

Killing Unarmed Civilians is Easy

By

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Humans have perpetrated violence on fellow humans since the beginning of recorded history. Humans have used tools and technology ranging from sticks and stones to nuclear weapons to aid in the efficient application of violence. Violence is a fact of life. Laws, treaties, agreements, courts, councils, unions – these institutions have in common a failure to prevent violence.

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights states in Article 3, “Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person.”¹ The Preamble to the same document states unequivocally, “Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law.”² Those two excerpts from the Declaration recognize two fundamental human rights. The first is the right to live free from persecution and tyranny. The second is the right to act to safeguard that freedom, to include self-defense and, if necessary, rebellion against tyranny.

Article 1 of the United Nations “Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide,” ratified by the United States of America, states “The Contracting Parties confirm that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international law which they undertake to prevent and to punish.”³ Signatory parties of this treaty are legally obligated, not just to respond, but also to prevent acts of genocide. The world

¹ The United Nations. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. December 10, 1948. <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/> (accessed January 22, 2010).

² Ibid.

³ The United Nations. "Convention on the Crime and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide." *Convention on Genocide*. December 9, 1948. <http://www.hrweb.org/legal/genocide.html> (accessed January 22, 2010).

at large has a dismal record of preventing or stopping genocides. The United States of America, with a rich tradition of standing up for human rights and opposing indignity, is no better with regard to genocide. This cannot be. The United States must take decisive action to prevent and stop genocidal campaigns of terror and regain the mantle of the world's preeminent defender of the oppressed.

The Twentieth Century is littered with the bones of victims of wholesale slaughter. The Ottoman Turks killed over one million Armenians between 1915 and 1917.⁴ The Soviet Union killed at least twenty million political opponents and perceived dissidents between 1929 and 1945.⁵ The Nazis killed another twenty million people, including six million Jews, between 1933 and 1945.⁶ The rest were gypsies, critics, “examples,”⁷ political opponents, and other so-called undesirables. Chinese Nationalists killed ten million political opponents and army conscripts between 1927 and 1949.⁸ Chinese Communists killed between twenty and thirty-five million between 1949 and 1976.⁹ Guatemalan forces killed over 100,000 indigenous Mayans between 1960 and 1981.¹⁰ Approximately 300,000 Ugandan Christians were killed from 1971 to 1979.¹¹ Khmer Rouge forces killed two million political opponents and educated persons between 1975 and 1979.¹² In 1994, at least 800,000 Tutsis were killed by government backed Hutus in Rwanda.¹³ The Sudanese backed Janjaweed militias killed farmers and non-Muslims

⁴ Zelman, Aaron, and Richard W. Stevens. *Death by Gun Control: The Human Cost of Victim Disarmament*. Hartford, Wisconsin: Mazer Freedom Press, Inc., 2001. Page 3.

⁵ Ibid. Page 3.

⁶ Ibid. Page 3.

⁷ Ibid. Page 3.

⁸ Ibid. Page 3.

⁹ Ibid. Page 3.

¹⁰ Ibid. Page 3.

¹¹ Ibid. Page 3.

¹² Ibid. Page 3.

¹³ Ibid. Page 3.

inhabiting Darfur in 2003 and 2004. Amnesty International USA estimates the number killed to be 300,000 and another 2.6 million persons displaced.¹⁴

Millions upon millions of civilians of different ethnic backgrounds, economic classes, religions, occupations, and ages have been senselessly slaughtered since 1900. There is one common thread that winds its way through all of these campaigns and ties them together: The governments in power enforced strict policies of victim disarmament. Adolph Hitler once said, “The most foolish mistake we could possibly make would be to allow the subject races to possess arms. History shows that all conquerors who have allowed their subject races to carry arms have prepared their own downfall by doing so.”¹⁵

Victim disarmament policies, including gun control measures, do not in and of themselves, cause genocide. One would be very hard pressed, however, to find an armed group subjected to genocide. The Guardian's Glenn Reynolds writes, “Though it is a long step between being disarmed and being murdered – one does not usually lead to the other – but it is nevertheless an arresting reality that not one of the principal genocides of the 20th century, and there have been dozens, has been inflicted on a population that was armed.”¹⁶

The United Nations and a plethora of Non Government Organizations (NGOs) insist that small arms and light weapons are the cause of much of the mass murders and genocides of the Twentieth Century. While small arms and light weapons have been used in the commission of

¹⁴ Amnesty International. "History of the Darfur Conflict." *AmnestyUSA.org*. <http://www.amnestyusa.org/darfur/darfur-history/page.do?id=1351103> (accessed January 22, 2010).

