Evaluation
of Current Risk Assessment Models for
Genocide and Mass Atrocity

by Kathryn Gillum

Genocide and other atrocity crimes (war crimes and crimes against humanity) are not only a curse to those directly involved, but also a burden on all of humanity. Under the United Nations' (UN) 2005 Responsibility to Protect (R2P), the international community has the moral obligation to intervene in atrocities and a duty to help protect victims.[1,2] Recognizing atrocity in its early stages gives the international community greater capability and more response time to protect civilians. R2P and preemptive action could also reduce the risk of financial and diplomatic losses, while protecting human life. Therefore, it is in the international community's best interest to act in accordance with R2P.[3] By acting before even a drop of blood is split, the U.S. and other world leaders will be better able to uphold international norms of protection and ensure that other nations do their part in protecting innocent lives.

Identifying genocide and atrocities before they occur can be difficult; however, risk assessments that evaluate a collection of risk factors can help. Risk factors are situations that normally have been identified as contributing to atrocities in the past. States that exhibit these factors have a higher risk of atrocities. Though these models vary in approach and factors, most of the risk factors can be grouped into three basic categories: political, economic, and social instabilities and/or inequalities. Political risk factors typically involve instabilities in governance, militarization, legislation, and national history. Economic risk factors can include a decline of a nation's gross national product, widening income inequality, or crumbling infrastructures. Examples of social factors can be aspects of increased hate speech or propaganda and active discriminations such as othering or purposeful alienation.

This article analyzes four influential atrocity/genocide risk assessments (the Fund for Peace's 2014 Conflict Assessment System Tool, Dr. Barbara Harff's 2005 Assessing Risks of Genocide and Politicide, the European Commission's 2008 Conflict Prevention, and the United Nations' 2014 Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes). The specific models in this article were

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selected to provide examples of how diverse authoring institutions, such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), scholars, and government bodies, outline risk assessments. Each analysis provides a model's overview, which evaluates the model's strengths and weaknesses and addresses the distinctions and commonalities among the models. Understanding and implementing these risk assessment models can help preemptively identify and prevent genocide and atrocity crimes. For a summarization and outline of the four assessments, please refer to the Appendix.

Fund for Peace's CAST (2014)[4]

The Fund for Peace is an educational and research-based, non-profit, NGO working toward the prevention of violence.[5] In 2014 it published the *Conflict Assessment Framework Manual* containing a risk assessment model called the Conflict Assessment System Tool (CAST). CAST is composed of twelve risk factors that are used to measure whether or not a state may experience atrocity. These twelve factors are broken down into three main sub-categories, "social indicators," "economic indicators, "and "political/military indicators."

Social indictor risk factors in CAST include aspects such as refugee populations. With the 4.6 million Syrians forced into a refugee population and 6.6 million that have become internally displaced persons (IDPs) since 2011, the plight of refugees is becoming a pressing global issue.[6] Other risks include certain community demographics and a history of discriminatory tensions. In this assessment, economic risks are not just national economic decline or inequality or even perceived inequality. Instead they also refer to inequalities in education and hiring practices among different groups. These inequalities further divide groups, not just economically, but societally as well. CAST's political risk factors deal with aspects of the status of the regime in power, along with the nation's military and parts of the state's past.

One aspect that makes CAST unique is its quantitative severity scale that provides ten examples of events that a state might endure ranked by severity from ten to zero, ten being events that put states at the highest risk and zero being events that put states at the lowest risk. This assessment keeps jargon to a minimum and allows for quick comparatives. Furthermore, CAST was not written with any one body in mind; rather, it is an unbiased approach that allows for use by many varying groups. CAST is, however, lengthy, and some risk factors are hard to pinpoint. And while CAST is strong on political risks, it lacks depth in social and economic risk factors.

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Harff's Assessing Risks of Genocide and Politicide (2005)[7]

In 2005, Dr. Barbara Harff, an advisor for the Genocide Prevention Advisory Network, updated her 2003 risk assessment in a piece titled, "Assessing Risks of Genocide and Politicide."[8] This assessment, originally published in *Peace and Conflict 2005: A Global Survey of Armed Conflicts, Self-Determination Movements, and Democracy*, has since become an excellent tool in genocide/politicide identification and prevention and is continuously updated. According to Dr. Harff, this model when used correctly can be up to 76–90 percent accurate, and it is the only model with an accuracy percentage.

