THE CURATED REPORT: THE RHETORIC OF REPORTS

ABOUT MASS ATROCITIES

by

ELEANOR L. ESTREICH

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Paul Slovic

Mass atrocities and genocides remain prevalent in the world today. Leaders and institutions should value human lives and actively work to prevent and manage crises, because violent conflict poses a serious threat to peoples, cultures, security, and our sense of humanity. Social science and statistical methods are improving our ability to anticipate and prevent mass atrocities, but we must also improve the way evidence is selected and represented to decision makers in strategic communications. Charles J. Brown of Strategy for Humanity has put forth a call for the study of *curated reports,* which are reports that reach discrete audiences of decision makers in the U.S., and address the problems that audiences face. Building from Paul Slovic's research on our psychological perceptions of mass atrocities, this thesis joins the rhetorical and psychological disciplines toward the aim of identifying how to improve the persuasiveness and effectiveness of reports about mass atrocities. Using rhetorical analysis, I conduct three case studies by rhetorically analyzing three reports that were issued about mass atrocities in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Syria. I identify three crucial factors of a report's audience that matter for the process of argument invention: the

audience's assessment of the risks of intervening in the region of interest, the explanatory models the audience uses to frame the violence, and the audience's psychological limitations when receiving information about events that are distant and involve large numbers of victims. I will argue that reports are more persuasive when the treatment of these three factors, through evidence selection and presentation, supports the argumentative aim of the report.

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Introduction

Speaking from Beirut in February 2018, Panos Moumtzis, the United Nations Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria crisis, expressed profound doubt in humanitarian diplomacy: "Humanitarian diplomacy is failing...We are not able to reach the conscience or the ears of politicians, of decision makers, of people in power"[1]. Moumtzis also "wondered what level of violence it would take to shock the world into action"[2]. Mass suffering in Syria, Myanmar, and several other regions of the world today should not only demand a sense of a moral urgency from each one of us, but also demand a renewed effort to mobilize moral urgency into meaningful action. It is a serious descriptive problem that mass atrocities frequently occur, but in light of Moumtzis's words, we should not abandon humanitarian diplomacy. Key decision makers still carry various forms of power, militaristic and non-militaristic, that can prevent and/or mitigate mass atrocities and genocides. Persuading decision makers to mobilize these various forms of power will be the topic of this thesis.

One of the most critical, recent contributions to fields of psychology and genocide studies illuminates why we may respond to genocides with apathy, rather than urgent moral action. Paul Slovic has identified that the way that our brains process certain types of information about mass atrocities affects our valuation of distant human lives[3]. Specifically, Slovic shows how rational models of valuing human lives, based on humanitarian principles, can fail in the face of certain information about mass atrocities and genocides[4]. The reason for this failure has to do with the fact that numbers and statistics do not often invoke the necessary compassion or affect needed for moral action – yet mass atrocities and other large, distant events often require statistical or

numerative description, based on the scale and extent of their impact[5]. This presents a problem for the report-writer who wants to describe mass atrocities and elicit moral action from decision makers. It is also a problem for the reader who may be distant from the conflict, but whose humanitarian principles, and actions stemming from these principles, should not be a function of his or her distance from the conflict.

Joining Paul Slovic's research with rhetoric, I will focus on advancing a study of how writers should consider the problems the reader faces, which includes a knowledge of Slovic's psychological research, when writing persuasive arguments to policymakers about mass atrocities. Part of this theory implies an approach toward reading reports about mass atrocities, because readers of reports are subject to the same psychological biases that Slovic documents.

The Curated Report and Strategic Communications about Mass Atrocities

The practical impetus for developing a theory of writing and reading reports that joins psychology and rhetoric is borne from a desire to answer Charles J. Brown's call for the study of *curated reports*. Brown, the director of Strategy for Humanity, is an atrocity prevention expert who has decades of experience working on atrocity prevention for the U.S. government and other entities. Brown has called for academics and practitioners to study more effective ways of communicating information about developing or ongoing mass atrocities[6]. His call for the study of curated reports echoes requests put forth in this year's policy brief from the Stanley Foundation's 58th Strategy for Peace Conference titled "Taking Stock of the Evidence: What Works to Reduce Violence and Prevent Atrocities?"[7] Recommendation sections focus on "knowledge

building" and "design[ing] messaging to target specific actors at many levels" and call

for the following:

- "Consider who could hold responsibility for managing knowledge curation, including gathering evidence and communicating it to necessary actors in the field. Informally and internally developed curation is not enough, and an intentional effort within academic and policy communities to develop a method for gathering and consolidating evidence is necessary, as is communicating this research to policymakers"
- "Consider the best ways to present research findings to policymakers; this may mean messaging at different levels of government staff in order to disseminate the information to support policy change"[8]

Pursuing effective ways to read and write reports is an answer to the call for curated

reports. The *curated report* is an ideal that report should strive to reach – it is a report

that succeeds at addressing the problems that audiences face, and develops persuasive

arguments that prevent and mitigate atrocities. Within the set of potential strategies for

dealing with the descriptive model of mass atrocities, curated reports constitute part of

the world of strategic communications. Like any type of strategic communications,

reports must deal with the shifting information age, in which large sets of data or

intelligence are frequently generated in the wake of any single event. While the

selection of evidence constitutes one task when writing a report, the *presentation* of

evidence concerns the curation of this evidence into arguments that the report will

advance. Therefore a *curated report* selects and presents evidence effectively.

These two tasks are difficult because despite large and often rich sets of

intelligence about mass atrocities, governments and civilians frequently fail to act in the

face of information about mass atrocities. Samantha Power's seminal work, *A Problem

From Hell,* has documented how many of America's decisions display apathy and even

complicity in the face of past genocides[9]. Moreover, mass atrocities and genocides have

occurred frequently since World War II; Harff estimates that there have been thirty-seven cases of genocides and politicides between 1955 and 2001[10].

Commensurate with Power's observation that the U.S. has sketched patterns of failure throughout history when genocides occur, ongoing atrocities around the world today affirm the need for urgent action and revived commitment to studying how conflict is prevented and exacerbated[i]. Muslim Rohingya people from the Rakhine state in Myanmar flee east to the Bangladesh border from government militias that kill, rape, and raze villages. Violent conflict continues unabated in Syria, including chemical weapons attacks by al-Asad's regime, despite several attempts to broker ceasefires.

Abandoning hope, however, would be unwise, and we should rather find avenues through which decision makers can be persuaded that mass atrocities do not exist on the periphery. In a broad sense, there are several reasons why finding mechanisms to prevent mass atrocities is in the interests of all peoples and governments[ii]. Preventing atrocities, or upstream prevention[11], allows more resources to flow toward societal growth and maintenance, rather than destruction. Mass atrocities and genocides have extremely destructive ripple effects through individual lives and generations, and often tear apart or wipe away substantial or whole parts of cultures and peoples – an impossible process to fully visualize. Upstream prevention also recognizes that peace is maintained, rather than a natural or organic state of society, and that this principle should extend into other areas of society and governance.

