

3. THE STRATEGIC LOGIC OF MASS KILLING

To identify societies at high risk for mass killing, I have suggested, we must first understand the specific goals, ideas, and beliefs of powerful groups and leaders, not necessarily the broad social structures or systems of government of the societies over which these leaders preside. A few leaders cannot implement mass killing alone, but perpetrators do not need widespread social support in order to carry it out. A tiny minority, well armed and well organized, can generate an appalling amount of bloodshed when unleashed upon unarmed and unorganized victims. Levels of hatred, discrimination, or ideological commitment common to many societies are sufficient to recruit the relatively small number of active supporters needed to carry out mass killing and to encourage the passivity of the rest of society.

These conclusions suggest that we will best understand the causes of mass killing when we study the phenomenon from a “strategic” perspective. Rather than focusing on the social structures or psychological mechanisms that might facilitate public support for mass killing, a strategic approach seeks to identify the specific situations, goals, and conditions that give leaders incentives to consider this kind of violence. I contend that mass killing occurs when powerful groups come to believe it is the best available means to accomplish certain radical goals, counter specific types of threats, or solve difficult military problems. From this perspec-

tive, mass killing should be viewed as an instrumental policy calculated to achieve important political and military objectives with respect to other groups — a “final solution” to its perpetrators’ most urgent problems.

Because mass killing is a means to an end, it is rarely a policy of first resort. Perpetrators commonly experiment with other, less violent or even conciliatory means in the attempt to achieve their ends. When these means fail or are deemed too costly or demanding, however, leaders are forced to choose between compromising their most important goals and interests or resorting to more violent methods to achieve them. Regardless of perpetrators’ original intentions or attitudes toward their victims, the failure or frustration of other means can make mass killing a more attractive option.

It is important to emphasize that a strategic understanding of mass killing does not imply that perpetrators always evaluate objectively the problems they face in their environment, nor that they accurately assess the ability of mass killing to resolve these problems. Human beings act on the basis of their subjective perceptions and beliefs, not objective reality. Indeed, the powerful role that small groups and individuals play in the conception and implementation of policies of mass killing can amplify the influence of misperceptions in promoting such violence. The often misguided and sometimes outrightly bizarre ideas and beliefs of perpetrator groups can persist at least in part because they usually are shielded from the critical scrutiny of a wider audience. A profound obsession with secrecy, frequently engendered by years spent in political or military opposition, is common in perpetrator organizations and tends to exacerbate misperceptions.

A strategic approach to mass killing, therefore, suggests only that perpetrators are likely to employ mass killing when they perceive it to be both necessary and effective, not when it is actually so. In many cases, the threat posed by the victims of mass killing is more imagined than real. The Jews of Europe, after all, posed no conceivable threat to Germany in the 1930s. This reality mattered little, however, since Germany’s leaders were steadfastly convinced of the contrary, and they possessed the power to act on their convictions. Perpetrators also frequently have overestimated the capacity of mass killing to achieve their goals, especially in the long term. While mass killing can be a powerful political or military strategy, it also can be decidedly counterproductive, even from the point of view of those who instigate it. In practice, the use of massive violence has often backfired, diverting scarce resources away from real threats, provoking increased resistance from victim groups, mobilizing third parties on behalf of the victims, or discrediting the ideologies in the service of which it has been employed.

Mass killing failed to achieve its perpetrators' objectives, at least in the long run, in all of the cases examined in this book. In the Soviet Union, China, and Cambodia communist leaders resorted to mass killing in an effort to force peasants to accept new, supposedly more productive means of agriculture. While the violence succeeded in coercing the peasantry, it also resulted in massive starvation, the near collapse of the economy, and eventually contributed to the decision to abandon radical communist agricultural methods. In Turkey, Nazi Germany, and Rwanda perpetrators used mass killing to eliminate perceived threats from ethnic minorities. In each case, the task of murdering defenseless civilians drew resources away from ongoing wars, contributing to major military defeats. During the civil war in Guatemala and the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, mass killing was intended to destroy civilian support for insurgent movements. In Afghanistan, the violence simply drove millions to support the rebels and provoked increased international opposition to the Soviet occupation. In Guatemala, the tactic was more successful in the short run, but popular resentment of the military government remained high and the regime ultimately was forced to negotiate with the rebels and implement democratic reforms.

A TYPOLOGY OF MASS KILLING

Rationality and Mass Killing

Many scholars have noted that mass killing and genocide can often appear rational from the perspective of the perpetrator. Peter du Preez, for example, contends that "there is a 'rationality of genocide' just as there is a rationality of business or athletics or war or science."¹ Likewise, Roger Smith writes that "genocide is a rational instrument to achieve an end."² More specifically, a number of scholars have pointed out that genocide can sometimes be motivated by the rational calculation that systematic violence will serve to counter real or perceived threats posed by victims or help to implement specific kinds of ideologies.³

Unfortunately, few scholars have gone beyond simply suggesting the potential rationality of genocide and mass killing to identify the specific conditions under which mass killing is most likely to appear necessary and effective to its perpetrators. Why, in other words, is mass killing a rational way to respond to some threats and implement some ideologies but not others? Helen Fein, for example, argues that many cases of genocide result from the violent repression of victim groups rebelling against severe discrimination.⁴ Rebellion, however, is a far more common phenomenon than mass killing. Fein does not attempt to explain why mass

killing is used to repress some rebellious groups and not others.⁵ Without this knowledge, we can neither fully understand the “rationality” of genocidal repression nor anticipate with confidence where and when it is most likely to occur.

My research, like these authors’, also suggests that perpetrators may view mass killing as a rational way to counter threats or implement certain types of ideologies. I argue, however, that perpetrators are likely to perceive mass killing as an attractive means to achieve these and other ends only in very specific circumstances and under very specific conditions. I have identified six specific motives — corresponding to six “types” of mass killing — that, under certain specific conditions, appear to generate strong incentives for leaders to initiate mass killing.

