



GPN GENOCIDE PREVENTION NOW

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Executive Director: Prof. Israel W. Charny, Ph.D. Director of WORLD GENOCIDE SITUATION ROOM: Prof. Elihu D. Richter, M.D., M.P.H.
Director of HOLOCAUST AND GENOCIDE REVIEW: Marc I Sherman, M.L.S.

Can we Prevent Genocide by Preventing Incitement? Part 2 Preventing Genocide by Preventing Hate Language and Incitement: Models from Epidemiology and Public Health

Elihu D Richter, Yael Stein, Alex Barnea Burnley, and Marc Sherman

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If state-sanctioned hate language and incitement predict, promote and catalyze genocidal scenarios, there is a compelling case for applying models from epidemiology and public health which take us to prediction and prevention. This article examines concepts and tools of public health, preventive medicine and epidemiology—the field which studies the distribution and determinants of diseases in populations. These concepts and tools, first developed to control and eradicate microbial diseases transmitted by water, food, air-borne and person-to-person spread, have produced spectacular advances in identifying the risks and advancing prevention of chronic non-infectious diseases -- e.g., heart disease, cancer, mass disasters, injuries, and violence. These models include: Surveillance, the Mean determines the Extreme, Positive Deviance, and the use of the Precautionary Principle.

In a previous paper (<http://www.genocidepreventionnow.org/2010/06/can-we-prevent-genocide-by-preventing.html>), we noted that the case for preventing genocide by preventing hate language and incitement derives from the fact that the latter mobilize and motivate perpetrators and desensitize bystanders. Such prevention requires developing world-wide networks for epidemiologic surveillance of hate language and incitement. These networks would trigger interventions before perpetrators start carrying out mass atrocities against victim populations, exploiting existing legal and extra-legal interventions as well.

The perils of neglecting the propagation and spread of state-sanctioned and state-sponsored hate language and incitement are ominous, especially in an era of push-button genocide and nuclear terror, rogue regimes and terror groups. Conversely, when regimes inciting to genocide are developing weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the case is imperative for stopping them from doing so, given the fact that such incitement is an early warning sign until proven otherwise.

Will humankind test the efficacy of going from post-event intervention to Predict and Prevent, using the models from public health? The lessons of the Holocaust empower us to address prevention of hate language and incitement when they are used against all populations, without waiting for the consequences.

*Wars are not fought for territory, but for words.
Man's deadliest weapon is language. He is susceptible to being
hypnotized by slogans as he is to infectious diseases.
And where there is an epidemic, the group mind takes over.
--Arthur Koestler 1978*

The epidemiology of hate language and incitement: Useful models from public health

Certain concepts from public health are useful for examining the impact of population-wide exposure to dehumanizing medical metaphors and messages on potential individual perpetrators and the population-at-large of followers and bystanders. Here we want to examine concepts and tools of public health, preventive medicine and epidemiology - the field which studies the distribution and determinants of diseases in populations. These concepts and tools, first developed to control and eradicate microbial diseases transmitted by water, food, air-borne and person-to-person spread, have produced spectacular advances in identifying the risks and advancing prevention of chronic non-infectious diseases, - e.g., heart disease, cancer, mass disasters, injuries, and violence.

Concepts such as Predict and Prevent, surveillance, early warning signs, incubation periods, and pro-active intervention against sources of exposure have been the basis of spectacular advances in both infectious and non-infectious diseases and mass violence. They are now part of everyday conventional wisdom concerning decision making and public policy. More recent concepts such as the Mean determines the Extreme and the Precautionary Principle should help advance the locus of genocide intervention from proof of intent after the event to Predict and Prevent.

Hate language and incitement: "The mean determines the extreme," but the extreme also determines the mean

The epidemiologist Geoffrey Rose made the point that for any exposure to a risk factor or disease, "the mean determines the range."^{1 2} Applied to genocide, we can paraphrase this aphorism to say that the mean determines the extreme. This somewhat simplistic but powerful aphorism is a way of saying that small increases in exposure applied to large numbers of persons—i.e., a population -- produce more persons with an adverse outcome ---i.e., perpetrators -- than large increases in exposure applied to small numbers of people. Applied to incitement and genocide, this concept suggests the hypothesis that massive population-wide exposure to hate language and incitement will shift the distribution curve for the level of hate to the right, producing a pool of potential perpetrators and complicit

bystanders. The numbers of perpetrators produced by such population wide incitement will be much larger than the number from high intensity messages directed to small high-risk groups.

