



THE SENTINEL PROJECT
FOR GENOCIDE PREVENTION

The Responsibility to Do What We Can: Understanding and strengthening local, nonviolent strategies for civilian self- protection in the context of mass atrocities

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THE SENTINEL PROJECT FOR GENOCIDE PREVENTION IS A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION DEVOTED TO EFFECTIVE **EARLY WARNING OF GENOCIDE** AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PREVENTIVE MEASURES BEFORE LIVES ARE LOST.

WE WILL ACHIEVE THIS THROUGH THE CREATIVE **USE OF TECHNOLOGY** AND **COOPERATION WITH THREATENED GROUPS**.

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1.0 - Abstract

This paper seeks to understand how civilians protect themselves during mass atrocities and how local, nonviolent self-protection strategies can be improved. In light of the international community's inability to intervene everywhere to protect civilians at risk of or experiencing mass atrocities, alternative methods that help civilians help themselves are a necessity. This paper offers a brief typology of mass atrocities before delving into specific strategies that civilians can use to protect themselves from violence. This paper also provides recommendations for how the Sentinel Project and other similar NGOs can help facilitate civilian self-protection. Finally, this paper examines avenues for further research on the topic.

2.0 - Introduction

The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine was a watershed moment for the civilian protection community. After many years of grassroots and elite advocacy for the institutionalization of civilian protection, the United Nations accepted that sovereignty was not a license to kill: with autonomy comes responsibility.¹ Unfortunately, even though civilian prevention is an emerging norm around the world, atrocities continue. This is not necessarily a failing of R2P or the international community, but rather structural factors cause the creation of an atrocity response gap. Even if a multitude of international leaders make atrocity prevention a priority, institutional, political, financial and human resource restrictions mean some atrocities are unavoidable. Those same restraints also determine that interventions are often unable to provide sustainable solutions.

In light of this response gap, most communities are left to fend for themselves in the face of violence without the resources to respond violently (regardless of whether violence would be effective). Fortunately, small-scale social networks have proved impressively adept at protecting themselves nonviolently from mass atrocities. Their record is tragically far from perfect, but nonetheless, most civilians who do survive mass atrocities do so without any help beyond their immediate communities. Though there are numerous examples of creative self-protection methods, civilians often respond to atrocities with decidedly reactive and piecemeal strategies. They often lack the information to adequately prepare themselves, or the means and expertise to do so.

Too little attention has been paid to these self-protection methods even though it is a crucial issue that must be addressed in order to develop comprehensive strategies for civilian protection. NGOs are in an advantageous position to contribute to the theoretical development and practice of civilian self-protection. Their flexible and often small-scale nature can help communities through the following actions:

- Imparting knowledge of “best practices” that have worked for other communities
- Improving existing strategies for self-protection
- Identifying and strengthening local institutions with protective capabilities
- Providing communities with more accurate and current information on the threats they face
- Aiding the process of preparation and planning for the worst

The scope of this paper is limited and does not seek to provide a comprehensive strategy for combating mass atrocities. Rather, it seeks to highlight an understudied and under-practiced subset of mass atrocities prevention and response. Further work is needed to incorporate civilian self-protection into a vertically-integrated and horizontally-integrated approach. This

¹ It is also important to note that non-state actors can commit mass atrocities.

paper is not the first to look at civilian self-protection strategies; Casey Barrs of the Cuny Center, among others, have previously completed comprehensive work in this field. However, this paper, if it succeeds in its aim, will be the first (to the author's knowledge) to lay out how generalized local and nonviolent strategies of civilian self-protection, aided by NGOs, fit into broader theories of how mass atrocities begin and continue. This paper will likely have a limited audience but hopefully it will spark discussion among some sections of the atrocity prevention community on civilian self-protection as a strategy that should be taken seriously.

The paper begins by providing a brief examination of the causes and manifestations of mass atrocities. It will then examine civilian response strategies by highlighting different types of mass atrocities. Next, the paper looks at specific actions that communities and civilians can take to protect themselves. In order to help contextualize these strategies, the paper also includes a short section of descriptions on situations in which local, nonviolent responses to mass atrocities do not work. This discussion builds towards offering recommendations on how the Sentinel Project can work with communities in the future to build resilience when faced with violence. Finally, the paper explores avenues for future research.

3.0 - A Typology of Mass Atrocities

3.1 - Why do mass atrocities happen?

It is well known that mass atrocities tend to occur during war, or at the very least during general upheaval, especially since the end of the Cold War.² During conflict, extremists have an increased potential to seize power as well as justification to use extreme measures to suppress dissent and restore order. Other factors, such as an authoritarian regime (or regimes in transition), economic inequality between groups, intra-elite competition, political polarization, and the existence of two main ethnic groups in which one is much smaller than the other, have also all been linked to an increased risk of mass atrocities.³

However, the presence of all these factors, or a general lack of peace, does not indicate that a mass atrocity will surely occur. In fact, in countries where one or more of these factors are present, more often than not, mass atrocities do not occur.⁴ As a result, it is important to develop an understanding of the reasons why violence escalates to the level of a mass atrocity.⁵ In particular, it is imperative to examine the strategic and instrumental nature of mass atrocities. Leaders who choose to carry out mass atrocities only do so as a last resort and as a means to another end. In the beginning phases, a mass atrocity is never an end in itself. Undertaking mass killings requires a significant amount of resources and is internally disruptive, making it an unattractive option unless leaders see no other means of achieving their goals.⁶ Additionally, armed groups are more likely to commit mass atrocities in areas where they do not depend on civilian support. Finally, rebel groups with low barriers to participation and the potential for short-term, individual material gains are much more likely to commit mass atrocities.⁷

