

[▲ Home](#)[◀ Contents](#)**American Transgressive Interventions:
The Question of Genocide***By David Model*

As a teacher of political science and, more generally, liberal studies, I am obliged to raise controversial topics and encourage students to think critically about the relevant issues. Challenging students to examine and analyze ostensibly radical ideas objectively develops their capacity to think clearly and skeptically. It is in this spirit that I wrote the following essay.

Despite the precipitous plunge in his popularity and growing criticism of his competence, character and style, President George W. Bush is not really very different from other presidents with respect to his hegemonic ambitions or his proclivity to use force to achieve foreign policy objectives. Continuing historical patterns, President Bush and all presidents since World War II have committed horrendous crimes against humanity in order to protect and advance American interests under the guise of liberating people from under the jackboot of brutal dictators or communist subversives, bringing democracy to totalitarian states, improving the lives of those who are suffering, and eradicating terrorism.

These are laudable goals reflecting prevailing shibboleths domestically. These goals are an alluring mantle for the real paradigm governing foreign policy which is the pursuit of American interests with total indifference to the consequences to people victimized by American "ideals".

The gaping discrepancy between the stated objectives of American foreign policy and its practice is best exemplified by the apogee of war crimes: genocide. In pursuit of these lofty objectives, the United States has committed no less than eight genocides. I will discuss two cases in this paper: Iraq and East Timor. The former is an example of direct guilt, the latter of complicity.

To understand the real motives driving American foreign policy, it is necessary to examine the words of the architects of that policy. Historian William Appleman Williams, in his book *Empire as a Way of Life*, clearly elucidates the underlying determinant in generating a blueprint for American foreign policy when he wrote that "Very simply, Americans of the twentieth century like empire ... It provided them with renewable opportunities of wealth." George Kennan, one of the major architects of this leitmotif in American foreign policy, in his role as head of the US State Department planning identified the driving force behind American foreign policy when he stated on 24 February, 1948 that:

We have about 50% of the world's wealth but only 6.3% of its population. We need not deceive ourselves that we can afford the luxury of altruism and world benefaction. We should cease to talk about such vague and unreal objectives as human rights, the raising of living standards and democratization. The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts.

Immediately following World War II, the Soviet Union emerged as the major challenger to American hegemony and, therefore, to the unfettered drive to secure America's self-proclaimed right to pursue the expansion of empire. During the Truman administration, foreign policy doctrine evolved in response to the mythicized world-conquering ambitions of the Soviet Union and the economic threat it posed, from containment as first enunciated by Kennan to NSC-68 (National Security Council). The concept of containment originated in Kennan's "Long Letter" from Moscow and reiterated in his July, 1947 article in *Foreign Affairs* under the pseudonym "X". Truman's decision to offer aid to Greece and Turkey endowed containment with official foreign policy status. According to Truman, economic aid "must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures." In this case, the armed minorities were insurgents struggling to overthrow the venal, brutal Greek dictatorship which ruled with 74,000 tons of American military equipment.

NSC-68 established the principle that defending American interests meant that:

In the concept of "containment" the maintenance of a strong military posture is deemed to be essential ... Without superior aggregate military strength ... a policy of "containment" ... is no more than a policy of bluff.

Containment, however, was a short-lived strategy. Rejecting the policy of containment, John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State under President Eisenhower, defined the policy of brinkmanship which, he proclaimed, was:

The ability to get to the verge without getting into a war is the necessary art. If you try to run away from it, if you are scared to go to the brink, you are lost.

Complimenting the policy of brinkmanship, MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) was devised by Dulles to discourage an attack with the threat of massive nuclear retaliation. According to Dulles:

The heart of the problem is how to deter attack. This we believe requires that a potential aggressor be left in no doubt that he would be certain to suffer damage outweighing any possible gains from aggression.

Brinkmanship was best epitomized by the confrontation between the Soviet Union and American navies during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Rationalizations for the application of military force have been based on euphemistic doctrines which have no basis in American or international law. George W. Bush's doctrine of preemptive war was not new to foreign and defense policy strategists, but can be traced back to Dean Acheson's doctrine dismissing the applicability of international law to the United States as outlined in a speech to the American Society of International Law in 1963 in which he argued that:

The power, position and prestige of the US had been challenged [Cuban Missile Crisis] by another state and the law does not deal with such questions of ultimate power—power that comes close to the source of sovereignty.

In other words, national interests including meretricious threats to the sovereignty of the American State supersede international law despite the fact that the United Nations Charter makes provisions for these exigencies.

The growing appetite for the unilateral application of force resulted in the "humanitarian intervention" or "illegal but legitimate" doctrine during the Clinton and Bush presidencies. This doctrine validated acts of preemption that justified the use of force whenever a threat was neither immanent nor substantial but judged necessary to defend the security interests of the United States against a perceived threat easily manufactured through the propaganda of fear.

