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Ediotrs' Introduction

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Editor's Introduction

Genocide Studies and Prevention 4:2 is a combined issue. Part I is a symposium of invited commentaries on the report of the Genocide Prevention Task Force; Part II features three articles on various aspects of genocide.

Part I: Commentaries

The Genocide Prevention Task Force was officially launched in November 2007 by a consortium of non-governmental agencies—the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, the American Academy of Diplomacy, and the US Institute of Peace—under the joint chairmanship of Madeleine Albright and William Cohen. Albright served as US ambassador to the United Nations and then as secretary of state during the Bill Clinton administration, while Cohen was secretary of defense during Clinton's second term. Participants in the task force, including consultants, were more than fifty people with international, diplomatic, political, government, military, academic, humanitarian, and other relevant experience.

The task force's mandate is explained in the title of its official report, *Preventing Genocide: A Blueprint for U.S. Policymakers*. The co-chairs explain in their foreword,

This report provides a blueprint that can enable the United States to take preventive action, along with international partners, to forestall the specter of future cases of genocide and mass atrocities. The world agrees that genocide is unacceptable and yet genocide and mass killings continue. Our challenge is to match words to deeds and stop allowing the unacceptable.¹

Since the task force's report was deemed by *GSP*'s editors to be an important event, we thought we should invite a diverse set of commentaries on the report from as many perspectives as possible. A symposium held in Washington, DC, was co-organized by the International Association of Genocide Scholars, the International Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies (A Division of the Zoryan Institute), and the editors of *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal*.

The objective of this one-day symposium was to assemble a group of experts in genocide and international human rights from various disciplines and countries to provide an independent, in-depth, scholarly review and assessment of the report's findings and implications. The commentaries that follow were contributed by experts from at least four countries and provide a diversity of views. They range from in-depth scholarly analyses to editorial-style opinion pieces, reflecting different approaches to the report by the various commentators, and provide a series of stimulating views on the task force report that will, we hope, stimulate further attention and discussion.

The symposium begins with a broad critique by Hirsch in which he notes five overall problems with the report:

- (1) It is poorly written and filled with bureaucratic jargon.
- (2) It is historically inaccurate and, in some discussions, almost revisionist. Hirsch argues that because of this weak analysis of the recent history of genocide, the report cannot serve as a foundation for adequate policy.
- (3) It was written and edited by individuals who participated in past policy failures as their attempts to prevent genocide either failed or were not

undertaken. This is part, Hirsch notes, of a “recycling” process in the capital whereby policy makers never achieve a new perspective because former members of previous administrations are recalled when a new administration enters office, which makes it difficult for new or different views to be represented.

- (4) Reports by commissions often do not change policy; sometimes they do not even influence policy. Often, in government, the presence of a report is pointed to as the equivalent of policy. This is a form of cooptation: in place of taking action, policy makers focus on the report.
- (5) The “clashing cultures” of the academy and the policy makers may contribute to different perspectives, with academics taking a more analytic and critical view and policy makers arguing that they are more “practical.” In any case, Hirsch argues, these are critical weaknesses that must be addressed if this report is to influence policy.

Following this broad critique, we move on to more specific analyses. Since the report is directed at US policy, we thought it would be enlightening to include perspectives from European and Latin American genocide scholars. Interestingly, their views were quite divergent.

We begin with what might be termed a “Latin American” perspective. Daniel Feierstein, director of the Center of Genocide Studies, Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero, and a professor at the Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina, argues that “from a Latin American perspective,” the report is “interesting but confusing.” He contends that the report is “embedded” in the values of “American society” and that this makes it “difficult for outsiders to evaluate [it] as an action plan.” Feierstein’s primary criticism is not so much what the report says but what it leaves out—that is, what it does not discuss “about the causes of genocide and ways of preventing it.”