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[i] Larger forces at play, like climate change, also affirm the need for urgent action.
[ii] The International Criminal Court (ICC) and various specific tribunals are currently the most comprehensive framework of international law for punishing perpetrators of genocide, but even if they were to build stronger deterrence over time, prosecuting atrocity crimes is still a judicial process that is reflective; this approach poses an issue for prompting discussion about atrocity prevention, which has to do with events of the future.

Upstream prevention is critical because that trade-offs become more drastic as conflicts escalate[12]. After the onset of a genocide, "many low-cost, non-military options for intervention may have evaporated, forcing policymakers to resort to risky and costly peace enforcement missions in order to suppress genocidal violence"[13]. Implementing atrocity prevention requires changing minds and approaches to prevention, which is a realm where communicative efforts in reports may play a significant role.

Additionally, there are numerous reasons why we should also find ways to mitigate or intervene in ongoing mass atrocities; at the very least, we must strengthen our deliberation and decision making abilities when mass atrocities occur. There is evidence that interventions have worked in the past, yet Power's research in *A Problem From Hell*[14] and Slovic's research in *Numbers and Nerves*[15] show how the United States is still usually unwilling to act on mass atrocities if they take place where the United States has no perceived self-interest at stake. Thus it is not interventions that are necessarily always at fault, but the reasoning and deliberation that leads to their (non)implementation can be weak. For example, Syria continually demonstrates that allowing dictators of violent regimes to gass their own civilians has far-reaching effects that tend to defy comprehensive description.

Which fields of study should we pull from in order to help identify a theory of reading and writing reports, based on Slovic's psychological research, and the descriptive model of frequent mass atrocities? The study of rhetoric forms a cornerstone of this thesis, because reports are a form of persuasive communication. Rhetoric allows the writer to identify the strength and effectiveness of arguments, evaluate the data on which arguments are based, understand how her arguments map across audiences, and

move decision makers emotionally or to action; more formally, rhetoric is linked to argument invention, which must exist in persuasive communication. However the study of rhetoric is also necessary for a thesis that tackles mass atrocities and genocides, because language is not solely mobilized in this world for eliciting compassion or bringing people together, and can be used in order to pave the road to genocide.

Mass atrocities typically garner headlines after they begin, but the road paved to mass atrocities begins before physical violence occurs. The road is paved to mass atrocities by those who have the ability to garner the sufficient resources to systematically organize a killing campaign. Organizing systematic killing requires persuading others – military leaders, or governmental parties, for example – to kill based on religiosity, gender, ethnicity, or other classifications. As Valentino argues, those who commit genocide are often small groups of powerful leaders who can mobilize resources and power in order to carry out systematic atrocities[16].

Adolf Hitler epitomizes how rhetoric can play a powerful role in the lead-up to genocide. Hitler often used speeches and rallies to drum support for his campaign, rationalizing the subjugation and exeuction of Jews through rhetorical persuasion. Kenneth Burke argues that many have overlooked the role of rhetoric in Hitler's campaign, and more specifically, how Hitler called upon the symbols of Christianity and post-WWI Germany to symbolically dehumanize Jews in the lead-up to the Holocaust[17]. Hitler's arguments, as Burke elucidates them, do not appeal to logically "rigorous" or "deductive" standards that we might be primed to expect from effective reasoning, but Hitler still struck a deep chord with his audience(s), and was able to gain critical support in orchestrating the Holocaust. Hitlerism, as Burke writes, "though

irrational, is carried on under the slogan of Reason"[18]. Along with Burke's analysis, the use of rhetoric in genocides has been extensively documented in academica and practice. For example, Genocide Watch understands that symbolization plays a key role in the escalation of conflict and lists "symbolization" as one of the escalation markers for genocide[19]. Power also writes that "the United States has repeatedly refrained from using the word genocide in fear of the real, but mostly perceived, legal responsibilities that would follow,"[20] underscoring that U.S. decision makers are particularly receptive to the legal dimensions of the word.

It is no surprise that Burke is often viewed as one of the early rhetoricians in the field of humanistic rhetoric, the field that Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca helped found with their treatise *The New Rhetoric[21]*. The humanistic vein of rhetoric generally rejects absolute rationality; understanding the way that Hitler and others have paved the way for genocide to occur through a reliance on rhetoric lets us understand that killing is *rationalized,* it is not *rational.* The implication for this understanding is the acceptance that rationality is not the product of consensus borne from self-evident proof, which is the main argument that Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca make in the *New Rhetoric*[22]. Opening our eyes to understanding how genocides are made is a necessity when considering how to prevent or mitigate their impact. Using the insights of *The New Rhetoric* and other scholars that have defined the humanistic study of rhetoric can allow us to determine what persuasive communication looks like in a context of violent conflict.

Developing strategic communications in response to mass atrocities requires an understanding of the rhetoric that leads to atrocities, because decision makers can be

sensitive to the interpretations of violence that diplomatic leaders use. However, as Hitler illustrates, diplomatic leaders can also be genocidaires.

Even when atrocities pose a serious threat to security, stability, and most importantly, our sense of humanity, the economist Richard Lanham duly notes that attention is scarce resource, and the spotlight is not placed on mass atrocities simply because information about them exists[23]. Because information about mass atrocities must be selected and presented to those who can act on them, the psychological challenges and rhetorical tasks behind curating reports will be the focus of this thesis.

A Rhetorical and Social-Psychological Theory of the Curated Report

The aim of this study is to improve the ideal of a *curated report*, which is a report that contains evidence about mass atrocities, captures and sustains attention from decision makers, and creates the propensity for action. A *curated report* considers the problems that readers face and addresses them. Some of these problems will be particular to the audience being addressed; yet there are also problems that the reader will face that are insensitive to audience type. Certain theories about the systematic errors in our psychological perceptions of mass atrocities apply to all audience members – both laypeople and experts.

These theories about our psychological perceptions of mass atrocities apply to all audiences of a report, because they are based on a theory of cognition that underlies all of our perceptions. Stanovich and West have denoted the two components of this dual-process theory of cognition *System 1* and *System 2,* and so it is sometimes called System 1 and System 2 thinking[24]. For many years, psychologists and social-behavioural scientists, as well as a recent number of rhetoricians, have turned their

attention to this cognitive theory. Kahneman has popularized System 1 and System 2 thinking in his book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*[25].

At the heart of this dual-process theory of cognition is the assumption that humans experience the world in two distinct ways: "people apprehend reality in two fundamentally different ways, one labeled intuitive, automatic, natural, nonverbal, narrative, and experiential, and the other analytical, deliberative, and verbal"[26]. While the terms *System 1* and *System 2* describe these two modes of thinking that underlie our cognitive processes, they are simply labels, and Slovic, Finucane, Peters, and MacGregor call these two modes or systems of thinking the "experiential system" that is "intuitive fast, mostly automatic, and not very accessible to conscious awareness," and the "analytic system," or "one that is slow, effortful, and requires conscious control"[27].

