Steps on the Path to Genocide: A New Analytical Model Applied to Bosnia-Herzegovina

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Abstract

Genocide does not happen overnight; rather it results from several distinct steps that go back decades or even centuries in a given geographical area's social history prior to the modern-day outbreak of genocidal violence. This new analytical model builds upon Raul Hilberg's 1961 "Six Stages of Mass Murder" scheme of the Holocaust to identify the social background of hate that has the potential to culminate in genocide. Ultimately, this analytical model can serve as a predictive index for recognizing the indicators that a given conflict may lead to a genocide.

Ethnic distribution in Bosnia and Herzegovina before and after the war

Five Preliminary Steps on the Path to Genocide (Prince, 2014)

1. Social History and Folklore of Persecuted or Persecuted by a Distinct Group - Historical background of persecution, hatred, and violence can occur across ethnic, political, or religious lines. For the Serbs, this perception of persecution dates back at least to 14th-century when Prince Lazar was beheaded by the Ottoman Turks following the Battle of Kosovo. Prince Lazar's death and the Turco-Turkish wars have been used by Serbian nationalists as a means of persecuting enemy nations. (IICA, 2013, 1994-12-01)

2. Power-Base of Hatred Arises - Group or person comes to power that possesses a combination of extreme hatred for the "other" group as well as a worldview of war being necessary to purge their sacred, ancestral lands of the "other." This perception is not a view held by the majority of the population, at first. (IICA, 2013, 1994-12-01)

3. Propaganda of Hate and Nationalism - To bring the public to the Power-Base's camp of hatred and fear for a blood, the Power-Base must produce propaganda that draws on divisive religious, ethnic, and political symbols and emotive social memories that awaken ancient hatreds between rivaling people groups. (IICA, 2013, 1994-12-01)

4. Hate Wave - Responding to the Power-Base's spurring of ethnic, political, and religious tensions, the general public takes up action through rallies, sermons, speeches, and other ostensibly violent social movements. This step ends with the public calling on the Power-Base to go to war or take some kind of violent action against the "other" group, or the public may even take the matter into their own hands. (IICA, 2013, 1994-12-01)

5. Power-Base Response - Power-Base then stokes that they must respond to the people and take action, thus hiding behind the facade of the public’s rage that the Power-Base originally created through Step 3. (IICA, 2013, 1994-12-01)

Implications

This analytical model can serve as a genocidal predictive index for governments and international institutions to use when attempting to identify predictors indicating that a conflict could soon escalate into a genocide. Additionally, this model provides broader insight into the trajectory of a conflict that may be heading towards a genocide; thus, this model can function as a guide for understanding what steps must be prevented from occurring to halt a given conflict from becoming a full-blown genocide.

References