In particular, Feierstein refers to what he calls the “active role played by US governments in promoting such practices in the first place.” In fact, he points out that “anyone living in a Third World country in Latin America, Southeast Asia, or Africa would find almost laughable the idea, mentioned earlier, that the main problem of the United States with respect to genocide has been ‘non-intervention.’” It is a common belief in the rest of the world that reduced US intervention has actually led to a “significant reduction in the systematic processes of mass murder in recent years.” Ultimately, Feierstein believes that the report is “profoundly ethnocentric.”

While his analysis is primarily critical, Feierstein does note that there are “some positive aspects to the report,” including a willingness to broaden the definition of genocide and calls for “establishing systems of risk assessments and early warning of genocide around the world” and preventing arms sales to places or groups where there is a risk of genocide.

Feierstein concludes by noting that any attempt to prevent genocide must address two problems: “(a) what the United States can and should do to prevent genocide; and (b) what the United States should *stop doing*.” He is not the only one of the commentators to note this problem with the report; his perspective as a Latin American scholar likely makes the problem much more obvious and, therefore, contributes an additional and important dimension to the analysis of the report.

A second non-US analysis, much less critical of the report, is contributed by Jacques Sémelin, professor of political science (Center for International Research and Studies, Sciences Po, Paris) and founder and editor-in-chief of the online *Encyclopedia of Mass Violence*.²

Sémelin believes that the report is an event of “great significance in the field of genocide studies.” This is so, he believes, because it is

the first time that a group of experts, mainly former high officials, former diplomats, generals, and members of Congress, have worked together in order to propose a coherent and well-argued list of recommendations to a state so that its government will play a major role in preventing genocide throughout the world.

He does note that few genocide scholars or NGO members were consulted, and he points out—echoing Feierstein’s critique—that the report is “an American event.”

Sémelin argues that the report is important, moreover, as “an answer” to past inaction by the United States in preventing genocide and as a “way for America to say ‘never again’”—forgetting, as others have noted, that saying “never again” has not meant that genocide will “never again” be committed. Sémelin comments on the six parts of the report and concludes that there still remain significant problems; in particular, the United States, according to Sémelin, can hardly claim to be a moral or political leader in genocide prevention without joining the International Criminal Court. Sémelin concludes that while its future impact cannot be foreseen, the report “will stand as a first and promising step.”

The third commentary, also from a Europe-based scholar, shifts the focus to international law. Martin Mennecke, presently a visiting professor of international law at Washington and Lee University, views the report as “a welcome addition to the growing efforts” in the area of genocide prevention and would like to see European institutions concerned with this topic engage in a similar exercise. Mennecke’s basic critique is that the “treatment of international law in [the report] remains inconsistent and insufficient. Most often law is reduced to ‘international political challenges’ or less than that.” He argues that the report should have explored “how recent trends in international law could contribute and shape future policies in the field of genocide prevention.” Like most of our other commentators, Mennecke notes that, “overall, there is little self-critical assessment of past US policies *vis-à-vis* international law.” The report, he contends, focuses primarily on political considerations and appears to view international law as a “secondary category.”

Mennecke concludes that while it has a “number of shortcomings,” the report at least puts genocide prevention on the agenda.

The final comment from a non-US-based scholar continues the focus on international law. William A. Schabas, professor of human rights law at the National University of Ireland, Galway, and director of the Irish Centre for Human Rights (along with several other positions), is a leading international expert on international law and genocide prevention. Schabas notes that the report states an intent to avoid the problems associated with the term “genocide” by referring instead to “mass atrocities,” which would include genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. This is, as Schabas notes, an old debate, and the report is misleading if its intent was to examine “genocide and mass atrocity” instead of genocide alone.

These definitional issues are important, according to Schabas, because as a result of “the limitations on the definitions of crimes against humanity and genocide adopted in the aftermath of World War II, from the 1940s until the 1990s there were important gaps in the ability of international law to deal with atrocities.” Schabas considers this no longer the case, because the evolution of international law now means that “crimes against humanity” addresses a broader range of atrocities than “genocide.” It also means, he notes, that “what the Albright-Cohen task force is talking about is ‘crimes against humanity,’ not ‘genocide.’” Schabas therefore believes that the task force has

engaged in a “form of deception”: “they are using one term, whose definition is well recognized and well accepted in international law, to replace another.” This is important, as he notes, because “words matter.”

