

# On the Timing of Genocide

Deborah Mayersen

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## Keywords.

genocide, genocide prevention, timing of genocide, causes of genocide, Armenia, Rwanda

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# On the Timing of Genocide

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It is a paradox that the eruption of genocide is unpredictable, yet never seems to occur without prior warning. Two different observers of the Armenians in Turkey, for example, accused the Ottoman government of a “policy of extermination” toward the Armenians in 1880; in 1895, a third observer declared “the extermination of the Armenians” imminent.<sup>1</sup> In 1962, a United Nations commissioner accused the ruling party in Rwanda of “a social policy apparently designed to eliminate . . . the Tutsi minority”: according to this commissioner, the Tutsi were at serious risk of imminent extermination.<sup>2</sup> All these observers were ultimately correct, as the Armenian and Rwandan genocides of 1915 and 1994 testify. Yet their dire predictions were wrong in one crucial aspect: the timing of when genocide would occur. In both cases, the predictions were wrong not by weeks or months, but decades. These examples highlight the difficulty of attempts to plot the path that leads to genocide. Despite widespread acknowledgement that societies at risk of genocide can be recognized as such, there remains an inability to predict accurately when the risk of genocide is likely to be realized. Yet understanding why genocide occurs *when* it does is a crucial component of understanding the nature of this heinous crime. Furthermore, attempts to prevent genocide are contingent upon the ability to accurately predict its onset.

This article, therefore, will offer new insights into the timing of genocide through the presentation of an explanatory model. Developed through research tracing the progression of risk over time in the case studies of the Armenian and Rwandan genocides, it extends previous models of the preconditions for genocide, to elucidate a model that includes temporal progression as an inherent component. The eight stages of the “temporal model” are briefly outlined below, prior to a fuller discussion of its development and components:

1. The presence of an out-group. This can be defined as a relatively powerless minority, with whom relations are politicized, and which is subject to legal discrimination.

2. Significant internal strife. Significant, ongoing destabilization that affects the dominant group and the out-group, and for which there is no clear solution.
3. The perception of the out-group as posing some kind of existential threat to the dominant power.
4. Local precipitants and constraints determine the nature and time of the dominant group's response. A violent response is typical, with the onset of massacres quite likely.
5. A process of retreat from the intensity of the circumstance, or further escalation. While the process is commonly one of retreat, repeated cycles of escalation through the preceding stages followed by retreat ultimately facilitates further escalation.
6. The emergence of a genocidal ideology within the dominant power, typically accompanied by concerted efforts by the dominant group to further augment their power, and a deepening perception of the out-group as posing an existential threat.
7. An extensive propaganda campaign, a key component of which features attempts to present the victim group as a grave threat to the dominant power.
8. Case-specific precipitants and constraints determine the precise timing of an outbreak of genocide.

This model focuses on genocide as a specific crime, rather than a broader discussion of mass atrocities or crimes against humanity. There are very real challenges associated with the prediction and prevention of all of these crimes, and many commonalities in their antecedents. It is also recognized, however, that genocide is a unique and distinct crime, and it is on this specific phenomena that the present article is focused.

“A genocide is a poisonous bush that grows not from two or three roots but from a tangle of roots that has mouldered underground where no-one notices it,” remarked one survivor of the crime.<sup>3</sup> In the last three decades, genocide scholars have made great progress in exploring those roots. Several models have been proposed that seek to identify and define the preconditions of genocide. The groundbreaking model of the sociologist Helen Fein, for example, outlines four factors that together constitute the “necessary and sufficient” preconditions for genocide.<sup>4</sup> According to Fein, these key factors are that “the victims have previously been defined outside the universe of obligation of the dominant group,” that “the status of the state has been reduced by defeat in war and/or internal strife,” the rise to power of “an elite that adopts a new political formula to justify the nation’s domination and/or expansion, idealising the singular rights of the dominant group,” and finally “the calculus of costs of exterminating the victim . . . changes as the perpetrators instigate or join a (temporarily) successful coalition at war against antagonists who have earlier protested and/or might conceivably be expected to protest persecution of the victim.”<sup>5</sup> Complementary to Fein’s model is that of Florence Mazian. Mazian’s six-stage model identifies as additional key factors “destructive uses of communication”—both “that supporting the superiority of the dominant group, and that of reducing the inhibitions of the masses and justifying the genocidal goals”—and “failure of multidimensional levels of social control”—including the failure of religious institutions and other nations to intervene on behalf of the victim group.<sup>6</sup>

Other models have focused primarily on societal rather than political risk factors in attempting to analyze the antecedents of genocide. The psychologist Ervin Staub, for example, identified “difficult life conditions,” “cultural-societal characteristics,” and a progression along a “continuum of destruction” as key preconditions for genocide. According to Staub, initial acts that cause limited harm result in psychological changes that make further destructive actions possible.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, the psychologist Israel Charny chose not to focus upon inherently pathological processes in his ten “Genocide Early Warning Processes,” but rather “a series of natural psychocultural processes . . . [that] may be turned by society toward support of life, or they may be turned toward momentums of increasing violence toward human life, culminating in genocide.”<sup>8</sup> The ten major early warning processes include such general factors as how a society values human life, more specific processes such as the machinery for managing escalations of threat, and finally processes more typically connected with risk for genocide, such as dehumanization of the victim group. The model also includes an interesting process largely omitted elsewhere: namely, “perception of victim groups as dangerous.” Similarly, Greg Stanton’s model “The Eight Stages of Genocide” has sought to traverse the spectrum from potentially genocidal features of normal societies, such as the tendency to classify social groups with names, symbols, and a conception of “us versus them,” through to polarization, organization, and extermination, with denial as the last stage of genocide.<sup>9</sup> Finally, political scientists such as Matthew Krain and Barbara Harff have conducted quantitative analyses of potential risk factors for genocide—although utilizing a much broader definition and larger numbers of cases of genocide than typically considered elsewhere.<sup>10</sup>