Harff's assessment has seven risk factors for genocide and politicide (defined as politically-based violence and killing). The majority of these risk factors are politically focused, with a strong emphasis on history. The first risk factor is if the

state has experienced a genocide or politicide since 1945; if it has, then it is more likely to experience another, as the state may have become more conditioned to outbreaks of violence. The next risk factor is political upheaval. If a country has experienced a regime change within the past fifteen years, the government may not yet be fully established, accepted, or stable. According to Harff, the most at risk regime is an autocracy, where there is a single person or party in control of the government. When a population is not properly represented in the government, the ethnic character of the rulers becomes another risk factor. The shared ideology of the ruling elite is also a hazard. If rulers have a belief system that enables them to justify elimination, persecution, or discrimination of a people, it puts the entire nation at higher risk for atrocity. This is the current situation with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, who rule as a theocracy with the religious justification for the elimination of outsiders through *jihād*.

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Dr. Harff's model is beneficial for many reasons, including the fact that she maintains the assessment as a living document adding current data to better her analysis. Also, she notes that while no person or analysis can accurately predict when violence will begin, being able to recognize the risks and precursors of genocide/politicide is beneficial in enacting preventative measures to stop the violence. Harff also provides examples of historical genocides and politicides to illustrate how the risk factors she suggests contributed to the violence. A drawback of this model is that economic and social risks are largely untouched.

The European Commission's Conflict Prevention (2008)[8]

In 2008, Ahlfors and Van wrote "Conflict Prevention," a risk assessment model for the European Commission (EC).[8] The purpose of this assessment was to categorize and define when and how the European Union (EU) could get involved when faced with atrocity. While the report's main focus is on prevention, it also addresses post-conflict peace building. This model outlines eight risk factors of atrocity crimes that each has concrete examples or indicators of how the risk can manifest in real-time, along with examples on how to combat it.

The EC highlights a state's illegitimacy, judiciary weaknesses, and geopolitical climate as risks. Economic risks are factors such as a non-diversified economy, and economic inequities that are a threat as they can exacerbate social tensions. Examples of social factor risks are group tensions, human rights abuses, and biased civil media outlets.

Overall, the EC assessment focuses on prevention and rebuilding from atrocity through the local community, thus allowing people power over their own lives. It is a well-balanced evaluation of political, economic, and social factors; however, it is targeted for use by the EU, and it may not be completely suitable for a broader, non-parliamentary, global utilization, as in some cases it pushes European ideology.

The United Nations' Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes (2014)[9]

In 2014, the UN Office of the Special Advisors on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect published the "Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes."[9] This assessment model notes that while all risks are equally important, they may be subject to change over time and severity, depending on the situation. It stresses the consequences of not acting preemptively and also addresses

the historic importance of doing so. The UN identifies eight common risk factors for all atrocity crimes, then it further discusses two specialized risks for each of the three individual crimes, providing a total of fourteen risks, with many risk examples or indicators. The eight common risks share many different elements of the state, such as regime stability and stressor factors. But, they also include factors of violence, such as the ability to commit an atrocity, as well as motivations and triggering events that can bring about or justify atrocity crimes. However, the last six specialized risks focus on the individual and legal aspects and include factors of victimization, the intent of violent actions, and how attacks are perpetrated.

The UN's framework is an internationally recognized risk assignment model. It is easy to read and offers legal definitions for all atrocity crimes, along with individual risk factors for each. No other risk assessment in this study addresses the issues of motivation and triggering events, which is important to note, as most atrocity crimes start with a triggering event, such as an act of terror or an election, and all violence starts with some form of motivation or intention. Another helpful aspect of this model is that the risks and their corresponding indicators act as real-time examples, making them easily recognizable in current atrocities. However, this risk assessment may be confusing, as the risks are difficult to fit into the three sub-categories of political, economic, or social risks, but the indictors that they offer for the risks can fit into one of these three sub-categories.

