

The Good Intentions That Pave the Road to War

Пише: Diana Johnstone

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(Counterpunch)



Opposing genocide has become a sort of cottage industry in the United States.

Everywhere, “genocide studies” are cropping up in universities. Five years ago, an unlikely “Genocide Prevention Task Force” was set up headed by former secretary of state Madeleine Albright and former defense secretary William Cohen, both veterans of the Clinton administration.

The Bible of the campaign is Samantha Power’s book, “[A Problem from Hell](#)”. Ms. Power’s thesis is that the U.S. Government, while well-intentioned, like all of us, is too slow to intervene to “stop genocide”. It is a suggestion that the U.S. government embraces, even to taking on Ms. Power as White House advisor.

Why has the U.S. Government so eagerly endorsed the crusade against “genocide”?

The reason is clear. Since the Holocaust has become the most omnipresent historical reference in Western societies, the concept of “genocide” is widely and easily accepted as the greatest evil to afflict the planet. It is felt to be *worse than war*.

Therein lies its immense value to the U.S. military-industrial complex, and to a foreign policy elite seeking an acceptable pretext for military intervention wherever they choose.

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The obsession with “genocide” as the primary humanitarian issue in the world today relativizes war. It reverses the final judgment of the Nuremberg Trials that:

War is essentially an evil thing. Its consequences are not confined to the belligerent states alone, but affect the whole world. To initiate a war of aggression, therefore, is not only an international crime; it is the *supreme international crime* differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole.

Instead, war is transformed into a chivalrous action to rescue whole populations from “genocide”.

At the same time, national sovereignty, erected as the barrier to prevent strong nations from invading weaker ones, that is, to prevent aggression and “the scourge of war”, is derided as nothing but a protection for evil rulers (“dictators”) whose only ambition is to “massacre their own people”.



This ideological construct is the basis for the Western-sponsored doctrine, forced on a more or less reluctant United Nations, of “R2P”, the ambiguous shorthand for both the “right” and the “responsibility” to protect peoples from their own governments.

In practice this can give the dominant powers carte blanche to intervene militarily in weaker countries in order to support whatever armed rebellions they favor. Once this doctrine seems to be accepted, it can even serve as an incitement to opposition groups to provoke government repression in order to call for “protection”.

One among many examples of this cottage industry is a program called “World Without

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Genocide” at the William Mitchell College of Law in my home town, Saint Paul, Minnesota, whose executive director Ellen J. Kennedy recently wrote an article for the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* which expresses all the usual clichés of that seemingly well-meaning but misguided campaign.

Misguided, and above all, misguiding. It is directing the attention of well-intentioned people away from the essential cause of our time which is to reverse the drift toward worldwide war.

Ms. Kennedy blames “genocide” on the legal barrier set up to try to prevent aggressive war: national sovereignty. Her cure for genocide is apparently to abolish national sovereignty.



For more than 350 years, the concept of “national sovereignty” held primacy over the idea of “individual sovereignty.” Governments basically had immunity from outside intervention despite human-rights violations they perpetrated within their borders. The result has been an “over and over again” phenomenon of genocide since the Holocaust, with millions of innocent lives lost in Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, Congo, Guatemala, Argentina, East Timor — the list is long.

In fact, Hitler initiated World War II precisely in *violation* of the national sovereignty of Czechoslovakia and Poland partly in order, he claimed, to stop human rights violations that those governments allegedly perpetrated against ethnic Germans who lived there. It was to invalidate this pretext, and “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”, that the United Nations was founded on the basis of respect for national sovereignty.

Of course, there is no chance that the United States will abandon *its* national sovereignty. Rather, all other countries are called upon to abandon *their* national sovereignty – to the United States.

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Ms. Kennedy's lengthens her list by arbitrarily grouping disparate events under the single label of "genocide", mostly according to their place in the official U.S. narrative of contemporary conflicts.

But the significant fact is that the worst of these slaughters – Cambodia, Rwanda and the Holocaust itself – occurred *during wars and as a result of wars*.

The systematic rounding up, deportation and killing of European Jews took place during World War II. Jews were denounced as "the internal enemy" of Germany. War is the perfect setting for such racist paranoia. After all, even in the United States, during World War II, Japanese American families were dispossessed of their property, rounded up and put in camps. The result was not comparable, but the pretext was similar.

In Rwanda, the horrific slaughter was a response to an invasion by Tutsi forces from neighboring Uganda and the assassination of the country's president. The context was invasion and civil war.

The Cambodian slaughter was certainly not the fault of "national sovereignty". Indeed, it was precisely the direct result of the U.S. violation of Cambodia's national sovereignty. Years of secret U.S. bombing of the Cambodian countryside, followed by a U.S.-engineered overthrow of the Cambodian government, opened the way for takeover of that country by embittered Khmer Rouge fighters who took out their resentment against the devastation of rural areas on the hapless urban population, considered accomplices of their enemies. The Khmer Rouge slaughters took place after the United States had been defeated in Indochina by the Vietnamese. When, after being provoked by armed incursions, the Vietnamese intervened to overthrow the Khmer Rouge, they were condemned in the United Nations by the United States for doing so.