Some scholars, most notably Daniel Goldhagen, have pointed to a “root causes” approach versus a focus on escalatory factors. Goldhagen argued that widespread anti-Semitism in German society created the conditions for the Holocaust.⁸ However, this argument has an

² Valentino, Benjamin A. *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the 20th Century*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004. Print., Harff, Barbara. "No Lessons Learned from the Holocaust? Assessing the Risks of Genocide and Political Mass Murders since 1955." *American Political Science Review* 97.1 (2003): 57-73. Web., and Bellamy, Alex J. *Mass Atrocities and Armed Conflicts: Links, Distinctions, and Implications for the Responsibility to Prevent*. The Stanley Foundation, Feb. 2011. Web.

³ Stewart, Frances. *Economic and Political Causes of Genocidal Violence: A Comparison with Findings on the Causes of Civil War*. *MicroCon*. 1-38., Mar. 2011. Web. and Pearlman, Wendy. "A Composite-Actor Approach to Conflict Behavior." *Rethinking Violence: States and Non-state Actors in Conflict*. Cambridge: MIT, 2010. 197-220. Ebrary. Web.

⁴ Valentino

⁵ This paper will use this working definition for a mass atrocity, "A mass atrocity is the widespread, intentional, and systematic killing of non-combatants by state or non-state actors, or the creation of conditions in which perpetrators can reasonably expect deaths of non-combatants to result. Quantitatively, the scale of death must be 2,000 non-combatants in a twelve month span. If the number of deaths drops below 1,000 during any three subsequent, consecutive twelve month periods, the mass atrocity ended in the first twelve month period." This definition was jointly developed by the author and Sentinel Project Research Analyst Sean Langberg.

⁶ Valentino

⁷ Weinstein, Jeremy M. *Inside Rebellion*. N.p.: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print. (7)

⁸ Goldhagen, Daniel Jonah. *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996.

obvious logical flaw: why do mass atrocities *not* emerge in many societies with deep social divisions and *do* occur in societies where those divides do not exist? To answer this paradox, Benjamin Valentino argues that society-wide divisions are in fact much less important in determining the probability of mass killing than the strategic choices of leaders. Few people in society actually direct mass killings, both strategically and ideologically (only tacit compliance is required from the rest of society), and so only a few individuals need to hold deep prejudices or a disposition toward brutal methods of ruling for accomplishing political goals.⁹ Many societies host political aspirants who wish to accomplish extreme political goals, and would be willing to do so through mass killing, but few have political openings through which extremists are able to seize power.

Another flaw in Goldhagen's argument is the way in which he suggests that ideology shapes conflict. Kalyvas argues that conflict has a highly influential effect on the shaping of identities and ideologies.¹⁰ Essentially, it is easy for scholars to look back on episodes of mass killing and find deep ethnic or social cleavages. Empirically, that finding is correct, but inferring causation is not; violent conflict deepens existing divides and creates new ones as cycles of revenge play out.

3.2 - How do mass atrocities function?

During mass atrocities, the proportion of individuals from a particular society who participate in the actual killings is generally quite small. Even during atrocities such as the Rwandan Genocide, where many of the killings were carried out by individuals who were known to the victims, the proportion of killers did not exceed ten per cent of the adult population.¹¹ Civilians are, however, often heavily involved in the procurement of information used by armed actors to carry out and justify killings.¹² While ideology certainly plays a role in convincing leaders that mass killing is necessary, it does not fully explain why individuals actively participate in mass atrocities, as many low-level perpetrators have poor understandings of the ideology behind their actions.¹³ The physical act of killing a victim, no matter the level of dehumanization, is unpleasant, and even with strong incentives in place, convincing individuals to commit mass murder is not easy. Sadists tend to be overrepresented in perpetrator groups relative to their general prevalence in society, but they still make up a small proportion of killers. Furthermore, they are unlikely to be trusted by leaders because of their devotion to killing rather than a broader strategic plan.¹⁴ So while a limited number of low-level individuals will participate in mass atrocities for the sheer enjoyment of the act or because of a deep-seated ideology, in-group coercion (both vertical and horizontal) and material incentives are more influential factors for most perpetrators.¹⁵

⁹ Valentino (24-6)

¹⁰ Kalyvas, Stathis N. *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

¹¹ *Ibid* (37)

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ Valentino (49)

¹⁴ *Ibid* (40-2)

¹⁵ *Ibid* (48)

Two separate examples of group coercion and material incentives occurred in the Holocaust. The Nazis succeeded in creating a strong moral code among killers that turned traditional morality on its head: killing became the moral thing to do. While its unpleasantness was acknowledged, killers were convinced that getting past their natural disgust in the pursuit of a higher goal was the morally correct course of action.¹⁶

In Abraham Ascher's historical study of Breslau's Jewish community, he notes that while many Nazis expressed anti-Semitic sentiments, greed also largely motivated their actions:

*"In addition, Nazi officials openly insisted that the wealth seized from Jews should be widely distributed among the German people – several of them going so far in 1942 as to argue that some of that wealth should be reserved until after the war for soldiers at the front. In deciding how to dispose of Jewish wealth or what economic activities Jews should be allowed to pursue, Nazi leaders regularly consulted such organizations as the local chamber of commerce and guilds ..."*¹⁷

During mass atrocities, perpetrator leaders play a large role in determining the onset and execution of mass killings. However, it is important to remember that perpetrator groups do not operate as singularly top-down hierarchies, but rather as interactional organizations with varying degrees of structure. Multiple interests and parties compete within the same organization, complicating Valentino's "strategic logic of mass killing." Per Wendy Pearlman, understanding the behaviour of armed groups as strategic and rational is correct, but only if they are seen as plural entities with multiple players and decision-making processes. Simply put, armed groups are not unitary, coherent actors.¹⁸ Pearlman also adds a temporal element to her theory, stating "... the factors and interactions that drive a movement's initial conflict strategy differ from those that shape it over time."¹⁹ Pearlman's composite-actor then has important implications for analyzing the function of mass atrocities. Mass atrocities will generally begin as instrumental, but may become less coherent to outside observers over time as different groups compete for power. This competition is also likely to intensify killings as groups within the perpetrator hierarchy seek to prove themselves in their quest for power. This effect is even more pronounced among career-minded individuals within perpetrator organizations.²⁰ Perpetrator organizations are complex and it essential to understand the multiple factors influencing the course of mass atrocities rather than drawing a direct line between the rise to power of extremists and the occurrence of a mass atrocity of a particular intensity.

¹⁶ Browning, Christopher R. *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. 1st Harper Perennial ed., Reissued [with a new afterword by the author]. New York: Harper Perennial, 1998.

¹⁷ Ascher, Abraham. *A Community Under Siege: The Jews of Breslau under Nazism*. N.p.: Stanford University, 2007. Print. (22-23)

¹⁸ Pearlman

¹⁹ Ibid (217)

²⁰ Ibid (207)

3.3 - Categorizing mass atrocities

There are many types of mass atrocities. Valentino lists six different types of mass killings: 1) communist, 2) ethnic, 3) territorial, 4) counterinsurgent, 5) terrorist and 6) imperialist.²¹ However, this paper will focus on only two categories: counterinsurgent (COIN) and communal mass atrocities.²² This paper excludes the other four for various reasons, notably; the end of the Cold War has greatly decreased the number of communist regimes; the strengthening of international institutions and norms of fixed borders combined with the decrease in interstate wars have lessened the opportunities for territorial wars; terrorist mass killings are infrequent and; imperialism is increasingly rare.²³ While the author fully acknowledges and accepts responsibility for the risks of delineating the mass atrocity scenarios addressed in this paper into two distinct categories, different civilian self-protection strategies are type-specific (many mass atrocities, such as Darfur and the current Syrian conflict, have elements of both communal and COIN violence). Therefore, some categorization is required.

Information is a crucial commodity during counterinsurgencies. The unconventional nature of COIN means the lines between combatants and civilians blur, creating an identification problem. To obtain information on the identity of opponents and collaborators, both sides must rely heavily on civilians. However due to chronically-lacking information-gathering capabilities, armed groups resort to coercive measures in order to intimidate civilians into denouncing their neighbours and to prevent them from supporting the other side.²⁴ However, coercive measures tend not to be very effective for two reasons. First, the fog of war makes fact-checking denunciations nearly impossible, meaning that civilians are relatively free to give false information to armed actors with little prospect for punishment.²⁵ Second, while limited selected violence is often effective at procuring useful intelligence, some information is needed to use selective violence. Armed groups may be initially violent towards civilians as they lack experience in irregular warfare, but over time they are likely to learn that indiscriminate violence is ineffective.²⁶ However, intelligence gathering requires significant financial and human resources.²⁷ Therefore, many groups, especially with leaders who do not wish to be seen as inactive, choose to pursue indiscriminate violence.²⁸ Similarly, groups that attract members through material incentives are often unable to prevent their combatants from using indiscriminate violence against civilians because group leaders do not have the resources to provide material benefits. Civilians then, are an obvious source of income.²⁹ Indiscriminate violence is only effective when one side is much stronger than the other, but it generally kills a lot of civilians without obtaining valuable information, as random violence makes civilians no

²¹ Valentino (73-90)

²² This paper uses the term "communal" rather than "ethnic" because many other social divisions play a role in violence between groups. Counterinsurgent is used instead of counterinsurgent to provide a more expansive definition for what the challenger force can look like.

²³ Kalyvas (333)

²⁴ Ibid (89-90)

²⁵ Ibid (185)

²⁶ Kaplan, Oliver. "Civilian Autonomy in Civil War." Diss. Stanford University, n.d. Web. (73)

²⁷ Mucha, Witold. "Prone to Conflict, but Resilient to Violence. Why Civil Wars Sometimes Do Not Happen: Insights from Peru and Bolivia." *Journal of Peace, Conflict and Development* 20 (2013): 96-114. Web. (112)

²⁸ Kalyvas (166)

²⁹ Weinstein (10)

more likely to provide denunciations; if civilians are killed without cause, there are not obvious actions they can take to protect themselves.³⁰