Invading and occupying Iraq—a country already decimated by Desert Storm, sanctions and no-fly zones—under the pretext of a preemptive war represents the quintessential tragedy and hypocrisy of American foreign policy. To verify that the American government has been complicit in genocide, I will establish a set of criteria and apply them to Iraq and East Timor.

The UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide sets out a number of criteria to evaluate whether a war crime attains the magnitude of genocide. Those criteria are not without controversy, but by examining the scholarly literature on the subject and the judgments of the International Criminal Court, I have established conservative standards to assess each case.

According to the Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, such as:

- a. Killing members of the group;
- b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm;
- c. Deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about

- its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Two important groups, political and cultural, were not included in the Convention. Political groups became a contentious issue among a number of countries negotiating the terms of the Convention, fearing that they would become subject to accusations of genocide. It was agreed to drop political groups.

“To destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group” does not explicitly include destruction of cultural groups, but United Nations’ Resolution 96 states that genocide “results in great losses to humanity in the form of cultural and other contributions.” Accordingly, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, referred to acts of cultural genocide in a judgment against Serbian leaders, as “the very foundation of the group.” Cultural groups will be added to the Convention.

Although the phrase “in whole or in part” sounds ambiguous, its ambit has been restricted by judgments of the International Criminal Court. According to the Rapporteur for the Preparatory Commission of the International Court, “the accused aimed to destroy a large part of the group in a particular area.” The International Criminal Court for the former Yugoslavia thus concluded that “the killing of all members of a group within a small geographic area” was tantamount to genocide. Notwithstanding the imprecision of these definitions of “part”, the area in Bosnia referred to in the ruling sets a baseline for future cases. The architect of the Convention, Raphael Lemkin, intended to define “in part” as a level of destruction sufficiently substantial to imperil the existence of the group. Shedding even further light on this problem, the Convention itself considers attempted genocide to be punishable under the Convention, implying that intent alone is sufficient to establish guilt.

“Intent” is another term in need of clarification. Apart from direct evidence through orders, statements or coordinated acts, intention can be shown if “acts of destruction that are not the specific goal, but are predictable outcomes or by-products of a policy, which may have been avoided by a change in that policy.”

The Genocide Convention defines two basic levels of guilt: the direct commission of genocide, and complicity to commit genocide. Complicity in genocide must embody:

- a. Intentional participation;
- b. Knowledge of the genocidal intent of the perpetrators;
- c. Organizing, planning, supplying arms, training, intelligence, or direct military support.

One example of direct American genocide, Iraq, has suffered massive destruction to infrastructure, economy and human life,

particularly since the imposition of American sanctions in 1990 and the bombings of 1991. UN Resolution 661 mandated sanctions against Iraq ostensibly to force Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait. The resolution was worded in such a way as to grant the United States a veto power over which products could be traded with Iraq and the US exploited that veto to punish severely the people of Iraq in the hope that they would overthrow Saddam Hussein themselves.

According to a 1993 UNICEF study, "what has become increasingly clear is that no significant movement toward food security can be achieved so long as the embargo remains in place." Declassified documents divulge the fact that the Americans were aware of, and responsible for, a humanitarian crisis caused by the sanctions. A Defense Intelligence Agency report on 18 January, 1991 concludes that:

Failing to secure supplies will result in a shortage of pure drinking water for much of the population. This could lead to increased incidences, if not epidemics of disease ... Current public health problems are attributable to the reduction of normal preventative medicine, waste disposal, water purification and distribution of electricity, and the decreased ability to control disease outbreaks.

On 15 January, 1991, B-52 bombers were flying toward their targets in Iraq and cruise missiles were fired from ships in the Indian Ocean. Iraqi defenses were incapable of offering any resistance.

Restricting bombing to only military targets was not part of the US war plan. Targets included hospitals, electric utilities, schools, factories, water treatment plants, irrigation systems, storage facilities and community health centres. Over 200,000 people died, the majority of whom were civilians.

In 2003, George Bush Jr. inflicted further atrocities on the devastated people of Iraq, and on a country virtually bombed back into preindustrial times by another so-called war. As of today, Iraq has suffered a further one million casualties and four million refugees.

Whether the administrations of Bush Sr., Clinton or Bush Jr. intended to commit genocide is irrelevant because the consequences of the bombings and sanctions could have been predicted by any reasonable person. The actions of these administrations clearly resulted in mass killing, serious bodily or mental harm, and the infliction of conditions calculated to bring about Iraq's physical destruction in whole or in part. Therefore, the US is guilty of genocide in Iraq.

An indisputable case of complicity in genocide occurred in East Timor, a small island 400 kilometres north of Australia that is inhabited by people who in 1975 were still practicing many of their ancient

customs which had survived for many centuries.

