Power gradually extirpates for the mind every humane and gentle virtue.
----Edmund Burke. A Vindication of Natural Society

Power, like a desolating pestilence, Pollutes whate'er it touches.
----Shelley. Queen Mab III

Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely.
----Lord Acton. Letter to Bishop Creighton

Power kills, absolute Power kills absolutely. This new Power Principle is the message emerging from my previous work on the causes of war\(^1\) and this book on genocide and government mass murder--what I call democide--in this century. The more power a government has, the more it can act arbitrarily according to the whims and desires of the elite, the more it will make war on others and murder its foreign and domestic subjects. The more constrained the power of governments, the more it is diffused, checked and balanced, the less it will aggress on others and commit democide. At the extremes of Power\(^2\), totalitarian communist governments slaughter their people by the tens of millions, while many democracies can barely bring themselves to execute even serial murderers.

These assertions are extreme and categorical, but so is the evidence accumulated in this book, *Death By Government*, and its complement *Statistics of Democide*. Consider first war. Table 1.1 shows the occurrence of war between nations since 1816. In no case has there been a war involving violent military action between stable democracies\(^3\), although they have fought, as everyone knows, non-democracies. Most wars are between nondemocracies. Indeed, we have here a general principle that is gaining acceptance among students of international relations and war. That is that democracies don't make war on each other. To this I would add that the less democratic two states the more likely that they will fight each other.

This belligerence of unrestrained Power is not an artifact of either a small number of democracies nor of our era. For one thing the number of democratic states in 1993 number around seventy-five, or also taking into account forty-eight related territories, about one-fourth of the world's population.\(^4\) Yet we have had no war--none--among them. Nor is there any threat of war. They create an oasis of peace.

Moreover, this is historically true of democracies as well. If one relaxes the definition of democracy to mean simply the restraint on Power by the participation of middle and lower classes in the determination of power holders and policy making, then there have been many democracies throughout history. And whether considering the classical Greek democracies, the forest democracies of medieval Switzerland, or modern democracies, they did or do not fight each other (depending on how war and democracy is defined, some might prefer to say that they rarely fought or fight each other).\(^5\) Moreover, once those states that had been mortal enemies, that had frequently gone to war (as have France and Germany in recent centuries),
that the actual democide would be below or above this range. The totals that have been displayed in previous figures have been the
over a thousand sources to arrive at an absolute low and high for democide committed by 219 regimes or groups. It is highly improbable

authoritarian or totalitarian power together and compares this to the democratic dead. For all this killing in this century, democide and

multiples

both measured as a percent of a regime's population killed (illustrate the power curves for the total democide and battle-dead (figures 1.7C-D). In each case, as the arbitrary power of a regime increases massively, that is, as we move from democratic through authoritarian to totalitarian regimes, the amount of killing jumps by huge multiples.

Two more figures will exhibit the sheer lethality of Power. Figure 1.8 shows the proportion of war and democide dead accounted for by

authority or totalitarian power together and compares this to the democratic dead. For all this killing in this century, democide and war by democracies contributes only 1 and 2.2 percent, respectively to the total.

And in figure 1.9, one of the most important comparisons on democide and power in Death By Government, the range of democide estimates for each regime-level of power is shown. As mentioned in the preface, I have collected over 8,100 estimates of democide from over a thousand sources to arrive at an absolute low and high for democide committed by 219 regimes or groups. It is highly improbable that the actual democide would be below or above this range. The totals that have been displayed in previous figures have been the
sum of cultural-ethnic differences, outgroup conflict, misperception, frustration-aggression, relative deprivation, ideological imperatives, dehumanization, resource competition, etc.? At one time or another, for one regime or another, one or more of these factors play an important role in democide. Some are essential for understanding some genocides, as of the Jews or Armenians; some politics, as of “enemies of the people,” bourgeoisie, and clergy; some massacres, as of competing religious-ethnic groups; or some atrocities, as of those committed against poor and helpless villagers by victorious soldiers.

But then neighbors in the service of Power have killed neighbor, fathers have killed their sons, faceless and unknown people have been killed by quota. One is hard put to find a race, religion, culture, or distinct ethnic group whose regime has not murdered its own or others.

These specific causes or factors accelerate the likelihood of war or democide once some trigger event occurs and absolute or near absolute Power is present. That is, Power is a necessary cause for war or democide. When the elite have absolute power, war or democide follows a common process (which I call “the conflict helix”).