Such models offer valuable insight into the factors that lead to genocide. Each presents a unique contribution to our understanding of the etiology of the crime; together they form a largely complementary corpus of knowledge. Yet individually and collectively they offer surprisingly little information as to the time periods over which the identified preconditions might be operative. Mazian, for example, suggested only that “earlier stages . . . combine according to a certain pattern before the next stage can contribute its particular value . . . As different components enter into the . . . process, the range of possible outcomes becomes progressively limited.”<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Stanton has proposed that “Genocide is a process that develops in eight stages that are predictable but not inexorable . . . The later stages must be preceded by the earlier stages, though earlier stages continue to operate throughout the process.”<sup>12</sup> Beyond providing an approximate order in which risk factors for genocide may become operable, there is little that specifically considers their temporal progression. The few quantitative analyses in this area offer some enticing hints as to what may be gleaned from further investigations—such as Krain’s findings that war, civil war, and decolonization leading to civil war are all significant predictors of genocide.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Harff’s findings indicate that it may be possible to empirically anticipate the escalation of a high-risk situation into genocide in the year preceding the eruption of violence.<sup>14</sup>

There are also several valuable studies that focus on the dynamics that lead to the decision to adopt genocidal policies, and the triggers for the eruption of genocide. The political scientist Manus Midlarsky, for example, has proposed genocide as an elite reaction to loss. According to Midlarsky, in states with a vulnerable target group, socioeconomic shrinkage (which can incorporate loss of physical territory, economic loss, and/or loss of relative status) “is the single most important long-term progenitor of genocide.”<sup>15</sup> The political scientist Benjamin Valentino has suggested a “strategic” perspective is most useful for understanding the causes of mass kill-

ing.<sup>16</sup> Valentino has contended “mass killing occurs when powerful groups come to believe it is the best available means to accomplish certain radical goals, counter specific types of threats, or solve military problems.”<sup>17</sup> However, both theories contribute more to evaluating why genocides and mass killings occur than when. The political scientist Scott Straus has more specifically explored how the regional, national, and local dynamics affected the timing of the Rwandan genocide both as a whole and in specific regions of Rwanda.<sup>18</sup> As Straus himself has acknowledged, however, there remains a need for further investigation of the timing of genocide.<sup>19</sup>

Crucial questions surrounding the timing of genocide merit further research. Can a society progress from a low risk of genocide to a high risk of genocide rapidly, for example, or is it a process more likely to take decades? Is the progression necessarily a linear one, or can there be stagnation at particular levels of risk, or even a regression? What triggers risk escalation? And, most importantly, could improved knowledge in this area inform future efforts at genocide prevention?

The present study considers these important questions through a historical inquiry into the events that culminated in two of the major genocides of the twentieth century—the Armenian genocide of 1915, in which approximately one million Ottoman Armenians perished; and the Rwandan genocide of 1994, in which approximately one million Tutsi and moderate Hutu were slaughtered. In each case, there was a lengthy period prior to the ultimate genocide in which the minority can clearly be identified as vulnerable and at risk of being targeted. This study will consider how that risk emerged and developed. It will consider when, in each case, particular risk factors became operable, and if they remained consistently operable thereafter. It will investigate the triggers that led to an escalation of risk, as well as the presence and effectiveness of any constraints that may have been operable. Rather than adopting a singular model of the preconditions for genocide as a guide, the wisdom of multiple models will be utilized, enabling the investigation of individual risk factors as they become salient in each case study. This approach allows for maximum flexibility in identifying those factors of most impact upon the temporal progression of risk of genocide; it also allows for the identification of new factors that may influence risk modulation processes. Through a close focus on how risk factors for genocide developed over time in both Ottoman Turkey and Rwanda, potentially common features of the risk escalation process may be identified. These could provide an important new contribution to our understanding of why genocide occurs when it does.

Even retrospectively, it is challenging to identify a precise “beginning” of the processes that lead to genocide. Features we commonly associate with risk of genocide, such as the presence of a pariah minority group, or a stratified society, may also be features of non-genocidal societies. Fein, for example, has remarked that “[f]or over a millennium preceding their annihilation, both Jews and Armenians had been decreed by the dominant group that was to perpetrate the crime to be outside the sanctified universe of obligation.”<sup>20</sup> The presence of an out-group, while commonly considered the first precondition of genocide, does not always provide useful insight as to the likelihood of its incidence in a foreseeable time period. In order to determine an appropriate period from which to commence this investigation, therefore, the time period during which minority identity first emerged as a significant political issue for both the Tutsi in Rwanda and the Armenians in Ottoman Turkey was chosen. This subtly different “beginning” may offer a more precise conception of the risk of genocide.

In considering the Armenian case, as Fein has noted, in some ways Armenians were regarded as an out-group within the Ottoman Empire for centuries prior to the 1915 genocide. Under Ottoman rule, the Armenian people were considered *giaours*, or infidels, subject to official discrimination. They had to pay special taxes, were forbidden from bearing arms, and Christian evidence was inadmissible in Ottoman courts of law. The Armenian minority was subject to long-standing oppression and discrimination.<sup>21</sup> In comparison to the subsequent mass outbreaks of violence, however, this period might be considered as relatively peaceful.<sup>22</sup> There was a recognized place for the Armenian minority as a *millet*, or national community, and relative stability. It was through the course of the nineteenth century that conditions considerably worsened.<sup>23</sup> The reasons for this appear to be twofold: the increasing politicization of relations between the Ottoman government and society and the Armenian community, and the increasing strain under which the empire labored as the nineteenth century progressed.