We do not have empirical verification of the hypothesis that Rose's aphorism is a valid tool for predicting the population-wide effects of exposure to incitement. But a simple thought experiment suggests the hypothesis that the power of population-wide exposures could be massive. Marketing a low intensity message of incitement with a success rate of 5% for recruiting perpetrators from a population of 500,000 will yield 2,500 candidates. By contrast, marketing a high intensity message with a success rate of 50% to a high risk subgroup of 500 will yield only 250 candidates.

"The mean determines the extreme" may help us understand why architects of genocide find it useful to direct their messages of hate at the total population. It is suggested, that their aim is to shift to the right the entire population curve for the probability that individuals will act out messages from hate language and incitement. Population-wide exposure not only produces the potential for large numbers of recruits, but also creates a total population-wide protective ambience for the indoctrination directed at the smaller number of hard-core perpetrators.

But, in genocide... does the extreme determine the mean? The notion that the mean determines the extreme is true when the exposure is independent of the outcome, such as with smoking and cancer – i.e., if a larger number of people smoke, we will encounter more cases of cancer. But as with contagious diseases, there are secondary consequences --- producing a small pool of hard core perpetrators who promote the spread of more hate and incitement. There are circular and mutually reinforcing relationships between those who do the inciting - those on the extreme-- and those who have been incited to carry out mass atrocities - i.e., all the others. These relationships produce tipping points for autocatalytic spread of genocidal messages and actions. What may have started as messages coming from the top down into a social system take on a momentum of their own as those on the extreme fringe propagate their messages and use intimidation to recruit more followers.

Positive Deviance, Exposure and Individual Susceptibility

In epidemiology, it is well recognized that the risk for contracting a given disease caused by an environmental agent, is a function of the interaction between exposure and susceptibility.^{3 4} There are individuals who, following exposure to a carcinogenic agent for as briefly as a month will contract a cancer associated with the agent. But then there are other individuals, who will live to the age of 100, going to the funerals of all those who warned them of the risks from far heavier exposures to the same agent. In short, increased exposure is predictive of increased risks for members of the group, but not determining for individual members of the group.

Is the exposure-susceptibility model useful for understanding the contribution of past exposure to background levels of incitement as triggers of terror

rampages in troubled individuals? This question applies to the case of the US military psychiatrist, Major Nidal Malik Hasan, in whom the warning signs of danger were missed prior to his rampage killing of 14 of his colleagues.⁵ The exposure-susceptibility model also applies to the "underwear bomber" and "Jihad Jane," two other troubled individuals who were recruited via the internet.^{6 7} The exposure-susceptibility paradigm leads us directly to examine the potential of applying the concept of promoting positive deviance - for which there are now abundant precedents in public health.⁸

Shifting the mean to the left and promoting positive deviance

It is suggested that "the mean determines the extreme" can be exploited for prevention of genocide. Preventive approaches have to be population-wide and directed to removing population-wide exposures to incitement. Strategies which aim to shift the curve to the left need to exploit the public health experience with promoting positive deviance. The aim is to shift the distribution curve for the entire population back to the left. It is not enough to restrict attention only to the high-risk groups at the right end of frequency distribution.^{9 10}

Genocide scholars have noted that among ordinary people, there is a minority---estimated by Christopher Browning to be of the order of 10%--who are resistant to such incitement and are unwilling to participate in the mass killing.¹¹ Browning's estimate was based on empirical studies of the behavior of reservists, nearly all not members of the Nazi party, in a German police battalion sent to Poland to carry out mass shooting of captive Jews. "The other children egged the boy on, but he did not want to throw the stone through the window", says it all.

Who are these individuals and why are they are resistant to incitement and hate language? Promoting the attitudes and traits of such individuals is one of the major challenges to those concerned with the primary prevention of genocide.

Incubation periods of hate language and incitement : How much time do architects and perpetrators need? The challenge to responders

How much time do perpetrators and their accomplices need to motivate a sufficiently large population to become executioners in Aktions, members of execution squads, wielders of hatchets who bludgeon, behead, and shoot or today send rockets at vulnerable populations with intent to kill. The challenge to perpetrators is formidable: to remove the inhibitions to butchery - in the first cases above direct hands in one-to-one butchery without the blunting effects of "push-button" distancing when the perpetrators are using weapons which produce a disconnection between action and consequence, as in operating missile delivery systems or chemical warfare systems. In the second instance, the need is to remove the inhibitions to mass killing that is experienced even though the distancing of technological delivery systems. The challenge to

responders is even more formidable: to intervene fast enough to prevent incitement leading to killing.