Common Factors and Comparisons

While each of these four models has unique aspects that can make it better or worse in certain situations, each offers significant insight into atrocity. It is also important to understand the common themes and similarities of the four assessments, instead of assessing the individual models by themselves. The most prevalent overall risk factors should be examined in an unstable state. Out of all the analyzed risk assessments, only a few common risk factors can be thought of as universal, which means that if a nation has one or more of these universal risk factors, it may be more at risk then if it has experienced a less common risk. There are three common risks shared in each assessment—history of abuse, economic inequality, and social discrimination against specific groups. Though these are not the only prominent commonalities, these are the only ones found in all four models (for more shared risks please refer to Table 1 below).

Risk Model	Past crimes/ abuses	Economic inequalities	Patterns of discrimination	Use of media	Lack of civilian controlled security services	Corruption	Regime change	Fractionalization of elites	Lack of state legitimacy
CAST	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Harff	X	X	X				X	X	
EC	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
UN	X	X	X	X	X	X			

**Table 1: Compared Risk Factors for Assessment Models (X implies the model shares this risk)
Source: Kathryn Gillum 2016**

The first common political risk factor is a history of atrocity crimes or human rights abuses. If a nation has experienced human rights abuses, which were uninterrupted by the international community, it is at risk of repeating actions in the future. Noninvolvement can justify a state's previous crimes, and states can further commit crimes because they believe they have impunity. When the international community does nothing to stop state-sponsored atrocities, the state has a sense that the international community will not stop them in the future. In many unstable nations, the entire culture is conditioned to accept a state of violence. This conditioning may have contributed to many German Jews not leaving Germany when Hitler took power, as the Jewish population was conditioned to accept violence against them as inevitable.

The next shared risk is economic inequalities along group lines. Economic inequalities play a role not only in the financial stability of a group, but also its social stability. Typically, those that have money have better access to healthcare, necessities, and protection than those who do not. Also, economic inequalities can cause social segregation with different material items, jobs, and education, furthering group divisions.

Perhaps one of the most important common social risks of atrocity is discrimination against specific groups. This particular risk is dangerous because it legitimizes othering. Social discrimination starts off with a dislike of one group, which than escalates into persecution of the group through laws and human rights abuses. Social othering and discrimination are factors that separate individuals from a once-united community. Without a hated group in a society, there would not be societal support of violence; therefore, without the supportive climate, potentially fewer atrocity crimes would be committed. Discrimination, like economic inequality, creates a hierarchy; however, the basis of that hierarchy is not who is rich and who is poor, but rather who is allowed to live in society and who is not.

Conclusion

These models offer systematic, qualitative, analysis tools to help proactively identify, assess, and address risk factors—typically social, political, and/or economic instabilities or inequalities—that can germinate in a nation and escalate into potential atrocity. While many important atrocity assessment models exist, there were only four models chosen for this comparative analysis. These assessments offer an excellent spectrum of atrocity recognition and preventive measures for citizens, NGOs, and world leaders to use to proactively address the probability of atrocity crimes globally. While all genocide risk assessment models are important and have their own unique strengths and weaknesses, some can be better than others for certain applications. A collection of assessments can be suitable to outline risks and aspects unique to certain situations.

As leaders in the international community, the U.S. and other powers, such as China, Russia, the United Kingdom, and France, have the responsibility to recognize and act to prevent atrocities that are escalating around the world. Our best hope for global security and stability likely depends on the collective and collaborative efforts of our leading world powers to identify and end atrocity crimes before they occur by adopting and applying these types of risk assessments. *IAJ*

NOTES

1   International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect, "A Toolkit on the Responsibility to Protect," <http://responsibilitytoprotect.org/ICRtoP%20Toolkit%20on%20the%20Responsibility%20to%20 Protect%20high%20res.pdf>, accessed on February 1, 2016.

2   United Nations General Assembly, resolution, adopted September 16, 2005, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/487/60/PDF/N0548760.pdf? OpenElement>, accessed on December 12, 2015.

3   Dr. J. Waller, "Responsibility to Protect," lecture, Keene State College, Keene, NH, March 2, 2015.

4   Fund for Peace, "Conflict Assessment System Tool," *Conflict Assessment Framework Manual*, <http://library.fundforpeace.org/library/cfsir1418-castmanual2014-english-03a.pdf>, accessed on February 2, 2016.

