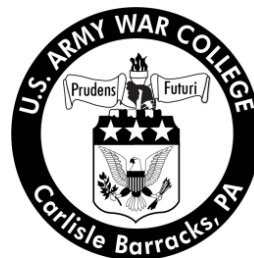


Strategy Research Project

Responsibility to Protect Whom? Strategic Challenges in Confronting Genocide

by

Colonel James H. Harrell II
United States Army



United States Army War College
Class of 2014

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Responsibility to Protect Whom? Strategic Challenges in Confronting Genocide

His cold eyes stated at me. At last he said wearily, 'I have more faith in Hitler than in anyone else. He alone has kept his promises, all his promises, to the Jewish people.'

—Elie Wiesel¹

The word “genocide” stimulates a visceral reaction because in the 21st century we know its face, we know how easily it can occur, how closely beneath the surface it lies. We have seen the images of bulldozed mounds of corpses, emaciated children, bins full of gold teeth and piles of bullet-holed skulls. These images tug at us, touching our psyches in ways we wish they couldn't. We feel this way not only because it frightens us as individuals, but because it also tears at the very fabric of human existence, which is woven from the idea of a collective good, a network of social contracts, a surrendering of some of each individual's interest to care for others. Humanity is distinct due to the degree to which we have woven this fabric, and unique in the dangers we pose to our own existence. Genocide suggests how easily this fabric may shred, how this basic contract can be broken, and how easily humanity may slip over the edge into collective annihilation. In our guts, we know genocide is wrong. So why don't we stop it?

The United States has a poor record preventing genocide. From the Indian Wars to Armenia, from World War II to Rwanda, American policy and strategy at the time of genocide have failed to prevent millions of deaths. Why is this the case? Is the United States morally bankrupt? Are the words of the Founding Fathers empty, a smokescreen for the greedy and heartless pursuit of material interests? Perhaps the answer is more complicated than that, rooted in the complexity of the environments whence genocide originates and our capacity and capability to do something about it.

Viewed in terms of the role of the state and the complexities of intervention, the record of the United States in the face of genocide is defensible; it is the result of a deliberate and rational balancing between the role of the state to serve its own people, its domestic and international functions, and the state's moral obligations as a member of the global community. As horrible as genocide is, American decisions to stop genocide unfold in the context of navigating difficult decision terrain; they have not been and will not be *fait accompli*. We will look at the factors that contribute to American decisions to confront genocide. I will examine the moral and legal roles and responsibilities of the state, the nature of strategy, and the idea of the United States as a unique state. Next I will describe the crime of genocide and the complex and frangible international legal and moral framework surrounding it. I will analyze the context, complexity, and calculus of U.S. policy and actions during three genocides. Finally, I will offer suggestions to assist future strategic leaders confronting the crime. The convergence of values and interests, state obligations, international norms, aspiration, and reality is a busy and dangerous one, and the American way of dealing with it during genocide is, as Ambassador Samantha Power puts it, "ruthlessly effective."² The American system is not ruthlessly effective in preventing genocide, but that is not its purpose. The American system ruthlessly pursues the national interests of the United States.

At the start, a note on personal experience and the moral weight of the study of genocide. The study of genocide is psychologically toxic, and the experience of it is arguably more so. As a U.S. Army officer in Bosnia in 1996, I saw firsthand the cost of genocide in mass graves, in silent villages whose only inhabitants were swarms of fat

flies, in a ravine full of scattered bones and the cast-aside effects of everyday life - toys, clothes, letters, photos - all the things the killers deemed worthless as they made the area “ethnically clean,” and in the distant eyes and soft voices of the women who survived. This paper does not defend inaction in the face of genocide and it does not hold up the record of the United States as flawless. From a purely moral standpoint, there is no excuse for a state with the means available to look away from genocide; in reality, and in the wider view of strategy and the basic functions of the state, states often cannot or will not align the means necessary to stop mass killing. This fact adds to the moral burden we all bear and illuminates the true cost of these difficult strategic decisions. For the future strategic leader, this paper may serve as an introduction to a problem that will tragically most likely occur again and again, and offers a starting point for further consideration. It advocates the need for policymakers to carefully weigh the obligation of the state to its people against the obligation to protect the people of the world. It hopefully attempts to introduce an element of healthy realism that will broaden discussion, expand options, and temper emotions at the critical moment of deciding whether or not to act.³

Roles, Identity, and Responsibilities of the State

To understand the human social fabric, the role and obligations of the state, and the complexity of state decision-making, and to appreciate the moral and political calculus necessary to deal with genocide, one must examine why in the first place this fabric exists. Human social organization stems from the survival strategy that the likelihood of survival increases tremendously as the result of the cooperative power of many people working together. It is this basic contract – akin to Rousseau’s social contract - between individual and group, this promise that life will be better tomorrow, if

we act as a collective that makes human social structure unique. With the formalization of political and economic norms, the state emerged as the ultimate expression of the phenomenon of tying national cognitive geographies to the physical world in pursuit of long-term collective security and self-perpetuation.⁴

The people define the state and the state derives its power from the people. The state has basic and inabrogable⁵ responsibilities to its own citizens that define the state's existential interests. The people ally themselves to the state, trust their lives and futures, and expend their efforts for the collective identity in exchange for basic promises or assurances from the state to provide for and protect the people.⁶ Although states have fulfilled this responsibility in a variety of ways over space and time, it is this promise to preserve the people, and in-turn the state, that has defined the basic purpose and highest calling of the state. The state cannot violate this promise to its citizens, this responsibility to protect *them*, without grave consequences.