These six motives can be grouped into two general categories. First, when leaders’ plans result in the near-complete material disenfranchisement of large groups of people, leaders are likely to conclude that mass killing is necessary to overcome resistance by these groups or, more radically, that mass killing is the only practical way to physically remove these groups or their influence from society. I refer to this general class as “dispossessive” mass killings. Second, mass killing can become an attractive solution in military conflicts in which leaders perceive conventional military tactics to be hopeless or unacceptably costly. When leaders’ efforts to defeat their enemies’ military forces directly are frustrated, they face powerful incentives to target the civilian populations they suspect of supporting those forces. I refer to this class of mass killing as “coercive” mass killings.

The specific real-world scenarios in which each type of mass killing occurs, as well as several selected historical examples of each scenario, are presented in table 1. I will briefly describe each of the types of mass killing in this table in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Of the six types mass killing, three have accounted for the majority of episodes of mass killing as well as the greatest number of victims in the twentieth century: communist mass killings, ethnic mass killings, and counter guerrilla mass killings. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 describe the general causes of these types of mass killing in greater detail and apply the strategic perspective to explain several prominent historical episodes of each type.

Conditionality

Although the scenarios described in this chapter generate powerful incentives for mass killing, they do not invariably provoke it. A variety of intervening variables may act to increase or decrease leaders’ incentives or capabilities to launch mass killing and, consequently, the likelihood that

TABLE I
A Typology of Mass Killing

Motive/Type	Scenario	Examples*
DISPOSSESSIVE MASS KILLING		
Communist	Agricultural collectivization and political terror	Soviet Union (1917–53) China (1950–76) Cambodia (1975–79)
Ethnic	Ethnic cleansing	Turkish Armenia (1915–18) The Holocaust (1939–45) Rwanda (1994)
Territorial	Colonial enlargement	European colonies in North and South America Genocide of the Herero in German South-West Africa (1904–7)
	Expansionist wars	German annexation of western Poland (1939–45)
COERCIVE MASS KILLING		
Counter guerrilla	Guerrilla wars	Algerian war of independence from France (1954–62) Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979–88) Ethiopian civil war (1970s and 1980s) Guatemalan civil war (1980s)
Terrorist	Terror bombing	Allied bombings of Germany and Japan (1940–45)
	Starvation blockades/siege warfare	Allied naval blockade of Germany (1914–19) Nigerian land blockade of Biafra (1967–70)
	Sub-state/insurgent terrorism	FLN terrorism in Algerian war of independence against France (1954–62) Viet Cong terrorism in South Vietnam (1957–75) RENAMO terrorism in Mozambique (1976–92)
Imperialist	Imperial conquests and rebellions	German occupation of Western Europe (1940–45) Japan's empire in East Asia (1910–45)

Note: This typology does not exhaust the entire universe of motives for mass killing in the twentieth century, but it does appear to account for the great majority of these episodes. At least two notable cases—the mass killing of between 250,000 and 1,000,000 people in Indonesia in 1965 and the mass killing of between 100,000 and 500,000 people in Uganda under Idi Amin from 1971 to 1979—do not appear entirely consistent with any of the motives described in this book.

*Selected examples only, not a complete list of all instances of mass killings within each category. Some examples combine aspects of more than one motive.

mass killing will occur. Although it is not possible to identify all of the factors and conditions that affect the likelihood of mass killing, I have attempted to identify some of the most significant intervening variables by analyzing the history of a number of less violent examples of the scenarios listed in table 1. I list these conditions at the end of each section below. It is important to note that these are not merely ad hoc lists of factors derived from specific historical cases. Rather, these conditions are influential precisely because each of them directly or indirectly influences the specific causal mechanisms implicated by the strategic theories described in this chapter — increasing or decreasing the availability of less violent strategies, or raising or lowering the impediments to mass killing.

Some of these conditions, such as the perpetrators' physical capability to carry out mass killing, the size of the potential victim group, and the ability of potential victims to flee to safety, are relevant to all types of mass killing. Other conditions apply only to specific scenarios. Conditions affecting the likelihood of communist mass killing, ethnic mass killing, and counterinsurgency mass killing are described in detail in chapters 4, 5, and 6.

DISPOSSESSIVE MASS KILLINGS

Dispossession mass killings are the result of policies that, by design or by consequence, suddenly strip large groups of people of their possessions, their homes, or their way of life. These kinds of policies do not aim at mass killing as such, but in practice their implementation often leads to it.

My research identifies three major types of dispossession mass killing in the twentieth century. First, regimes seeking to achieve the radical communization of their societies have forced vast numbers of people to surrender their property and abandon their traditional ways of life. Second, racist or nationalist regimes have forced large groups of people to relinquish their homes and possessions during the “ethnic cleansing” of certain territories. Third, the territorial ambitions of colonial or expansionist powers have often stripped preexisting populations of their land and means of subsistence.

A Note on the Role of Ideology in Dispossession Mass Killing

Several of the cases categorized in this book as dispossession mass killings have been described as ideological mass killings/genocides by other authors. Indeed, few scholars who have studied genocide and mass killing have failed to comment on the central role that ideology has played in

some of the twentieth century's bloodiest mass killings. In particular, the ideology of ruling elites played a central role in the mass killings of communist states such as the Soviet Union, China, and Cambodia and of explicitly racist states such as Nazi Germany. Various authors have suggested that the most dangerous ideologies are those that seek national purification, dehumanize other ethnic groups, place national security above all other goals, or expound a political formula that excludes victim groups from the larger community or nation.⁶

From a strategic perspective, however, what the ideologies that lead to mass killing share is not their specific content but the magnitude, scope, and speed of the changes they force upon large groups of people. The desire to implement such radical changes may stem from ideological doctrines calling for a revolutionary transformation of the economic or demographic composition of society, but it may also stem from more "pragmatic" concerns, such as the effort to eliminate specific kinds of political or military threats, or the attempt to colonize and repopulate territories already inhabited by large numbers of people. Whatever its fundamental motivation, the effort to impose extremely radical changes on the lives of large numbers of people often results in the near-total material or political disenfranchisement of existing social groups.