In contrast, Hutu-Tutsi sub-group identity can be considered as a significant feature of Rwandan society well before the Tutsi can be identified as an out-group. In at least some parts of precolonial Rwanda, sub-group identification became linked with the stratification of society.<sup>24</sup> Cattle, owned and managed by Tutsi pastoralists, became the central symbol of wealth and status within the society. Tutsi also dominated positions of political power. Hutu were generally agriculturalists, and considered to be of a lower status than Tutsi. Intergroup relations were characterized by patron-client relationships. Yet, while the historical existence of the Hutu and Tutsi identities must be acknowledged, it must equally be acknowledged that societal stratification was strongest only in central Rwanda, where the authority of the Rwandan kingdom was at its greatest strength. Even there, relations were tempered by a range of other sub-group identities, such as those of lineage and clan, and a number of other mitigating factors. It took more than a half-century of colonial rule to augment and harden sub-group identity, and a massive reversal of colonial policy at its conclusion to leave the historically privileged Tutsi as an out-group following decolonization.

Together these histories suggest that there are three key components to identifying an out-group as one at some risk of genocide. First, the group must be relatively powerless to effect change regarding its status within wider society, and it is often vulnerable more generally. Second, the group, or its members, face legal discrimination because of their group identity. Third, relations between the group and mainstream society and/or government are politicized to some extent. That is, intergroup relations are commonly discussed in the media, are regularly an issue in political circles, and differences of opinion on other issues tend to align with intergroup identity. Together, these three markers appear to distinguish between an out-group vulnerable to a process of risk escalation that might potentially culminate in genocide and a group that might have some pariah features, but nevertheless is able to exist stably within a society.

Utilizing this definition of an out-group, the Armenian minority in the Ottoman Empire can be classified as such from around the middle of the nineteenth century—and most certainly by 1878. The 1878 Treaty of Berlin, by seeking to mandate better conditions for the Armenian minority through Articles 61 and 62, effectively ensured the politicization of Armeno-Turkish relations. Ironically, the resentment of the Ottoman government at these provisions meant they led to deterioration—rather than improvement—in conditions for the Armenians. In the Rwandan case, Hutu-Tutsi relations were heavily politicized in the fractious decolonization process in the

late 1950s and early 1960s. Following Rwandan independence in 1962, the Tutsi minority could be clearly defined as a relatively vulnerable out-group. In both cases, the classification of these minorities as out-groups remained salient through to the genocides of 1915 and 1994. Yet in both cases, several decades passed between the societies meeting this first precondition and the eventual outbreak of genocide. Given that this suggests that out-groups can and do exist for long periods quite stably within societies, it then becomes salient to question what might trigger the escalation of risk beyond this point.

A number of models of the preconditions for genocide, including those of Fein and Mazian, identify significant internal strife as a key risk factor. For the present purpose, internal strife is defined as significant, ongoing destabilization that affects both the dominant group(s) and the out-group, and for which there is no clear solution. It may be economic, political, or involve threats to territorial integrity. For example, the Ottoman Empire's dire economic position in its final decades or the repeated incursions of Tutsi refugees into Rwanda following independence both constitute internal strife. In both the Armenian and Rwandan cases, periods of significant internal strife were repeatedly associated with a marked increase in out-group vulnerability. The internal strife was not always related in any way to the presence of the out-group, nor did it necessarily lead to any immediate deterioration in conditions specifically affecting it. Yet the out-group, relatively powerless and already subject to discrimination, appears extremely vulnerable to being targeted at such a time of national stress. In Rwanda, that is precisely what happened. In periods of internal strife between late 1963 and early 1964, in 1972–1973, and again during the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the Tutsi minority in Rwanda became markedly more vulnerable to violence. Similarly, as the Ottoman Empire declined through the last decades of the nineteenth century, so too did the security and safety of the Armenian minority. In each group, there was a much greater awareness of their vulnerability, and the potential danger of their circumstances, than when only the first precondition was present. For example, in the Rwandan case these times of increased risk are closely aligned with surges in Tutsi refugees fleeing the country. There was a clear perception of an escalation of risk.

There is, of course, a tension between the assertion that internal strife leads to a marked increase in out-group vulnerability and that it does not necessarily lead to an immediate deterioration in conditions of life for the out-group. Yet internal strife appears singularly insufficient to provoke violence directed toward the pariah minority. Rather, it seems to facilitate a cascade of events that culminates in outbursts of violence. In particular, there is a distinct intervening factor likely to become operative at this juncture, destabilizing the already precarious situation, and dramatically increasing the risk profile of the out-group. That is, the out-group comes to be perceived as posing, or at the very least associated with, an existential threat to the dominant group. It is perceived as posing a threat to the very existence of the dominant group or power structure, at least as it is presently constituted. Such a perception, it is important to note, is always a construction of the dominant power.<sup>25</sup> There may be a real and serious threat to the dominant power or the mainstream society; however, the link between such a threat and the out-group as a whole is typically tenuous and manipulated by political power-brokers. More often, such a threat may have some factual basis but is distorted, exaggerated, or otherwise manipulated by the relevant powers, if not wholly manufactured. Indeed, the role of the dominant power in the characterization of the out-group as an existential threat is crucial. Intellectuals and politicians in a society with an out-group may at times view this

group as a threat; however, it is only when the genuine power brokers of the nation embrace such a view that it becomes dangerously toxic. The presence of significant internal strife often facilitates such circumstances, as powers seek a convenient scapegoat for wider troubles.

