

## ***Early Warning and Complex Monitoring of Ethnic Conflict and Mass Atrocities***

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SLIDE 1: The name of this presentation is “Early Warning and Complex Monitoring of Ethnic Conflict and Mass Atrocities.” It is a subject that I know rather well because for the past two years, beginning during the Kosovo War in 1999 and lasting until January of this year, I was OSS Inc.’s Senior Analyst for Genocide and Instability Warning Issues, a contractual position provided for by a CIA-funded contract. As such, I provided the State Department and the Agency with daily reports, gathered from open sources, of war crimes and other mass atrocities worldwide, as well as of ominous clues and indicators of potentially genocidal violence.

SLIDE 2: You may be familiar with David J. Scheffer, at that time the State Department’s Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes. It was to him and his staff that I provided my reports, usually online. Ambassador Scheffer, in turn, reported directly to then-Secretary of State Madeline Albright. This high level of involvement might not have existed were it not for the fact that the reports I provided were meant for early warning purposes. Otherwise, once a war crime is committed, that crime is in the past—and it therefore becomes a matter usually left to police investigators and prosecuting attorneys. However, when a war crime, or indeed any atrocity, is an omen of sorts, a warning of something much worse to come, then it becomes an issue worthy of senior attention. The ultimate goal of early warning is to help *prevent* the worse from happening, not to prophesize the worse in a ways that nothing can be done about it.

SLIDE 3: When I refer to an *atrocity*, I am not referring to something isolated, like the shooting at Columbine High School. Rather, I am referring to a crime perpetrated by an official authority, that is, a government or a rebel army. The quotes you see here are from Raphael Lemkin, the man who coined the term *genocide*. Lemkin was a Polish Jew and an international legal scholar who, even before the Holocaust murdered his parents, worked to internationally outlaw what we now call *crimes against humanity*, much as piracy was internationally outlawed before the 20th century.

SLIDE 4: Lemkin not only coined the word *genocide*, but he also helped enact the Genocide Convention in 1948. The Convention’s definition of genocide, which is the international legal definition, is shown here.

SLIDE 5: Incidentally, the Genocide Convention does not protect political and socio-economic groups, in part because, if it did, the Soviet Union and other Communist states would not have signed the Convention back in 1948. Nevertheless, those groups have obviously suffered, too, as evidenced by the Soviet Great Purges, the Chinese Communist Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, and of course the “Killing Fields” by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. Ideologies such as Marxism-Leninism and racial nationalism, epitomized by Nazism, have justified the perpetration of genocidal violence in countless places.

SLIDES 6: Which brings me to what we can look for to provide the first indications of possible genocide. I mentioned ideology but, more important than that, I want to stress the importance of group identities: that is, how one group views another as a monolithic enemy, as a scapegoat for

its problems, as an easy target for an ambitious tyrant to exploit. Adolf Hitler once said that, if the Jews did not exist, “We would have to invent them...” Hitler also emphasized the importance of propaganda, which for us makes propaganda an extremely important source of open source intelligence. We tend to think of propaganda as being simply a collection of lies, and therefore not reliable. It may indeed be full of lies, but within those lies the propaganda can reveal the true intentions of the propagandist, or at least what he is capable of committing. For example, in the early years of the Nazi regime, when the entire German press was censored, spouting only what the Nazi regime wanted the outside world to know, imagine if you were an observer back then and one day you saw the following newspaper front page.

SLIDE 7: The political cartoon here is of a demonic-looking Jewish rabbi opening up a Pandora’s box of evils rushing out to afflict the entire world, supposedly from a conspiratorial conference of Jews held in Frankfurt in 1897. The headline reads, “End of the Jewish Lie of German War Guilt,” and if you know the German history of World War I, you know what this headline refers to. This newspaper page appeared in 1935, only two years into Hitler’s dictatorship. Today, historians debate both when and how the Nazi regime decided to initiate the Final Solution, and that is a reasonable debate for them to have. But it does not take a genius, or an oracle, to figure out that in 1935 the Jews in Nazi Germany were in very serious danger. If the Nazi regime is willing to print this, how politically constrained is it? How cruel is it? How violent? How far could it go? Today we know the answer, yet even back in 1935, or earlier still, we could get a pretty good idea just by reading this newspaper.

SLIDE 8: Some other indicators of potential genocide. These indicators are derived from empirical research done by political scientists and sociologists who study genocide as a phenomenon. I will just summarize them by saying that a country that does not have effective human rights protections, such as a working Bill of Rights upheld by an accountable government and an independent judiciary, is a country where a genocide is definitely possible. And if, in that country, there is a group that in recent times has been a public scapegoat, abused and brutalized with near impunity, that group is still in very great danger.