5   "About The Fund for Peace," <http://global.fundforpeace.org/aboutus>, accessed on February 3, 2016.

6   "Syria Crisis," <http://www.wvi.org/syria-crisis>, accessed on March 21, 2016.

7   Dr. Barbara Harff, "Assessing Risks of Genocide and Politicide," 2005, <http://www.genocidewatch.org/images/AboutGen_Assessing_Risks_of_Genocide_and_Politicide.pdf>, accessed on February 3, 2016.

8   "Programming Guide for Strategy Papers," November 2008, <http://www.eplo.org/assets /files/3.%20 Resources/EU%20Documents/European%20Commission_Programming%20Fiche_Conflict_Prevention. pdf>, accessed on February 3, 2016.

9   United Nations, "Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes: A Tool for Prevention, 2014, <http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/adviser/pdf/framework%20of%20analysis%20for%20atrocity%20 crimes_en.pdf>, accessed on February 1, 2016.

	FFP's Conflict Assessment System Tool (2014)	Harff's Assessing Risks of Genocide and Politicide (2005)	EC's Conflict Prevention (2008)	UN's Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crime (2014)
Model Overview and Approach	A research tool and prevention mechanism to qualitatively and quantitatively assess 12 genocidal risk factors or indicators.	Structural living model of genocide and politicide with 7 main risks, and many examples of when and how risks were used.	Outline used for conflict prevention and peace building initiatives with 8 risk factors.	Prevention tool with 14 risks with multiple indicators for each risk, broken down into risks of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes.
Champions and Affiliates	NGO established in 1957 with many political and business ties	Genocide Prevention Advisory Network; background with U.S. task force and Naval Academy	European Union	Special advisors on the prevention of genocide, UN
Primary Risk Factors	Social: demographic pressures; refugees and IDPs; group grievance; human flight and brain drain Economic: uneven economic development; economic decline Political: state legitimacy; public services; human rights and the rule of law; security apparatus; factionalized elites; external intervention	Social: little Economic: trade openness Political: prior genocides and politicides; political upheaval; ethnic character of ruling elite; ideological character of the ruling elite; regime type All: severe political and economic discrimination among minorities (applies to all three)	Social: tensions among communities without resolution; violations of fundamental rights in the state; weak civil society or media Economic: poor economic management; socio-economical regional inequalities Political: legitimacy deficit; restrictions to the rule of law; geopolitical instabilities	Social: capacity to commit crimes; tensions or patterns of discrimination; enabling circumstances Economic: little Political: past violation of human rights; weak state structure; no mitigating factors All: instability; motivations; triggering factor (communal factors only)
Key Strengths	✓ Quick quantitative assessment ✓ Strong comparative analysis ✓ Non-biased approach that includes examples and explanations applicable to most NGOs	✓ Focuses on political analysis ✓ Short, concise, easy to understand ✓ "Living model" with continuous updates ✓ Ties risks to history's atrocities	✓ Many examples of indicators to the risks ✓ Focuses on community rebuilding ✓ Offers many possible solutions to the risks	✓ Stresses trigger factors ✓ Addresses UN's faults ✓ Clearly defines and provides risk for all atrocity crimes, ✓ In-depth risk indicators
Chief Weaknesses	✓ Proactive response ✓ Somewhat convoluted risk indicators ✓ Lengthy report	✓ No indicators of risk ✓ Little on social and economic risk ✓ Lacks depth	✓ Less universal ✓ Limited to European intervention	✓ Crimes against humanity and war crimes poorly addressed ✓ Risks do not easily dovetail into social, economic, or political segments
Distinguishing Features	Only model with quantifiable severity rating scale (10-most; 1-least) in each of 12 risk indicators	Assessment is continuously updated and provides concrete examples from history to illustrate risks; only model with percentage accuracy ratings	Pro-active model that offers multiple possible solutions for each risk	Breaks down atrocity crimes and provides communal and separate risks for each crime; only model that stresses trigger factors

Appendix: Leading Genocide Risk Assessment Models At-A-Glance
Source: Kathryn Gillum, April 2016