Some examples from the Rwandan case study provide further clarity. In Rwanda, there were multiple instances when the Tutsi as a group—for varying reasons—came to be perceived as an existential threat. The Bugesera Invasion in Rwanda in December 1963, for example, when a few hundred lightly armed Tutsi refugees crossed into Rwanda from Burundi, and were joined by several hundred more internally displaced Tutsi, led to *all* Tutsi being perceived as threatening to the survival of Rwanda as a Hutu nation, at least temporarily.<sup>26</sup> Thus the prefect of the Gikongoro region responded to the attacks: “We are expected to defend ourselves. The only way to go about it is to paralyse the Tutsi. How? They must be killed.”<sup>27</sup> This sparked an indiscriminate massacre of Tutsi men, women, and children.<sup>28</sup> In 1972–1973, Rwandan Tutsi were again perceived as an existential threat, this time in response to the massacres of Hutu by (mostly) Tutsi soldiers in neighboring Burundi. The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) invasion by second generation Ugandan Tutsi refugees in October 1990 also led to further perceptions of Rwandan Tutsi as posing an existential threat to the nation. Thus, according to the infamous “Hutu Ten Commandments” published in December 1990, “*all* the Tutsi . . . only work for the supremacy of their ethnic group.”<sup>29</sup> In each of these cases, there was a sizeable leap between the actual threat and the resulting manipulation and distortion of the circumstance to characterize the Tutsi out-group as a whole as posing an existential threat. That happened in each of these cases, and signified a considerable and dangerous escalation of the risk of violence and a dramatic destabilization of conditions.

At this stage, the roles of precipitants and constraints become crucial. By nature, an existential threat to the dominant group is one that requires a concerted response if that group is to maintain its position of power. The case studies suggest that the result will typically be violent, with the onset of massacres quite likely. Several factors can influence the strength and timing of the dominant group’s response: the potency and immediacy of the existential threat, and how directly the threat is or can be linked to the out-group. At this juncture, however, on the precipice of violence, precipitants and constraints specific to the local circumstance are likely to be the most important determinants. The diversity of accelerants that can be operable, combined with any constraint needing to override the strong motivation of the dominant power to deal with the perceived or proclaimed threat, makes endeavors to prevent violent outbreaks at this point fraught with difficulty.<sup>30</sup>

Consideration of the circumstances surrounding the outbreaks of violence in Ottoman Turkey in both 1894 and 1895, for example, aids in understanding the central role of precipitants and constraints. By 1894, Sultan Abdul Hamid II had long characterized the Armenians as an existential threat to his crumbling empire. In 1878, following Ottoman defeat in the Russo–Turkish war, the San Stefano Treaty had made Russian withdrawal from Ottoman Armenian territories it had occupied conditional upon reforms to improve the conditions for the Armenian population.<sup>31</sup> While the Treaty of Berlin adopted a softer approach, Article 62 effectively granted the Armenians civic equality—inimical to the *millet* system that formed the basis of the empire.<sup>32</sup> The severe constraints against violent retaliation toward the Armenian population operable then—including the weakness of the empire after its wartime defeat, and the very real threat of further European intervention—had prevented

major violence. However, as these constraints weakened by the early 1890s, the stipulations of the Berlin Treaty remained valid, but never realized, and the perceived existential threat of the Armenians remained. The government, apparently looking for a pretext, allowed a number of minor incidents in Sassoun to trigger a retaliatory massacre out of all proportion to any actual threat. In response, the European powers renewed many of the demands of the Berlin Treaty in a new memorandum—effectively reigniting Ottoman perceptions of the Armenians as an existential threat.<sup>33</sup> According to the missionary to Ottoman Armenia and Secretary of the National Relief Committee Frederick Greene:

These reforms, though partial in application, involved, in principle, the civic equality of Christian and Moslem, and this, from the Turkish standpoint, would imperil the foundation of the State. The mere asking of such reforms and the intrusting their execution to the Turks, was a stultification on the part of the diplomats who demanded them; for it does not lie within the power of Abdul Hamid, as the Caliph of Islam and the successor of the Prophet, to grant them.<sup>34</sup>

In response to international pressure to sign the memorandum, another minor incident—this time a protest march—was used as a convenient trigger to launch a much more intense and widespread burst of massacres. In each case, once the predisposing factors were in place, it was precipitants and constraints specific to the particular circumstance that influenced the onset of a violent response to resolve the perceived existential threat.

Thus far, therefore, we have seen that the presence of an out-group in a society can be a long-term and relatively stable feature of that society. The advent of significant internal strife, however, leads to a marked increase in out-group vulnerability. Internal strife, while insufficient as a singular causative factor, is likely to provoke a cascade of events that result in violent outbursts targeted toward the vulnerable out-group in the short to medium term. This analysis informs our grasp of the triggers that lead to an out-group becoming at increased risk of massacre and/or pre-genocidal violence.

The next stage, however, is perhaps the most crucial to determining the timing of genocide. It can be described as a process of review requiring either retreat or escalation. First, the more common process of retreat—that is, to a lower level of risk—will be discussed. Two separate drivers can determine a path of retreat. One is that a level of resolution of the existential threat that is deemed acceptable to the dominant power may remove the need for continued violence—a factor that can often coincide with a desire to restore some stability to the nation through the restoration of peace. Alternatively, the process of retreat may be driven by the authority's relative lack of power, that is, an inability to realistically contemplate escalation. Very often, some combination of the two factors will influence the outcome in a given circumstance.

If we consider once again the example of the Armenian massacres in the 1890s, this process can be seen clearly. The massacres of 1895, for example, were precipitated by the perceived dual threats of Armenian pressure for greater rights and security (expressed in this case through an Armenian rally protesting the lack of a concerted response to the Sassoun massacre a year earlier) and international pressure in support of their cause. The British Ambassador Sir Phillip Currie who was stationed at Constantinople demonstrated a keen grasp of these pressures and their potential danger. In November 1894, he reported:

The Sultan, I am told, declared quite recently to a foreign Representative that nothing would induce him to introduce reforms into his Asiatic provinces, and it is not likely that he would yield without the employment of force. If the attempt were made without being carried through to a successful issue, the position of the Armenians would become even worse than it is at present.<sup>35</sup>

To a considerable extent, the massacres from October to December 1895 can be regarded as functionally effective in dealing with these threats to the empire. The Armenians were terrified into submission—at least temporarily. The bluff of the international powers was called and found wanting—weakening their position and credibility.