SLIDE 9: So, now that we know what to look for, where can we get our information? For the most part, I drew upon the four basic categories listed here: the news media, academia, non-governmental organizations, and what I call politically-biased websites.

SLIDE 10: Perhaps not surprisingly, most of my information came from the news media. What might surprise you is that my best source within the news media was, not the broadcast media, but the print media; in other words, newspaper articles. We tend to think of the broadcast media as a very timely source, epitomized by the immediacy of CNN, but the truth is that very few stories get covered by television or radio unless that story is already “hot” and, in the case of television, photogenic. But that is too late for early warning purposes and, in any event, coverage by the broadcast media tends to be rather shallow because it usually consists of little more than “sound bytes.” Newspapers can cover stories in greater depth and, of course, more of them, because newspapers have the space for more stories. Yet even newspapers face the pressures of mass customer interest, which means that newspapers may not cover a particular country every day, especially an obscure Third World country. Fortunately, the journalists permanently stationed there do cover that country every day, even if their written stories do not

always get published. The way to read their stories is to scan the big wire services, such as Reuters and the Associated Press. Moreover, there are news-oriented web-sites that are not commercial, yet still reliable. The United Nations runs at least two: ReliefWeb and the International Regional Information Network (IRIN). These sites cover just about every Third World country on a daily basis, with very good basic reporting.

SLIDE 11: Academia is an open source of information that the news media loves to quote, which makes the collection of this type of information that much easier. Academic websites, however, tend to be more analytical than news-oriented. I'll give you three examples.

SLIDE 12: There are a number of research centers dedicated specifically to studying genocidal phenomena and proscribing possible solutions. This one, the Center for Holocaust, Genocide & Peace Studies, is located at the University of Nevada at Reno. That location may sound rather obscure, but the average research center studying these issues rarely has more than a handful of staff, usually organized around one or two tenured professors. On this site you will not find many, if any, current events information. What you may find are some insightful theories and analyses, such as the indicators of potential genocide that I showed to you earlier.

SLIDE 13: FEWER stands for the Forum for Early Warning and Early Response. With a name like this, you might think my job for the past two years had been done for me. Alas, not true. FEWER is a good organization, as is its affiliate, called International Alert. The problem, in my view, is that these organizations are too academic; that is, they produce relatively long reports and studies that would interest a university professor more than a government policymaker. In my case, being with a private contractor, I had to tailor my reports to satisfy my client, the U.S. Government. This does not mean that I "cooked" intelligence or changed the substance of my reports. It does mean that I worked very closely with my client to ensure that the format was user-friendly, that the reports were short and straightforward, and that I was readily available when the client had a question or wanted a change. Non-profits like FEWER are under no such obligation. And, in my opinion, this shows.

SLIDE 14: This is from the website of Harvard University's School of Public Health, in particular its Committee for Health and Human Rights. There are many of these places around, and not only in the field of public health. Their utility for early warning is, however, limited at best.

SLIDE 15: For fairly good early warning data, the websites of non-governmental organizations, especially those dedicated to human rights issues, proved to be my best source. NGO websites were not always my first source, but they were usually my most detailed source and sometimes, in obscure cases, my only source.

SLIDE 16: The lion's share of material came from Amnesty International, a human rights NGO based in London, as well as from Amnesty's American cousin, Human Rights Watch, based in New York. They produce news releases almost every day, indeed sometimes several a day. They also produce, though less frequently, extremely detailed reports per country, usually with documentation such as victim testimonies.

SLIDE 17: Once a humanitarian situation becomes a full-blown crisis, the NGOs that devote themselves to emergency relief become very deeply involved. This is the website for CARE, which I used quite often during the Kosovo War.

SLIDE 18: Doctors Without Borders is an NGO mostly concerned with public health in the Third World, though in the early 1990s the organization went through a revolution in its thinking, first opposing the UN's military intervention in Somalia in 1992, to becoming in 1994 a major advocate for military intervention in Rwanda to stop the genocide there.

SLIDE 19: The International Committee for the Red Cross has a website that is not as helpful as you might think. This is because the ICRC does not like to publicize foreign war crimes; rather, it prefers to use quiet diplomacy to discourage atrocities. Its website does have occasional press releases, however, and I used it quite a lot during the Kosovo War. It also has copies of every international treaty and agreement pertaining to the laws of war, including every relevant Hague and Geneva Convention. In that sense, it is quite impressive.

