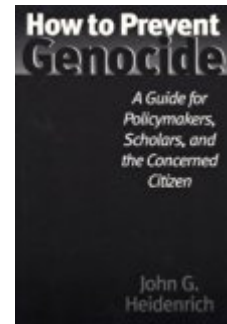


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

John G. Heidenrich. *How to Prevent Genocide: A Guide for Policymakers, Scholars, and the Concerned Citizen*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2001. 275 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-275-96987-5.

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What To Do About Genocide?

What To Do About Genocide?

This is an important book that should be read by those concerned about genocide and mass murder. John G. Heidenrich presents a thorough and detailed summary of methods and techniques employed by international organizations, the United Nations, and nations acting on their own or collectively, to prevent, stop, and anticipate genocide.

Heidenrich has a solid background in this subject, having worked as a military analyst for the Defense Intelligence Agency, a senior analyst for Genocide and Instability Warning Issues at Open Source Solutions, and project director of the Project on Genocide Prevention at the Institute for Defense and Disarmament Studies. He also was a graduate student at Harvard, and received a grant from the United States Institute of Peace to develop his ideas. His acknowledgements and credits encompass many of the most prestigious practitioners and scholars of international relations, foreign policy, and genocide studies. It is clear that Heidenrich is well grounded and prepared to write this book.

After presenting the legal definition of genocide in Chapter 1, he discusses topics related to the nature and theory of genocide, such as nature verses nurture, the power of conditioning, group identities, and the importance of politics. In one of the most important discussions, he argues correctly that genocide is rarely a spontaneous outbreak of violence between groups, but instead is planned, prepared for, and organized. This is critical in

understanding, for example, the incredible genocide in Rwanda, which was not a wild tribal outbreak of hatred, but a well-planned government murder. He also makes clear that genocides are often the product of scientific and philosophical beliefs that provide a rationale for the murders, such as the “religions” of Nazism and Marxism-Leninism.

Heidenrich then moves on to describe war crimes and acts of genocide and how these fit into international law. He provides a most useful overview of the law and its sources, dealing with the Geneva and Hague Conventions, and supplementary conventions, such as the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. He moves on to the prevention and punishment of genocide, and the organization of the United Nations as relevant to understanding the success and, more often, failure, in dealing with potential and actual genocide. He also has a good section about judicial action on genocide,

Following this, Heidenrich covers the need to forecast and detect genocide, and attempts to do so. This section is as detailed as the others, providing in essence a handbook of sources, problems, and indicators, assessing possible commitment to genocide, and why there should be a genocide early warning center.

The rest of the book increasingly focuses on attempts to prevent or stop genocide. He discusses nonviolent pressure, for example by means of diplomacy, trade, nonviolent resistance, and publicity. He also covers an often neglected issue: covert action against genocide, even

including assassination, psychological action, and covert rescue. An example of the latter was the rescue of perhaps 100,000 Jews by Raoul Wallenberg, a diplomat at the small Swedish legation in Hungary during World War II.

Often ignored in books on this subject are the ethical principles involved in any humanitarian intervention, which Heidenrich, in proof of the thoroughness of his work, discusses in detail. For example, he covers the “Just War” theory attributed to Saint Augustine, later developed by the Christian Church to provide criteria for the morality of war. He concludes that because genocide is so much worse than war, the just war doctrine provides only moral guidelines and not absolutes.

In subsequent chapters, Heidenrich covers the nature of peacekeeping and peace enforcement and carefully distinguishes between the meaning and operation of each. And he disentangles the complex events involved in United Nations and NATO operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina. It is more than a helpful summary; it is worth reading for the details and information he provides. He also deals with Rwanda and then draws out the lessons of both Bosnia and Rwanda, arguing that they well show the need for the insertion of properly trained and equipped military personnel at the right place and at the right time.

