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Prediction, Prevention, and Punishment of Genocide: Observation on Rwanda and Future Policies

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Many people are now asking whether we must passively await the predictable escalation of disaster from the politics of hate and fear to crisis, genocide, and gigantic flows of refugees which, in turn, lead to hunger, thirst, epidemics, the erosion of regions, and destabilization of governments.

I think not. These are not inevitable phenomena, like earthquakes, but are man-made calamities. We are witnessing the casualties of the old order of bystander states refusing to take steps to thwart genocide (or stop it in its early stages), justifying their abstention by the lack of national interest, and paying enormous costs to put band-aids on the living casualties. The casualties include the millions of dead, wounded, raped, maimed, and the homeless—refugees and internal exiles. Studies show that the overwhelming majority of refugees—over 16 million by the end of 1993 (not including the refugees from Rwanda)—are created by states committing genocide and gross violations of human rights.

My thesis is that genocide is preventable (as are political mass murders), because it is usually a rational act. That is, the perpetrators calculate the likelihood of success, given their values and objectives. One of the reasons genocide is likely to succeed is

that it is not deterred by other countries—indeed, the patrons of the perpetrators often aid them. Although there is much the international community could do were there the will, we should, for practical purposes, focus first on joint and individual actors

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