Each system is the master of a distinct domain; in *Thinking, Fast and Slow,* Kahneman demonstrates how different tasks are associated with either System 1 or System 2 thinking[28]. For example, completing complex mathematical problems engages System 2, while immediately shrinking in fear from a dangerous, thrown object is an automatic reaction governed by System 1. As Slovic and Peters argue, "there are strong elements of rationality in both systems of thinking"[29]. This has to do with the fact that System 1 allows us to perceive the world and react in ways that are highly rational: for example, our eyes automatically feed our brains consistent images that allow us to navigate our physical environment, yet slow and deliberate thinking allows us to sit down and work through a math problem[30].

So each system is the master of different tasks, and are typically rational and successful at guiding humans through complicated environments[31]. However, each

system is still prone to errors; for example, the eyes can be tricked by visual illusions[32], even though they are usually accurate in their ability to survey and assess visual environments. Moreover, if System 1 makes errors, we do not always make the effort to correct them[33]. Frank et al argue that System 2 monitoring of System 1 impressions is "typically rather lax," – meaning we only choose to switch to System 2 thinking when we deliberately choose to[34].

Some of the errors that System 1 makes occur systematically. When the errors are systematic, it is called a *bias*[35]. For example, when the eye looks at certain visual patterns, it will systematically see certain illusions. Slovic has shown that in the face of certain types of information about mass atrocities, our intuitive, automatic System 1 mode of thinking makes systematic errors and fails to elicit a rational response reflecting the principle of equal valuation of human lives. Since System 2 is an effortful system, we commonly fail to put effort into correcting for our intuitive reactions to statistics about mass atrocities[36].

In the face of statistics, Slovic and Slovic describe "psychological tendencies, such as psychic numbing, that are profoundly relevant to our efforts, conscious or not, to appreciate everyday information expressed quantitatively"[37]. The important thing to grasp, as they write, is that "we are all, to some degree, 'innumerate.' Even the most mathematically gifted human beings are psychologically limited when it comes to attaching feeling to numerical information. The ability to sense the meaning of quantitative information does not come down to computational talent"[38]. Yet the meaning of quantitative information describing mass atrocities matters for decision makers tasked with responding to mass atrocities, because moral action does not arise

from a vacuum – people must find issues important enough to direct competing demands for attention and resources toward them.

The first bias that Slovic discusses in *Numbers and Nerves* is called "psychic numbing"[39]. Slovic argues that risk management follows the two tracks of System 1 and System 2 thinking: we can use logic and deliberation to analyze risk, or we can rely on our feelings[40]. The role of affect in risk judgment when faced with statistics about mass atrocities is worrying: "Particularly problematic is the difficulty of comprehending the meaning of catastrophic losses of life when relying on feelings…disaster statistics, no matter how large the numbers, lack emotion or feeling. As a result, they fail to convey the true meaning of such calamities and they fail to motivate proper action to prevent them"[41]. As a result, the way we value lives, as the number of lives increases, does not conform to a model where each life has equal value. Slovic suggests two additional descriptive models, the psychophysical model and the collapse of compassion.

The psychophysical model is based on the "considerable evidence that our affective responses and the resulting value we place on human lives follow the same sort of psychophysical function that characterizes our diminished sensitivity to changes in a wide range of perceptual and cognitive entities – brightness, loudness, heaviness, and wealth – as their underlying magnitudes increase"[42]. The collapse of compassion describes how "the importance of saving one life pales against the background of a larger threat: we may not 'feel' much difference, nor value the difference, between saving eighty-seven lives and eighty-eight"[43].

Our reliance on System 1 thinking then produces value judgments of human life that are inconsistent with the principle that lives have equal value. The insensitivity

model, or the collapse of compassion model, when we are faced with disaster statistics likely has deep implications for decisions that are made about them; psychic numbing is based on the observation that "large numbers have been found to lack meaning and to be underweighted in decisions unless they convey affect (feeling)"[44]. Psychic numbing, then, stems from a quality of mass atrocities – the fact that they involve mass numbers of victims. For mass atrocities that are distant from U.S. decision makers, report-writers must find a way to describe them. While statistics are frequently used, statistics are deeply problematic if the goal is to elicit directed attention for them.

The second cognitive calculus that Slovic and Slovic discuss is called pseudoinefficacy: "For those in a position to help, decisions are strongly motivated by perceived efficacy. Inefficacy, real or perceived, shrivels compassion and response, even among those who have the means to protect and improve lives"[45]. Like psychic numbing, pseudoinefficacy is "an affective phenomenon – positive feelings about children one can help are dampered by negative feelings associated with children who one cannot help"[46]. Experimentally, Slovic shows that the very presence of victims who can not be helped determines the amount that people will donate to other victims who can be helped[47]. In a world where multiple crises are ongoing, one hypothesis that arises is that the increasing scarcity of attention[48] may influence or compound pseudoinefficacy, as we may be less likely to pay attention to crises if our response "shrivels" with a knowledge of others who can not be helped.

The third cognitive calculus brings psychic numbing and pseudoinefficacy together for political decision making. The prominence effect is an example of imperative-driven decision making, which describes how people make decisions on the

basis of a single imperative[49], rather than rationally weighing the costs and benefits of various choices in a decision set. The prominence effect describes when leaders "choose what is best according to the most prominence – that is, the most defensible – attributes"[50]. When decisions involving trade-offs "that pit the value of human lives against other important objectives," how do leaders make these decisions? Slovic and Slovic suggest that "when security is tenuous, moral action to help others is unlikely"[51]. As a result, "lofty humanitarian values are systematically devalued in the decision-making process...decisions in support of security appear vastly more defensible than decisions to protect distant lives"[52]. Slovic and Slovic place psychic numbing, pseudoinefficacy, and the prominence effect in the context of meaningful action when they write that

> meaningful action to prevent genocide and mass atrocities faces two psychological obstacles. The prominence effect leads to decisions that favor inaction, even when this violates deeply held values. And decision makers can get away with this because the public is psychologically numbed[53]

What role does this psychological research have for the writer who wants to advance arguments in a curated report? Mercier[54] observes that

> much work in the psychology of reasoning has suggested that, in fact, humans reason rather poorly, failing at simple logical tasks[55], committing egregious mistakes in probabilistic reasoning[56,57], and being subject to sundry irrational biases in decision making[58]. This work has led to a rethinking of the mechanisms for reasoning, but not – or at least, not to the same degree – of its assumed function of enhancing human cognition and decision making. The most important development has been the emergence of dual-process models that distinguish between intuitions and reasoning (or system 1 and system 2 reasoning)[59,60,61,62,63,64,65]

Mercier understands that cognition underlies reasoning, and so the dual-process theory of cognition, also known as *System 1 and System 2 thinking,* can underlie all of our

reasoning processes. Reasoning, whose function is "the production and evaluation of arguments in communication," is specifically the realm of System 2 thinking[66].