Security is the fundamental role of the state. The people expect the state to provide basic benefits including security from external attack, an effective internal collective decision-making process, laws to govern basic individual and corporate transactions, the foundations of a functional economy, and access to conduct social, military, political, and economic intercourse with other individuals and states. These basic functions cannot be sacrificed by the state in pursuit of lesser interests, and cannot be allowed to deteriorate to the point of dysfunction without the people taking action to correct the state, or to ignore the state and return to ethnic or familial levels of self-reliance.

By the 20th century, international law described states as individual “persons,” collective identities with certain intrinsic rights. Sovereignty, the identity of the state as a “person” under international law, has been argued and interpreted various ways, but expresses generally as described in the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States which defines, “The state as a person of international law should possess the following qualifications: a) a permanent population; b) a defined territory; c) government; and d) capacity to enter into relations with the other states,” with rights to “defend its integrity and independence, to provide for its conservation and prosperity, and consequently to organize itself as it sees fit, to legislate upon its interests, administer its services, and to define the jurisdiction and competence of its courts.”⁷ Further, the Convention defined the personal sanctity of the state and the limits of international intervention in Article 8, “No state has the right to intervene in the internal or external affairs of another.”⁸

With sovereignty comes the notion of non-interference.⁹ In December, 1965, the United Nations reaffirmed the idea of state sovereignty in General Assembly resolution 2131(XX), resolving that “all peoples have an inalienable right to complete freedom, the exercise of their sovereignty and the integrity of their national territory, and that, by virtue of that right, they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.” The same resolution proscribed intervention, “No State has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in the internal or external affairs of any other State. Consequently, armed intervention and all other forms of interference or attempted threats against the personality of the State or against its political, economic and cultural elements, are

condemned.”¹⁰ As an indicator to the complexity of the environment, GA/2131(XX) simultaneously asserts the sovereignty of states, weakens the ability of the United Nations to resolve conflict and prevent violations of international law, and strengthens individual states’ justifications for their actions. Even in the U.N.-construct of collective security, the state remains sacrosanct, free to justify pursuit of its interests at home and abroad as it sees fit.

In formulating and executing strategy in pursuit of their basic purpose to secure and advance their interests, states use the aggregate foundation of national identity and state socio-political culture as a lens through which to view the world, to determine and prioritize interests, to develop policy, and to act domestically and internationally.¹¹

Strategy, the act of positioning the state for success, is a constant high-stakes balancing act between ends, ways, and means in the presence of risk.¹² Balance is the key, and the goal is never to put the state into a destructive disequilibrium. Rare is the case that a state can myopically pursue any single interest and not increase risk elsewhere. During periods of success, states effectively balance basic responsibilities to citizens, the desire to protect themselves and to grow beyond their current sphere, and the interests and power of other states. The Roman and British Empires at their peaks seem to have been examples of the right balance. States which failed to find that balance, such as France during its Napoleonic experiments, suffered defeats and found their power waning. States which failed to meet their most basic responsibility to provide for the people as a result of internal dysfunction, external aggression, overextension, or distraction simply ceased to exist. In one particularly poignant example, Nazi Germany collapsed in utter social failure and military defeat in 1945.

Perhaps, though, states should look beyond simple self-service. Perhaps the role of the state should extend beyond its borders and contribute to the general welfare and promote the common defense of the world community. In May, 1945, Dutch Quaker missionary, pacifist, and education reformer Kees Boeke,¹³ described a deeper democracy, “If we really wish to see the whole population united, like a big family, in which the members care for each other’s welfare as much as for their own, we must set aside the quantitative principle of the right of the greatest number and find another way of organising ourselves.”¹⁴ In his essay, Boeke described a “sociocratic” system in which there would be three fundamentals,

The first is that the interests of all members must be considered, the individual bowing to the interests of the whole. Secondly, solutions must be sought which everyone can accept: otherwise no action can be taken. Thirdly, all members must be ready to act according to these decisions when unanimously made. The spirit which underlies the first rule is really nothing else but concern for one’s neighbour, and where this exists, where there is sympathy for other people’s interests, where love is, there will be a spirit in which real harmony is possible.¹⁵

In this way, states might pursue interests based on brotherly love and in an environment of respect for equals, and thus avoid a repeat of 20th-century horrors.