¹⁵ Zelman, Aaron, and Richard W. Stevens. *Death by Gun Control: The Human Cost of Victim Disarmament*. Hartford, Wisconsin: Mazel Freedom Press, Inc., 2001. Page 75

¹⁶ Polsby, Daniel D., and Don B. Jr. Kates. "Of Holocausts and Gun Control." *Washington University Law Quarterly*. 1997. <http://lawreview.wustl.edu/inprint/75-3/753-4.html> (accessed January 22, 2010).

genocide, many other implements have been used. The Nazis employed giant ovens and gas chambers. The Hutus primary tool in Rwanda was the machete. Indeed, blaming small arms and light weapons for genocide is akin to blaming the keyboard this paper was composed upon for poor grammar and spelling.

“Small arms and light weapons, readily available at low cost, concealable and low-maintenance, are often referred to as “weapons of mass destruction, in slow motion.””¹⁷ Former General Secretary of the United Nations Kofi Annan is credited with the comparison of small arms to weapons of mass destruction. The comparison is based upon the cumulative deaths of people throughout the world in comparison to the deaths of people in the nuclear blasts at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Annan’s comparison is a failure on two very important points – strategic deterrence and killing without small arms.

Nuclear weapons are capable of extreme destruction. The devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki pale in comparison to the power of modern nuclear warheads. Nuclear weapons are the epitome of nuclear physics and represent the highest order of national engineering genius. The Cold War featured two super powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, ideologically opposed, jockeying for advantage over each other, terrified of what the other might do or be capable of. Both sides were keenly aware that an exchange of nuclear weapons would result in the end of the world, or mutually assured destruction. Winning the war is little consolation when the victor is as dead as the vanquished. The stabilizing factor of the Cold War was that nuclear weapons were so terrible that deploying them was unthinkable. If only one side possessed them, it is highly likely that side would have used them in a pre-emptive strike on the other country.

¹⁷ *Targeted News Service*. "Reducing Global Small Arms Violence the Focus of Lecture Marking Appointment of New International Policy Studies Chair." November 3, 2009.

The fact that both sides possessed them, however, removed the ability of the other side to act with impunity. There would be dire consequences for nuclear aggression. Firearms in the hands of the oppressed are a strategic deterrent. "From the point of view of any aggressor, it is desirable if not essential that intended victims not possess weapons, especially firearms. This principle holds true whether the subject is a gangster premeditating a crime or a government planning a genocide. This is an inherently dangerous incentive structure."¹⁸

The Rwandan genocide of the Tutsis at the hands of government-backed Hutu militias was largely "carried out with machetes, but automatic rifles and hand grenades were also common."¹⁹

Decimation means the killing of every tenth person in a population, and in the spring and early summer of 1994 a program of massacres decimated the Republic of Rwanda. Although the killing was low-tech – performed largely by machete – it was carried out at dazzling speed: of an original population of about seven and a half million, at least eight hundred thousand people were killed in just a hundred days. Rwandans often speak of a million deaths, and they may be right. The dead of Rwanda accumulated at nearly three times the rate of Jewish dead during the Holocaust. It was the most efficient mass killing since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.²⁰

While the Tutsis were unarmed, the Hutus were poorly armed. There were not enough arms to go around. The Hutus started killing the defenseless, including women and children, by clubbing or chopping them to death. Small pockets of resistance were contained until armed

¹⁸ Polsby, Daniel D., and Don B. Jr. Kates. "Of Holocausts and Gun Control." *Washington University Law Quarterly*. 1997. <http://lawreview.wustl.edu/inprint/75-3/753-4.html> (accessed January 22, 2010).

¹⁹ Council on Foreign Relations. "Arming Genocide in Rwanda." *Foreign Affairs*, Sep/Oct 1994: 86-97.

²⁰ Gourevitch, Philip. *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families: Stories From Rwanda*. New York City: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998. Page 4.

reinforcements could bring firepower to the situation. Pancrace, a member of a Hutu death squad, describes the killing process:

Many people did not know how to kill, but that was not a disadvantage, because there were *interahamwe* [government backed militia] to guide them in their first steps. At the beginning the *interahamwe* came in by bus from the neighboring hills to lend a hand. They were more skilled, more impassive. They were clearly more specialized. They gave advice on what paths to take and which blows to use, which techniques. Passing by, they would shout: “Do like me. If you feel you are making a mess of it, call for help!” They used their spare time to initiate those who seemed uneasy with this work of killing.²¹

The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, in direct contrast to the situation in Rwanda, is an excellent example of a place where the introduction of small arms and light weapons to the oppressed stopped a genocidal campaign. The armed forces of the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan on 27 December 1979. The extent of human suffering from 1979 to 1989, when the Soviets withdrew, is staggering. “By that time every ninth Afghan had died, every seventh (or eighth) had been disabled, and every third had fled abroad. Afghanistan lay in ruins, and the Soviets had still not accomplished their war objective. This, then, was the longest, costliest, most destructive, and most indecisive war a superpower (with 280 million people) has ever fought against a small country (with 15.5 million people).”²²

The killings started small. On 30 July 1980, the Soviets killed fifty Afghans in the town of Turani, near Baghlan, in retribution for an ambush on Soviet armor.²³ Two weeks later, three

²¹ Hatzfeld, Jean. *Machete Season*. Translated by Linda Coverdale. New York City: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005. Page 36.