Arguments in a curated report then have the ability to embody, present, and encourage reasoning, offering a way to engage System 2 thinking and correct for the biases that System 1 produces in the face of numbers and statistics. As an effect, the deployment of Mercier's argumentative view of reasoning in a curated report can provide a link between what we know about our individual cognitive processes, and the social, political processes that curated reports attempt to influence. Mercier writes that the argumentative view of reasoning "can act as a bridge between the cognitive and the social approaches to reasoning"[67]. The ability for reasoning to mediate the line between cognitive and social approaches is extremely important, as "failures of reasoning are most likely to be remedied at the collective than at the individual level"[68].

Therefore reasoning, and its argumentative basis, provide a powerful way to confront the System 1 biases that Slovic documents. There is, however, no guidebook on the correct way to assemble these arguments, what evidence to use besides pure statistics, and how to vary one's arguments based on other variables – such as the audience, the time period in a conflict, and what powers or resources key decision makers have. The discipline of rhetoric, however, can guide us about how to invent effective arguments that underlie reasoning and, as Mercier says, provide a bridge between the intricacies of individual cognition with the social sphere of political deliberation, as well as between System 1 and System 2 thinking.

Rhetoric and argument invention are inherently connected, but given the broad applicability of rhetoric, it can be difficult to define what people mean when they say

"rhetoric," or "rhetorical." In other words, the broad applicability of rhetoric is one of its strengths, but this can pose a problem for identifying what rhetoric is. Arguably, the humanistic school of rhetoric – well represented by *The New Rhetoric* project – provides a theoretical view of rhetoric that embraces a dual-process theory of cognition.

The New Rhetoric attempts to revive and renew a critical appreciation of Aristotle's original ancient texts on rhetoric[69]. The authors of *The New Rhetoric* argue that the degeneration of rhetoric as a discipline was chiefly made possible by Descartes, who "limited the scope" of what we consider to be legitimate reasons and arguments[70]. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca refute the idea that mathematical, deductive logic is the only superior and legitimate type of reasoning[71]. As an effect, they argue that designating reasoning and argumentation to such a limited scope has had enduring effects on the arguments we take seriously[72].

The rejection of mathematical logic as a superior criteria for evaluating and generating arguments is immediately applicable to writing reports about genocides. First, the type of data and evidence usually considered legitimate for formal logic is a quite narrow set of data types[73], and as shown previously, Burke argues that genocidal leaders, such as Hitler, used religious symbols, emotion, and other types of data in order to form arguments that mattered for the course of a genocide. For complete analyses of mass atrocities and genocides, a narrow view of logic and the types of data that underpin formal syllogisms must be rejected.

Additionally, the theory of System 1 and System 2 thinking arguably rejects the superiority of mathematical logic and the notion of absolute rationality, because this theory accepts our sensory impressions and automatic, subconscious modes of thinking

as legitimate drivers of our often rational behaviour. Moreover, the link that Mercier makes between cognition and reasoning also rejects the Enlightenment view of pure rationality, because Mercier rejects the "logicist paradigm"[74]. Mercier argues that this "logicist paradigm" has dominated the study of the psychology of reasoning in the past, and this paradigm "emphasize[s] strict adherence to logical norms"[75]. It is difficult to determine what a "logical norm" is, once the ground beneath our idea of what "logical" is begins to shift, and when logical norms can vary between individuals. Strong anecdotal evidence that leaders have used imperative-driven decision-making[76] also dispels the role of pure rationality in atrocity response, as this theory diverges from the cost-benefit analyses an idealistically rational human would conduct.

The New Rhetoric also shows how argumentation is a function of the audience being addressed. When we design communications, we should be thinking about the intended audience; Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca break audience down into three types: particular, composite, and universal[77]. Because each person operates under the theory of System 1 and System 2 thinking, this theory applies to the universal audience. However because there will always be variation between groups that matter for rhetorical persuasion, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca recognize that some features apply to *particular* audiences[78]. Practitioners who have spent careers communicating with politicans about mass atrocities are well-suited to provide their insights about some of the issues of particular audiences.

Practitioners have lent their insights and wisdom about patterns in atrocity response. Practitioners often have a clear view of the recurrent practical issues, as well as the patterns in politics and decision making, that permeate the world of responding to

mass atrocities. Two prevalent sets of patterns in decision making about mass atrocities that apply to particular and composite audiences are the role of precedent in decision-making, and explanatory framing mechanisms used to interpret violence from afar.

Neustadt and May have advanced the idea of precedent – the notion that recent events can exert a powerful influence on the decisions we make in the present[79]. Neustadt and May argues that recent events bear heavily on the way that current decisions are faced. Thus Neustadt and May's research shows us how recent contexts and recent events matter for decisions about mass atrocities. In particular, the role of precedent in violent conflict appears to affect leaders' perceptions of the risks of intervening in a region of interest. For example, Barack Obama's dilemma in weighing how to respond to Syria seems to reflect the role of precedent – after campaigning on a promise to end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, these recent wars affected his deliberations in deciding whether to launch attacks against al-Assad following the infamous August 2013 chemical weapons attack on Eastern Ghouta.

Practitioners have also identified the way that individuals, institutions, or nations apply explanatory frameworks to mass atrocities and genocides. These frames affect our collective understanding of mass atrocities. Levinger argues that one of the reasons for U.S. inaction in the face of the Rwandan genocide was due to the use of a "faulty cognitive frame," in which the U.S. "failed to differentiate between threats of civil war and genocide"[80]. The "civil war" frame is one type of frame, but there are many others, including the "ancient hatreds" frame, in which leaders explain the violence by attributing it to "ancient sectarian differences,"[81] the "cycle of violence"[82] frame, in which leaders expect periods of wartime and peacetime, and attribute violence to a

cycle of wartime, the "neo-colonial" framework, in which leaders use the racist language of "savagery" and expect violence from certain regions of the globe, or the "spontaneous violence" frame, in which the systematic nature of mass atrocities is denied, and the violence is explained away. Sometimes these frameworks are deployed in narrative form by decision makers who seek to defend inaction, and sometimes they are used by genocidal perpetrators in order to mask atrocities and try to absolve themselves of responsibility for the violence.

Joining these practitioner observations with psychology and rhetoric, we fuse a triad of three intersecting disciplines. A theory for writing and reading curated reports – reports that find their way to decision makers in power – will lie at the center of this triad. To advance the study of curated reports, we need to examine past examples of curated reports that varied in their effectiveness, in order to produce judgments about how to select and present data in light of Slovic's psychological research. These case studies of individual reports are meant to critique and analyze the way that we select evidence and advance arguments about mass atrocities to decision makers. By using insights rhetorical and psychological disciplines to critique these reports, I will seek to better understand the types of arguments we make and provide judgments to advance an understanding of what makes an effective and persuasive report.

The selected reports and methodology is designed to reach this aim. I will consider three reports that have critical commonalities. The most obvious commonality is that each report reponds to a critical moment in the course or progress of a genocide. The first report, an ICRC report issued from Kigali, responds to the onset of the Rwandan genocide. The second report, a presentation that James Finkel gave to

Madeleine Albright during the Balkan wars, presents evidence of Serb ethnic cleansing in Bosnia. The third report, a dissent memo released by State Department officials in 2016, responds to the Syrian war and al-Assad's mass atrocities against civilians.