Experience from the Holocaust, former Yugoslavia and Rwanda suggests that a period of weeks to months may be sufficient to produce cadres of genocidaires who do the killing and raping, and to deflect bystanders from protest or resistance. Eight months elapsed between the onset of Radio TV de Libre Milles Collines (RTVLMC)'s incitement in Rwanda in August 1993 - at first, coy, and then ever more explicit—and the mass killing, although there had been years of preparation and organization partially hidden from the eyes of outside observers.¹²

Often, perpetrators reactivate submerged half buried or half forgotten "memories," or recycle myths, as is the case with the blood libels of antisemitism to produce rage, revulsion, demands for revenge, and hate - and desensitization of bystanders, although, as noted, in an era of push-button genocide, such incitement may hardly be as necessary.¹³ Most recently, we see, ominously, the recycling of such blood libels in liberal democratic countries---e.g., the Swedish newspaper story on Israelis harvesting the organs of killed Palestinians,^{14 15} or the Turkish TV series broadcasting fictional images of what appear to be Israeli soldiers killing children.^{16 17} These examples of the demonization, defamation and disinformation by antisemitism, whatever the inciters' intent, can certainly be expected to both increase the pool of perpetrators of genocidal terror and increase mass desensitization of bystanders.

The case for action: 'What Now... and If Not Now, When?'

The foregoing underscores the importance of online surveillance systems for tracking hate language and incitement in real time, so as to trigger interventions directed at those who manufacture and disseminate their toxic messages. The interventions can include a mix of political, economic, educational, legal or military measures. The failure to jam or bomb the Rwandan radio transmitters is an excellent example of a low-cost, low risk missed opportunity for intervention against toxic incitement, which could have crippled the Rwandan regime's capacity to organize, instruct, inform and incite its genocidaires.¹⁸ By contrast, in Darfur, where there was no widely known public hate language and incitement, but indications of incitement directed to mobilize perpetrators, preventive measures would have required political, military and economic sanctions against leading members of the regime, along with bombing the Janjaweed. Darfur tells us that the absence of evidence of public state-sponsored hate language and incitement is no guarantee of absence of risk for a genocidal scenario. Indeed, the Darfur story shows how the absence of incitement directed towards the outside world may serve to conceal genocidal actions.

How long does it take to reverse the effects of incitement and hate language?

The adverse impacts of incitement and hate language are a function of the intensity and frequency of exposure. They are modified by the political and social context shaping the susceptibility of the target population to the messages, notably an authoritarian structure. Getting rid of the message by removing its propagators from power gets rid of the exposure. Denazification was successful in Germany in transforming its society into a normal democracy ---even if beer hall and kitchen table hate may have persisted, because the Allied Occupiers destroyed the Nazi regime, reshaped Germany's political and social environment and transformed the educational information system.¹⁹ Half a century later, there are still bigotry and hate crimes in Germany, among others a result of the intergenerational transmission of the age-old motifs of antisemitism and hatred for foreigners. But state-based structures of modern liberal democracy, including laws against hate crimes, so far appear to be robust enough to withstand their challenges - unless there will be violent economic and social upheaval. Where there is lack of will or power at the level of the State to defeat and remove those producing the incitement, we are left with the challenge of decades of work to undo the enduring intergenerational effects of their hate language and incitement.

In Rwanda, the incitement from RTVLMC to "kill the cockroaches" ended when a Tutsi exile army defeated the government's army. Former bitter enemies live side-by-side, tensely, and in pain and grief, but in peace. In Cambodia, the same happened when the Vietnamese invaded that country and destroyed the Khmer Rouge regime.

Can genocide be stopped once it is started? It seems unlikely without a total defeat of a regime carrying out genocidal mass atrocities. However, preventing genocide in advance by preventing incitement and hate language seems possible. It requires effective use of the tools of international law to punish the inciters, as proposed by Irwin Cotler and cosigners in their Petition,²⁰ and if not officially, at least in the court of public opinion.