Radical ends, however, require radical means. Leaders attempting to implement such sweeping agendas soon discover, or simply anticipate, that members of disenfranchised groups will not cooperate with the implementation of a new social order in which they stand to lose their livelihood, their homes, or their very way of life. Massive violence may be required to force such radical changes upon large numbers of people. Under these circumstances, leaders may simply decide that the victim group must be totally annihilated, or that killing large numbers of them is necessary to enforce compliance from the group and deter surviving members from mounting further resistance. Even if victim groups can be forced to submit, the process and aftermath of such radical changes, often involving the sudden relocation of vast numbers of people or the disruption of traditional modes of subsistence, can take a staggering toll in human life.

Despite the deadly consequences of the ideological, political, or territorial goals that motivate dispossessive mass killings, it is important to understand that these goals seldom, if ever, seek the killing of victim groups as an end in itself. This conception of the role of ideology in mass killing would simply lead to the tautological conclusion that groups engage in mass killing because they want to engage in mass killing. Rather, I contend that dispossessive mass killings occur when perpetrators con-

clude that this kind of violence is the most practical strategy to accomplish specific political or military objectives short of mass killing. These objectives may call for an open assault on the way of life of victim groups, for their segregation or even physical removal from society, but they do not amount to killing for killing's sake. In fact, as we shall see in chapter 4, mass killings in the Soviet Union, China, and Cambodia resulted from the effort to implement policies that communist leaders believed would ultimately improve the lives all citizens, including the social groups whose existence was most severely disrupted by them. In the eyes of communist leaders, violence became a necessary expedient because these groups failed to rise above their narrow "class consciousness" to appreciate the benefits of communist society.

Communist Mass Killing

The most deadly mass killings in history have resulted from the effort to transform society according to communist doctrine. Radical communist regimes have proven so exceptionally violent because the changes they have sought to bring about have resulted in the nearly complete material dispossession of vast numbers of people. Radical communist policies have extended well beyond the restriction of personal and political freedoms characteristic of authoritarian or dictatorial regimes. The most radical communist regimes have attempted to bring about the wholesale transformation of their societies, often including the abrupt destruction of traditional ways of life and means of production, and the subordination of personal choices and daily activities to the dictates of the state. Not surprisingly, many people have chosen to resist these drastic changes. Faced with the choice between moderating their revolutionary goals to allow for voluntary change and forcing change on society using whatever means necessary, communist leaders like Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot opted for mass killing over compromise.

Mass killings associated with the collectivization of agriculture and other radical communist agricultural policies provide the most striking examples of this process. Communist agricultural policies like collectivization have tended to go hand in hand with mass killing because, more than any other communist program, these policies have stripped vast numbers of people of their most valued possessions — their homes and their way of life. The imposition of radical communist agricultural policies on the peasantry of the Soviet Union, China, and Cambodia resulted in millions of deaths. Many victims were executed outright in the effort to crush real or suspected resistance to the socialization of the countryside, but most died in the massive famines sparked by collectivization.

Communist leaders did not deliberately engineer these famines, as some have suggested, but they did use hunger as a weapon by directing the worst effects of the famines against individuals and social groups perceived to oppose collectivization.

In addition to violence associated with communist agricultural policies, communist mass killings have also taken the form of bloody intra-party purges and attacks on social and cultural elites, intellectuals, and members of opposition political parties. The Great Terror in the Soviet Union and the Cultural Revolution in China represent the most notorious examples of this kind of communist political terror.

Almost all governments face some form of domestic political opposition, so what explains the exceptional violence of these communist states? I argue that, like collectivization, these purges were motivated by the desire of leaders to eliminate perceived resistance to the communist transformation of society. Communist leaders feared opposition to their radical policies not only in the countryside but also among intellectuals and even members of the communist party itself. Indeed, the most savage political purges in the Soviet Union, China, and Cambodia were driven in large part by the effort to eliminate real and perceived opposition to the regimes' radical agricultural policies within the communist party. In the eyes of Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot, the achievements of communism remained extremely fragile long after the revolution. Perhaps even more than they had in the collectivization campaigns in the countryside, however, communist leaders vastly inflated the extent and influence of their political enemies during the purges. The pseudo-Marxist belief that resistance to communism was motivated by one's class consciousness — an attribute that was difficult or impossible to change — led to the prophylactic targeting of entire social groups and family members of suspects, a practice that massively expanded the scope of the terror.

Communist mass killing is more likely

- the higher the priority that communist leaders assign to the radical transformation of society
- the more the communization of society results in the dispossession of large numbers of people
- the more rapidly communist leaders seek to implement dispossessive policies
- the greater the physical capabilities for mass killing possessed by the regime
- the fewer and more difficult the options for victims of communist policies to flee to safety

TABLE 2
Communist Mass Killings in the Twentieth Century

Location-Dates	Description	Additional Motives	Deaths
Soviet Union (1917–23)	Russian Civil War and Red Terror	Counter guerrilla	250,000– 2,500,000
Soviet Union and Eastern Europe (1927–45)	Collectivization, Great Terror, occupation/communization of Baltic states and western Poland	Counter guerrilla	10,000,000– 20,000,000
China (including Tibet) (1949–72)	Land reform, Great Leap Forward, Cultural Revolution, and other political purges	Counter guerrilla	10,000,000– 46,000,000
Cambodia (1975–79)	Collectivization and political repression	Ethnic	1,000,000– 2,000,000
POSSIBLE CASES*			
Bulgaria (1944–?)	Agricultural collectivization and political repression		50,000– 100,000
East Germany (1945–?)	Political repression by Soviet Union		80,000– 100,000
Romania (1945–?)	Agricultural collectivization and political repression		60,000– 300,000
North Korea (1945–?)	Agricultural collectivization and political repression	Counter guerrilla	400,000– 1,500,000
North and South Vietnam (1953–?)	Agricultural collectivization and political repression		80,000– 200,000

Note: All figures in this and subsequent tables are author's estimates based on numerous sources.