At the same time, however, it was not clear that the international powers would not intervene in the event of a more global or deadly campaign against the Armenian minority. In 1896, for example, when violence broke out in Constantinople—witnessed by European diplomats—for a short time, at least, there appeared to be a real threat of international intervention.<sup>36</sup> The British *chargé d'affaires* told the sultan he would land British sailors.<sup>37</sup> According to Viscount James Bryce, British parliamentarian and keen observer of Armenian affairs:

The perpetration of this massacre under the very eyes of the Ambassadors and the European residents, and the reign of terror which followed it, roused the attention of Europe in a way which the even more frightful and far more extensive massacres of the preceding autumn and winter, carried out in the cities of the interior, had not done. A cry of horror arose in England . . . [Sultan] Abdul Hamid . . . recoiled in terror from his own act, and the Turkish population expected the immediate appearance of European fleets to punish or depose him.<sup>38</sup>

Undoubtedly, the threat of intervention was a decisive factor determining the cessation of the massacre in Constantinople, and likely contributed to the cessation of the massacres of that period generally. Ultimately, the Ottoman sultan chose a process of retreat rather than escalation. The solution was a limited one: the existential threat posed by the Armenians had been resolved to the maximum extent possible, given the relative powerlessness of the sultan with respect to the international powers.

The extent of the retreat seems to vary according to the particular circumstance. The more substantial the retreat, however, the more stable it will be, and interestingly, the more the dominant power will have an investment in that retreat. Consider, for example, the anti-Tutsi massacres in Rwanda in December 1963–January 1964, in the wake of the Bugesera invasion. Quite rapidly following these events, it became clear that there would not be a Tutsi-led coup attempt in Rwanda. The precondition of internal strife was no longer operable, and the nation returned to a lower-risk profile for genocide, in which only the continuing presence of the Tutsi out-group may be noted. As this occurred, the Rwandan government actively called for tolerance. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared in a statement: “Rwanda wants to be a tolerant and peaceful nation. This is the will of all the people, and this is the will of all its leaders.”<sup>39</sup> In this document, furthermore, the government clearly differentiated between the *petit* Tutsi refugees, whom they explicitly stated were not responsible for the “terrorist attack,” and the “great feudal criminals” who were.<sup>40</sup> President Kayibanda did not homogenize, dehumanize, or vilify the Tutsi out-group and actively sought at least some level of rapprochement.<sup>41</sup>

In circumstances where the retreat is more limited, by contrast, with two or more risk factors remaining operable, such reconciliation is less likely to be sought,

and the situation is inherently less stable. In the Ottoman Empire, for example, dire economic pressures and ongoing territorial threats constituted continuing internal strife in the wake of the 1890s massacres. Thus, conditions for Ottoman Armenians remained far more hostile and uncertain. Missionary Reverend Edwin Bliss commented in late 1896, "Massacre has been followed by persistent persecution, less prominent, perhaps, but not less effective."<sup>42</sup> One European resident of Constantinople recorded:

The massacre of the Armenians came to an end . . . but the persecution of them which went on for months was worse than the massacre. Their business was destroyed, they were plundered and blackmailed without mercy, they were hunted like wild beasts, they were imprisoned, tortured, killed, deported . . . The poverty and distress of those left alive in Constantinople was often heartrending, and many women and children died of slow starvation . . . this persecution still continues in a milder form.<sup>43</sup>

A vital element in understanding the development of risk of genocide over time is to consider the cyclic pattern that emerges at this stage of retreat/escalation. In both the Armenian and Rwandan cases, one can plot the risk profile reaching this stage multiple times and then retreating to an earlier stage, in a cyclic process that lasted (in each case) for several decades. In Rwanda, for example, the risk profile escalated to this stage in 1963–1964, 1972–1973, and 1990. The repeated cycles of progression and then retreat in both case studies suggest the importance of the entrenchment of this process prior to further escalation. As previously mentioned, Staub has explored the role of a "continuum of destruction" as a precondition for genocide, whereby initially limited acts of harm psychologically facilitate subsequent, more destructive actions. Gradually, feelings of responsibility for others' welfare and inhibitions against killing break down.<sup>44</sup> The cyclic process that preceded both the Armenian and Rwandan genocides seems to have greatly facilitated the normalization of ethnic violence within Ottoman and Rwandan societies, and the dehumanization of the out-group as vilified "Other." Similar cycles of escalation and retreat can be observed prior to the Holocaust and the genocide in Darfur. Over time, a lasting suspicion or distrust of the out-group comes to permeate the society, even in the absence of a specific cause for distrust at a particular point. Thus, even when the Young Turk regime had officially granted Ottoman Armenians citizenship, it continued to refer to them by the derogatory descriptor *giaours* (infidels).<sup>45</sup> This entrenched distrust can later be of great significance, as would-be perpetrators seek to impose their own interpretation of the history of majority–out-group relations onto a society. In particular, they can be manipulated by authorities to link the out-group to an existential threat. During times of internal strife or crisis, vilification of the out-group is thus a readily available strategy for the political elite. The longer the period over which these cycles occur, and the more often they do, the more available and "normal" such a strategy becomes.