Among the globally resonant lessons of the World Wars was the need for a greater collective security expressed in a universal and enforceable legal framework for the protection of human rights. This system would require states not only to resolve international differences peacefully, but would also charge them formally with the responsibility to protect those basic rights for their own citizens.¹⁶ With the founding of the United Nations, members sought to extend the basic promise of the state to all the world’s peoples and to minimize the horrors of future conflicts, aspiring to create a global security framework, in essence a “global state” in the sense Boeke described,

founded on universal moral commonalities and a desire to look out for one's neighbor, based in international law, and realized by the power of the United Nations and other international bodies. The framers of the United Nations Charter pledged to "practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest."¹⁷ As Boeke might agree, the concept holds great promise. As promising as the concept of sociocracy is, success relies on states recognizing the greater good as more vital than individual state interests, and this does not seem to be a natural tendency.

Since 1945 humanity has fallen somewhat short of these aspirations. Despite the vision of the greater collective protection afforded by the new world order, old world national socio-cultural differences and political-economic competition continued to persist and drive people toward ever-bloodier and more brutal conflicts. Genocide did not stop with the liberation of the death camps, with the U.N. Charter, with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or with the 1948 Convention; more than twelve million more found their ends as victims of hate in more than fifty major instances of genocide since 1945.¹⁸

Why? The reasons lie in the gaps between aspiration and reality; between needs and wants; between the familiar conventions of the old world order and the dreams of the new. The old world of nations and states endures, entrenched by basic individual and social needs unified in ethnicity and locality, and rooted in social and political inertia borne of fear and uncertainty. The higher-level socio-political aspirations espoused at the U.N. resonate unevenly at home, in places where a person's goal is still to look out

for himself and those like him, where the next meal or a safe night's sleep are not guaranteed. The combined weight of history, treaties and agreements, statements of common morality, and formal political and legal frameworks fails to lessen the basic commitment between the state and its people: to promote its interests above all others at the expense of greater humanity. In this enduring, uneven, and volatile socio-economic and geopolitical terrain, the risk to the state of abrogating its compact with its citizens remains great.

An "Exceptional" State?

What of the role of the United States as *a state*? How is it different from other states? How does it see itself and how does that perception shape policy and strategy? The United States at birth was a product of a European cultural, political, and legal heritage leavened with Enlightenment philosophy and a self-centric, self-reliant, morally-bounded sense of purpose born of vast geography and a diverse population, separated from mother Europe. This combination of ideas, survival strategy, and environment produced a uniquely-American and extremely resilient way of thinking, living, and relating that would permanently shape its identity.

The United States from the beginning clearly communicated its national values in terms of its understanding of basic human rights, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness,"¹⁹ of the responsibilities and limits of governance, of the responsibility of the rulers to the ruled,

That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness,²⁰

and the fundamental expectations of the role of the state,

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.²¹

With its Declaration of Independence and Constitution, the new state clearly defined how it viewed its role, and took on a new level of social responsibility that would prove to be a heavy burden in years to come. It is important not to miss the significance of the moment of the specific meaning of the phrases “domestic tranquility” and “to ourselves and our posterity.” These simple phrases represent the immutable *raison d’être* of the United States to protect and self-perpetuate in the interests of its citizens. With this first fusion of idealism as realism, the United States was to be a state with a never-ending and somewhat unique challenge to balance its realistic interests with its idealistic aspirations both home and abroad. With these words, the state signed its covenant with its people but left somewhat fuzzy its commitment to anyone else. The solemnity of the commitment was literal and would firmly guide American policy over time.

Two important “exceptions” derive from the American identity and the formal melding of idealism and realism, with an enduring impact on American strategy. First is the tenacious American grip on sovereignty. The American independence movement that culminated in the Declaration of 1776 reflected a deep value for America’s right to act as a state and to pursue American interests as an equal with other states rather

than a subservient colony to another power. Additionally, it reflected a deep suspicion of and aversion to interference from foreign powers.²²

Second, having made the unequivocal moral and political statements of the Declaration and the Constitution, and never failing to narrate its own role as an exceptional moral beacon, the United States left itself vulnerable to a domestic and international expectation that U.S. policy and action should predominantly reflect values over all other interests. Over time the domestic and global communities have come to look to the U.S. to act in ways blindly consistent with its stated humanistic values, and in doing so to preserve its strategic credibility, to validate its contribution, and to provide a consistent beacon to human aspiration. Audiences have inflated this expectation, fortified it with rhetoric and legend, and filtered it through countless lenses of perception. This inflated and simplistic view complicates U.S. strategic challenges. In his September 11, 2013, New York Times op-ed, Russian President Vladimir Putin illuminated the complexity this expectation presents to strategy when he responded to previous remarks by President Obama, “I would rather disagree with a case he (Obama) made on American exceptionalism, stating that the United States’ policy is ‘what makes America different. It’s what makes us exceptional.’ It is extremely dangerous to encourage people to see themselves as exceptional, whatever the motivation.”²³ Obama and Putin both missed the mark on American exceptionalism. All states have values, so it is not idealism that makes America exceptional. It is not American policy that makes America exceptional; all states have policy. The exception is the actual and perceived seamless melding of the two. Often, in light of competing and more vital interests the U.S. has acted in ways seemingly inconsistent with that moral expectation and it has at

times put itself in a less than favorable light when measured purely against that standard. In reality, though uncomfortable, it is often the moral component that weighs less.