The heavy dependence of armed actors on intelligence provided by noncombatants gives civilians an immense amount of power in determining the course of a conflict and this power is often abused. In their studies of civil war, both Kalyvas and Kaplan find that civilians consistently partner with armed actors to settle personal scores by providing armed actors with faulty intelligence that implicates neighbours as enemy collaborators.³¹ This problem is chronic. According to anecdotal evidence provided by Kalyvas from the Greek Civil War, most noncombatants accused of aiding the enemy are falsely accused while a majority of collaborators escape denunciation.³² These denunciations further entrench cycles of violence. As these cycles play out, careful intelligence gathering begins to lose out to the indiscriminate use of violence as malicious violence normalizes. Furthermore, psychological pressures caused by the interminable identification problem make soldiers more likely to commit atrocities.³³

The functioning of communal mass atrocities is both better researched and likely more familiar to readers of this paper than COIN mass atrocities. Much of the relevant information appears above in the section “How do mass atrocities function?” However, there are a few points worth adding. First, assuming that just because conflict erupts between two groups, particularly ethnically-defined groups, it is solely motivated by deep ethnic hatred is a simplistic understanding. Frequently ethnic rhetoric masks deeper issues at play even though the use of ethnic rhetoric by leaders can have very real implications for individual perceptions. A necessary but not sufficient condition for mass atrocities to occur between two groups is the creation of social myths, often based in a warped interpretation of history, that justify violence by essentializing a rival group.³⁴ Rumours and other misinformation play a role in creating those social myths, but they can also have more destructive immediate effects. One example comes from the Sentinel Project’s experiences in Kenya’s Tana Delta. Violence between the Orma and Pokomo ethnic groups between August 2012 and January 2013 caused dozens of deaths, and relations have remained tense ever since. Just prior to the Sentinel Project’s visit to the area, a rumour spread amongst the Pokomo indicating an outside source had delivered 3,000 AK-47 assault rifles to the Orma so that they could launch a pre-emptive attack to destroy the Pokomo and drive them off their land. Fortunately, the supposed weapons cache rumour did not lead to violence, and it’s unlikely the weapons ever existed.

One important thing to note when discussing these two types of mass atrocities is to emphasize their similarities as instrumental processes. While the nature of violence differs in the two cases and necessitates different civilian self-protection strategies, violence against civilians develops through a similar process in both cases. During COIN, the pursuit of information and preventing civilians from aiding the other side are the main motivations for

³⁰ Ibid (143)

³¹ Kalyvas (351) and Kaplan “Civilian Autonomy in Civil War” (62)

³² Kalyvas (189)

³³ Ibid (69)

³⁴ Baum, Steven K. *The Psychology of Genocide: Perpetrators, Bystanders, and Rescuers*. N.p.: Cambridge UP, 2008. Web. (26)

committing violence. During communal violence, the pursuit of a political and/or material goal combined with extreme politics convinces leaders to attack civilians from another group.

4.0 - Local, Nonviolent Strategies for Civilian Self-Protection

4.1 - Other approaches to civilian self-protection

Many authors have addressed civilian self-protection from different angles, and so this section will attempt to synthesize them into a coherent narrative before proposing new strategies. Aditi Gorur, in a study of armed peacekeepers and civilian self-protection, makes the crucial point that civilians constantly make efforts to defend themselves even if they do not see these actions as separate from normal, everyday behaviour.³⁵ Similarly, Liam Mahony writes that civilians consider any existing social structure to have protective capabilities during mass violence.³⁶ Kaplan, Mitchell and Hancock have expanded on this idea by examining the concept of a zone of peace (ZoP), in which communities voluntarily withdraw themselves from a conflict.³⁷ Kalyvas stops short of proposing a ZoP as a way that civilians can protect themselves from civil war violence, but does extensively document the variation in civil war violence caused by limiting denunciations by civilians.³⁸ ZoPs can take many forms but they are all based around the concept of gaining the trust of armed actors to not support either side in exchange for autonomy. Another self-protection measure comes from an analysis of the misinformation that often facilitates violence. Bhavnani, Findley, and Kuklinksi argue that during communal violence, leaders have a strong effect on the transmission of deliberate misinformation.³⁹ Therefore, fact-checking these rumours, removing extremist leaders from political office, or creating contact programs that bring together individuals from rival groups in areas at risk of impending violence could provide a mitigating effect.

Casey Barrs is probably the most prolific author and researcher on civilian self-protection. He has authored several papers focused on small-scale methods for how civilians can protect themselves during atrocities and how NGOs can aid this process. First and foremost, he has written the most authoritative document in existence on strategies civilians use to protect themselves during conflict.⁴⁰ His other two most important concepts are Locally-Led Advanced Mobile Aid (LLAMA) and “emergency livelihoods.” LLAMA is a way for mobile, flexible and lightweight teams to bring aid to areas that normal aid distribution cannot reach.⁴¹ Beyond delivering humanitarian aid, LLAMA can provide communities at risk of violence with crucial information on troop movements and knowledge of escape routes or self-protection

³⁵ Gorur, Aditi. *Community Self-Protection Strategies: How Peacekeepers Can Help or Harm*. Stimson Center, Aug. 2013. Web. (4)

³⁶ Mahony, Liam. *Non-military Strategies for Civilian Protection in the DRC*. Fieldview Solutions, Mar. 2013. Web. (20)

³⁷ Kaplan "Civilian Autonomy in Civil War" and Hancock, Landon E., and C.R. Mitchell. *Zones of Peace*. Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian, 2007. Ebrary. Web.