SLIDE 20: The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the former President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, also has website. In addition to carrying her speeches as well as the proceedings of related UN conferences and commissions, this website carries the reports of UN human rights investigators abroad, which can be quite revealing. For instance, one such report in 1993 warned of a potential genocide in Rwanda, which of course materialized there a year later. For me, the greatest difficulty dealing with this site was actually noticing those reports when they came out, because they are not well advertised. You have to look for them.

SLIDE 21: As I mentioned earlier, when a humanitarian situation becomes a full-blown crisis, the websites of relief aid organizations can become quite informative. This is especially true of this website, that of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Whether the crisis involved Kosovo, Chechnya, or East Timor, this site covered it in detail, including its human rights aspects since refugees do have rights, albeit rights that are often trampled upon. I actually used this site more than the previous one.

SLIDE 22: There are other international organizations as well, here for instance the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Organization for African Unity. About a year ago the OSCE produced some very detailed reports about Kosovo, warning of future instability and further ethnic troubles unless the Great Powers made greater efforts to improve Kosovo's economy and local administration. That is a form of early warning.

SLIDE 23: Politically-biased websites. One could argue that every website which I've shown you thus far is politically biased. Journalists and news editors have agendas, as do human rights NGOs and international organizations. Here, however, I'm talking about groups with some degree of political power, if only marginally.

SLIDE 24: For instance, this is the website of the Iraqi National Congress, which describes itself as "The Main Opposition Group to Saddam Hussein's Regime in Iraq." At the bottom it says, "On this site you will find news about the current situation in Iraq and information about the democratic Iraqi opposition."

SLIDE 25: This is a website supporting the opposition National League for Democracy in Burma, or Myanmar as the military government likes to call the country. The woman shown in the middle is the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

SLIDE 26: We don't generally think of religious groups as being political groups, but they are when charges of religious persecution are involved. This website is maintained by Baha'i International, an organization of the Baha'i religious faithful. What it shows here is a secret memorandum, smuggled out of Iran, which describes what restrictions the Iranian regime imposed on Iranian Baha'is in 1991 in an effort to undermine their faith.

SLIDE 27: Finally, the perpetrators themselves sometimes have websites and foreign press offices. What you see here comes from the website of the Iraqi Mission to the United Nations. If you like reading propaganda, you can find plenty of it here.

SLIDE 28: Ladies and gentlemen, as I look back over these past two years, I come to these conclusions. First, open source intelligence of this sort should aim to fill a gap, not an archive. In other words, the policymaker needs this information in a concise, timely form that he or she can really use. It does that policymaker no good to get swamped, repeatedly, with too much information.

Second, because there is so much raw data out there, the intelligence from this must be collected and processed by the analysts themselves, not by amateurs. It can be a very tiring, monotonous job—one which skeptical supervisors may see as a waste of talent, believing that their analysts should be assigned to “more immediate, more urgent” tasks. But this is a delusion. Amateurs cannot do this job any better than if you tried to navigate the *Encyclopedia Britannica* without knowing the letter order of the English alphabet. You need to know where to look, how to look, and what to look for.

Which brings me to my third point: With trained analysts on the job, doing the analysis itself is actually quite easy, even remarkably so. For contrary to popular belief, these humanitarian crises do not erupt spontaneously, but rather gradually, after a predictable deterioration. All we need to do is watch carefully. The hard part is keeping enough people doing the watching. The people I dealt with at both the State Department and the Agency wanted to do this work, and I honestly believe that their supervisors wanted them to do this work, but there were always distractions and other duties and unexpected assignments—and guess what suffered? Consequently, we could barely lift our eyes above the event horizon, even though we wanted to look farther beyond and actually had some analytical tools with which to try.

That is what we need to do: try to look farther out. It takes the United Nations at least three or four months to assemble and organize each new UN peacekeeping force. Diplomats typically need months or even years to effectively turn around an unfavorable situation abroad. In short, our leaders need months or even years of early warning. And I honestly believe that we can provide them with that, or at least try to. For the goal of early warning is not prophecy but prediction, to warn of what *may* happen so that we can undertake early efforts to avoid it. I do not think this goal is too ambitious. Even now, scholars are refining the indicators I have briefly

summarized for you. With but a few more analysts and staff—and I mean no more than a handful—a longer range forecasting effort is quite feasible. My preference is for a U.S. Government effort supported by one or more contractors, because I believe this would be the easiest approach. However, I would support a collaborative effort between various governments, or within the United Nations, or between universities and think-tanks.

What I fear is that this effort will not get started again until we have another preventable human calamity erupt somewhere, if not more than one. Therefore, I ask you, in whatever capacities you yourselves work, please demonstrate your concern as citizens and as human beings, actively, to influence your neighbors and your government, so that the words *Never Again* will one day refer to a genuine commitment to protect all the peoples of the world.

Thank you.

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