Three profound effects of this cycle facilitate further escalation to potential genocide. The first is that the strategy of utilizing the out-group as a convenient scapegoat in times of national crisis can be quite effective at rallying the majority in the desired political direction, while decreasing the focus on any more awkward issues for the political elite. As the strategy is used repeatedly at times of internal strife, the out-group can become inextricably linked to the nation's difficulties. It can appear that the authorities are always trying to resolve the "same" issue—for which the out-group is held responsible. In such circumstances, the temptation for "final" escalating violence is clear—although far from inevitable. The second effect of this

cycle is that the risk to which the out-group is exposed is not limited to the tenure of any particular ruling power. The repeated politicization of ethnic issues, the repeated scapegoating of the out-group, and the distrust and suspicion toward this minority become embedded features of the society. The out-group remains vulnerable to political manipulation by successive regimes. Thus, the Armenian massacres of the 1890s took place under the rule of Sultan Hamid II, while the genocide was engineered by the Young Turks who overthrew him. The third effect of this cycle is what Vahakn Dadrian has termed the “legacy of impunity.”<sup>46</sup> That is, as ruling powers discover that they can provoke ethnic violence, and even massacres with little consequence, they are emboldened to act increasingly recklessly. For example, the lack of a concerted international response to the Sassoun massacre of Armenians in 1894 facilitated the subsequent massacres; similarly, the lack of an international outcry at the limited anti-Tutsi massacres in Rwanda in the early 1990s encouraged further violent outbreaks.

Such outcomes may influence regimes to contemplate further escalation, rather than retreat, at this critical juncture. In the Armenian and Rwandan case studies, each ruling group ultimately preferred a process of escalation—placing the nation at grave risk of genocide. Instead of a retreat, the emergence of an ideology that could be used to legitimize genocide—or at least its emergence from the radical fringes—came to be a feature of each society. Moreover, in each case the presence of such an ideology proved conducive to the formation of a genocidal plan; once such a plan developed, the ideology in turn became increasingly radical and more specifically about justifying genocidal goals. In Ottoman Turkey, this ideology was that of pan-Turkism. A nation, according to Turkish ideologue Ziya Gökalp, who joined the inner sanctum of the Young Turk party in 1911, was “a society . . . of people who speak the same language . . . and are united in their religious and aesthetic ideals.”<sup>47</sup> What emerged as an ideology that excluded the Armenian minority from membership in the newly conceived concept of “Turkish society,” led quite rapidly to a plan for their physical elimination from that society. In a dialectical process, as the plan was formulated, justifying it required further ideological radicalization. The Armenian minority was no longer simply excluded; rather, it was seen as actively and dangerously threatening. In just six short years, the Young Turk leader Enver Pasha went from declaring the Armenians “brothers” to declaring “they will have to be destroyed.”<sup>48</sup>

Critical to escalation at this stage are the dual drivers of the entrenched power of the dominant authority and deepening perceptions of the out-group as an existential threat to the nation. Evidence from the Armenian and Rwandan case studies has indicated that a regime without sufficient resources to contemplate genocide realistically will not attempt or threaten to do so. For example, consider Rwanda in 1963–1964. In many respects, this appears as a society at far greater risk of genocide than Rwanda in the late 1980s. Hutu powers had not only just secured independence for the nation but also managed to secure almost all organs of power under their own leadership in the process. Victory had resulted from a fierce, racially driven campaign, which pitted Tutsi as foreign invaders and oppressors, “who imposed their rule . . . by cunning and cruelty.”<sup>49</sup> Then, after eighteen months of quite peaceful nation building, the Bugesera invasion shook the country deeply. Superficially at least, the risk of the emergence of a genocidal ideology at this point seems great. The Kayibanda government, however, simply did not have the resources or sufficient control of the country to contemplate such a course of action. Its army was woefully inadequate; its leadership only just grasping the rudiments of running a country.

Thus the rhetoric very quickly returned to themes of unity and cooperation. “Rwanda wants to be a tolerant and peaceful nation,” declared Kayibanda.<sup>50</sup> A quarter of a century later, by contrast, Habyarimana and the *akuzu* had a far tighter grip on the nation as they contemplated genocide.

The second driver of the emergence of an ideology that facilitates genocide is a deepening perception of the out-group as posing an existential threat to mainstream society or the nation, or both. Such perceptions are themselves at least partially manipulated by the dominant power. Usually the threat is presented as intractable—somehow justifying the escalated approach being contemplated. “Who could tell the difference between the *inyenzi* who attacked in October 1990 and those of the 1960s?” asked Hutu propagandists in 1993.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, characterizing the out-group in this way is crucial for the potential success of genocidal plans. Regime leaders possessed of a genocidal ideology appear to grasp that a particularly effective approach to reducing the natural inhibitions of humankind toward the mass murder of other humans is to present such actions as necessary self-defense. In order for this to be feasible, however, the out-group must be regarded as being dangerously threatening to the dominant group, irrespective of the reality. Thus, in the wake of the RPF invasion of Rwanda in October 1990, Habyarimana exaggerated the ongoing risk posed by the RPF rather than publicizing its very serious losses.<sup>52</sup> As the 1990s progressed, official propaganda presented the RPF as posing a grave existential threat to Rwanda, refusing to acknowledge a more balanced view that might have recognized their willingness to share power under the auspices of the Broad-Based Transitional Government and participate in democratic elections. The reality of the situation mattered less than the potential for such threats to be considered real, grave, and pressing by the population.

The emergence of an ideology that facilitates genocide, usually shortly followed by the outlines of a genocidal plan, is further characterized by a huge drive for control by the potential perpetrators. This can take multiple and very diverse forms, but each with the central goal of ensuring sufficient power and means to conduct the contemplated actions. Thus, in the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in Ottoman Turkey, it initially took the form of factional jousting for seats on the Central Committee for the extremist faction. Later, as the genocide was imminent, tactics included the disarming of all Armenians, separation of men from their families, and specific strategies to deal with areas of previous resistance. In Rwanda, too, pro-genocidal parties maneuvered within government circles for sufficient political power to enact their plans; massive imports of arms were ordered; and there was a massive build up of troops.

