (tantamount to saying the perpetrator is crazy), that white people

⁴⁹ Marsden, Sarah V., *Reintegrating Extremists: Deradicalisation and Desistance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p. 99.

⁵⁰ Marsden 2017, p. 63.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 100.

are far from disappearing, that Americans should remember that the US has always been an immigrant nation.⁵² Public response to the attack has featured marches against hate.

None of these reactions speak to those who are feeling fear and anger about the status decline of white Americans. It is not useful to tell those in the grip of strong emotion that they are mistaken, that there is nothing to fear, nothing to be angry about. A more useful approach might be to acknowledge the ongoing apprehension among many white Americans or a demographic replacement and then ask what might usefully be done about this perceived threat. Is violence going to help? Are other responses possible? What might be done to improve the social and economic welfare of blue-collar workers in the US? Might such improvement raise the birthrate of blue-collar families, including white families?

These particular possibilities are not crucial; it is a response that starts from acknowledgement of grievances that is important. As in the case of Islamic grievances, public recognition of white nationalist grievances might do more against radicalization than suppressing and denying the existence of such grievances. Suppressing and denying grievances tends to create anger and alienation on top of the original grievances, in this and other cases.

Conclusion

Politicide and terrorism are related as outcomes of asymmetric conflict that has escalated to violence. Most intergroup conflicts do not evolve to violence, but to understand those that do we need to consider both politicide and terrorism as forms of intergroup conflict. Theory and practice require specifying the conditions under which asymmetric conflict leads to violence. Perceived threat, means, and opportunity are all potential predictors of both politicide and terrorism.

For groups with more power, there are four kinds of threat: material, status, security, and pollution threats. Material threat instigates mostly anger; status threat instigates both anger and shame; security threat instigates fear; and pollution threat instigates disgust. The 9/11 attacks, for instance, combined material, status, and security threats to the US.

Although many believe that the predominant response to terrorist attack is fear, there is evidence that anger is predominant. Back, Küfner, and Egloff examined emotion words in millions of words of texts sent in the US on the day of the 9/11 attacks.⁵³ Anger-related words increased throughout the day, ending six times higher than fear- and sadness-related words.

This result is important for two reasons. First it shows the usefulness of assessing mass opinion, especially emotions, for the victims of terrorist attacks. Mass opinion can be of interest not only for terrorist sympathizers but also for terrorist victims. Second, it warns of the power of *jujitsu politics*, the terrorist strategy that aims for anger and over-reaction that is likely to increase sympathy and recruitment for the terrorist cause.⁵⁴

⁵² Beckett, Lois and Jason Wilson, 'White power ideology': why El Paso is part of a growing global threat,' *The Guardian*, 4 August 2019. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/aug/04/el-paso-shooting-white-nationalist-supremacy-violence-christchurch>.

⁵³ Back, Mitija D., Albrecht C. P. Küfner, and Boris Egloff, 'The emotional timeline of September 11, 2001,' *Psychological Science*, 21, 2010, pp. 1417–1419.

⁵⁴ McCauley and Moskalenko 2017 pp. 149-160.

For groups with less power, the same four threats have become reality in four different kinds of perceived loss. Material loss instigates anger; status loss instigates anger and shame; cultural identity loss instigates fear; and too many of them contaminating “us” instigates disgust.

An important difference between politicide and terrorism, then, is the difference between threatened loss and actual loss. The four threats that move the more powerful towards the use of violence against the less powerful are usually threats of anticipated loss with relatively small actual losses. In contrast, the less powerful side attacks the more powerful with a sense of desperation that comes from experiencing the four threats as having become the reality of four kinds of major losses.

Both politicide and terrorism are extreme forms of violence that target civilians. Extreme violence is almost always preceded by lesser forms of violence, including violence against property, violence that does not necessarily cause irreversible harm (beatings, rape, torture, expulsion), and killing on a smaller scale before larger killing.

Escalation of violence usually includes an expansion of the category of acceptable targets. This expansion has both a moral and a cognitive aspect. Morally, escalation means that more of ‘them’ are seen as guilty of, or supportive of, violence against ‘us’; thus, more are justifiable targets of our justice, revenge, and self-defense. Cognitively, escalation means that they are essentialized such that “they are all the same,” “they are disgusting.” Therefore, all of them are justifiable targets. This is the significance of calling the enemy by the names of disgusting life forms - viruses, lice, cockroaches, rats, and pigs, for example.

To sum up, studies of politicide lead to three generalizations relevant to countering terrorism.

First, neither politicide nor terrorism can be understood without studying both sides of the conflict.