³⁸ Kalyvas

³⁹ Bhavnani, Ravi, Michael G. Findley, and James H. Kuklinksi. "Rumors Dynamics in Ethnic Violence." *The Journal of Politics* 71.3 (2009): 876-92. Web. (885)

⁴⁰ Barrs, Casey A. *How Civilians Survive Violence: A Preliminary Inventory*. Cuny Center, Nov. 2010. Web.

⁴¹ Barrs, Casey A. "Locally-Led Advanced Mobile Aid." *Journal of Humanitarian Assistance* (2004): n. pag. *Relief Web*. 13 Nov. 2004. Web.

measures.⁴² The concept of “emergency livelihoods” urges humanitarian organizations working with civilians fleeing violence to be more pragmatic and less prescriptive.⁴³ Bribing armed groups or simply fleeing are two strategies that humanitarian organizations often recommend against on principle. Barrs, however, argues that civilians are the ones who own their own survival, and that outside actors should therefore do their best to support the actions they decide to take. NGOs thus should focus on helping civilians live “emergency livelihoods.” Similarly, Mahony argues that NGOs need to expand beyond what they see as their traditional roles to create long-term solutions to violent conflict.⁴⁴ Lastly, in his report for the Sentinel Project, Sean Langberg argues for a paradigm shift in conflict early warning systems. These changes would vertically integrate flows of information. At the same time, the systems would be placed into the hands of locals, thus allowing them to use the information gathered in order to prompt nearly immediate self-protective actions.⁴⁵

4.2 - Responses to counterinsurgent mass atrocities

Armed actors generally pursue two things from civilians during COIN: information and collaboration (or non-collaboration with the enemy). As described above, they often use violence to achieve these goals. While the logic of COIN violence is largely rational, miscommunicated orders, mistaken perceptions, intra-perpetrator factions vying for power, individual desires for wealth, and soldiers cracking under emotional pressure can all cause violence against civilians that falls outside of strictly “strategic” logic.⁴⁶ In situations in which armed actors actively engage each other in combat, some civilian collateral damage is unavoidable, but there are concrete ways in which civilians can successfully remove themselves from conflict.

In order to create a ZoP, trust between civilians and multiple armed actors is crucial.⁴⁷ If armed actors cannot trust that civilians are not helping a rival group, they are likely to target civilians as a deterrence measure, even if no actual collaboration occurred. To establish this trust, communities must take several actions, including:

- Ensuring clear and widespread messaging
- Engaging in constant contact with combatant leaders⁴⁸
- Creating a strong internal belief that non-collaboration is the best option
- Creating an inclusive internal conflict resolution process
- Forming a formal investigative body to investigate charges of collaboration

⁴² Barrs, Casey A. "Conflict Early Warning: Warning Who?" *Journal of Humanitarian Assistance* (n.d.): n. pag. *Tufts Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*. Web.

⁴³ Barrs, Casey A. *Preparedness Support: Helping Brace Beneficiaries, Local Staff and Partners for Violence*. The Cuny Center, May 2010. Web.

⁴⁴ Mahony (4)

⁴⁵ Langberg, Sean E. *Localized Early Warning Systems: From Natural Disasters to Human Security Leveraging a People-Centered Protection Network*. The Sentinel Project, 13 Aug. 2013. Web.

⁴⁶ Kalyvas

⁴⁷ "ZoP" will function as an overarching concept here to describe ways in which civilians can remove themselves from COIN violence, even if such strategies aren't formally classified by their creators as such.

⁴⁸ Mahony (28-9)

- Establishing a set procedure for addressing residents who violate the non-collaboration policy⁴⁹

The first and second actions simply ensure that individual militants are aware of community policy and do not inadvertently violate this agreement. The second action also helps to build trust and rapport between leaders from armed actors and the ZoP community. Convincing residents that the benefits of staying out of armed conflict outweigh the negatives (either through education or material incentives) is crucial for establishing credibility with armed actors. Even if a ZoP is declared, if residents violate the non-collaboration policy too many times, armed actors have little incentive to observe the community's autonomy. An internal conflict resolution process provides an outlet for internal disputes which can turn deadly during insurgencies. The presence of a trusted process decreases the likelihood that civilians will partner with armed actors by preventing denunciations that target a local rival. These armed incursions can quickly destroy a ZoP's special status. The fifth strategy, forming a formal internal investigative body, is the method that does the most to sustain the ZoP, especially during times of strained relations with armed groups. It allows the community to deal with the mistakes of its own members rather than allowing armed actors to determine justice summarily. It also demonstrates good faith to armed actors; the ZoP community is genuinely interested in preventing collaboration rather than acting covertly in support of one group or another. Finally, following an investigation, the community needs to establish a method to create solutions for citizens found guilty of collaborating, preferably one that does not involve handing them over to armed groups. Planning ahead for violations allows the ZoP to remain in existence without sacrificing civilians. One possible option is to provide funds for the guilty individual to move to another region in which they will be safe from retaliatory attacks.⁵⁰

The six strategies above seek to work with armed actors in order to produce mutually-acceptable results. There are, however, more aggressive options available for communities at risk of counterinsurgent mass atrocities. The large-scale confrontation of armed groups by civilians in order to force a change of behaviour by the armed group is one such strategy. It works if the armed group is comfortable with perhaps killing individual civilians but is reluctant to commit a large-scale massacre.⁵¹ While this strategy can be quite effective, it is also very risky, especially if a community is unable to accurately assess the armed group's willingness to commit mass killing.