The Crime of Genocide

The crime of genocide is a broken promise between humanity and itself, a failure to fulfill our responsibility to protect fellow humans from the collective and contagious insanity of unprovoked mass murder. There are many definitions, and the term wasn't coined until 1944, when the indefatigable Polish-Jewish jurist Raphael Lemkin defined the crime as a way to characterize the phenomenon embodied in 20th century mass killings. Lemkin combined geno-, from the Greek word for race or tribe, with -cide, from the Latin word for killing.²⁴ Genocide is a unique criminal combination of activities designed to bring harm for the purposes of denying human rights to a group solely based on genetic or social identity.

The crime as defined is relatively new, but the phenomenon is not. For centuries, human populations conducted warfare that included genocidal activities as a matter of course. Thucydides wrote, "The Melians surrendered at discretion to the Athenians, who put to death all the grown men whom they took, and sold the women and children for slaves, and subsequently sent out five hundred colonists and inhabited the place themselves."²⁵ This treatment of the Melians was the rule of the time, not the exception.

To legally acknowledge and define the crime, in 1948 the United Nations General Assembly adopted Treaty No. 1021, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.²⁶ According to the treaty,

(Article 2) defines genocide as 'any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group ... ', including:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.²⁷

The definition is to this day actively debated. For the purposes of this paper, the U.N. definition suffices. Looking at genocide as the grossest form of obscenity, the words of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart ring true, "I know it when I see it."²⁸ Lemkin and the U.N. codified the crime of genocide not in a vacuum but as a result of the ages-old historical pattern of targeted mass killing, at the tipping point of the revelation of the Holocaust of World War II, and in the interest of preventing it in the future. As jurists, scholars, and policy makers debate which activities qualify as genocide, the argument remains one hundred percent moot to the victims.

The U.N. strategy against genocide continues to evolve. The 1948 Convention, consistent with the Charter, did not supplant state sovereignty, and thus lacked teeth in pre-emption and enforcement. Short of a decision to violate member states' sovereignty, the United Nations had little basis to directly hold guilty states accountable. In practice, the law burdened the international community with responsibility for action rather than the genocidal nations and states themselves, and allowed a time delay between indicators and warnings of genocide and international action that often worsened the bloodshed.²⁹ After the disasters of Bosnia and Rwanda in the 1990s, the United Nations introduced the concept that guilty states could be held accountable and

that sovereignty could be trumped by the moral obligation of the global community to intervene to prevent genocidal killings. The United Nations advanced the concept of “Responsibility to Protect” in 2005, explaining “sovereignty no longer exclusively protects States from foreign interference; it is a charge of responsibility that holds States accountable for the welfare of their people.”³⁰ As of 2014, the concept remains a pseudo-doctrine under continued study and debate, available as a tool for the U.N. and its member states either to justify pre-emptive intervention or to forego it if more vital interests dictate.

Genocide and Strategy

Genocide springs from a complex social, political, and legal environment, and sovereignty reigns as the main obstacle to prevention. In order to formulate strategy and policy to confront genocide or to evaluate how states responded in the past, one must understand the complexity of the decision terrain involved. Assuming for argument the best intentions and strong moral convictions against genocide, for states to act unilaterally or collectively, the state must self-satisfy against seven conditions. In order to successfully act, the state must: 1) identify the potential or ongoing genocide; 2) understand the strategic environment and the impact of context; 3) identify prioritized political ends; 4) directly associate a vital interest to the genocide; 5) analyze and decide on acceptable risk; 6) align ways and means appropriate to achieving the end; and 7) commit to decisive action. If all of these conditions are not satisfied, it is likely that the genocide will continue unabated to its natural end. History shows that states find it difficult to favorably assess this set of conditions in most instances of strategy. Genocide presents difficult choices in the face of what at least appear to be clear answers – the strategic calculus is difficult.

The equation also changes in relation to each particular case. Some factors are constant, others are variable. Natural constants of genocide include: target group(s); perpetrator group(s); social preconditions for violence; and a perverted or failed state. Each instance of genocide takes on a unique character, and fog and friction abound. Each set of circumstances is different, each state views the criteria and the situation differently, and conditions on the ground change day-by-day. Strategic context matters; the sum total of a state's strategic situation dictates available options. Both perpetrators and their opponents can be expected to obfuscate, dissemble, and rationalize as events unfold. Bureaucracy slows and diverts efforts to understand, coordinate, and act. Biases and agendas shroud the issues. International law is cloudy and contradictory, offering simultaneous justification and proscription to genocide, prevention, and intervention. Feasible, acceptable, and suitable ways and means may or may not be available. There may be no effective direct or indirect access to the region or to the decision-makers who have the power to stop the killing. Given direct access for dialogue, both allies and perpetrators are tied to their own interests, and this may limit their options to alter events. Last, and emotionally most crushing, outsiders may just not care about the victims.