Push button genocide: When incitement may not be necessary

Today, in the era of mass bombing, the threats of nuclear genocide, and the threat of push-button genocide, the distance between those pressing the button and those who are the "targets"—itself a dehumanizing term - creates possibilities for genocide without mass hate. In a scenario in which a small number of perpetrators carry out atrocities directed against a defined population --- as when Saddam used helicopter gunships to gas the Kurds in Iraq²¹ - in theory, all that is necessary is to rely on the readiness to obey the orders of those told to push the buttons and/or to harden feelings of disconnection and depersonalization in them.

Past action against hate language and incitement

The horrific effects of dehumanizing hate language by the Nazis led to the enactment of the provisions in the *UN Convention on the Punishment and Prevention of Genocide*. Incitement to genocide was defined as a crime against humanity. *The Convention* was the basis for the conviction and execution of Julius Streicher for the inflammatory language he published in *Der Sturmer*.²² Following the Rwandan genocide, the UN incorporated the provisions specifying that incitement to genocide is a crime against humanity, into the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. These provisions were the basis of the International Criminal Tribunal Court-Rwanda- ICT-R convictions of broadcasters, rock singers and journalists for incitement to genocide.^{23 24 25} The Mugasera case - in which the former politician was accused of encouraging attacks in Rwanda on Tutsis in his speech - using principles from international law, established the precedent that criminal liability exists even if it is not possible to prove a direct cause and effect connection between the words of the individual inciter and the subsequent genocide.²⁶ Today, many countries have laws against hate language and incitement.

The Precautionary Principle: Prediction, prevention and protection

Can we prevent genocide by preventing state-sponsored hate language and incitement? A coherent approach to prevention of genocide requires that we advance the temporal locus of intervention from that period in time when the perpetrators start carrying out their mass killings, rapes, expulsions and plundering, or committing push-button genocide--- to an earlier time when warning signs signal genocidal intent. *Genocide prevention needs to move from interventions triggered by evidence of proof of intent after the event, to actions to predict and prevent before the event.*

Richter and Stanton argue that the proposal to criminalize and prosecute incitement by state authorities and their funded or protected surrogates is an example of applying the Precautionary Principle - public health's gift to genocide prevention.²⁷ The Precautionary Principle specifies that when there is uncertainty concerning the likelihood of the occurrence of a catastrophic event, it is better to intervene to prevent rather than wait and do nothing. The Precautionary Principle shifts the burden of proof from those suspecting the risk to those denying it. Since human lives are at stake, there is an ethical import to delay. It restates the aphorism that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.^{28 29 30}

The case for application of the Precautionary Principle to the prevention of genocide – perhaps the ultimate man-made human catastrophe, is that the negative consequences of doing nothing to stop state-sponsored hate language and incitement are far greater than the negative consequences of doing something.³¹ Intervention against state-sanctioned hate language and incitement before the killing starts is far less dangerous than failing to stop incitement and thereby allowing perpetrators to expel, plunder and exterminate. *We suggest that the downside consequences of using the tools of international law to stop hate language and incitement are far less than*

those from sending in armed forces to defeat or destroy genocidal regimes once the killing and mass expulsions begin.

We have to recognize that if there is state-sanctioned hate language and incitement, there is an increased risk for genocide, but this relationship is not necessarily determinant. Furthermore, note that there can be genocide without hate language and incitement. Perpetrators can use mass starvation to commit genocide without mass incitement, thereby concealing their actions from their own countrymen and the outside world.

This lack of total predictability was the pretext for US Genocide Prevention Task Force's rejection of recommendations to apply the Precautionary Principle, and promote interventions directed against state-sponsored hate language and incitement.³²

Using this logic, there would not be case for smoking bans, since most smokers do not get cancer, and many cancer victims have never smoked.

As already noted, the Nazis used hate language, but did not explicitly incite - so as to conceal and camouflage their genocidal goals. As a result, it was not until mid-1942 - more than 3 years after their invasion of Poland, that the world began to recognize the horrible scale of the Holocaust's atrocities. Legal distinctions between hate language and incitement, while important for ascertaining accountability, are not crucial to prevention. *From the standpoint of prevention, what counts is not proof of criminality, but interventions directed at the causes – e.g., the potentially horrific effects of dehumanizing hate language and their genocidal consequences.*

Using the Precautionary Principle to prevent hate language and incitement

The foregoing helps clarify strategies for guiding prediction and prevention of genocide and protection of vulnerable populations. We suggest that the case for action for testing these strategies is compelling.