Rather than studying only the perpetrators of violence, the victims must also be studied. An impediment to this kind of study is that it risks blaming the victims. Studying the victim group in mass killing, or the victim group in terrorist attack, is nevertheless required to understand the trajectory of intergroup conflict that produces violence against civilians.

For both politicide and terrorism, trajectories of escalating violence depend on means and opportunity. Politicide requires the identification of victims, means of killing, and organization and motivation of killers. When politicide has the power of a state behind it, the means and opportunity are not difficult to find. For terrorists, without the power of a state, the means and opportunity are more problematic. But terrorists still require the identification of victims, means of killing, and organization and motivation of killers. These requirements have led security officials to focus on terrorist attempts to surveil targets, procure firearms and bomb materials, and communicate grievances and methods on the internet.

It is worth noting that means and opportunity can create motivation. An example is the case of Dr. al-Balawi, whose suicide bombing at Khost in December 2009 killed several high-level CIA agents. Months of internet flaming in support of jihad and suicide bombing did not lead al-Balawi to any radical action. Then Jordanian intelligence officers forced him to travel to Pakistan to try to

make contact with Dr al-Zawahiri. Connection with jihadist militants provided means and opportunity and al-Balawi moved from radical opinion to radical action. Al-Balawi wrote that he would be ashamed not to take up the bomb vest once it was offered.⁵⁵

Second, neither politicide nor terrorism can be understood without separate attention to leaders, perpetrators, and mass sympathizers of violence against civilians.

The differences between leaders and perpetrators tends to be larger for politicide than for terrorism. Nevertheless, perpetrators of politicide and terrorism are similar in the importance of individual and selfish motives in recruitment to violence. Perpetrators of both politicide and terrorism are few - usually just a few percent - in relation to the size of the group they claim to do violence for. The outgroup threat in asymmetric conflict is felt by many on both sides, and cannot explain why so few engage in violence. Individual and selfish motives, and means and opportunity help explain the perpetrators' action.

Assessment of mass opinion is an important part of understanding asymmetric conflict. As politicide and terrorism are forms of political conflict, the everyday tools for the analysis of political competition will be useful - not just polling but focus groups, and careful pilot testing of new messages and policies.

Polling before and during politicide is difficult, but polling to understand terrorism is not. Polling of both terrorist sympathizers and terrorist victims is relatively easy and often available. The first can track progress in the War of Ideas; the second can track the success of the terrorist strategy of seeking over-reaction to terrorist attack (*ujitsu politics*).

Third, interventions against politicide and terrorism require recognizing the intergroup threats and grievances perceived by both stronger and weaker sides of the conflict.

Like the weaker side, the stronger side in politicide perceives threats and feels grievances. These are the justification of mass killing; if they seem unreal to outsiders, they are nonetheless real to the killers, their leaders, and at least some of those they claim to represent. Likewise, terrorists perceive threats - and losses - perpetrated by the state they oppose.

Interventions against terrorism are unlikely to succeed without attention to the threats and grievances perceived by terrorists and their sympathizers and supporters. For Islamist terrorism, this means attention to grievances relating to Western foreign policies toward predominantly Muslim countries. Instead, Western governments have focused on what's wrong with jihadist groups and their fundamentalist forms of Islam, and have tried to suppress or ignore Muslim grievances. So far there is no sign that suppressing and ignoring grievances shared by substantial percentages of Muslims, including Western Muslims, is winning the War of Ideas.

UK counter-radicalization practitioners have discovered a promising and constructive alternative to suppressing and ignoring; they agree that Muslims have real grievances against Western foreign

⁵⁵ Turcan, Metin and Clark McCauley, 'Boomerang: Opinion versus action in the radicalization of Abu-Mulal al-Balawi,' *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*, 3(1) 2010, pp. 14-31.

policies, then turn the discussion to how best to reduce these grievances. The human and moral costs of violence are easier arguments than convincing Muslim activists and terrorists that Muslim grievances are illusory.

Similarly, for right-wing terrorism, interventions are unlikely to succeed without attention to the threats and grievances perceived by terrorists and their sympathizers. This means, in the case of the US, attention to genuine grievances relating to the status decline of non-Hispanic whites in relation to darker-skinned immigrants. Instead, Western governments have focused on what's wrong with right-wing groups and with right-wing terrorist individuals. Labeling right-wing terrorists as mentally unstable racists does not address the anti-immigrant sentiments shared by millions of Americans and by many Europeans as well.

Politicide and terrorism emerge out of asymmetric conflicts - political conflicts with histories of action and reaction over time. It is these trajectories of conflict that must be understood to prevent and reduce the extremes of violence against civilians that are justified as "killing them to save us." Finding, fixing, and finishing the individual perpetrators of violence against civilians, few as they are - at least in the West - will not resolve the problem.

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