Characteristic, too, of a society in which this precondition is operable is a number of “tests” of the power of the dominant group. Typically, these tests will be to gauge the support of the population, and/or test the international reaction to the proposed course of action—that of both allies and enemies. For example, as the genocidal ideology took root in Rwanda in the early 1990s, a number of massacres occurred. According to Twagilimana, at least one of the purposes of the Bugesera massacres in March 1992, in which approximately 277 people were killed, was “to verify the feasibility of massacres in the political south.”<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Prunier has remarked upon the Hutu government’s close attention to the reaction of their French ally to the massacres of the early 1990s. According to Prunier, after each massacre, the Habyarimana government “[w]atched to see how the French were going to react. The Hutu were pleased by France’s tolerance and understanding, and they began to raise the level of violence. Had the French made it clear that they did not support

this extremism, the situation might not have deteriorated so badly.”<sup>54</sup> While care must be taken not to let knowledge of the subsequent genocide influence our consideration of these massacres, they do provide some evidence of preparation for further violence.

The emergence of a genocidal ideology appears to be very rapidly followed by an extensive propaganda campaign, in both the Armenian and Rwandan cases. Extensive efforts were made to dehumanize the out-group, which might be labeled as dogs, cockroaches, devils, or any other derogatory classification. Hutu propaganda declared: “A cockroach gives birth to another cockroach . . . a Tutsi stays always exactly the same.”<sup>55</sup> The importance of such propaganda has already been elucidated by a number of scholars of the preconditions for genocide. Leo Kuper identified ideological legitimation as a necessary precondition for genocide to occur; Fein referred to the necessity of the elite adopting a political formula that justifies the nation’s domination and idealizes the singular rights of the dominant group.<sup>56</sup> Mazian’s model most clearly highlights the vital communicative aspect of this precondition. Termed “Destructive Uses of Communication,” Mazian’s precondition refers to both communications that support the superiority of the dominant group, and those that reduce the inhibitions of the masses and justify the genocidal goals.<sup>57</sup> Stanton, Richter, and others have also referred to “mass incitement” as a key warning sign of impending genocide.<sup>58</sup>

By this stage, the situation is on the brink of disaster. The risk factors that predispose a nation to genocide are all present. As prior to the outbreak of massacres, case-specific precipitants and constraints now come to govern events. A striking feature of this stage in both the Armenian and Rwandan case studies is the “accelerant” role of a specific event that led to a sharply heightened perception of the out-group as an existential threat. In the Rwandan case, for example, the military superiority displayed by the RPF in early 1993 in the ongoing civil war, and their ability to return to the subsequent Arusha negotiations in a position of strength, was interpreted by the Hutu extremists to view the Tutsi as an ever more real and severe threat to Rwanda as they conceived of it. By mid-1993, for example, Hutu propagandists asserted, “We know that they have attacked us with the intention of massacring and exterminating 4.5 million Hutu and especially those who have gone to school.”<sup>59</sup> A similar picture had emerged in Turkey by 1914. There, Russian intervention had led to Turkey signing a new Armenian Reform Agreement under duress, which the Young Turks regarded as an attack on Ottoman sovereignty.<sup>60</sup> As Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs Serge Sazonov recalled, the Turkish attitude to the reforms was one of “undisguised ill-will,” as the Young Turks perceived them as “an attempt on Turkish independence.”<sup>61</sup> The Armenians themselves were thus seen as highly threatening to the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. In both cases, these events heightened the existential threat these out-groups were perceived to pose. In both cases, this spike occurred almost exactly fourteen months prior to the onset of the subsequent genocides. This suggests the important role of the perception of the out-group as posing an existential threat in this final stage before the outbreak of genocide.

Beyond the key accelerant role of perceptions of the out-group as an existential threat in facilitating the onset of genocide, precipitants and constraints appear to be locally driven. They can vary widely. In Rwanda, for example, the prospect of there being no further way to delay the implementation of the Arusha Peace Accords—that is, the seeming imminence with which the Hutu power brokers would have had to cede their hegemony over the nation—played a precipitating role in the onset of

the genocide.<sup>62</sup> Concerning Ottoman Turkey, numerous scholars have commented upon the crucial role of the start of the First World War in removing a powerful constraint against genocide—that of the threat of international intervention. By this stage of the process, ruling elites have invested heavily in the genocidal process. They are not simply reacting to circumstances as they arise, but actively attempting to manipulate those circumstances to their own advantage. Thus, they may be attempting to create triggers or remove constraints in order to facilitate the onset of genocide. For example, Dadrian has suggested that the desire to annihilate the Armenians may have played a role in influencing Turkey's decision to enter the war.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, while it has never been proven, scholars of the Rwandan genocide have suggested it is possible that Hutu extremist members of President Habyarimana's own entourage were somehow responsible for shooting down the presidential plane. Whether or not that really happened, the sharp variability of what can function as a precipitant or constraint at this stage, combined with the dominant authority's heavy investment in a genocidal strategy and desire to manipulate circumstances to its own advantage, make this stage inherently grossly unstable and unpredictable. The only possible caveat to the above is to note that, even for a regime that has invested heavily in a genocidal strategy and that may conceive it as the only route possible for the nation, actually making the decision to initiate genocide appears to be a significant hurdle. In both the Armenian and Rwandan cases, the situation remained poised on the brink of genocide for several months before the final leap was taken.

Tracking the development of risk of genocide over time in the case studies of the Armenian and Rwandan genocides suggests substantial commonalities in the temporal progression of such risk. The temporal model, presented earlier in this article, lays out these commonalities to incorporate temporal progression as an integral component of understanding risk of genocide. It is important, however, to clarify how this model improves our understanding of the progression of the risk of genocide.

A key finding is the identification of stage five, a cyclic process of retreat or escalation, in determining the short- to medium-term outcome in a particular circumstance. It is at this stage that we can clearly identify the paradox inherent in predicting genocide—that it can be fiendishly difficult to predict in any given time period, yet it is often clearly foreseeable, and indeed foreseen. Interestingly, while this stage of a cyclic process of retreat or escalation has never been elucidated previously in a model of the preconditions of genocide, it has instinctively been recognized by observers of specific instances. In an at-risk society, it is at this stage that genocide will often first be predicted. Observers of this stage may sense a very real risk of genocide, sufficient to express it officially in high-level warnings. Thus, to recall the paragraph with which this article commenced, when the observers of the Armenians in Ottoman Turkey in 1880 and 1895, and of Rwanda in 1962, spoke of the threat of the extermination of the Armenian and Tutsi minorities respectively, they unwittingly identified peak points in this cyclic process—points where escalation to further violence might well have been contemplated.