²² Kakar, M. Hassan *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response, 1979-1982*. Berkeley: University of California Press, c1995 1995.

<http://www.escholarship.org/editions/view?docId=ft7b69p12h&chunk.id=conclusion&toc.depth=100&toc.id=conclusion&brand=eschol>

²³ Ibid.

<http://www.escholarship.org/editions/view?docId=ft7b69p12h&chunk.id=conclusion&toc.depth=100&toc.id=conclusion&brand=eschol>

thousand Afghans died during Soviet attacks on Herat. The Soviets, fearing any gathering of people to be hostile, started launching helicopter gunship raids on men, women, and children engaged in wedding ceremonies, religious observances, or funerals.²⁴

Afghanistan's network of roads was transformed into a network of death and destruction. Along the Logar road, Soviet gunships destroyed anything within 150 meters of the thoroughfare. Houses, buildings, gardens – all destroyed. Entire villages nestled against the road disappeared in piles of rubble.²⁵ Author Hassan M. Kakar, a professor of History at the University of Kabul at the time of the invasion, writes of Logar, “My diary entry for 21 November reads: “The actual number of the casualties is unknown. It is said that they were beyond calculation. In many places dead bodies lay here and there. No one dared to bury them. Dogs have consumed many. They have decomposed and have an offensive odor. Some houses have been destroyed while others are closed because of the destruction of their inhabitants.” The people were unable to cope with the enormous problems relating to casualties, and many left their homes to take refuge in Pakistan.”²⁶ Shamali, Panjsher, and Paghman experienced similar atrocities at the hands of the Soviet oppressors.

Soviet atrocities were not limited to the conventional realm. “Mycotoxins such as yellow rain, sleeping death, and Blue X seem to have been used in Afghanistan. Yellow rain causes burning sensations, vomiting, headaches, spasms, and convulsions. Internal bleeding follows,

²⁴ Ibid.

<http://www.escholarship.org/editions/view?docId=ft7b69p12h&chunk.id=s1.13.5&toc.depth=100&toc.id=ch013&brand=eschol>

²⁵ Ibid.

<http://www.escholarship.org/editions/view?docId=ft7b69p12h&chunk.id=ch014&toc.depth=100&toc.id=ch014&brand=eschol>

²⁶ Ibid.

<http://www.escholarship.org/editions/view?docId=ft7b69p12h&chunk.id=s1.14.1&toc.depth=100&toc.id=ch014&brand=eschol>

followed by the destruction of the bone marrow. The skin then turns black as necrosis sets in. The time from exposure to physical decomposition may be a matter of hours. Sleeping death kills the victim instantly. Victims have been found in fighting position, holding their rifles, eyes open, fingers on their triggers, with no apparent cause of death. Blue X, a nonlethal agent dispensed in aerosol form and dropped from aircraft, renders the victim unconscious for eight to twelve hours.”²⁷

The Soviets finally withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989. Despite technical and materiel superiority, they were driven from Afghanistan, not by unarmed people, but by well-equipped, heavily armed freedom fighters. The freedom fighters were armed by the United States to aid in the containment of the Soviet threat to Western democracy. While that primary goal was accomplished, it also stopped the Soviet-inflicted genocide of the Afghan people.

Beginning in 1985, though, the mujahideen were supplied with thick jackets, snow boots, and ski tents, which enabled them to remain in the field in large numbers during the winter months. More important, they began to receive heavy equipment, such as bazookas and heavy machine guns; they were also supplied some relatively primitive SAM-7 missiles. Their old Lee Enfield rifles had already been replaced with Kalashnikovs. During this time, too, the Reagan administration raised the level of funding for weapons to the mujahideen from \$280 million in 1985 to \$470 million in 1986 and to \$630 million in 1987. From 1984 on, Chinese assistance and the flow of Saudi funds to the resistance also stabilized at a substantial scale.²⁸

The fierce resistance put up by the Afghan Taliban and Mujahideen forces would have been impossible without arms. During the first half of the occupation, Soviet forces operated with impunity, secure in the knowledge that the Afghans were powerless against their tanks and

²⁷ Ibid.