Another commonality between these reports is that intelligence existed, at the time of their release, that could confirm that mass atrocities or a genocide were occurring. The intelligence usually indicated a recent shift in the country or region of interest that constituted an increase in the intensity of killings taking place, progress in preparations that aided in the execution of a genocide, the onset of a genocide or mass killing campaign, or continued and unabated escalation of atrocities. Because this intelligence existed, it was in the interest of report-writers to communicate this information to decision makers, and for decision makers to understand and act upon this information. These important shifts could be sufficiently proved by corroborating evidence available to those who could write the reports. In other words, there was a pool of data and evidence that report-writers could draw upon, and that provided evidence for the threat of existence of mass genocides and/or genocide.

The final commonality is that at the time of each report's release, key decision makers in the United States had the capacity or power to act in various ways (both militarily and non-militarily) in order to influence the course or progress of mass atrocities and/or genocide. The set of actions that are available to U.S. decision makers will always matter for the decisions that are made. Perceptions of how viable actions are, and the individual sets of choices people believe exist, may vary from the actual set of available actions.

Each report varies in the attention and action(s) they are able to elicit from the key decision makers to whom they were addressed. This offers an opportunity to identify what factors, across reports, contribute to each report's persuasiveness. Communications about mass atrocities is not only about giving intelligence the light of day – it is understanding where the light should fall, what shadows the light may yet cast, and what type of light will most illuminate the eyes of those who need to understand the implications of mass atrocities.

This research will argue that the persuasiveness of a report depends on the extent to which three crucial factors are addressed in the process of argument invention. These three factors are the audience's assessment of the risks of intervening in the region of interest, the explanatory models the audience uses to frame the violence, and the audience's psychological limitations when receiving information about events that are distant and involve large numbers of victims.

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[1] Moumtzis, Panos (remarks to the press, Beirut, Lebanon, February 2018).

[2] ibid.

[3] Paul Slovic and Scott Slovic, *Numbers and Nerves: Information, Emotion, and Meaning in a World of Data* (Corvallis: OSU University Press, 2015), 1.

[4] ibid.

[5] ibid.

[6] Charles J. Brown, Phone call to author, November 17, 2017.

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Describing Genocide From Kigali: The ICRC Report

For a curated report to be persuasive, it must first engage the attention of its audience. Whether a report is persuasive or not persuasive then depends on two distinct goals: the first goal is capturing attention. The second goal reflects what Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca call the "goal of all argumentation," which is to move audiences to action, or to create the propensity for action by strengthening the audience's adherence to certain beliefs[1]. The prevailing opinion about Rwanda is that the international community failed at multiple stages of the genocide, and that even before the genocide, viable measures existed that would have prevented the extent of the violence that played out in 1994. Based on reflections from David Scheffer, who was senior advisor to Madeleine Albright in 1994[2], an International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) report had the potential to better communicate the importance of action and push for mitigative measures.

While an ICRC report released in April 1994 successfully captured Scheffer's attention, the report failed to move Scheffer to action, or create the propensity for him to act. While the ICRC report uses rich imagery and affect, it is merely descriptive, perhaps reflecting the core tenet of neutrality that the ICRC attempts to honor in its communication strategies about violent conflict[3]. However, I will argue that the report was unsuccessful, even if its primary argumentative aim was merely descriptive. The accuracy of describing Kigali in April of 1994 would have, without doubt, depended on communicating the recent shift in the intensity, scope, and frequency of killings of Tutsi and moderate Hutu peoples by Hutu extremists, Interahamwe forces, and others after the genocide began.

The report suffers in its descriptive aims because it fails to effectively address three crucial factors of audience: the "civil war" and "neo-colonial" frameworks that were used to interpret violence in Rwanda in the 1990s, the influence of Somalia on risk assessments for intervention, and the potential for psychic numbing and pseudoinefficacy. The successes and failures of this report are worth studying, because reasonable, proposed actions existed at this point in the genocide that Scheffer could have pushed for in his meetings with those tasked with responding to Rwanda. Romeo Dallaire, who was the head of the U.N. peacekeeping forces in Kigali, had repeatedly sought approval for calling upon a reasonable number of additional troops who could have arrived from other countries in Africa[4]; because these reasonable, proposable actions could have mitigated or quelled some of the violence, we see how rhetorical strategies may directly influence lives at stake.

In failing to fully respond to "civil war" and "neo-colonial" frameworks, the ICRC report failed to persuade its audience that a significant shift in the intensity and scope of the violence, accompanying the onset of the genocide, had occurred. More specifically, within the "civil war" and "neo-colonial" frameworks are modes of interpretation that often exclude the possibility of genocide because the interpretive lens these frameworks offer is insensitive to changes in the severity and scope of violence. The selection of evidence in the ICRC report fails to challenge these two frameworks, and therefore the report does not meaningfully provide Scheffer with arguments to defend the determination of genocide to others, and particularly, in the Deputies Meeting that shortly followed his reception of the report.

A contributing failure of the report was the decision not to explicitly address the influence of Somalia on U.S. decisions about Rwanda. Reflections from key U.S. officials in 1994 tasked with responding to Rwanda have regretfully said that the "Blackhawk Down" incident in Mogadishu, Somalia[5] that took place prior to the Rwandan genocide sparked a sense of fear in maintaining peacekeeping operations in African countries, and influenced the decision to evacuate U.S. and U.N. peacekeepers once the genocide began in Kigali[6]. However, based on David Scheffer's reflection on Rwanda, there also appears to be a psychological basis, rooted in System 1 and System 2 thinking, for the more general way that U.S. decision makers allow recent contexts and events to shape the way decisions are faced.

Kahneman's research documenting our reliance on System 1 thinking appears to be a strong basis for the way that decision makers formulate risk assessments at odds with rational humanitarian decision making; because the report does not challenge this System 1 calculus, it does not provide Scheffer with the justifications he could have used to call for additional troops or other, more direct life-saving measures than pushing for a legal investigation into genocide. Overall, by considering how Somalia permeated the calculus of fear in the U.S., we can look to a dual-process theory of thinking for imagining how the report could have responded. The undue influence of Blackhawk Down on decision-making was a sufficient reason for the report to use logical, deliberative reasoning characteristic of System 2 thinking to explicitly question the link between Somalia and Rwanda, toward the aim of facilitating better decision-making.

The third crucial factor of audience that the report did not fully address was the audience's susceptibility to the cognitive processes Slovic denotes psychic numbing[7].

Through transforming observations from ICRC personnel into rich, affectual, and visual imagery of the violence, the report uses metaphor to describe the violence. Importantly, because metaphor is a means for comparison, the type of metaphors that the report uses allow readers to use the individual body as a scale or gauge for comprehending the violence. While this mediation between the individual person and thousands of mounting casualties offers a potentially powerful hedge against the dangers of psychic numbing, the report does not consistently apply this scaling technique, and therefore the report threatens to induce psychic numbing.