Yet this highlights one of the difficulties of attempting to track the path that leads to genocide—this is a critical juncture, but an early one that more often will lead to a process of retreat rather than escalation. Rulers at this stage must choose between a process of escalation, potentially leading to future genocide, or a process of retreat. It is here that the temporal model can offer some insight as to which choice is more likely in a given circumstance. First, the political elite in a nation that has reached this juncture previously and retreated to an earlier stage in the model—and

particularly a nation that has cycled through this process multiple times—may be more likely to consider escalation as a serious option. This is particularly so if previous cycles of more limited violence, as occur at stage four of the model, have been conducted with impunity. Further escalation may also be more likely if the out-group has repeatedly been made a scapegoat in times of national crisis. Alternatively, a dominant power without sufficient resources to conduct more massive violence will almost certainly prefer a process of retreat. This decision will also be influenced by the strength and intractability of the perceived existential threat posed by the out-group, or linked to the out-group. Paradoxically, this can be a somewhat dialectical process, as the dominant power at least partially manipulates this perception of threat, but then acts to counter it seemingly without consideration of its own role in the process.

The cyclical nature of the way in which risk of genocide fluctuates over time highlights the inherent difficulty of attempts to predict genocide. The most common process at stage five of the temporal model is a process of retreat—meaning nations can exhibit some risk factors for genocide for long periods. Indeed, this model confirms the generally long-term nature of these processes. Alternatively, however, if a regime opts for a process of further escalation at this stage, there can be quite a short time period between early and late stages of the model. For example, in Rwanda between the late 1980s and 1994 there was a very rapid and dramatic process of risk escalation. Such variability has contributed to a generally poor understanding of the development of risk for genocide over time. The temporal model, however, provides a logical lens through which to interpret such variability.

Beyond offering an explanation for the difficulties associated with early-stage or pre-crisis prediction of genocide, the temporal model offers valuable insight into the timing of genocide as it becomes increasingly likely. Indeed, it is a sign of strength of the temporal model that once a situation has escalated beyond the cyclic process of stage five, it begins to offer a very real timeline for the onset of genocide. Quite specifically, the Armenian and Rwandan cases suggest stages six to eight of the model cluster together very closely, and that there is a severe risk of genocide occurring between eighteen months and five years from the onset of stage six—that is, the emergence of a genocidal ideology in the dominant power. Considering the Armenian genocide, for example, even early estimates of the emergence of a genocidal ideology within the CUP in Ottoman Turkey, such as Dadrian's estimate of "the outlines of a genocidal scheme" being in place by the close of 1910, suggest a very short period between the emergence of this ideology and the onset of genocide.<sup>64</sup> In the Rwandan case study, the time periods under consideration are even shorter. Again, taking a relatively early estimate of the emergence of a genocidal ideology of late 1991 would still leave a period of only two and a half years until the onset of genocide—and there are competent arguments to suggest that date might be closer to late 1992.<sup>65</sup> Potentially, the time period between the emergence of a genocidal ideology and the onset of genocide therefore could be as short as eighteen months. The Holocaust suggests a slightly longer time period. While Hitler espoused his anti-Semitic ideology for some while prior to taking power, it is not until 1933 or even 1934 that the Nazi Party can be regarded as the dominant power in Germany. By mid-1941, the *Einsatzgruppen* mobile killing squads had commenced the "Final Solution." Together, these cases suggest that once this stage is reached, the society is at extreme risk of genocide, and the situation is inherently unstable.

Finally, beyond offering an improved understanding of how risk factors for genocide develop over time, the temporal model also provides a new perspective on

at-risk but non-genocidal societies. The model highlights the important role of constraints in impeding outbreaks of genocide, in a way that previous models have not. Indeed, the absence of constraints is as important as the presence of precipitants in determining the onset of genocide. Once the predisposing factors are in place, it is an interplay of precipitants and restraints that governs the outbreak of violence, both when that violence is somewhat limited, in stage four of the model, and when the nation is on the brink of genocide. Moreover, the type of constraints that are operable on a regime at stage five, as government leaders consider a process of retreat or escalation, are critical determinants of that choice. Evidence from the Armenian and Rwandan case studies suggests that regimes that do not realistically wield sufficient power and resources to conduct genocide at a particular time will not seriously contemplate doing so. Thus Sultan Hamid II, for example, constrained by the threat of European intervention in the Ottoman Empire, did not escalate the violence against the Armenians to a genocidal level. In seeking to understand the timing of genocide, the crucial role of constraints as contributors to the outcome must not be overlooked.

The quest to understand the timing of genocide highlights that it is a complex variable, with many contributing factors and case-specific determinants. One of the key challenges facing scholars in this field is to avoid the simplified conclusions hindsight renders all too tempting: that events were predictable, inevitable, and inexorable. Explanations, interpretations, and assumptions can gradually transform the often unpredictable reality into a seemingly foreordained series of events that belies the palpable uncertainty as they transpired.<sup>66</sup> At the same time, however, modeling that can offer some genuinely predictive capacity is a crucial component of efforts to prevent future outbreaks of genocide. There remains much further work to be done to explore the temporal progression of risk of genocide. The present model offers substantial insight, yet it is constrained by its reliance on two case studies. Further analysis is required. Nevertheless, the findings presented here contribute to a deeper appreciation of how—and when—particular factors are likely to converge to result in an outbreak of genocide.

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## Notes

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