U.S. Genocide Response Case Studies³¹

If we use the seven decision conditions and planning factors and remain mindful of the basic role of the state and of the "exceptionalism" native in the U.S. outlook to itself and its policy, we can make a basic evaluation of how the United States developed its strategy and acted during three genocides of the 20th century. Armenia in 1915, South Asia in 1971, and Rwanda in 1994 presented unique and wicked problems for American strategists. Each case has an important distinguishing characteristic. The first

occurred early in the backwaters of a war where the United States had vital interest and cultural proximity, but wanted to avoid entanglement. The second occurred at the end of a peripheral war the U.S. was losing and in a place important to preserving Grand Strategic options. The last occurred when the United States was not at war but was ending a recent period of inconclusive, expensive, and messy multinational peace operations, and in a region that most Americans cared little about. Strategic context matters. These cases highlight the real complexity of decision in the face of genocide.

Armenian Genocide, 1915

In 1915, amidst the final collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of the Young Turks, the Turkish government systematically deported and murdered over one million ethnic Armenians in Turkey. Turkish forces rounded up and murdered Armenian men, and forced surviving women and children into caravans for the long trek to the Syrian deserts. Along the way, Turkish troops subjected Armenian people in the caravans to the worst forms of torture, exploitation, and murder.³² The Turkish government intended the genocide as the final solution to a long period of varied tensions, hatred, and periodic violence between the Muslim Turks and Christian Armenians, as an aid to Turkish unification, and to solidify control of eastern Anatolia.³³ Turkey was allied to Germany and Austro-Hungary, and embroiled in combat defending the Dardanelles against Allied forces focused on Gallipoli.³⁴

President Woodrow Wilson and the United States were observing the World War, committed to staying on the periphery. Strategically, the United States found itself in a position similar to that before its war with England in 1814, with a European war in progress, trading partners on all sides, suspicion of foreign influence and subversion, domestic interests tied to large voting blocs of immigrants and economic concerns, and

a comparatively weak military.³⁵ Wilson walked a domestic political tightrope between neutrality, preserving diplomatic and economic interests overseas, satisfying public sentiments, and looking forward to influencing the eventual peace and the world order that would follow.³⁶

Decision Condition	US and Armenian Genocide 1915
1) Identify	Summer 1915, Morgenthau cables
2) Understand Strategic Context	World War I; U.S. neutrality
3) Identify a Political End	Neutrality, preserve economic and diplomatic access, mitigate Armenian suffering
4) Associate a Vital Interest	Neutrality, access to Turkey
5) Analyze and Decide on Risk	High risk of early entry to war (in Turkey)
6) Align Ways and Means	Diplomatic direct negotiation (Turkey) and indirect (Germany-Austria) leverage; arouse public support for aid; offer emigration option
7) Act Decisively	Ways and Means employed not decisive; no means or access for military intervention

Figure 1. U.S. Decision Condition Matrix, Armenian Genocide of 1915

U.S. Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire Henry Morgenthau reported in detail in the summer of 1915 on the increasing and incontrovertible evidence of the genocide, and Turkish refusals to curb the violence, including “persecution of Armenians assuming unprecedented proportions,” “systematic attempt to uproot peaceful Armenian populations,” including “arbitrary arrests, terrible tortures,” and “wholesale expulsions and deportations” and that Turkish leaders told him he had “no right to interfere with their personal affairs.”³⁷ His bosses in Washington seemed interested but authorized only continued pleas for restraint and perhaps attempts to leverage German and Austrian influence on Turkey.³⁸ The chain of correspondence between Morgenthau and Washington is a maddening testament to minimal commitment. Morgenthau was

increasingly frustrated but continued to work individually with Turkish ministers of interior and defense to seek alternatives for the Armenians, including September 1915 plans to allow evacuation of Armenians wholesale to the unpopulated American west.³⁹

By this time, former President Theodore Roosevelt aroused U.S. public sentiment, venting his anger with Wilson's failure to intervene, while prominent members of Congress and society publically discussed the tragedy and actively collected financial aid for the Armenians.⁴⁰ Morgenthau made no progress; he departed Turkey in 1916 while the killings continued.⁴¹ The U.S. did not declare war on the Ottoman Empire when it entered the war in April 1917, but Wilson was a key figure in the inconclusive effort to establish independent Armenia in 1919-1920.⁴² In an address to the Democratic National Committee at the White House in February, 1919, Wilson summed up his opinion of the Armenian situation, "I think there is a very promising beginning in regard to countries like Armenia. The whole heart of America has been engaged for Armenia. They know more about Armenia and its sufferings than they know about any other European area."⁴³

As much as America knew, it failed to act in a meaningful way. The United States had responded to the genocide, ineffectively applying the diplomatic and informational instruments of power during the crisis, and returned to those after the war (long after the damage had been done). Despite the strong public outrage, the United States government chose above all to protect its strategic goals of neutrality and continued trade. Not even Woodrow Wilson was willing to pull the trigger to stop the killing. Figure 1 depicts the decision conditions.