* Episodes are listed under the heading "possible cases" in this and subsequent tables when the available evidence suggests a mass killing *may* have occurred, but documentation is insufficient to make a definitive judgment regarding the number of people killed, the intentionality of the killing, or the motives of the perpetrators.

Ethnic Mass Killing

Ethnic, national, or religious groups may become preferential targets in any of the types of mass killing described in this book. In these pages, however, "ethnic mass killings" are distinguished from the other types of mass killing by the explicitly racist or nationalist motives of the perpetrators. Ethnic mass killing, I argue, is not simply the result of perpetrators' bitter hatred of other ethnic groups, or of a racist ideology that calls for the extermination of these groups as such. Ethnic mass killing has deeper roots in perpetrators' fears than in their hatreds. I find that mass killing is most likely to occur when perpetrators believe that their ethnic oppo-

nents pose a threat that can be countered only by physically removing them from society, in other words, by implementing a policy of ethnic cleansing. This perception may be shaped by perpetrators' ideological beliefs about other ethnic groups, as it was in Nazi Germany, but it may also be a reaction to real, if almost always misperceived or exaggerated, threatening actions of some victim group members, as it was in Rwanda in 1994. In many cases, a combination of ideological beliefs and real-world conflicts seem to shape perpetrators' perceptions of victim groups.

The decision to engage in ethnic cleansing, however, is not always a decision to perpetrate mass killing. Ethnic cleansing and mass killing are often conflated in popular parlance, but they are not synonymous. Ethnic cleansing refers to the removal of certain groups from a given territory, a process that may or may not involve mass killing. Nevertheless, like communist policies such as collectivization, large-scale ethnic cleansing frequently has been associated with mass killing because it often results in the near-complete material dispossession of large groups of people. Violence is often required to force people to relinquish their homes and their possessions. Even after victims have been coerced into flight, the process and aftermath of large population movements itself can be deadly.

The bloodiest episodes of ethnic mass killing, however, occur when leaders conclude that they have no practical options for the physical relocation of victim groups. In such cases, perpetrators may see violent repression on a massive scale as the only way to meet the perceived threat posed by their victims. The killing may be designed to deprive the victim group of its ability to organize politically or militarily by eliminating its elites, intellectuals, or males of military age. At the most extreme, perpetrators may conclude that systematic extermination is the only available means to counter the threat. Ethnic mass killing, therefore, is best seen as an instrumental strategy that seeks the physical removal or permanent military or political subjugation of ethnic groups, not the annihilation of these groups as an end in itself.

Ethnic mass killing is more likely

- the greater the threat that racist or nationalist leaders believe is posed by their ethnic, national, or religious adversaries
- the fewer and less practical the policies other than ethnic cleansing that racist or nationalist leaders believe will counter the perceived threat posed by their victims
- the more rapidly ethnic cleansing is carried out
- the greater the number of people subjected to ethnic cleansing
- the greater the physical capabilities for mass killing possessed by the racist or nationalist regime
- the fewer and more difficult the options for victims to flee to safety

TABLE 3
Ethnic Mass Killings in the Twentieth Century

Location-Dates	Description	Additional Motives	Deaths
Turkey (1915–18)	Genocide of Armenians	Counter guerrilla	500,000– 1,500,000
Soviet Union (1941–53)	Deportation of nationalities	Counter guerrilla	300,000– 600,000
Germany (1939–45)	Genocide of Jews and other Nazi race enemies		5,400,000– 6,800,000
Yugoslavia (1941–45)	Ustasha violence against Serbs	Counter guerrilla	350,000– 530,000
Eastern Europe (1945–47)	Post–WW II expulsion of ethnic Germans from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and elsewhere		2,000,000– 2,300,000
India (1947–48)	Partition of India		500,000– 1,000,000
Bangladesh (1971)	Partition of East Pakistan		500,000– 3,000,000
Burundi (1972)	Genocide of Hutu	Counter guerrilla	100,000– 200,000
Bosnia-Herzegovina (1990–95)	Ethnic cleansing of Muslims from Bosnia	Counter guerrilla	25,000– 155,000
Rwanda (1994)	Genocide of Tutsi	Counter guerrilla	500,000– 800,000

Territorial Mass Killing

The third general motive for dispossessive mass killing arises when powerful groups attempt to resettle territories already inhabited by large, pre-existing populations. Unlike the ethnic mass killings described above, perpetrators of territorial mass killing do not seek to cleanse a given territory of its inhabitants because they believe these people themselves pose a threat, but rather because perpetrators want to populate (and usually cultivate) the land with their own people. As with ethnic mass killings, however, territorial mass killing occurs because the process and aftermath of rapidly removing large numbers of people from their homes often involves considerable violence.

Territorial mass killings have emerged in two closely related scenarios. First, mass killing can result when settler colonies attempt to expand their territory into regions already populated by indigenous people.⁷ This scenario has occurred primarily in colonial settings, most notably in the European colonies of North and South America and to a lesser extent in Africa.

Not all colonists, however, have annihilated the indigenous peoples they encountered. Even states that have engaged in mass killing in some of their colonies have conducted themselves more humanely in others. What separates these “peaceful” colonies from the ones that have resorted to mass killing? The answer often seems to depend upon the nature of the colonial economy and its relationship to the indigenous population.

In agricultural economies, particularly those with an emphasis on grain production or herding, land is an extremely valuable asset. The economic structure of indigenous societies, however, may also depend heavily on access to large amounts of land. Many colonies do not encompass enough high-quality land to support both a land-hungry agrarian economy and the preexisting indigenous population. In such cases, the settlers’ desire for more and more land has tended to push the colony into conflict with indigenous populations. Indigenous efforts to resist colonial expansion have prompted increasingly violent responses from the settlers, sometimes escalating to mass killing. Where surplus land is available, colonists have sometimes attempted to relocate indigenous people to distant or unwanted parts of the colony. Even in these cases, however, the outcome is often bleak. Violence commonly has been required to force indigenous people to abandon their homes and traditional territories. The displacement of large populations has often proved deadly, as the relocation of the Cherokee Indians in 1838 on the infamous “trail of tears” powerfully demonstrated.⁸ Even those who have managed to survive relocation frequently have faced starvation, disease, and depredation by other groups in their new territories.