Mercier positions the argumentative function of reasoning between the two realms of individual cognition and social reasoning[8]; since the two goals of a report are capturing attention and moving the audience to action, argumentation is needed to link these two goals, as they map onto the related distinction between individual reaction and collective decision making. Scheffer's reaction to the ICRC report shows how the report made a strong impression on him individually, but did not persuade him to act on this strong impression in a critical Deputies Meeting after he received the report:

> Clearly, the alarm bells should have been ringing incessantly within Washington policy circles over the rapidly mounting death count in Rwanda. I should have gone ballistic on April 26, when I saw in an intelligence report that the International Committee of the Red Cross was estimating between 100,000 and 500,000 killings of mostly Tutsi in Rwanda. That was the critical moment – in late April – when the trumpet should have finally blasted to take forceful action and describe the killings as genocide, whether or not a legal determination could yet be made. I could have shouted out the point at the Deputies Committee meeting and insisted on more action and a public pronouncement of genocide. But I hesitated, I opted to press for one primary goal and ensure I achieved it: to obtain the deputies' support for a genocide investigation. I wonder to this day whether I could have accomplished more at that meeting[9]

The report clearly left Scheffer with a strong impression. He chooses to include this report when reflecting on Rwanda, and that based on this "critical moment," he "should have gone ballistic," and the "trumpet should have blasted"[10].

What elements in the report, then, may have persuaded Scheffer to pursue an investigation into whether genocide was actually occurring, rather than "[shouting] out the point at the Deputies Committee meeting and [insisting] on more action?"[11]. Why did Scheffer choose to pursue a legal investigation of genocide when Scheffer had the opportunity to "take forceful action and describe the killings as genocide?"[12]. Scheffer remarks that the ICRC report should have changed the Washington calculus toward the genocide; yet the report did not persuade Scheffer to move from his individual impressions from the report to advocating for action in the social, collective, and political realm of the Deputies Committee meeting.

In *All the Missing Souls,* Scheffer cites the ICRC report that moved him:

Heavy fighting in Kigali - ICRC working amidst the chaos

Complete mayhem has hit the streets of Kigali, leaving a heavy death toll and large numbers of wounded. Armed elements are on the rampage, going from house to house killing and destroying. The violence was sparked off by the death of the President of Rwanda, the President of Burundi and a number of dignitaries of both governments, who were all killed as their plane came in to land at Kigali last Thursday evening. Since then the bloodshed in the city has steadily grown in intensity. Today the fighting is still fierce, and the city is gripped by generalized looting and lawlessness. ICRC delegates in Kigali have described scenes of extreme violence, stating that there are thousands of casualties lying in the streets.

In the meantime foreign governments, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations are evacuating their expatriates from Kigali.

Amid the chaos, the ICRC's 26 delegates in Rwanda have been working with the Rwandese Red Cross First-Aiders, evacuating the wounded to the main hospital

in Kigali. They have also been providing the hospital with urgently needed medical supplies[13]

Repetition of the location Kigali provides a location for the reader to locate mounting bloodshed. Leff has demonstrated that the debate in rhetorical criticism has often centered around the relationship between style and content; Leff has also shown the style and content are inseparable parts of texts for understanding their applications in rhetorical settings[14]. In this case, though it may seem trivial at first glance, the repetition of a capitalized word reinforces the geographical place denoted by language that the reader can continually circle back to; this also offers the ability for the writer to layer meaning onto the same repeated symbol.

The writer repeatedly uses "Kigali" to locate different descriptions of violence: it is the "streets of Kigali" wherein "complete mayhem" exists, the geographical location "Kigali" wherein planes can land, and the city "Kigali" where ICRC delegates are located. By using Kigali to identify a singular location for the bloodshed, the ICRC report establishes a trajectory for this bloodshed by using terms like "steadily grown in intensity," alongside a progression from past to present in the first paragraph. Therefore, as time moves from past to present, the intensity of bloodshed also grows. The report could have given the exact locations of planes and delegates, but the iterative use of "Kigali" reinforces the totality of phrases such as "complete mayhem" by repeating the name of the same vessel, Kigali, in which this totality of violence is realized. Therefore the report uses Kigali as a way through which the adjective "complete" can be realized.

The various ways in which Kigali is used – as a location for planes to land, a street-level cartographic cross-section in which one may envision the "streets of Kigali," and as the home for ICRC delegates – endows Kigali with various interpretations. Like

most cities, Kigali has various functions, but in the context of mounting bloodshed,

Kigali also becomes a singular entity through which to comprehend the violence in the

use of bodily metaphor. In particular, the writer uses sudden, immediate metaphors of

microcosmic or individual violence with which to communicate the large-scale violence

unfolding in Kigali, as "complete mayhem" can "hit" the "streets of Kigali," and the

"bloodshed" can grow "in intensity."

To hit something has to do with the actions of a single body, but the suddenness

and immediacy of this action is superimposed upon the developed symbol of Kigali to

communicate the sudden and immediate change that the whole city of Kigali has

experienced over the period of observation. Similarly, bloodshed is a phenomenon

observed in real-time at the level of the individual body or bodies – yet the writer

assigned a "bloodshed in the city," characterizing the city as a individual body or entity

in itself that can shed blood. The "city is gripped," yet to understand how something is

"hit," and how "bloodshed" mounts requires an understanding of how experience basic

sensory or perceptual things – like being hit, seeing bloodshed, and being gripped by

something.

The implication of the report's use of bodily metaphors to describe the genocidal

violence in Rwanda is significant: because metaphors are mechanisms of comparison,

the use of bodily experience as a point of reference for comprehending the violence in

Kigali means that the experiences of an individual body provide the reader with a way

to *scale* the violence. Metaphors in the report scale the violence by using individual

sensory experiences as gauges for the intensity, development, and scope of the

genocidal violence. This use of metaphor differs from a typical statistical representation

of victims, and by engaging the individual with the intensity, development, and scope of the violence, may be a factor that moved Scheffer individually.

The imagery wrought by these metaphors, in particular, suggest a different understanding of human lives than the representation of lives through statistical or quantitative information. Simple statistics, such as the figure of 800,000 people that are estimated to have died in the Rwandan genocide[15], do not call upon our experiences as human beings in order to convey the depth of suffering that the statistic is supposed to represent. When the ICRC report uses descriptive imagery, like mounting bloodshed, it calls upon our own experiences or imaginative faculties for envisioning bloodshed in order to qualify our beliefs in what is occurring in Kigali. Importantly, this suggests that the imagery wrought by the ICRC report may offer a powerful hedge against psychic numbing, by providing a link between the individual and the masses of victims.