A Note on the Holocaust

The environment and the strategy of U.S. response to the Nazi genocide against the Jews and others in Europe during World War Two were similar to those Wilson encountered during the Armenian genocide. Although the United States knew early-on of the Nazi crimes, America had many competing interests as it decided how to deal with its role in the war. Between 1933 and 1941, America remained neutral to the European conflict, focused on isolationist policy, reeling from the Great Depression and in early stages of economic recovery. It was conciliatory to Germany, wanting to quietly trade with England, and wary of Japan. The U.S. military was toddling, a small and somewhat outdated force that only began meaningful modernization in 1940 as the drift toward war became more pronounced. The Nazis were perpetrating their worst crimes behind a veil of rhetoric and foreign public indifference, deep in Eastern Europe and far from American political, diplomatic, or military reach.⁴⁴ America took limited diplomatic, informational, and aid measures similar to the Armenian case. Roosevelt had few strategic options until the U.S. entry into the war, and even then the only possible solution was Allied physical liberation of Nazi-occupied areas with their hundreds of concentration camps, slave labor camps, and mass death facilities. Allied liberation of the camps saved thousands of lives, but again as with Armenia, intervention lay beyond the realm of interests, ways, and means until the bitter end of the war in Europe.

"The Tilt:" The South Asia Crisis, 1971

After the 1970 elections, Pakistani political power shifted to East Pakistan for the first time. Pakistani dictator General Yahya Khan (Yahya) refused to honor the election results and in response to East Pakistani popular protests in March of 1971 mobilized West Pakistani forces to enforce martial law in the eastern areas. Yahya expanded

martial law into a systematic effort to control cities and infrastructure and to physically eliminate the threat of future Bangladeshi resistance. This effort quickly became a genocide. Pakistani troops and their proxies murdered between one and three million Bangladeshi men and boys, and mistreated and displaced millions of Bengali women and girls. Millions streamed across the border into India. Reports of the time alleged that the “gendercide” included explicit orders to West Pakistani soldiers to rape Bengali women. Yahya’s ruthless but inefficient cleansing, instead of stabilizing the situation, angered India to the brink of war and further stoked the fires of Bangladeshi independence.⁴⁵

In the U.S., the Nixon administration worked to balance the denouement of the Vietnam War, social unrest at home, the continuing Cold War with the Soviet Union, and the evolving U.S.-China relationship, of which Yahya was a key broker.⁴⁶ Nixon and Kissinger’s initial response to the crisis was to avoid intervention, but they quickly shifted or “tilted” to Pakistan in order to protect the Yahya-Nixon relationship. A complex Cold War ballet took place as Soviet client India threatened Pakistan and the U.S. played China against the Soviet Union, promising to protect China if they acted against India to protect Pakistan. The crisis is a fascinating and tragic example of the effects of tenaciously-defended grand strategy in a complex political environment. Fortunately, the State Department documented the crisis in detail in its 900-page *Foreign Relations of the United States 1969-1976, Volume XI, South Asia Crisis*, providing stark insight to American policy machinery of the time.⁴⁷ Nixon adopted the central policy themes of quiet concern, strong support to Pakistani sovereignty, and strong adherence to Cold War strategy. The genocide was a peripheral concern, only rising in importance as India

moved closer to war with Pakistan. On March 28, 1971 the American Consul in Dacca, East Pakistan reported “a reign of terror by the Pak military,” involving planned murders using death lists of prominent Bengali academics as well as common Bengali citizens. The same day, the NSC staff notified Kissinger of the situation and of India’s increasing concern.⁴⁸ Cables of the following days reported a rapidly worsening situation.⁴⁹ During an April 5th meeting, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State laid out the American position to Pakistani Ambassador Hilaly: concern for the Bengal situation, emphasis on growing Congressional and press interest; affirmation of U.S. non-intervention policy; concern that U.S.-provided weapons might be used in such a crisis; and an offer to assemble humanitarian aid. Hilaly asked for U.S. consideration of recent actions to preserve Pakistani sovereignty, expressed Yahya’s personal appreciation for U.S. cooperation and restraint to that point, and discussed Soviet comments about possible Indian intervention.⁵⁰ On April 28, Kissinger detailed three policy options for Nixon: support to Yahya; genuine neutrality; and/or serious effort to assist Yahya to end the war and transition to East Pakistan autonomy. Kissinger recommended the third option. Nixon initialed “Option 3” and placed a hand-written note at the bottom, “Don’t squeeze Yahya at this time.”⁵¹ Subsequent communications revolved around arms sales and maintaining the balance between India, Pakistan, China, the Soviet Union and the United States as India moved closer to open conflict with Pakistan. In November, the U.S.S. Enterprise moved to a position off the Bengal coast in an effort that appeared aimed as a deterrent against Indian intervention.⁵² The killings in Bengal

continued unabated, a sideshow to the dance of bigger elephants.