This deadly competition for land played a major role in the destruction of many indigenous tribes of America.⁹ According to David Stannard, “since the colonizing British, and subsequently the Americans, had little use for Indian servitude, but only wanted Indian land . . . straightforward mass killing of the Indians was deemed the only thing to do.”¹⁰ Not all economies, however, are so economically dependent upon land. Non-agricultural forms of production require relatively little land but are often dependent on a cheap and plentiful source of labor. Indigenous people have often fulfilled this function. Indigenous people can also provide important markets for goods and have even provided soldiers for colonial armies.

Two French colonies in North America provide telling examples of how the economic relationship between colonists and indigenous peoples can influence the likelihood of mass killing.¹¹ In what is now Canada, the Huron people became an integral part of France’s fur trade, serving as guides and skilled trackers for the French. French trappers relied on Huron villages for supplies and protection from other Indians. The

French and the Hurons maintained a relatively peaceful relationship until the Huron were decimated in a war with the Iroquois in 1649. The relationship between the French and the Natchez people of the lower Mississippi, on the other hand, ended in the annihilation of the Natchez by the French colonists. In the lower Mississippi, the French planned a large colony based on agriculture. They imported slaves from Africa for their servants and laborers. The Natchez people simply stood in the way of expanding French plantations. When the Natchez would not abandon their land peacefully, the French decided to remove them by force. By 1731 the Natchez had ceased to exist.¹²

The second major scenario of territorial mass killing results when states engaged in wars of expansion seek to resettle areas already densely populated and developed by others. Perhaps the most horrific example of this kind of mass killing occurred during the Second World War as Germany attempted to expand its territory into Poland, Russia, and other Eastern European states. This effort to acquire *Lebensraum* (living space) for Germany's population was one of Hitler's primary obsessions, rivaled in importance only by his interrelated campaign to rid Europe of the Jews. Hitler's plans called for physically removing many existing populations and repopulating the land with ethnic German farmers. In some places, German occupiers temporarily spared the conquered populations for use as slave labor during the war, but German plans called for the eventual relocation of tens of millions of Eastern Europeans.

German occupation had its most devastating effect in occupied Poland where colonization by German settlers began almost immediately following the German invasion in 1939.¹³ Hitler designated vast swaths of Polish territory for near-total ethnic cleansing (of both Poles and Jews) and annexation by the Reich. Hitler never planned the systematic murder of all Poles, but the effort to subjugate and dispossess the entire nation nevertheless proved predictably violent. As Walther von Brauchitsch, the German army commander in chief, explained in a letter to a hesitant subordinate, "The solution of ethnic-political tasks, necessary for securing German living space and ordered by the Führer, had necessarily to lead to otherwise unusual, harsh measures against the Polish population of the occupied area."¹⁴ Hitler ordered Polish political, military, and cultural leaders executed for fear that they would organize resistance to the occupation. At least 750,000 Poles and Jews were forced from the German-annexed territories of western Poland alone to make room for hundreds of thousands of German settlers from across Eastern Europe.¹⁵ By the end of the war more than 22 percent of the prewar Polish population was dead.¹⁶

The German occupation of France and the Low Countries, on the

other hand, reveals how different ends contributed to the utilization of different means. German military and police forces occupied French territory with the intention of exploiting its natural resources and labor as part of the effort to increase German war production. Hitler, however, never intended to colonize large portions of Western Europe. German violence in the west followed the more selective patterns associated with imperialism and the suppression of guerrilla resistance movements (I describe these motives for mass killing in subsequent sections). The German occupation in the west was hardly benevolent. The Nazis deported Jews and Gypsies to death camps as they did throughout Europe. German forces executed tens of thousands of non-Jews for resisting the occupation and deported hundreds of thousands for temporary forced labor in Germany, where many perished. Yet, compared to the near-complete devastation wrought by the German occupation in the east, Western European populations fared considerably better.

Territorial mass killing appears to have become much less common in the last hundred years than it was in previous centuries. Unfortunately, this trend is probably not the result of a general moral conversion among colonial or expansionist powers. Rather, it seems to reflect two historical trends. First, by the turn of the century, European violence and disease had already decimated many indigenous populations and European settlement had already expanded to the territorial limits of most major settler colonies. Second, especially since the end of the Second World War, the conquest of territory seems to have become less important for national security and economic prosperity, providing fewer incentives for expansionist wars.¹⁷

Territorial mass killing is more likely

- the higher the priority perpetrators assign to repopulating new territories
- the smaller the ratio of usable land per colonist resettled in new territories
- the greater the number of people already residing in colonized territories
- the more rapidly perpetrators seek to relocate existing populations
- the greater the physical capabilities for mass killing possessed by the perpetrators
- the fewer and more difficult the options for victims to flee to safety

TABLE 4
*Territorial (Colonial and Expansionist) Mass Killings
 in the Twentieth Century*

Location-Dates	Description	Additional Motives	Deaths
Namibia (1904–7)	Genocide of Herero and Nama	Counter guerrilla	60,000– 65,000
Eastern Europe (1939–45)	Nazi territorial expansion	Counter guerrilla, imperialist	10,000,000– 15,000,000

COERCIVE MASS KILLINGS

Sometimes mass killing is simply war by other means. Coercive mass killings occur in major armed conflicts when combatants lack the capabilities to defeat their opponents' military forces with conventional military techniques. When such conflicts threaten highly important goals, leaders must search for alternative means to defeat their adversaries. Under such circumstances, military and political leaders may conclude that the most effective way to achieve victory is to target the civilians that they suspect of providing material and political support to their adversaries' military forces. Perpetrators of this kind of mass killing usually do not seek to exterminate entire populations; rather, they use massive violence and the threat of even greater violence to coerce large numbers of civilians or their leaders into submission. When more "selective" mass killing fails to dissuade civilian supporters or induce surrender, however, coercive mass killing can escalate to the genocidal targeting of suspect ethnic groups or the enemy populations of entire geographical regions.¹⁸

I divide coercive mass killings into three major types: counter guerrilla, terrorist, and imperialist.