In any society, including the international one, relations between individuals and groups is structured by social contracts determined by previous conflicts, accommodations, and adjustments among them. These social contracts define a structure of expectations that guide and regulate the social order, including Power. And this structure is based on a particular balance of powers (understood as an equilibrium of interests, capabilities, and wills) among individuals and groups. That is, previous conflict and possibly violence determine a balance of powers between competing individuals and groups and a congruent structure of expectations (as for example, war or revolution ends in a new balance of powers between nations or groups and an associated peace treaty or constitution). This structure of expectations often consists of new laws and norms defining a social order more consistent with the underlying distribution of relative power.

However, relative power never remains constant. It shifts as the interests, capabilities, and wills of the parties change. The death of a charismatic leader, the outrage of significant groups, the loss of foreign support by outgroups, the entry into war and the resulting freedom of the elite to use force under the guise of war-time necessity, and so on, can significantly alter the balance of power between groups. Where such a shift in power is in favor of the governing elite, Power can now achieve its potential. Where also the elite have built up frustrations regarding those who have lost power or nonetheless feel threatened by them, where they see them as outside the moral universe, where they have dehumanized them, where the outgroup is culturally or ethnically distinct and the elite perceive them as inferior, or where any other such factors are present, Power will achieve its murderous potential. It simply waits for an excuse, an event of some sort, an assassination, a massacre in a neighboring country, an attempted coup, a famine, or a natural disaster, that will justify beginning the murder en masse. Most democides occur under the cover of war, revolution, or guerrilla war or in their aftermath.

The result of such violence will be a new balance of powers and attendant social contract. In some cases this may end the democide, as by the elimination of the “inferior” group (as of the Armenians by the Turks). In many cases this will subdue and cow the survivors (as of the Ukrainians who lived through Stalin’s collectivization campaign and intentional famine). In some cases, this establishes a new balance of power so skewed toward the elite that they may throughout their reign continue to murder at will. Murder as public policy becomes part of the new structure of expectations, of the new social order. Consider the social orders of Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, and their henchmen.

As should be clear from all this, I believe that war and democide can be understood within a common framework. It is part of the same social process, a balancing of powers, where Power is supreme.

It is not apparent, however, why among states where Power is limited and accountable, war and significant democide do not take place. Two concepts explain this: that of cross pressures and of the associated political culture. Where Power is diffused, checked, accountable, society is riven by myriad independent groups, disparate institutions, and multiple interests. These overlap and contend; they section loyalties and divide desires and wants. Churches, unions, corporations, government bureaucracies, political parties, the media, special interest groups, and such, fight for and protect their interests. Individuals and the elite are pushed and pulled by their membership in several such groups and institutions. And it is difficult for any one driving interest to form. Interests are divided, weak, ambivalent; they are cross-pressured. And for the elite to sufficiently coalesce to commit itself to murdering its own citizens, there must be a near fanatical, driving interest. But even were such present among a few, the diversity of interests across the political elite and associated bureaucracies, the freedom of the media to dig out what is being planned or done, and the ever present potential leaks and fear of such leaks of discontented elite to the media, brake such tendencies.

As to the possibility of war between democracies, diversity and resulting cross-pressures operate as well. Not only is it very difficult for the elite to unify public interests and opinion sufficiently to make war, but there are usually diverse, economic, social, and political bonds between democracies that tie them together and oppose violence.

But there is more to these restraints on Power in a democracy. Cross-pressures is a social force that operates wherever individual and group freedom predominates. It is natural to a spontaneous social field. But human behavior is not only a matter of social forces, but also depends on the meanings, values, and norms that things have. That is, democratic culture is also essential. When Power is checked and accountable, when cross-pressures limit the operation of Power, a particular democratic culture develops. This culture involves debate, demonstrations, protests, but also negotiation, compromise, and tolerance. It involves the arts of conflict resolution and the acceptance...
of democratic procedures at all levels of society. The ballot replaces the bullet, and particularly, people and groups come to accept a loss on this or that interest as only an unfortunate outcome of the way the legitimate game is played. "Lose today, win tomorrow."

That democratic political elite would kill opponents or commit genocide for some public policy is unthinkable (although such may occur in the isolated and secret corners of government where Power can still lurk). Even publicly insulting and dehumanizing outgroups in modern democracies has become a social and political evil. Witness the current potency of such allegations as "racism" or "sexism." Of course, the culture of democracy operates between democracies as well. Diplomacy, negotiating a middle-way, seeking common interests, is part of the operating medium among democracies. A detailed political history of the growth of the European Community would well display this. Since each democracy takes the legitimacy of the other and their interests for granted, conflict then is only a process of non-violent learning and adjustment between them. Conferences, not war, is the instrumentality for settling disputes.