Psychic numbing and pseudoinefficacy are processes of human cognition that are primarily associated with reaction to the overwhelming, incomprehensible, and arguably impossible feat of comprehending the loss of thousands, millions, or even billions of people[16]. In a very real way, statistics denoting the loss of hundreds of thousands of people in the Rwandan genocide, the loss of billions of European Jews in the Holocaust, and the loss of thousands of Muslims from the Rakhine state in Myanmar today will always remain abstractions to those who have never experience genocide first-hand. Mediating between the individual and the statistic, however, offers a powerful way to try and communicate the importance of such massive of life, because we *can* understand the emotion behind what it means to experience things at the level of the individual body, or the loss of a single life. Frank et al. posit that the illustration, if it

mediates the complicated relationship between the individual and the statistic, can offer a powerful rhetorical strategy for conveying the scope of genocidal violence, without losing "the affective connection to the individual": "Kurzweil's statement, 'Six million Jewish people is one Jewish person six million times,' folds one person into six million and back again, demonstrating the potential of the illustration to navigate between the danger of statistics and the example"[17].

The ICRC report uses a particular aspect of individual experience as a scalar point of reference in metaphorical description. There are various ways to represent human deaths; the most common representation is number of victims, but a statistic, in comparison to the use of metaphor, does not offer a point of reference for overcoming either the insensitivity or collapse of compassion that often characterize our reaction to large statistics. Thus the metaphorical scaling technique specifically mediates between the individual and the massive scope of the violence, offering a potentially powerful hedge against the tendency for psychic numbing, in which large statistics often do not carry the necessary affect to make information meaningful for decision making[18].

This metaphorical scaling technique is not just used to describe Kigali, but is also used in other instances in the ICRC report. When the report-writer says "heavy death toll," the qualifier "heavy" uses a perceptive scale to gauge the suffering, rather than a statistical one. Another scale of intensity is used when the writers report that the bloodshed has "grown in intensity." Individually comprehensible scales like *weight* and *intensity* are used in order to qualify the mass statistics of suffering, yet the report still ends with the blunt phrase "there are thousands of casualties lying in the streets"[19].

Though the term "thousands of casualties" is tied to the phrase "extreme violence," the word "extreme" stands alone without a scale, and thus a point of reference, to comprehend the meaning of "extreme." Additionally, recalling Slovic's research on psychic numbing, "large numbers have been found to lack meaning and to be underweighted in decisions unless they convey affect (feeling)"[20]. The term "thousands" is a large, vague statistic, and while it is placed within a paragraph that uses strong, affectual adjectives in other places, "thousands" stands on its own and thus threatens to invoke insensitivity to the human lives beneath the statistic, or even the collapse of compassion – the two descriptive models[21] that psychic numbing collectively points toward.

Moreover, if the street is the imagistic scene in which the "thousands of casualties" are located, the imagery of this rendering of the violence suggests many who can not be helped, because the report does not offer actions its readers can take in order to help the victims that are strewn in the street. While this image might have the potential to invoke a sense of false efficacy in readers, it is difficult to balance representations of severity, while instilling a sense of true efficacy. Nonetheless, it is difficult to determine what the outcome would have been, if this image were paired with clear, proposed actions.

Including the vague, imprecise statistic of "thousands of casualties" is not just a potential point in the report where the audience would be subject to psychic numbing, and also pseudoinefficacy, based on the imagery in which this vague statistic is placed. Frank et al. discuss the construction of images and symbols toward the end of developing *presence,* which they argue is a rhetorical tool that can provide the

underpinnings for moral argumentation for situations in which genocide is occurring[22].

The idea of presence is simple at first glance, but psychologically rich, when the

rhetoric maps itself into the way decisions are faced. Frank et al. write that "to achieve

presence, images and symbols should be constructed to convey and elicit feelings"[23].

Frank et al. argue that images and symbols build to presence, and that "an understanding

of presence can help address the vulgarity of numbers"[24]. The images and symbols in

the ICRC report provide a powerful way for the individual to comprehend the

increasing scale and intensity of the Rwandan genocide, but ultimately these

descriptions are not paired with actions that Scheffer could have defended in the

Deputies Committee meeting.

It is curious to consider that the ICRC report chose to foreground the term

"thousands of casualties" to reflect the chaos of the genocide that had engulfed Kigali –

an interview with Philippe Gaillard, who directed the ICRC in Kigali in 1994, notes that

he guessed the more precise estimate of at least 250,000 deaths on the 20th of April:

> a couple of funny phone calls from BBC London who made the first call around
> the 20th of April asking me the same question, 'What's your estimation of the
> number of people killed?' And I told them at least 250,000. One week later they
> called me again and asked me, 'What's your estimation today?' So I told them,
> 'You can double it. Five hundred thousand people have been killed'[25]

Why did the ICRC settle for the imprecise "thousands" in the opening lines of this

report when the head of the ICRC was giving a public audience more precise estimates

of the dead? The ICRC report was released only one week into the genocide, whereas

Gaillard's statement to the press took place approximately one week later; Scheffer

notes that he didn't read the ICRC report until one week after Gaillard's statement on the

20th of April. The ICRC may not have had access to precise statistics of the dead, but if

they did, the choice to report "thousands of casualties" is still significant because imagery does not have to function at the cost of statistical precision. Looking toward other aspects of the ICRC report's audience, due to the "civil war" explanatory framework that was used to interpret violence in Rwanda in 1994, the choice to include vague, imprecise statistics is a misreading of audience if the argumentative aim was to describe the genocidal violence.

For the Rwandan genocide, Levinger describes a "cognitive frame," or an explanatory framework, that he calls the "civil war" cognitive frame[26]. Levinger argues that

> "two key factors inhibited the capacity of U.S. government analysts and policymakers to comprehend and respond to the imminent catastrophe brewing in Rwanda," including "the use of a *faulty cognitive frame* that failed to differentiate between threats of civil war and genocide," and "the adoption of *rigid policy guidance* stressing the need to achieve a formal power-sharing agreement for Rwanda"[27]

Levinger's description of the "faulty cognitive frame" was a powerful reason for the ICRC report to either include precise statistics at the forefront, or distinguish the spark in the intensity of the violence from past clashes between Habyarimana's government and the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). This is because of the interpretive dangers of "civil war" explanatory frameworks when they are applied: new signs of violence are interpreted as further signals of an ongoing civil war. Moreover, like the "ancient hatreds" framework, we tend to think of "two sides" in a civil war. There were two clear sides in the Civil War that U.S. decision makers were familiar with, and prior to the genocide, there were, to some extent, "sides" – the RPF and the predominantly Hutu government. But the genocide was radically different than the time period before it

began, and there are important reasons that it was crucial to communicate the onset of genocide.

Two crucial aspects of the shift from civil war to genocide provide the impetus for communicating the onset of genocide; first is the drastic shift, or intensification, of the power dynamics. While victims are not passive bodies in a genocide, there are a clear group of perpetrators that holds the power to kill en masse and can be identified. Second is the intensity, frequency, or speed of the killings that occurred when the genocide began in Rwanda. When the genocide began, the death toll did not just rise (as it does in civil wars, over time), rather the rate of killing increased.