Counter guerrilla warfare

Mass killing can become an attractive strategy for governments engaged in counter guerrilla warfare. Although many observers have characterized mass killing in counter guerrilla warfare as the result of the actions of undisciplined, frustrated, or racist troops, the strategic approach suggests that counter guerrilla mass killing is a calculated military response to the unique challenges posed by guerrilla warfare.

Unlike conventional armies, guerrilla forces often depend on the local civilian population for food, shelter, and supplies. Guerrillas also depend on the local population to reveal information about enemy outposts and troop movements and as a form of "human camouflage" into which guerrillas can blend to avoid detection. Thus, according to Mao Zedong's fa-

mous analogy, “the guerrillas are as the fish and the people the sea in which they swim.”¹⁹

Civilian support can be a major source of strength for guerrilla armies, but it can also be a weakness. Regimes facing guerrilla opponents either at home or abroad have sometimes been able to turn the guerrillas’ dependency on the local population to their own advantage. Unlike the guerrillas themselves, the civilian support network upon which guerrillas rely is virtually defenseless and impossible to conceal. Some regimes have found it easier, therefore, to wage war against a guerrilla army by depriving it of its base of support in the people than by attempting to target the guerrillas directly. In the terms of Mao’s analogy, this strategy seeks to catch the fish by draining the sea. Not surprisingly, this strategy of counterinsurgency has frequently resulted in mass killing.

Theorists of counterinsurgency warfare have often advocated “selective” violence targeted only against those who provide active support for the guerrillas. In practice, however, such distinctions have been difficult to maintain. As I describe in detail in chapter 6, counterinsurgency warfare has often been characterized by reliance on indiscriminate tactics such as “free-fire zones,” the intentional destruction of crops, livestock and dwellings, massive programs of population resettlement, and the use of torture and large-scale massacres designed to intimidate guerrilla supporters.

Guerrilla warfare, of course, has been one of the most common forms of combat in the twentieth century. Although it has seldom spared civilian populations, in most cases it has not provoked mass killing by counterinsurgent forces. As I document in chapter 6, when leaders believe that the guerrillas are not receiving significant support from the local population or do not pose a threat to the regime’s critical goals or interests, they have little reason to order the killing of large numbers of civilians.

Counterinsurgency mass killing is more likely

- the greater the threat that perpetrators believe guerrillas pose to vital interests
- the more significant the support perpetrators believe that guerrillas receive from the civilian population
- the greater the difficulties the perpetrators encounter in defeating the guerrillas with less violent means
- the greater the numbers of people who reside in areas of guerrilla activity
- the greater the physical capabilities for mass killing possessed by the perpetrators
- the fewer and more difficult the options for victims to flee to safety

TABLE 5
Counter guerrilla Mass Killings in the Twentieth Century

Location-Dates	Description	Additional Motives	Deaths
Philippines (1899–1902)	US occupation of the Philippines		100,000– 200,000
China (1927–49)	Nationalist repression in Chinese civil war		6,000,000– 10,000,000
Spain (1936–43?)	Nationalist violence in Spanish civil war	Terrorist	185,000– 410,000
Algeria (1954–63)	Algerian war of independence from France		70,000– 570,000
Sudan (1956–71)	Suppression of southern Sudanese	Ethnic	250,000– 500,000
Tibet (1959–60)	Suppression of Tibetan rebellion	Communist	65,000– 90,000
Iraq (1963–91)	Suppression of Kurdish rebellions		85,000– 265,000
Guatemala (1966–85)	Guatemalan civil war		100,000– 200,000
Ethiopia (1974–91)	Ethiopian civil war	Communist	500,000– 1,000,000
Angola (1975–2002)	Angolan civil war		60,000– 375,000
Indonesia (East Timor) (1975–99)	Suppression of East Timorese secession		100,000– 200,000
Afghanistan (1978–89)	Soviet invasion and occupation	Communist	950,000– 1,280,000
El Salvador (1979–92)	Salvadoran civil war		40,000– 70,000
Sudan (1983–2002)	Suppression of southern Sudanese	Ethnic	1,000,000– 1,500,000
Somalia (1988–91)	Suppression of Isaaq clan/SNM	Ethnic	50,000– 60,000
Burundi (1993–98)	Suppression of Hutu	Ethnic	100,000– 200,000
Russia (Chechnya) (1994–2000)	Suppression of Chechen secession movement		55,000– 60,000
POSSIBLE CASES			
Tanzania (German Southwest Africa) (1905–7)	Suppression of Maji-Maji uprising		200,000– 300,000
Vietnam (1945–54)	French suppression of Vietminh guerrillas		60,000– 250,000

continued

TABLE 5
continued

		POSSIBLE CASES	
Colombia (1948–58)	“Conservative” violence against “Liberals” in Colombian civil war	Terrorist	50,000– 150,000
Vietnam (South) (1965–75)	U.S. and South Vietnamese suppression of NLF		110,000– 310,000
Cambodia (1969–73)	U.S. invasion-bombardment of Cambodia	Terrorist	30,000– 150,000
Uganda (1979–87)	Suppression of suspected NRA supporters		100,000– 300,000

Mass Killing as Mass Terror

A second scenario of coercive mass killing occurs when combatants engaged in protracted wars of attrition search for means to swiftly end the war. As in counter guerrilla killings, leaders may choose to target enemy civilians in the hopes of coercing surrender without having to defeat the enemy's military forces directly. During times of war, of course, civilians often become victims of famine, disease, and exposure or perish in the crossfire of opposing forces. These deaths, though tragic, do not qualify as mass killing as defined above because they are not intended by either party. Combatants may also target civilians intentionally, however, when leaders come to believe that bringing the conflict directly to the enemy civilian population will spread terror, break enemy morale, destroy enemy economic productivity, or spark rebellions inside enemy territory. The ultimate goal of this type of mass killing is simple — to speed the end of the war.