<http://www.escholarship.org/editions/view?docId=ft7b69p12h&chunk.id=s1.14.5&toc.id=ch014&toc.depth=100&brand=eschol&anchor.id=d0e5894#X>

²⁸ Ibid.

<http://www.escholarship.org/editions/view?docId=ft7b69p12h&chunk.id=epilogue&toc.depth=100&toc.id=epilogue&brand=eschol>

artillery and helicopter gunships. Anti-tank missiles and Stinger anti-air missiles neutralized the threat of Soviet might. A strict insurgency campaign, never allowing Soviet forces tactical control over a situation, eluded the Soviet juggernaut and unceasingly pestered them until they left, disgraced, in 1989.

Despite a legal obligation to respond to genocide and actions that may precede genocide as codified in the United Nation's "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide," little has ever been accomplished on this front. Heads of state make great speeches and condemn evil acts. President Bill Clinton, on the dedication of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Arlington, VA, said, "The evil in this museum is incontestable. But as we are its witness, so must we remain its adversary in the world in which we live; so we must stop the fabricators of history and the bullies as well. Left unchallenged, they would still prey upon the powerless, and we must not permit that to happen again."²⁹ President Clinton spoke those words on 22 April 1993. One year later, on 21 April 1994, a grim milestone slipped into history alongside the Holocaust and those fancy words – the International Red Cross estimated the Rwandan death toll since 7 April, fourteen days previous, was 100,000 persons killed.³⁰

How should President Clinton have acted? How should the United States respond today if faced with a similar situation? The answer lies in Afghanistan. The United States armed oppressed against oppression. The ultimate objective of arming the Taliban was containment of Soviet influence but the result was cessation of genocide.

²⁹ Clinton, William J. "Remarks at the dedication of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum - Bill Clinton's speech, April 22, 1993." *FindArticles.com*. April 22, 1993. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2889/is_n16_v29/ai_13930216/ (accessed January 22, 2010).

³⁰ BBC News. "Timeline: 100 Days of Genocide." *BBC.co.uk*. April 6, 2004. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3580247.stm> (accessed January 22, 2010).

The United States, acting under the *jus cogens* authority of the “Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide,” should ensure oppressed groups in danger of falling prey to genocide should not be left defenseless. In Rwanda’s case, small arms would have sufficed to stop the slaughter. There are documented instances of Rwandans defending themselves. Their defense would have been significantly more effective had they had access to the only effective means of self defense available – the firearm. The firearm equalizes all users; the frail and the weak are equals to the strong and the fit. The vulnerable are no longer defenseless. Furthermore, empowering the vulnerable in this way builds self confidence and independence. If the United States must act in a situation, it is best to act in a manner that ensures a return will not be necessary.

The United States should most certainly not arm the entire world. Again, disarmament does not cause genocide. The citizens of Japan and the United Kingdom, despite extremely strict firearms prohibitions, are not in grave danger of extermination. The United States should concentrate on those in danger. The Hutu Power movement had been advocating a slaughter of the Tutsis as early 1992.³¹ Many international organizations, including Genocide Watch (www.genocidewatch.org), keep track of at risk populations. Genocide Watch publishes regular reports identifying what it considers the most likely places for genocide and mass murder to occur. Partnerships such as these are the key to a comprehensive approach to genocide.

Many organizations, starting with the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), will vehemently fight this course of action. Yet, UNODA cannot lay claim to a single instance of success to demonstrate that the service it purports to provide actually works.

³¹ Gourevitch, Philip. *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families: Stories From Rwanda*. New York City: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998. Page 96.

There are, however, disfigures, lifeless corpses to testify to UNODA's failure. UNODA and other organizations, such as the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), will assert that the small arms provided to the defenseless will wind up in the hands of drug traffickers, terrorists, insurgents, and other violent extremists. How is that any different from the condition today? These people already possess small arms and are not shy in their use, especially on those that cannot resist them. The only thing those two organizations have accomplished in their entire history is the disarmament of victims, including those in Rwanda.

The oppressed people of this world have died enough deaths. They deserve a fighting chance to live, which is far better than the alternative they have been condemned to. Disarmament has failed again and again. There is no logical reason to suspect different results when the next genocide occurs. The United States can lead a new approach to genocide. "We must find in our diversity our common humanity. We must reaffirm that common humanity; even in the darkest and deepest of our own disagreements."³²

³² Clinton, William J. "Remarks at the dedication of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum - Bill Clinton's speech, April 22, 1993." *FindArticles.com*. April 22, 1993. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2889/is_n16_v29/ai_13930216/ (accessed January 22, 2010).