Indonesia coveted the small island to its south for its land and resources; but, more importantly, both Australia and the United States were determined to gain access to the oil off the southern coast of East Timor by using Indonesia as a surrogate. On 7 December, 1975 Indonesian ships began to bombard the capital, Deli, while 10,000 paratroopers marched from town to town and indiscriminately massacred every man, woman and child. Indonesia occupied East Timor until the results of a referendum, forced on them by human rights groups and the United Nations, were released on 30 August, 1999 which revealed that 78% of the East Timorese favoured independence.

The Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor revealed that the Indonesian forces:

failed to discriminate between civilian and military targets in conducting repeated large-scale bombing ... destroyed food sources by burning and poisoning crops and food stores ... [and] refused to allow access to international aid organizations ... The Commission finds that the only logical conclusion ... is that the Indonesian Security forces consciously decided to use starvation of East Timorese as a weapon of war.

Indonesian security forces systematically raped the women of East Timor, sterilized women and murdered 200,000 citizens.

The Commission also reported that:

the United States of America failed to support the right of the East Timorese to self-determination, and that its political and military support was fundamental to the Indonesian invasion and occupation.

In addition to the Commission's report, there is a mountain of declassified documents which prove, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the US was fully aware of Indonesia's intentions and that the US supplied military equipment to Indonesia with the full knowledge that it would be used to kill East Timorese.

In a telegram from the American Embassy in Jakarta to the American Secretary of State, President Ford is quoted as saying "We understand the problems you have [with East Timor] and the intentions you have." Additionally, in a memorandum from Clinton F. Granger, member of the National Security Council, to Brent Scowcroft, Ford's National Security Advisor, listed the Military Assistance Program equipment used by the Indonesians in East Timor including ships, aircraft, helicopters, rifles and munitions.

The administrations of Ford and Carter, in particular, were aware

of the intentions of the Indonesians and provided the military and political support that was tantamount to complicity in genocide.

There is copious evidence that the United States was also either directly or indirectly responsible for, or complicit in, genocide in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Guatemala, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Indonesia. The carnage resulting from these genocides clearly exposes the disparity between the American foreign policy articulated for its domestic audience and the reassurance of its allies on the one hand and its manifest praxis on the other. The esoteric doctrines defined by the framers of American foreign policy are completely inconsistent with its outcomes. This hypocrisy betrays the indifference of American leaders to basic democratic principles and to respect for international law.

Bibliography

Acheson, D. (1968). Remark quoted in L. Henkin, *How nations behave: Law and foreign policy*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor. (2006, January 24). Retrieved from <http://www.etan.org/news/2006/cavr.htm>.

Defense Intelligence Agency. (1991, January 8). *Iraq water treatment vulnerabilities*. Retrieved from http://www.gulfink.osd.mil/declassdocs/dia/199505091/950901_511rept_91.html.

Dulles, J. F. (1954, April). "Policy for security and peace." *Foreign Affairs* 32(3), 353-364.

Gellately, R. & Kiernan, B. (Eds.). (2003). *The spectre of genocide: Mass murder in historical perspective*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Kennan, G. (1948, February 28 – declassified June 17, 1974). "Review of current trends in U.S. foreign policy," Policy Planning Staff, PPS No. 23. Included in the U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1948, volume 1, part 2* (Washington DC Government Printing Office, 1976), 524-525.

National Security Council. (1950, April 14). "NSC-68: The United States objectives and programs for national security." Retrieved from <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsc-68.htm>.

National Security Council. (1975, December 12). Memo from Clinton Granger to Brent Scowcroft. :Indonesian use of AMP equipment in East Timor. Retrieved from <http://www.gwu.edu/~narchiv/NSAEBB/NSABB1741/1010.pdf>.

Shepley, J. (1956, April). "How Dulles averted war." *Life Magazine*.

Truman, H. S. (1947, March 12). "Address before a joint session of congress. Retrieved from <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/trudoc.htm>.

UNICEF. (1993). Children, war, and sanctions. Cited in G. Ullrich (1998). "The effects of sanctions on the civilian community of Iraq." Retrieved from <http://mapw.org.au/congress/p4.htm>.

United States Department of State. (1975, December). "Telegram from American Embassy in Jakarta to the Secretary of State." Retrieved from the Gerald Ford Library's Website <http://www.gwu.edu/~narchiv/NSAAE62#doc4>.

Williams, W. A. (2006). Empire as a way of life. Brooklyn NY: IG Publishing.

David Model teaches political science at Seneca College in King City, Ontario, Canada. He can be reached at david.model@senecac.on.ca. This article is based upon a paper prepared for the Scottish Association for American Studies meeting in Edinburgh, February, 2008.

[◀ Contents](#)

• The views expressed by the authors are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of The College Quarterly or of Seneca College.

Copyright © 2007 - The College Quarterly, Seneca College of Applied Arts and Technology