Some of the bloodiest events do not make it to Ms. Kennedy's "genocide" list. Missing is the killing of over half a million members of the Indonesian Communist Party in 1965 and 1966. But the dictator responsible, Suharto, was "a friend of the United States" and the victims were communists.

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But while ignoring over half a million murdered Indonesians, she includes Bosnia on her list. In that case, the highest estimate of victims was 8,000, all men of military age. Indeed, the NATO-linked International Criminal Tribunal (ICTY) has ruled that the 1995 Srebrenica massacre was “genocide”. To arrive at this verdict, despite the fact that the alleged perpetrators spared women and children, the ICTY found a sociologist who claimed that since the Muslim community of Srebrenica was a patriarchy, murdering the menfolk amounted to “genocide” in a single town, since the women would not return without the men. This far-fetched judgment was necessary to preserve “Bosnia” as Exhibit A in the case for NATO military intervention.

It is generally overlooked that Srebrenica was a garrison town where the Muslim men in 1995 were not all natives of that originally multi-ethnic town and had been carrying out attacks on surrounding Serb villages. Nor have Western media given much attention to the testimony by Srebrenica Muslim leaders of having heard the Islamist party leader, Alija Izetbegovic, confide that President Clinton had said that a massacre of at least 5,000 Muslims was needed to bring the “international community” into the Bosnian civil war on the side of the Muslims. Those Muslim leaders believe that Izetbegovic deliberately left Srebrenica undefended in order to set up a massacre by vengeful Serbs.

Whether or not that story is true, it points to a serious danger of adopting the R2P principle. Izetbegovic was the leader of a party which wanted to defeat his enemies with outside military aid. The world is rife with such leaders of ethnic, religious or political factions. If they know that “the world’s only superpower” may come to their aid once they can accuse the existing government of “slaughtering its own people”, they are highly motivated to provoke that government into committing the required slaughter.



A number of former U.N. peacekeepers have testified that Muslim forces in Bosnia carried out the infamous “Marketplace bombings” against Sarajevo civilians in order to blame their Serb enemies and gain international support.

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How could they do such a horrid thing? Well, if a country's leader can be willing to "massacre his own people", why couldn't the leader of a rebel group allow some of "his own people" to be massacred, in order to take power? Especially, by the way, if he is paid handsomely by some outside power – Qatar for instance – to provoke an uprising.

A principal danger of the R2P doctrine is that it encourages rebel factions to provoke repression, or to claim persecution, solely to bring in foreign forces on their behalf. It is certain that anti-Gaddafi militants grossly exaggerated Gaddafi's threat to Benghazi in order to provoke the 2011 French-led NATO war against Libya. The war in Mali is a direct result of the brutal overthrow of Gaddafi, who was a major force for African stability.

R2P serves primarily to create a public opinion willing to accept U.S. and NATO intervention in other countries. It is not meant to allow the Russians or the Chinese to intervene, say, to protect housemaids in Saudi Arabia from being beheaded, much less to allow Cuban forces to shut down Guantanamo and end U.S. violations of human rights – on Cuban territory.

U.S. intervention does not have a track record of "protecting" people. It is easier to imagine an effective intervention where none has been attempted – for instance in Rwanda – than to carry it out in the real world.

In December 1992, a Marine battalion landed in Somalia in "Operation Restore Hope". Hope was not restored, Marines were massacred by the locals and were chased out within four months. It is easier to imagine an effective intervention where none has been attempted – for instance in Rwanda – than to carry it out in the real world.

For all its military power, the United States is unable to make over the world to its liking. It has failed in Iraq and in Afghanistan. The 1999 "Kosovo war" is claimed as a success – only by studiously ignoring what has been going on in the province since it was wrested from Serbia by NATO and handed over to Washington's ethnic Albanian clients. The "success" in Libya is publicly unraveling much faster.

Like all the R2P advocates, Ms. Kennedy exhorts us "never again" to allow a Holocaust. In reality there has "never again" been another Holocaust. History produces unique events which defy all our expectations.

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But what, people ask me, if something that dreadful did happen? Should the world just stand by and watch?

What is meant by “the world”? The Western ideological construct assumes that the world should care about human rights, but that only the West really does. That assumption is creating a deepening gap between the West and the rest of the world, which does not see things that way. To most of the real world, the West is seen as a cause of humanitarian disasters, not the cure.

Libya marked a turning point, when the NATO powers used the R2P doctrine not to protect people from being bombed by their own air force (the idea behind the “no fly zone” UN resolution), but to bomb the country themselves in order to enable rebels to kill the leader and destroy the regime. That convinced the Russians and Chinese, if they had had any doubts, that “R2P” is a fake, used to advance a project of world domination.

And they are not alone and isolated. The West is isolating itself in its own powerful propaganda bubble. Much, perhaps most of the world sees Western intervention as motivated by economic self-interest, or by the interests of Israel. The sense of being threatened by U.S. power incites other countries to build up their own military defenses and to repress opposition militants who might serve as excuses for outside intervention.

By crying “genocide” when there is no genocide, the U.S. is crying wolf and losing credibility. It is destroying the trust and unity that would be needed to mobilize international humanitarian action in case of genuine need.

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