Decision Condition	US and the East Pakistan Genocide, 1971
1) Identify	March, 1971; direct and detailed diplomatic and Intelligence Community reporting
2) Understand Strategic Context	NSC 68 Cold War strategy (USSR, China, US, Pakistan, India); war-weary US populace
3) Identify a Political End	Sustain Pakistan (Yahya); contain Soviet Union
4) Associate a Vital Interest	No direct interest in East Pakistan
5) Analyze and Decide on Risk	High risk of wide-spectrum Pakistan-India conflict and loss of entré into China
6) Align Ways and Means	Diplomatic: direct negotiation (Pakistan) and indirect leverage (China, India, Jordan, Iran); Information: clandestine deterrent efforts; Military: USS Enterprise demonstration against India and leverage arms sales levels; Economic: leverage loan guarantees for Pakistan
7) Act Decisively	Ways and Means employed decisive to preserve Cold War strategy, did not affect genocide

Figure 2. US U.S. Decision Condition Matrix, East Pakistan Genocide of 1970

In December 1971, India went to war with Pakistan. The United States conducted behind-the-scenes diplomacy that would allow India to act in East Pakistan but would not allow expansion of hostilities in West Pakistan.⁵³ After thirteen days of fighting in East and West, Pakistani forces in East Pakistan surrendered, largely ending the genocide and setting conditions for the achievement of Kissinger’s “Option 3.”

In this case, the United States considered the genocide as a distracter to its pursuit of Cold War grand strategy. Nixon’s personal relationship with the perpetrator Yahya combined with the necessity to maintain equilibrium between hegemony. In addition, domestic informational, political, and resource constraints meant there would be no significant chance of direct U.S. intervention in the crisis. Figure 2 depicts analysis of U.S. strategy during the crisis.

Rwanda, 1994

In the spring of 1994, after three years of civil war, former Belgian colony Rwanda was enjoying a relative calm. The majority Hutu-controlled government had agreed to work together with Tutsi militia of the Rwandan People's Front (RPF) via the Arusha Accord in August 1993 to maintain stability and facilitate reconciliation. France and Belgium kept Rwanda at arm's length, which Rwandans largely favored. A small United Nations peacekeeping force of the UN Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) had been on the ground since October 1993, to begin the process of securing the tenuous peace. Extremists on both sides opposed the Accord, and long-time unresolved ethnic hatred remained just beneath the surface.⁵⁴

On January 11, 1994, the UNAMIR commander, Canadian Major General Romeo Dallaire, sent a fax to U.N. peacekeeping leadership in New York, warning of Hutu government preparations to kill Tutsis. In his report, Dallaire detailed suspected Hutu death lists and arms stockpiles.⁵⁵ On April 6, 1994, the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi died when their plane crashed while returning from Tanzania. The same day, Hutu government forces began a pre-planned and systematic campaign to control key infrastructure, eliminate opposition members in the government, academia, and church. The first days' victims included the moderate acting Prime Minister and the framer of the Arusha Accord. Squads of men armed with death lists and walkie-talkies began to round up and murder every Tutsi they could find. Almost immediately, the RPF rejoined the fight against the Hutu government. By April 21, most foreigners had fled Rwanda and the U.N. Security Council at the request of the United States had voted to withdraw UNAMIR.⁵⁶

As the killing continued, the United Nations continued to debate the next phase, and foreign press began to pressure Western governments to act. On June 22, the Security Council approved a French-led intervention in Rwanda as the RPF moved quickly to secure objectives en-route to the capital Kigali, which fell to the RPF on the 4th of July.⁵⁷ The French force avoided combat with the RPF and set up in a “protection zone” in southwest Rwanda.⁵⁸ The Hutus killed between 500,000 and one million Rwandans, most of them Tutsis, and displaced many hundreds of thousands.⁵⁹

In the spring of 1994, the United States and the Clinton administration celebrated the downfall of the Soviet Union and the atrophy of its nuclear arsenal, eagerly awaited the impact of the rapidly expanding “Information Superhighway,” and looked forward to streamlined trade envisioned by NAFTA.⁶⁰ The recent failure of America’s participation in multi-national peacekeeping operations in Somalia was quite fresh in the minds of American civilian and military policymakers. The face of the Somalia operation for Americans was not the thousands of lives saved by the peacekeepers, but was the embarrassing Battle of Mogadishu, where on October 3-9, 1993 the U.S. lost 19 dead and 91 wounded in sharp clashes with Somali militias serving Mohamed Farah Aidid. Militiamen dragged American dead through the streets while crowds chanted pro-Aidid slogans, and news cameras caught every horrific moment. Most U.S. forces departed Somalia by March of 1994, leaving Aidid stronger than ever and Americans tired of unproductive and messy peripheral overseas interventions.⁶¹ U.S. policy from the beginning of the Rwanda crisis focused on non-intervention. An April 11 talking points memo prepared for the Undersecretary of Defense Frank Wisner by the Deputy Secretary of Defense for Middle East Africa correctly described the situation including