Schabas concludes that while the report is addressed to the US government, it concerns all, since the United States remains the most powerful nation; and the report is very short on multilateralism. “Most countries,” he points out, “would expect that initiatives to prevent genocide should originate from the United Nations in New York, not from the Department of State and the Pentagon in Washington.” Finally, Schabas opines that the new Barack Obama administration in Washington should not endorse the report:

An endorsement of the Albright-Cohen Report may be a step in the wrong direction . . . given the report’s exaggerated emphasis on the use of force and its cavalier dismissal of important legal distinctions . . . Prevention of genocide (and of mass atrocity) will result from stronger international institutions, in particular the United Nations and the International Criminal Court, not from the threat of unilateral military action by the United States.

The last three analyses are written by US scholars of genocide. As one might expect, their views are divergent, and they concentrate on different aspects of the report.

Scott Straus, a political scientist from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, argues that the “contents of the report are a decisive step forward in the debate over how to prevent . . . genocide”; he believes the report is insightful and provides policy options that are “concrete and sensible.” Straus identifies what he refers to as “five areas of specific strength”: identifying a coherent policy, providing a “comprehensive strategic approach,” making short-term recommendations, identifying a “series of specific coercive and non-coercive measures that can be taken to prevent genocide,” and engaging and incorporating “scholarship and debates in the genocide studies field.”

Even a quick reading of the discussion up to this point will make clear that Straus is at odds with some of our earlier commentators. In addition to disagreeing on the strengths he reports, some of the early analysis takes a diametrically opposed view. In fact, however, Straus also identifies several weaknesses. The primary weakness, also noted by Schabas and others, is that the report places too little emphasis on multilateral action with US cooperation and too much on unilateral US action, which, as Straus notes, misses an important opportunity to reinforce international doctrine.

The second commentary from a US genocide scholar is directed at some of the unstated and faulty assumptions upon which the report is based. Alan Kuperman, associate professor of public affairs at the LBJ School of Public Affairs, University of Texas at Austin, notes that “good intentions may be necessary, but they are not sufficient, to prevent genocide.” The unstated and flawed assumptions upon which the report is based therefore constitute, according to Kuperman, a “recipe for failure.”

While the report offers “several constructive reforms,” Kuperman believes that overall . . . the report ignores the most profound lessons of past failures, declines to make the hard choices on policy dilemmas, and neglects to call for the costly military reforms that could enable intervention to prevent future genocides. A more realistic assessment of these challenges gives rise to a very different set of recommendations than found in the report.

Kuperman concludes, rather starkly, that “the Albright-Cohen recommendations cannot achieve their stated goal and therefore need to be augmented.”

The final analysis of the Albright-Cohen Report broadens the perspective from political science and international law to a more philosophical analysis. Henry Theriault, associate professor of philosophy at Worcester State College in Massachusetts, notes that the report is based—as Kuperman also argues—on faulty assumptions and a questionable interpretation of past history. These lead to a view of genocide that is essentially limited and “discounts precisely the kinds of genocide that the United States and other great powers are typically involved in.” This view is tied to a more comprehensive critique in which Theriault points out instances in which the United States not only knew genocide was being committed but, in several cases, actively supported such action. As a result, according to Theriault, “the report consistently ignores the foregoing issues, instead presenting the US relationship to genocide as one of mistaken inaction and unfortunate indifference.”

Theriault relentlessly highlights the report's consistent misrepresentation of US policy toward genocide, which goes so far as to ignore the founding genocide upon which the country was established—the genocide of Native Americans. In the absence of a forthright acknowledgment the United States' own role in supporting and committing genocidal acts, he argues, the report is constructed on false assumptions and reconstructed history, which cannot serve as the foundation for a successful policy of prevention.

After additional critical analysis, Theriault concludes by offering a series of recommendations that he believes are more likely than those in the report to set the United States on a path toward preventing genocide.