In sum, then, where absolute Power exists, interests become polarized, a culture of violence develops, and war and democide follow. In this century alone, by current count, absolute-totalitarian-Power has murdered near 138,000,000 people (table 1.6). Over 14,000,000 more of its subjects have died from battle in their wars. Where among states Power is limited and accountable, interests are cross-pressured and a culture of nonviolence develops, no wars have occurred and comparatively few citizens have been murdered by the governing elite, and even most of those killed is questionable. About 90 percent of the citizens killed by democracies have been by marginally democratic Spain (during its 1936-1939 Civil War and by Republicans after the war), India, and Peru (during its struggle against the communist Shining Path guerrillas).

This picture of Power and its human costs is new. Few are aware of the sheer democide that has been inflicted on our fellow human beings. That Hitler murdered millions of Jews is common knowledge. That he murdered overall near 21,000,000 Jews, Slavs, Gypsies, homosexuals, Frenchmen, Balts, Czechs, and others, is virtually unknown. Similarly, that Stalin murdered tens of millions is becoming generally appreciated; but that Stalin, Lenin, and their successors murdered almost 62,000,000 Soviet citizens and foreigners is little comprehended outside of the Soviet Union (where similar figures are now being widely published). Then there is Mao Tse-tung's China, Chiang Kai-shek's China, the militarist's Japan, Yahya Khan's Pakistan, Pol Pot's Cambodia, and the others listed in table 1.4, who have murdered in the millions. Even those students of genocide who have tried to tabulate such killing around the world have grossly underestimated the toll. The best, most recent such accounting came up with no more than 16,000,000 killed in genocide and politicide since World War II. But this estimate does not even cover half of the some 35,000,000 people likely murdered by just the Communist Party of China from 1949 to 1987 (table 1.2).

Moreover, even the toll of war itself is not well understood. Many estimate that World War II, for example, killed 40,000,000 to 80,000,000 people. But the problem with such figures is that they include tens of millions killed in democide. Many war-time governments massacred civilians and foreigners, committed atrocities or genocide against them, executed them, and subjected them to reprisals. Aside from battle or military engagements, during the war the Nazis murdered around 20,000,000 civilians and prisoners of war, the Japanese 5,890,000, the Chinese Nationalists 5,907,000, the Chinese communists 250,000, the Nazi satellite Croatians 65,000, the Tito Partisans 600,000, and Stalin 13,053,000 (above the 20,000,000 war-dead and democide by the Nazis of Soviet Jews and Slavs). I also should mention the indiscriminate bombing of civilians by the Allies that killed hundreds of thousands, and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Most of these dead are usually included among the war-dead. But those killed in battle versus in democide form distinct conceptual and theoretical categories and should not be confused. That they have been consistently and sometimes intentionally confounded helps raise the toll during World War II to some 60,000,000 people, way above the estimated 15,000,000 killed in battle and military action. And that the almost universally accepted count of genocide during this period also is no more than "6,000,000" Jews, around 13 percent of the total war-time democide, has further muddled our research and thought.

Even more, our appreciation of the incredible scale of this century's genocide, politicide, and mass murder has been stultified by lack of concepts. Democide is committed by absolute Power, its agency is government. The discipline for studying and analyzing power and government and associated genocide and mass murder is political science. But except for a few specific cases, such as the Holocaust and Armenian genocide, and a precious few more general works, one is hard put to find political science research specifically on this.

Now, one university course I teach is introduction to political science. Each semester I will review several possible introductory texts (the best measure of the discipline) for the course. I often just shake my head at what I find. Given the democide totaled in table 1.2 the concepts and views promoted in these texts appear grossly unrealistic. They just do not fit or explain, or are even contradictory to the existence of a Hell-State like Pol Pot's Cambodia, a Gulag-State like Stalin's Soviet Union, or a Genocide-State like Hitler's Germany.

For instance, one textbook I recently read spends a chapter on describing the functions of government. Among these were law and order, individual security, cultural maintenance, and social welfare. Political scientists are still writing this stuff, when we have numerous examples of governments that kill hundreds of thousands and even millions of their own citizens, enslave the rest, and abolish traditional culture (it took only about a year for the Khmer Rouge to completely suppress Buddhism, which had been the heart and soul of Cambodian culture). A systems approach to politics still dominates the field. Through this lens politics is a matter of inputs and outputs, of citizen inputs, aggregation by political parties, government determining policy, and bureaucracies implementing it. Then there is the common and fundamental justification of government that it exists to protect citizens against the anarchic jungle that would otherwise threaten their lives and property. Such archaic or sterile views show no appreciation of democide's existence and all its related horrors and suffering. They are inconsistent with a regime that stands astride society like a gang of thugs over hikers they have captured in the woods, robbing all, raping some, torturing others for fun, murdering those they don't like, and terrorizing the rest into servile obedience. This exact characterization of many past and present governments, such as Idi Amin's Uganda, hardly squares with conventional political science.