Heidenrich has a solid military background and shows it in these chapters on military operations to prevent or stop genocide. He precisely details operations in military actions and the mistakes made. For example, he has an interesting section on the use of isolated airpower and its failure. He also brings in a number of alternative expedients for dealing with genocide, such as the interposition of military forces, the separation of combatants or the genociders from the genocidees, safe havens, safe zones, and the use of nonlethal weapons.

This is not to say that Heidenrich is enthusiastic about military operations. He is quite aware of the limits of national and multinational military forces. He discusses the problems they have faced and in some cases have created. In particular, he has an excellent discussion of the NATO Alliance, and the expansion and confusion in its mission.

All this provides a background for understanding Heidenrich’s proposed response for dealing with genocide: a UN or private equivalent legion of about 5,000 volunteers. He develops this idea very well, provides its historical background, and reviews recommendations and reports suggesting such a legion. He also details how it should be armed and organized. This is no frivolous,

ivory tower idea, but instead rests on solid groundwork, and military and political analysis. I was persuaded.

I have two major criticisms of the book, but since they are the same problems I find in almost all books on preventing or understanding genocide, these should not, and I do not mean them to, distract from the book’s value and my recommendation that it be read and studied widely.

The first criticism is about Heidenrich’s confusion over the meaning of “genocide” itself. He gives, as all books on genocide do, the legal, Genocide Convention definition of genocide as, in summary, the attempt in whole or part to destroy a nonpolitical group by murder, bodily or mental harm, or other non-murderous means. However, his implicit discussion of “genocide” and references to actual “genocides” describing any mass murder by government constitute a wholly different thing. For example, he implicitly refers to the mass murders by Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot as genocide, but only a small minority of the millions these tyrants killed would be, by the legal definition, victims of genocide. He alludes to a wider definition of genocide, such as politicide or democide, but he really doesn’t make clear whether he is using for particular cases the widest definition, which is of any murder by government, or the legal definition.

Following his presentation of the legal definition and his mention of politicide and democide, he refers to Raphael Lemkin, the originator of the term genocide, as providing a more conceptually useful definition, but this definition hardly differs from the legal one. In the theoretical and conceptual chapters, this confusion over the meaning of genocide is clear, but when Heidenrich discusses stopping or preventing genocide, he appears to stick to the legal meaning. Even here there is a problem, for throughout he seems only concerned with genocide by murder, and ignores genocide by non-murderous ways.

The second criticism involves the various methods and techniques the author covers. By means of comparison, think of a book about the prevention of smallpox that focused entirely on the discovery of disease in a population, segregating the diseased, providing medical personnel, and other ways of treating smallpox once it occurs. Such a book would fail in its goal of comprehensive prevention by ignoring the first line of defense: inoculation before the disease appeared. Similarly, we have the means to prevent genocide before its appearance. Our “innoculation” is democratization and the extension of human rights. Modern democracies commit virtually no genocide and mass murder of their citizens,

and what democide they do commit is against foreigners during a war. However, since democracies also do not make war on each other, even wars would be avoided, and therefore, this single cause of democide by democracies. Unfortunately, Heidenrich's book ignores this most powerful preventative.

There are passages in the book which come close to this argument, but they are soon contradicted. In one place the author writes about democratic principles and individual rights as a "powerful means of preventing genocide" (p. 258), but then on the same page says "an ultimate cure will not be found exclusively within political arrangements." This can be argued, of course, but why in a book on prevention did Heidenrich not take more space than a paragraph or so to talk about human rights and democracy as a solution? Further contradictions: he

says on one page (p. 8) that the "last decade of the twentieth century when more people lived under democratic governments than ever before, still witnessed plenty of genocide." But later (p. 18) he says the "1990s actually experienced less genocide, not more." One can be definite: a plot of all genocide and mass murder would show that it has been on a sharp decline since the 1950s, in inverse correlation with the growth of human rights and democracy.

As I read a book, I make a check mark next to what I think is well worth remembering, or where the author makes an exceptionally good point. I put an X next to what I think is mistaken. As I looked over Heidenrich's book before writing this, I was surprised at the number of check marks compared to the few Xs.

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