For lack of a better term, I refer to episodes of mass killing motivated by these kinds of goals as terrorist mass killings. Like most definitions of terrorism, this terminology focuses on the deliberate use of violence against civilian targets in the effort to coerce political change.²⁰ Unlike many conceptions of terrorism, however, this terminology encompasses terrorist violence conducted by states, and explicitly includes such violence when it occurs during war.²¹

The advent of strategic air and missile power in the second half of this century has rendered the strategy of terror during war an especially at-

tractive and extremely destructive weapon. During the Second World War, Britain and the United States intentionally bombed German cities in an effort to weaken German public support for the war and force an early surrender. In the early stages of the war, British civilian and military leaders considered the possibility of using air power to attack Germany's military forces and industrial assets without targeting civilians, but they soon discovered that these techniques were not technically practical.²² British strategic bombing planners ultimately decided that in order to crush the German will to fight, the Allies "must achieve two things: first, we must make [German towns] physically uninhabitable and, secondly, we must make the people conscious of constant personal danger. The immediate aim is therefore two-fold, namely to produce: (i) destruction; and (ii) the fear of death."²³ By 1942 the British government had directed the Royal Air Force to abandon its efforts to conduct precision bombing of military and industrial targets and stated that "a primary object" of RAF bombing raids should be "the morale of the enemy civil population."²⁴

In public, of course, the allies were careful to justify their attacks by claiming that the raids were intended to destroy German war industries or military targets. The high proportion of incendiary bombs used by the allies, however, casts doubt on whether military targets were the first priority of these operations.²⁵ As for industrial targets, while the destruction of German industry was undoubtedly the primary objective of some attacks, many cities without significant industrial resources were also destroyed.²⁶ Arthur Harris, the head of the RAF Bomber Command, admitted in his memoirs that the destruction of several factories in the devastating 1943 raid on Hamburg — an attack that killed more than forty thousand people — had been "a bonus."²⁷ By the end of the war, British and American bombing probably killed between 300,000 and 600,000 civilians in Europe.²⁸

Long-range bombers and missiles may have perfected the instruments of terror warfare, but the strategy of targeting enemy civilians in the effort to force a military surrender is probably as old as war itself. Military forces throughout history have relied on the practice of siege warfare and the use of starvation blockades to achieve the same effect. Famine is often an unintended consequence of war, but it too can be used as a military tool, like the bombing of cities, to induce capitulation without a conventional military victory.²⁹ During the First World War, for example, more than 250,000 people died of starvation and malnutrition when the British blockaded Germany and Austria-Hungary in an effort to starve them into surrender.³⁰ More recently, at least half a million people died in the late

1960s when Nigeria blockaded food supplies to the eastern part of the country, which was attempting to secede.³¹

In addition to strategic bombing and siege warfare, powerful sub-state insurgent groups have sometimes used coercive mass killing to terrorize their enemies, typically colonial governments and their loyalists among the native population. By killing large numbers of civilians from specifically targeted groups, these insurgents hope to achieve their political goals without directly engaging the superior military forces of their enemies. Algerian resistance groups relied heavily on this strategy during their war for independence from France, killing almost seventy thousand people—nearly all of them native Algerians.³² Communist guerrillas in Vietnam also utilized mass terror in their fight for liberation against France and the United States.³³

The incentives to resort to mass terror probably exist in most major conflicts, particularly for the weaker side. Yet terrorist mass killing has remained relatively rare compared to the number of conflicts waged in the last century. Three main factors seem to account for this pattern. First, many groups simply lack the physical capabilities needed to implement a military strategy of mass terror. While I have argued that mass killing does not require large or highly capable forces in the absence of organized resistance, terrorist mass killings take place during war and are often directed against civilian groups protected by substantial military organizations of their own. Large, expensive, and technologically sophisticated forces are often required to overcome or bypass enemy military defenses and kill civilians in large numbers. Few states throughout history, for example, have possessed the military forces necessary to carry out large-scale strategic bombing campaigns or to implement effective starvation blockades even if they wished to do so.

Sub-state groups, in particular, have seldom been able to muster the capabilities and organization necessary to carry out violence on the pace and scale of mass killing as defined in this book. Sub-state terrorism may be a “weapon of the weak,” but mass killing through terrorism has eluded even the most determined international terrorist organizations. The increasing ease with which weapons of mass destruction, especially biological weapons, can be produced and delivered to their targets, however, seems likely to increase the capabilities of sub-state groups to carry out mass killing in the future.

Second, because mass killing can be a risky and costly strategy, even groups that possess the means to carry out mass terror have employed it only rarely. Mass killing can be counterproductive if it draws in concerned third parties, alienates important allies, or provokes international sanc-

tions. Policies such as strategic bombing can backfire, stiffening the resolve of enemy populations and making surrender less likely.³⁴ As a result, most leaders would prefer to wage war with conventional means if possible. Combatants see mass killing as necessary and attractive only in the most desperate conflicts. In most wars, at least one combatant has the ability to win with means short of mass killing. Coercive mass killing becomes likely, therefore, only under the unusual circumstances in which the perpetrators' military forces are capable of killing large numbers of enemy civilians but incapable of conventional military victory. Paradoxically, then, groups that can marshal the forces to carry out a strategy of mass terror may actually have fewer reasons to utilize it, since groups with such formidable capabilities will often have the means to win without resorting to this kind of violence. While the weaker side in any major conflict may have an incentive to escalate to mass killing, it will seldom have the capabilities needed to carry it out against a militarily superior opponent.