Consider also that library stacks have been written on the possible nature and consequences of nuclear war and how it might be
What is needed is a reconceptualization of government and politics consistent with what we now know about democide and related misery. New concepts have to be invented, old ones realigned to correct--dare I write “modernize”-- our perception of Power. We need to invent concepts for governments that turn their states into a border to border concentration camp, that purposefully starve to death millions--millions!--of their citizens, that set up quotas of those that should be killed from one village or town to another (although murder by quota was carried out by the Soviets, Chinese communists, and Vietnamese, I could not find in any introductory or general political science literature even a recognition that governments can be so incredibly inhumane). We have no concept for murder as an aim of public policy, determined by discussion among the governing elite in the highest councils, and imposed through government bureaucracy. Indeed, in virtually no index to any general book on politics and government will one find a reference to genocide, murder, killed, dead, executed, or massacre. Such is not even usually indexed in books on the Soviet Union or China. Most even omit index references to concentration or labor camps or gulag, even though they may have a paragraph or so on them.

A preeminent fact about government is that some murder millions in cold blood. This is where absolute Power reigns. A second fact is that some, usually the same governments, murder tens of thousands more through foreign aggression. Absolute Power again. These two facts alone must be the basis of our reconceptualization and taxonomies. Not, as it is today, only whether states are developed or not, third world or not, militarily powerful or not, or large or not. But also and more important, whether Power is absolute, and whether it has engaged in genocide, politicide, and mass murder.

In any case the empirical and theoretical conclusion is this. The way to end war and virtually eliminate democide appears to be through restricting and checking Power. This means to foster democratic freedom.

NOTES

1. Rummel (Understanding Conflict and War, "Libertarianism and International Violence", "Libertarian Propositions on Violence Within and Between Nations").

2. Power capitalized stands for government power and its holders (such as Stalin), agencies (such as government departments and bureaucracies), and instruments (such as armies, concentration camps, and propaganda).

3. Since democratic Finland joined Nazi Germany in its war on the Soviet Union during World War II, Great Britain declared war on Finland. No military action apparently took place between Finland and Britain, however.

4. Were it not for India becoming authoritarian, around 40 percent of the world’s population would be democratic. This is based on Freedom House’s classification of states as free, partially free, or unfree, depending on their civil liberties and political rights. For their latest classification, see Freedom Review 24 (February 1993): 4-41.

5. For some contrary evidence from classical warfare among Greek city states, see Russett 1993, chapter 3.

6. The historian Spencer Weart has studied the history of warfare since ancient times for possible examples of war between democracies. In spite of the many democracies that have existed throughout history, he has found no clear case of such as war [See Spencer Weart, Never At War, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998].


8. Battle-dead up to 1980 is from Small and Singer’s (1982) compilation of wars and battle-dead. That for the remaining years is my estimate.

9. I calculate a mid-estimate of near 17,000,000 Africans killed in the slave trade. See line 92 of Table 2.1A in the Statistics of Democide.

10. William Shakespeare, King Richard II, iv, i, 144.

11. The first was by Elliot (1972).

12. Democide is appropriately compared to international war battle-dead, rather the total international and domestic war battle-dead. Totalitarian regimes use their absolute power to suppress any opposition before it can employ arms against it, and thus come out relatively low on domestic battle-dead (although still higher than democracies). What internal war does occur is usually at the inception of the regime, as for the very bloody civil war after the Bolshevik coup in Russia in 1917, or after a major war when under foreign occupation the opposition is able to arm themselves and organize, as for the guerrillas that fought against Soviet reoccupation of the Baltic States after the Second World War.

13. However one evaluates the rightness or wrongness of American intervention in Vietnam, one fact has become clear from
the documents, interviews, and speeches of Vietnamese officials since the end of the war: the Vietnam War was started by communist North Vietnam in order to takeover South Vietnam. Since South Vietnam was recognized by a number of states, including the United States, as a sovereign state, this was an act of international aggression. And it was not until the South was near military collapse that the United States fully intervened with massive force to save her. See chapter 11 of Death By Government.

14. Back and forth, over 4,838 miles one way, near twenty times? This is so incredible that I would not believe the calculation and had to redo it several times.

15. The appropriateness of including this type of killing under democide is discussed with regard to its definition.


19. During the war the Soviets committed genocide against at least nine of their distinct ethnic-linguistic sub-nations, including ethnic Germans, ethnic Greeks, Crimean Tatars, and Balkars. Genocides by others include those of the Germans against Slavs, Gypsies, and homosexuals; Croatians against the Serbs, Jews, and Gypsies; the Serbs against Croatians and Moslems; the Hungarians against their Jews; the Serbs, Poles, and Czechs against their ethnic Germans.

For citations see the Death By Government REFERENCES

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