While ZoPs theoretically provide the best chance for civilians to remove themselves from conflict, situations on the ground sometimes mean that a community simply removing themselves from conflict is not the best option or is not an option at all. For example, if one group is exceptionally brutal in their information-gathering methods, allying themselves with an opposing group could be a prudent strategy. Alternatively, if the organizational structure of the community is attacked directly, the community will be hard-pressed to organize and protect

⁴⁹ Kaplan "Civilian Autonomy in Civil War"

⁵⁰ Ibid (64)

⁵¹ Ibid (65)

itself from multiple armed actors.⁵² Therefore, communities must remain flexible with their self-protection strategies to fit the particular situation.

There are numerous strategies that communities can use to remove themselves from counterinsurgent violence, but they all require high levels of community organization. Without a strong understanding among individuals that any sort of participation in the conflict could lead to disastrous consequences for the entire community, ZoPs are not likely to withstand the stresses of large-scale violence. In his study of ZoPs amongst indigenous Colombian communities, Kaplan found that communities that regularly visited shamans were more likely to avoid counterinsurgent violence. While this finding makes little sense initially, Kaplan explains it by arguing that indigenous communities that visit shamans are likely to be more close-knit and cohesive, therefore making them more likely and able to collectively organize self-defensive actions. Along these lines, rural communities with stable populations and clearly defined borders (characteristics that contribute to community closeness) have an easier time organizing themselves against violence.⁵³

4.3 - Responses to communal mass atrocities

On the surface, responding to communal rather than counterinsurgent mass atrocities seems much more difficult because civilians are the direct targets of violence. This observation, however, fails to take into account the instrumental nature of both types of mass atrocities. In communal mass atrocities, civilians become targets because they are perceived to stand in the way of another goal, and in counterinsurgent mass atrocities, civilians become targets because they are perceived to be helping the enemy or preventing the gathering of intelligence. In both cases, violence against civilians only happens after perpetrators fail to accomplish their goals through other means. Both response strategies then focus on changing incentives for perpetrators. Despite these similarities, civilian self-protection strategies differ significantly between communal and counterinsurgent.

As argued in the above section “Why does mass atrocities happen?,” widespread prejudice in a society does not lead directly to mass atrocities. It is certainly a factor, but other causes offer better explanations. For that reason, attempting to address deep societal cleavages is not a particularly effective method of preventing mass atrocities. Arguably, anti-mass atrocities and anti-genocide education in primary and secondary education can lead to norm diffusion, but that project requires large resources without immediate or tangible results. Valentino makes the argument that even if there are marginal benefits to decreasing prejudice in a society, the costs required to undertake a project aimed at changing societal attitudes are enormous. Similarly, spreading democracy and improving ethnic relations are imprudent strategies to undertake because scholars and leaders simply do not know how to perform them effectively.⁵⁴ Other more focused strategies are therefore necessary.

⁵² Ibid (171)

⁵³ Kaplan, Oliver. "Shootings and Shamans: Local Civilian Authority Structures and Civil War Violence in Colombia." (2012): 1-32. *Social Science Research Network*. 25 July 2012. Web.

⁵⁴ Valentino (236-8)

Concentrating on “hot spots” is one such strategy. Before violence becomes too entrenched, identifying areas or groups at risk of violence allows for small-scale pre-emptive interventions. Because mass atrocities are often carried out by a few people (many of them low-level perpetrators who lack strong ideological reasons for participating), concentrating a majority of preventive resources on those groups, to the extent that they can be identified (tools like the Sentinel Project’s Hatebase could be informative in this regard), is a prudent strategy. Contact groups in these hot spots allow for rival groups to come together in a neutral, mediated space and attempt to talk out their differences. These projects have a long record of success.⁵⁵ However, if the two groups do not both see the other as equals, contact groups may be disadvantageous.⁵⁶ Public messaging that targets the potential perpetrators, thus raising the moral costs of participation in committing mass atrocities, can also be effective.

Communal mass atrocities inevitably rely on the propagation of misinformation and social myths to justify violence.⁵⁷ This happens on two levels. First, essentialized versions of group histories are created in order to provide a historical precedent for targeting a particular group. Second, rumours are spread regarding the nefarious intentions of a rival group, thus justifying pre-emptive attacks. These two levels of misinformation reinforce each other. Widespread public messaging, such as fact-checking text message services, can counter this misinformation. Rumours of group intentions are easier to counter than social myths, but even then there is a marginal potential positive effect.

Perpetrator leaders often have fairly esoteric ideologies. The Nazis, for example, coupled anti-Semitism with bizarre beliefs regarding the occult.⁵⁸ Valentino argues that broader society and low-level perpetrators likely do not understand these beliefs, but that they often persist among perpetrator leaders because they are never scrutinized in depth by a broader audience.⁵⁹ Therefore, publically challenging perpetrator leaders on their more extreme views, including those that demand the extermination of a particular group, could assist in generating the (frequently absent) public political will needed to remove or moderate extremist leaders.

4.4 - When does nonviolent self-protection not work?

Despite the many ways in which civilians can and do protect themselves non-violently from mass atrocities, there are some conditions under which these strategies do not work. Recognizing these situations improves the understanding of how these processes can become more effective.