From a simple summary of the commentaries, it is obvious that the contributors to this symposium have a wide range of views on the historical accuracy and the possible impact of the report and of its recommendations. We, the *GSP* editors, hope to circulate this issue with these commentaries to the original authors of the report and, in a future issue, invite them to respond to the analysis presented above. In this fashion, we hope to stimulate a dialogue between what I have referred to as the two “competing cultures” of academics and policy makers. The success or failure of this endeavor, of course, depends upon the willingness of the report's authors to respond and to consider the analysis presented above.

Part II: Three Articles on Genocide

As noted above, this issue also includes three original research articles on three different aspects of genocide. The first argues that there is, in fact, something called “intergenerational moral responsibility.” Armen Marsoobian, professor of philosophy at Southern Connecticut State University, constructs an argument “for the claim that we are morally responsible (in the qualified sense proposed in the article) for the crimes of our ancestors if our ancestors, as a collectivity, were part of a community for whose sake and in whose name crimes were committed that meet the definition of the crime of genocide.”

Marsoobian posits two arguments to support this view. The first involves the idea that collectivities have an identity across time; the second involves the notion that large collectivities, such as nations, provide “moral reliability” within which individuals may function and on which they count to support their values. This means, he argues, that individuals have a moral responsibility “not to the past per se but to the past as it play an active role in the present.”

Marsoobian's interesting philosophical analysis is followed by a more conventional examination of failure to prevent genocide in three cases: Rwanda, Srebrenica, and Darfur. Fred Grünfeld, of the University of Maastricht Faculty of Law, University College Maastricht, the Netherlands, and the Maastricht Centre for Human Rights, and Wessel Vermeulen, a research assistant to Dr. Grunfeld, argue that in spite of ample warnings, the UN Security Council was not willing to take any action to prevent genocide or to stop the genocide taking place in these three contexts.

The final article examines the attempts to identify missing persons in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Kirsten Juhl, research fellow at the University of Stavanger, Norway, argues that it is important to solve the missing-persons issue in the aftermath of genocide and that this may be a "prerequisite to prevent recurrences."

Juhl's analysis examines missing-persons issues from what she calls a "risk management and societal safety perspective." Very important is the "state's ability to establish public confidence in critical social institutions and to build mutual trust among different groups within the population." Her study is based on empirical data and considers, as she notes, "how the emotional overrules the rational, how the predominantly ethnic discourse in society overpowers the weaker human-rights discourse, and how this may threaten the important building of confidence and trust."

* * *

GSP 4:2 is thus a heterogeneous mix of commentaries and wide-ranging substantive articles. The commentaries elucidate and draw attention to the shortcomings as well as the positive contributions of the Albright-Cohen Report, while the three articles raise a series of interesting questions and provide some new perspectives on the study of genocide. As noted above, in a future issue the editors will invite the authors of the Albright-Cohen Report to respond to the commentaries published in this issue. We hope that you, the reader, will look forward to these with the same anticipation of a productive debate that characterizes the editors.

Herb Hirsch
GSP Co-editor

Notes

1. Madeleine K. Albright and William S. Cohen, "Foreword: A Call to Action by the Co-chairs," in *Preventing Genocide: A Blueprint for U.S. Policymakers*, co-chaired by Madeleine K. Albright and William S. Cohen, ix-x (Washington, DC: Genocide Prevention Task Force, 2008), http://www.usip.org/genocide_taskforce/report.html (accessed 9 June 2009), ix.
2. Jacques Sémelin, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mass Violence* (Paris: Sciences Po, CNRS, CERI, Caen Memorial, Hamburger Institut für Sozial Forschung, 2008), <http://www.massviolence.org> (accessed 9 June 2009).

Notice of Errata

In *GSP* 3.3 (December 2008), pp. 341–52, Henry Maitles is identified as sole author of the article titled "Why are we learning this?: Does Studying the Holocaust Encourage Better Citizenship Values?"; in fact, however, Paula Cowan (University of the West of Scotland) should also have been identified as an author of this article. Henry Maitles regrets the error.