What can be done?

From Darfur and Rwanda, we have learned from bitter experience that the proposal to establish a standby military Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) to intervene to stop genocide may have become an oxymoron. The same conclusion applies to its parent vision: that it is possible to prevent genocide once the mass killing starts. To date, RDF's have not been rapid (e.g. Bosnia),³³ they did not truly deploy (e.g. Darfur),³⁴ and they did not have real force at a level which deterred (e.g. Rwanda).³⁵ So far, those nations with the force to deploy do not have the appetite or will to put their sons at risk to protect some faraway group "out there" - for all too readily understandable reasons.

If state-sanctioned hate language and incitement often predicts genocide, it remains to be seen if stopping such hate language and incitement prevents many genocides. To create the data base for putting this hypothesis to test, *Genocide Prevention Now* of the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide, Jerusalem is proposing an international worldwide network for tracking and monitoring hate language and incitement (HL&I) based on predict-and-prevent models for surveillance of epidemic warning signs, derived from epidemiology and public health. This network would develop search engines for tracking dehumanizing language from figures of authority - ("top down") - or when it reaches a critical mass from viral dissemination ("bottom up"). The objective is to produce an ongoing worldwide data base which will trigger interventions *before* the killing starts, by when it is already too late.

Conclusion

Genocide and its prevention both result from human choice. But if state-sanctioned hate language and incitement predict, promote and catalyze genocidal scenarios, then the case is compelling for applying the Precautionary Principle to prevent genocide by preventing such hate language and incitement, which mobilizes and motivates perpetrators and desensitizes bystanders. Such prevention requires developing worldwide networks for epidemiologic surveillance of hate language and incitement. These networks could trigger interventions before perpetrators start carrying out mass atrocities against victim populations. Such interventions can exploit existing legal tools available under international law, but there are extra-legal interventions as well. Surveillance would give force to existing tools of international law to detect, deter, prevent and punish for the crimes of hate language and incitement. Other forms of incitement which need to be monitored are the recycling of demonizing myths such as those of genocidal antisemitism.

One lesson from the Holocaust is that there may be existential dangers associated with ignoring state sanctioned dehumanizing hate language, with and without explicit incitement, propagated by rogue regimes. We suggest that the spread of dehumanizing hate language drives a new world-wide axis of genocide.

In conclusion, the perils of neglecting the propagation and spread of state-sanctioned and state-sponsored hate language and incitement are ominous, especially in an era of push-button genocide, nuclear terror, rogue regimes and terror groups. Conversely, when regimes propagating such incitement are developing weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the case is imperative for stopping them from doing so, given the fact that such incitement is an early warning sign (EWS) until proven otherwise.

Will humankind test the efficacy of going from proof of intent after the event to predict and prevent? The lessons of the Holocaust empower us to address prevention of hate language and incitement against all populations without waiting for the consequences.

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Professor Elihu D Richter MD MPH is Editor and Director of GPN World Genocide Situation Room and Associate Director of the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide in Jerusalem. He is Head of the Genocide Prevention Program at Hebrew University-Hadassah School of Public Health and Community Medicine and former head of the Unit of Occupational and Environmental Medicine. He has published and lectured on the use of public health models

for the prediction and prevention of genocide.



Yael Stein MD is a researcher-team member of the World Genocide Situation Room, the website of the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide in Jerusalem of GPN. She has experience in Occupational Medicine, Epidemiology and Hospital Administration and is currently studying towards a PhD degree in Public Health at the Hebrew University-Hadassah School of Public Health and Community Medicine.

Yael describes herself as a "goal-oriented, idealistic entrepreneur, seeking spiritual and ethical fulfillment" in her work; "I focus on making a difference."



Alex Barnea Burnley, MSc in Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict is Research Assistant and Project Manager of the World Genocide Situation Room section of GPN, the website of the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide in Jerusalem. He acted as project manager for UK relief work in Tsunami-affected Thailand and later as consultant to a Cambodian

NGO - orphanage.



Marc Sherman, M.L.S. is Editor and Director of the Holocaust and Genocide Review. He also is the Director of Information Services for the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide in Jerusalem, an Associate Editor of the Encyclopedia of Genocide and many volumes of the Institute's series, *Genocide, A Critical Bibliographic Review*.

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