⁵⁵ Chirof, Daniel, and Clark R. McCauley. *Why Not Kill Them All?: The Logic and Prevention of Political Murder*. N.p.: Princeton UP, 2008. Ebrary. Web. (196)

⁵⁶ Staub, Ervin. "Preventing Genocide: Activating Bystanders, Helping Victims Heal, Helping Groups Overcome Hostility." *Studies in Comparative Genocide*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999. N. pag. Print. (258)

⁵⁷ Baum (26), Staub (257), and Bhavnani, Findley, and Kuklinski (877)

⁵⁸ Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas. *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and Their Influence on Nazi Ideology : The Ariosophists of Austria and Germany, 1890-1935*. N.p.: New York UP, 1992. Print.

⁵⁹ Valentino (47-67)

Violence during mass atrocities expands through an escalatory process. Broadly, there is not a point where mass atrocities begin, though scholars do create arbitrary definitions of what constitutes a mass atrocity in order to aid in research on the topic. The process is very rarely linear; the intensities of mass atrocities wax and wane. The 1994 Rwandan Genocide, for example, had a very clear inflection point. Within hours of the downing of President Habyarimana's plane, large-scale killings started. However, the process of mass atrocities had begun long before with Hutu leaders spreading sectarian messages, organizing the Interahamwe, and stockpiling weapons. Even in instances such as Rwanda, it would be erroneous to see mass atrocities as binary, where one is either happening or not happening. Instead, a process-oriented understanding is more complete. This also means that the general discourse on mass atrocities, which separates mass atrocity "prevention" and "response," is flawed. At what point does intervention in mass atrocities stop being prevention and become response? This is not to say that the "prevention" paradigm is unhelpful. Indeed, thinking about taking pre-emptive actions is crucial but it must come with the understanding that all is not lost once killing begins. Many of the same strategies that are applied prior to the killings still apply. However, as cycles of violence become entrenched and deaths multiply, "prevention" strategies do progressively lose their effectiveness. The same applies to nonviolent civilian self-protection. As killing becomes normalized, civilians have increasing difficulty finding allies and persuading combatants to spare them no matter the benefits to the soldiers.⁶⁰

As levels of violence increase, the potential for organization gradually decreases and the collective action problem, which exists even during times of relatively low violence, becomes even more acute. Organizing for civilian self-protection becomes difficult as individuals begin to think more about their immediate survival and less about the wellbeing of their community. As resources and chances for escape decrease, civilians turn inwards. Therefore, the high levels of social cohesion and organization needed to implement and sustain civilian self-protection measures cease to exist.

During mass atrocities, an increase in violence levels exposes combatants to intense stresses. These psychological forces can prevent combatants from acting strategically and they may begin to "shoot first and ask questions later" if they feel their lives are in severe danger. Even combatants who were previously careful to avoid civilian casualties may become fearful and impulsive.⁶¹ Especially during COIN, where lack of information is a constant problem, psychological strains cause combatants to become paranoid, thus making them more likely to commit massacres or attack civilians whom they suspect are plotting against them.⁶²

Different types of armed groups tend to respond to civilian self-protection efforts differently. During COIN, groups with flexible, political motives are generally more willing to work with civilian communities and accept autonomy. These groups need civilian support, and in the case of Colombia, rely on ideological narratives that portray them as the defenders of the

⁶⁰ Kalyvas (114)

⁶¹ Franchetti, Mark. "US Marines Turn Fire on Civilians at the Bridge of Death." *The Times* [London] 30 Mar. 2003: n. pag. *Moodle*. Web.

⁶² Kalyvas (69)

people.⁶³ However, ideologically inflexible groups will be less responsive to noncombatants. Criminal organizations, on the other hand, are much more focused on purely economic goals and if civilian autonomy threatens a criminal organization's economic interests, cooperation between the two entities is unlikely.⁶⁴ For example, in Mexico, cartels are the major source of violence against civilians. The nature of these organizations makes civilian autonomy difficult to achieve, and therefore civilian groups that have sprung up to fight their influence are largely armed.⁶⁵

⁶³ Kaplan "Civilian Autonomy in Civil War" (69)

⁶⁴ Ibid (73-74)

⁶⁵ Asfura-Heim, Patricio, and Ralph H. Espach. "The Rise of Mexico's Self-Defense Forces." Web log post. *Foreign Affairs*. N.p., July-Aug. 2013. Web.

5.0 - Recommendations for the Sentinel Project and Similar NGOs

Currently, no framework exists through which NGOs can channel their efforts to aid civilian self-protection. This is especially problematic given the importance of civilian self-protection in saving lives during mass atrocities. Therefore, recognizing the ubiquitousness and utility of these strategies is of the utmost importance for organizations seeking to promote civilian survival of mass atrocities. NGOs such as the Sentinel Project are in an ideal position to help civilians protect themselves because of their relative lack of political constraints and ability to innovate. Both western and non-western NGOs can contribute to this effort.