the intentions of the Hutu government the RPF, and UNAMIR. The memo described the potential for a “massive (hundreds of thousands of deaths) bloodbath,” and outlined the U.S. strategy of remaining the only “honest broker” left who can influence the diplomatic process.⁶² The White House Press Secretary issued a statement on April 22 declaring that the killings had “shocked and appalled the world community.” The release called for the Rwandan army and the RPF to “agree on an immediate ceasefire,” and reaffirmed support for the renewed role of UNAMIR in stabilizing the situation.⁶³ A May 1, 1994 summary of an interagency action officer meeting to discuss Rwanda detailed the diplomacy-based U.S. plan to: use contacts and demarches to influence stopping the massacres; support UN actions to stabilize the situation; and to prevent the violence from spreading. The same summary makes mention of legal caution on characterizing the killings as genocide, citing risk that “Genocide finding could actually commit USG to actually ‘do something,’” and avoids the use of U.S.-sourced counterpropaganda to dissuade further killings, warning of a “significant increase in our role.”⁶⁴ While these are action officer-level comments, they serve to illuminate the pervading sense of direction regarding the crisis. In this case, the United States simply had nothing more than the most peripheral interests, and was willing to commit nothing more than superficial diplomatic efforts. Close on the heels of Somalia and focused on better times at home, America let the Rwandan genocide go. Figure 3 outlines the decision factors that shaped the strategy.

Decision Condition	US and Rwanda, 1994
1) Identify	Dallaire fax, diplomatic and Intel Community reporting
2) Understand Strategic Context	Clinton domestic focus; Cold War ended; failure in Somalia
3) Identify a Political End	Avoid entanglement in Africa
4) Associate a Vital Interest	No interest in Rwanda
5) Analyze and Decide on Risk	High risk if involved on the ground; negligible risk without involvement
6) Align Ways and Means	Diplomatic: direct negotiation (RPF and GoR) and indirect leverage (UN, France); no significant Military, Information, or Economic commitment
7) Act Decisively	US actions were peripheral and not decisive

Figure 3. U.S. Decision Condition Matrix, Rwandan Genocide of 1970

These brief case studies illustrate a portion of the complexities that shaped American decisions on confronting genocide. Each case was unique, and each case sheds light on different characteristics of the strategic environment. In each case, U.S. vital interests drove policy and action away from timely intervention and toward the accomplishment of higher-priority strategic goals. In each case, the U.S. solution was tied directly to those interests and not to the genocide.

Implications for 21st-Century Strategic Leaders

The environment of this century promises no relief from the complex decision terrain of the last century. Indeed, one can argue that as globalization increases, overlaid on the legacy of ancient social conflicts and the evolving but persistent old sovereign state-based system, as gaps between haves and have-nots change and as resources become scarce, the environment will become nightmarishly complex, volatile, and uncertain and the possibility of genocide may multiply.

The nature of strategy will likely remain the same delicate balancing act: seeing oneself, seeing the environment, determining what is important, deciding on a direction and how much to pay, and then aligning ways and means to get there. It is unlikely and unreasonable without a revolution in the concept of sovereignty to expect states to neglect their vital interests for the greater good. Future strategists can expect that central concept to endure.

The nature of the genocide problem will also endure. Genocides will continue to occur in places isolated from the world's ability to gain access to intervene, with pre-existing social differences where one group can target another, where more secure states have little important interest or where the costs of caring are too high. The character of genocide may change. The killing methods may evolve; the extent of the killing may slide along the continuum of horror between physical and psychological; international norms and laws may adapt, or they may not.

Only with an increase in the significance of the greater good will come an appreciation that saving lives can itself be a vital interest. The list of potential catalysts to that change is likely short. One catalyst may involve the increasing importance of the Information instrument of national power, and in particular the need to tie what a state says to what it actually does. As the character of the world order changes, as the Information Age takes its course, and as America's role shifts from global hegemon to something perhaps less central, U.S. ability to effect influence and to project power may increasingly have more to do with how well America actually performs its own favored role of moral beacon and world protector. In this future environment, America may not have the luxury of empty rhetoric or hubristic disingenuity. The value of America may

more and more derive from its ability to deliver on its own aspirations and its promises to the world. Future U.S. strategy may require a higher prioritization of collective security and moral fidelity than it ever has.

The United States has recognized and opposed genocide, but it has failed to stop it because that is simply not its highest purpose as a state. No genocide has ever risen in importance as an American interest to the level that America chose to act decisively to prevent it, but the complexities of the strategic environment rarely present no-cost solutions. The United States ruthlessly and successfully protected itself. It has coldly pursued its interests and in so doing has met its security obligations to its people. It has failed to meet other obligations, however. America still struggles mightily to realize its aspiration of idealism as realism in a complex and dangerous world. For the potential future victims of genocide, America will continue to represent hope. For the American strategist, this dilemma will endure and the weight of this burden will never lessen.

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