Finally, when both parties to a conflict have the capability to wage a campaign of mass terror against each other, a state of mutual deterrence may prevail, further limiting the incidence of this kind of violence. Sub-state terrorist or guerrilla groups are particularly vulnerable to the threat of retaliation in kind, since they often lack the capability to defend their supporters from government repression.³⁵

Terrorist mass killing is more likely

- the more the perpetrators believe the conflict threatens their vital interests
- the more the perpetrators believe that their enemies cannot be readily defeated with conventional means
- the greater the number of people who reside in territories engaged in conflict with the perpetrators
- the greater the physical capabilities for mass killing possessed by the perpetrators
- the less effective the capabilities for retaliation the perpetrators believe that victims possess
- the less the perpetrators believe that mass killing will provoke the intervention of other powers
- the fewer and more difficult the options for victims to flee to safety

TABLE 6
Terrorist Mass Killings in the Twentieth Century

Location-Dates	Description	Additional Motives	Deaths
Germany (1914-18)	Allied blockade of Germany in WW I		250,000- 425,000
China (1927-49)	Communist terror in Chinese civil war	Communist	1,800,000- 3,500,000
Spain (1936-39)	Republican terrorism in Spanish civil war	Communist	20,000- 55,000
United Kingdom (1940-45)	German bombardment of UK in WW II		60,000- 62,000
Germany (1940-45)	Allied bombardment of Germany in WW II		300,000- 600,000
Japan (1942-45)	American bombardment of Japan in WW II		268,000- 900,000
Algeria (1954-63)	FLN terrorism		70,000- 235,000
Vietnam (1954-75)	NLF (Viet-Cong) terrorism in Vietnam war	Communist	45,000- 80,000
Nigeria (1967-70)	Suppression of secession of Biafra	Counter guerrilla?	450,000- 2,000,000
Angola (1975-2002)	UNITA terrorism		125,000- 560,000
Mozambique (1975-1992)	RENAMO terrorism in Mozambican civil war		100,000- 700,000
Algeria (1992-2002)	Civil war/antigovernment terrorism		75,000- 150,000
POSSIBLE CASES			
North Korea (1950-54)	U.S./R.O.K. bombing and other killing in Korean War	Counter guerrilla	500,000- 1,500,000
Colombia (1948-58)	Liberal violence against conservatives in Colombian civil war		50,000- 150,000
Iraq (1990-97)	Economic embargo of Iraq by UN/U.S. (prior to "oil for food" program)		80,000- 170,000

Imperialist Mass Killing

The third scenario of coercive mass killing is closely linked to empire. Imperial powers have garnered a well-deserved reputation for the brutal treatment of civilian populations. The Roman empire, the Aztec empire in Central America, Nazi Germany's empire in Europe, and Japan's empire in China and Korea each perpetrated mass killing against at least

some of their conquests. Like territorial mass killing, however, imperialist mass killing has declined in frequency in the twentieth century as the great European empires have steadily dissolved.

Much of the violence associated with imperialism seems to be motivated by the effort to diminish the costs of building and administering large empires.³⁶ The purpose of an empire is to extract wealth from conquests, but empires would be prohibitively expensive to maintain if each subject city, state, or province had to be defeated by force and then policed to a man. Imperial leaders, therefore, have strong incentives to adopt a strategy of mass killing as a means of deterring rebellions and resistance within their empire and as a method of intimidating future conquests into submission. The large-scale killing of rebellious subjects is intended to demonstrate to all others considering resistance the terrible fate awaiting those who refuse to accept imperial rule.

The Mongol empire ruled by Genghis Khan and his progeny was one of the earliest and most efficient practitioners of this strategy of mass killing. According to Paul Ratchnevsky, "Genghis Khan used terror as a strategic weapon in his military plans. . . . Terrible destruction was threatened in the event of resistance; bloody examples were designed to spread fear and reduce the populace's will to resist."³⁷ Because imperial powers intend mass killing to deter future resistance throughout the empire, they frequently employ it even after rebellious states or regions have capitulated. To ensure the greatest effect, the violence often is carried out in an exceptionally grisly and highly public manner. One of the bloodiest examples of this strategy in recent history occurred during the Japanese campaign to expand its empire into the Chinese mainland. In December 1937, Japanese troops descended on the city of Nanking in an orgy of rape, murder, and mutilation that ultimately left between 200,000 and 350,000 people dead.³⁸ Many explanations of the brutality of the Japanese empire in China have emphasized the racism, indiscipline, and vengefulness of Japanese troops.³⁹ However, the violence also represented a calculated strategy designed to terrify China's vast population into submission without a fight.⁴⁰ Indeed, it is likely that Nanking was singled out for especially harsh treatment because of the fierce resistance Japanese forces had encountered as they advanced on the city, and because of Nanking's symbolic value as the capital city of Nationalist China.

Of course, not all empires engage in mass killing, and even empires that have perfected this brutal strategy seldom unleash it against all of their conquests. The incentives for imperialist mass killing seem to be greatest when empires are relatively weak or overstretched, or when they make extreme demands on their subjects. Under these conditions, resistance to imperial rule is likely to be especially determined, and the empire's abil-

ity to police far-flung territories with conventional means will be heavily strained.

Imperialist mass killing is more likely

- the more the perpetrators perceive their empire as a vital interest
- the greater the numbers of people residing in areas resisting imperial rule
- the larger the size of the empire relative to the perpetrators' capabilities to police it
- the greater the physical capabilities for mass killing possessed by the perpetrators
- the fewer the capabilities for retaliation the perpetrators believe that victims possess
- the less the perpetrators believe that mass killing will provoke the intervention of other powers
- the fewer and more difficult the options for victims to flee to safety

TABLE 7
Imperialist Mass Killings in the Twentieth Century

Location-Dates	Description	Additional Motives	Deaths
East Asia 1937–45	Japanese occupation of East Asia (especially China)	Counter guerrilla	3,000,000– 10,600,000
Western Europe 1940–45	German occupation of Western Europe	Counter guerrilla	425,000– 625,000