This paper offers six recommendations for NGOs looking to decrease the civilian toll of mass atrocities and that are willing to consider helping civilians pursue nonviolent self-protection:

- NGOs should be pragmatic with their methods to ultimately promote civilian survival
- NGOs should not implement a template for successfully aiding civilian self-protection efforts
- NGOs should strengthen existing social structures and institutions rather than create new ones
- NGOs should make improving the flow of information to communities at risk a central goal
- NGOs should pursue all civilian self-protection projects, even if they are small
- NGOs should work towards having small, mobile groups operating on the ground

Liam Mahony has criticized NGOs for failing to move beyond their traditional roles that promote democracy, human rights and international law even when civilians need other services, such as money transfers or up-to-the-minute information about troop movements, to improve their chances of survival.⁶⁶ Along the same lines, Barrs proposes focusing on “emergency livelihoods” in which NGOs do their best to assist civilians with basic survival aid and support them as owners of their own survival.⁶⁷ Barrs’ suggestion is important and NGOs should remember that the survival of the people they help is ultimately more important than traditional roles or other moral principles.

Each mass atrocity and societal context is different; therefore, there is no single strategy or set of strategies that can be consistently applied to improve the ability of civilians to protect themselves. The strategies explained above in “Local, Nonviolent Strategies for Civilian Self-Protection” are only designed to provide a broad outline of possible strategies. There are many limitations from situation to situation that prevent a particular tactic from working. Therefore, NGOs must analyze each specific situation in depth before implementing appropriate and

⁶⁶ Mahony (4)

⁶⁷ Barrs "Preparedness Support" (5-24)

relevant strategies. In doing so, NGOs are better positioned to respond accordingly to help civilians protect themselves during complicated mass atrocity scenarios.

As Mahony notes, communities tend to use every existing social structure to facilitate civilian protection.⁶⁸ Therefore, NGOs should recognize this fact and seek to strengthen these institutions rather than creating their own. Cedric de Coning argues that NGOs should think about the long-term self-protective capacity of a community;⁶⁹ if an NGO creates a community institution designed to counter a specific threat, in the event of a future threat, the community will have to start over from scratch. This approach is more harmful than non-intervention as the previously existing social structures will not have gained experience with how to respond to violence. Instead, working within existing social structures and institutions increases community resilience in both the short and long-term.

Civilian lack of information during mass atrocities can cause paralysis, preventing them from, for example, fleeing an area even when they know an armed group may be entering. If they were to know with certainty when an armed group was going to pass through an area, or what the exact intentions of the armed group were, they would be able to make decisions more likely to ensure their survival. NGOs often have the ability to aggregate and distribute information in a way that at-risk communities do not. Fact-checking rumours or conflict early warning systems are two promising informational avenues more NGOs should pursue. However, as Sean Langberg reminds us, NGOs must make sure the information they gather is distributed to at-risk communities, rather than remaining the realm of intellectual elites.⁷⁰

Efforts to aid civilian self-protection can be effective and very small scale at the same time, so NGOs should not be deterred by chronic funding shortages. Some projects, such as simply aggregating a network of researchers and informers in an at-risk community, can be carried out on a nominal a budget. Small interventions such as this can still be very beneficial.

Ultimately, NGOs should be working towards having staff on the ground to assist at-risk communities and the LLAMA concept is a good way to frame what those future interventions might look like.⁷¹ As Barrs notes, LLAMA teams should be mobile, flexible and have training in how to survive and help others in high-risk situations. Militaries do not have a monopoly on these skills, but individuals with military training will be an asset to a LLAMA team. These teams can provide communities with material aid and conflict information. LLAMA teams on the ground are the best way to work directly and consistently with communities and to facilitate “emergency livelihoods.” The risk of LLAMA-like interventions should not be downplayed but it must also be remembered that militaries often encounter similar risks in standard operations, and many people likely to undertake LLAMA work will have had previous experience in conflict zones. Though they are inherently dangerous, these types of efforts can go a long way in aiding civilian-self protection.

⁶⁸ Mahony (20)

⁶⁹ De Coning, Cedric. "Understanding Peacebuilding as Essentially Local." *Stability* 2.1 (2013): 1-6. 5 Mar. 2013. Web. (3-4)

⁷⁰ Langberg

⁷¹ Barrs "Conflict Early Warning"

6.0 - Avenues for Further Research

Nonviolent, local civilian self-protection is a chronically understudied phenomenon and there is much more research to be done on the topic. First, the theoretical background for developing civilian self-protection strategies is not particularly deep. Improving the theory of why nonviolent, local interventions are successful will enable researchers to create new strategies and explain why some interventions work in certain situations while others do not. It is more difficult, for example, to come up with nonviolent solutions to communal rather than COIN mass atrocities, presenting a clear avenue for research. Second, despite evidence regarding the common occurrence of civilian self-protection during mass atrocities, there is little documentation of this specific phenomenon. The area of study would benefit from qualitative accounts of these efforts as well as quantitative data on how civilians tend to survive, or not survive, mass atrocities. Third, and perhaps most importantly, is the need for a qualitative and theoretical understanding of how victims and perpetrators actually interact. The information on this topic is remarkably scant, and an anthropology of a mass atrocity would be an invaluable addition to current scholarship. It would allow researchers to understand how conflict is managed and how power is leveraged at the micro level. These understandings would conceptually inform NGOs on when it is best for communities to stay in place and negotiate with armed actors, and when the risk of atrocities becomes great enough to make evacuation the best option. Fourth, further research is needed on how civilian self-protection can be integrated into large-scale civilian protection efforts run by NGOs, governmental organizations, and international governmental organizations. Finally, an expansion, both prescriptive and theoretical, of the LLAMA and “emergency livelihoods” concepts could help to guide future efforts to support civilian self-protection.