There is always the possibility that despite a report's best efforts to present evidence illustrating the onset or intensification of a genocide, decision makers will only respond to information that is consistent with the interpretive frame that they bring to new information that the report presents. Hertwig et al. denote this process "deliberate ignorance," and that "strategic ignorance has diverse functions," including helping negotiators to "gain a *bargaining advantage*"[28] and "avoiding liability"[29]. More research needs to identify when decision makers use these processes in the face of information about genocide, but a clear long-term, structural solution is to educate people to understand their biases, and to consistently guide their attention to information that may contradict their beliefs or world views.

The application of the explanatory model of a recurrent civil war in Rwanda by the U.S. Ambassador to Rwanda may have contributed to a sense of apathy by stifling the alarm bells that Scheffer felt were necessary after new information about violence, as Feil argues that outsiders can become accustomed to "a cycle of violence"[30]. Another

reason the civil war framework was prevalent might have been that it was true to some extent – violence in Rwanda between Habyarimana's militia forces and RPF forces after the RPF had invaded Rwanda in 1990 had already taken thousands of lives in the early part of the decade, so the onset of the Rwandan genocide took place against the backdrop of a civil war. Yet it was not simply a civil war.

Another relevant explanatory framework is the racist or neo-colonial framework, which can be an extension of the "ancient hatreds" argument, as well as a broad way of describing the way that some U.S. decision makers interpreted the violence in Rwanda before and during the genocide. The racist and neo-colonial framework is a way of describing when people expect violence from parts of the world as a racist mode of interpretation: news agencies interpreted the violence in Rwanda as tribal hatreds[31], whereas similar types of violence in Europe were not "tribal." The distinction here hinges on one word, but has vast and far-reaching consequences that reflect the relationship between colonial powers, like the U.S., in Africa. The word "tribal," when used by colonial powers, invokes the colonialist view of groups in Africa when colonial powers arrived, and linked with the interpretation of violence, suggests that tribal hatreds and violence are simultaneous expressions. Dispelling this framework requires more than a single report, but since it held relevance for Rwanda, the ICRC report could have provided more than description, in order to establish why attention for Kigali was warranted.

What more may have generated "apathy" in Washington, as Scheffer describes? There is more than one possible answer, and we will never be absolutely certain; one partial answer is the mass violence that was occurring during the Balkan wars in

Europe, and an attention deficit for violence in Rwanda. Mass violence in Bosnia was high on the political agenda – Albright, in particular, was especially responsive to Bosnia[32] – and attention fatigue or deficit is a problem for decision makers who are tasked with responding to multiple crises at once. Jana Mason of UNHCR notes that

> the biggest challenge with reports these days, at least in the refugee/humanitarian field, is the lack of time/attention on the part of the audience. Another challenge is the "information overload" that currently exists, meaning that audiences can find information on a given situation through numerous sources, resulting in competition for "eyeballs"[33]

It is certainly difficult for reports to overcome the hurdle of capturing attention, when attention is often pulled in several directions at once. However, Scheffer's description of his reaction to the report demonstrates that the ICRC report successfully captured his attention. As Scheffer describes, the failure of the report lay in its inability to bridge the gap between the strong individual impressions it left Scheffer with, and the opportunity for action in the social, collective setting of his Deputies Meeting. We might look to the way that other decision makers faced decisions to do with Rwanda, which offers insight into how the report should have responded when strengthening decision-maker perception of the violence.

For the question of apathy, one important answer may be the manner in which faulty risk assessments were generated in the wake of recent events that preceded the onset of the Rwandan genocide. In particular, haunting the failure of the U.S. response to Rwanda were judgments influenced by the Blackhawk Down incident in Somalia. The Blackhawk Down incident in Mogadishu was the killings of 18 US soldiers in Somalia in October of 1993[34]. This incident cast profound doubt on the role of U.S. and U.N. peacekeeping forces, and especially in African countries. How did the Arusha

Accords and deaths of U.S. soldiers in Somalia cast their shadows on analyses of Rwanda? How did these shadows distort analyses? An OECD Steering Committee report argues that "facing the consequences" associated with accepting the possibility of genocide might have paved the way for a more objective analysis[35]. Therefore understanding the constraints of the subjective analyses that were conducted is essential for knowing how to communicate in a way that facilitates more rational analysis of crises.

Many decision makers involved with the Rwandan genocide recall that Blackhawk Down formed a significant part of the fear of intervening in Rwanda, the decision to pull U.S. and U.N. peacekeeping forces from Kigali, and the decision not to intervene; in his discussion of Rwanda, Levinger cites the OECD Steering Committee report that argues

> there existed an internal predisposition on the part of a number of the key actors to deny the possibility of genocide because facing the consequences might have required them to alter their course of action. The mesmerization with the success of the Arusha and the failure of Somalia together cast long shadows and distorted an objective analysis of Rwanda[36]

It is hard to determine what Eriksson means by "objective," but Eriksson suggests that Somalia altered analyses of Rwanda and as a result, analyses of Rwanda suffered. Scheffer corroborates Eriksson's conclusion, when he writes that

> One of my own shameful moments occurred shortly after the Mogadishu killings had paralyzed Washington. I briefed congressional staffers in November 1993 that our inaction to the massacres of tens of thousands of both Tutsi and Hutu in Burundi demonstrated the Clinton administration's reason-headed approach to peacekeeping. We were not going to rush into each and every humanitarian catastrophe, I confidently reported[37]

In reflection, Scheffer names alternate courses of action rather than opting "to press for one primary goal," reflecting on the decision-making power he held at the time; the

choice to press for a legal investigation for the determination of genocide carries little

effectiveness in stemming atrocities in a timely fashion. Scheffer's statement that the

"alarm bells should have been ringing" provides an example of U.S. apathy toward new

information about violence in Rwanda.

Arguably, in order to address the influence of Somalia, the writers would have

had to draw on the rhetorical notion of *presence* to make this risk factor present to

decision-makers. For a genocide pedagogy, Frank et al. argue that

> The rhetorical construction of presence is a function of five characteristics. First
> it is the result of an advocate gaining and sustaining the attention of an audience,
> no small matter. Second, the advocate who has secured the attention of the
> audience reinforces and changes beliefs and perceptions. Third, the advocate
> must exercise imagination to create and sustain presence. Fourth, the successful
> construction of presence by an advocate should elicit action by the audience.
> Fifth, presence is created with artfully constructed and calibrated images and
> symbols[38]

While the ICRC report had already gained Scheffer's attention, it does not address

Somalia, which concerns the second stage of building presence – reinforcing and

changing the belief that Somalia was sufficiently related to Rwanda for the purpose of

making decisions about troops and U.S. involvement. While there is no requirement that

a descriptive report needs to discuss recent events and contexts, if a report that reaches

decision makers in the US seeks to elicit specific actions or better deliberations about

violent conflict, then there is ample evidence to meet the argumentative aim of

describing the genocide, the ICRC report should have brought decision makers'

attention to the role of Somalia in facing decisions about Rwanda.

Why was Somalia generating fear for peackeeping missions in Rwanda? One

partial explanatory factor for why decision-makers failed to act in Rwanda is the undue

influence that events in Somalia had on an attitude toward engaging in different foreign

conflicts that *chronologically* followed Somalia but were still *characteristically* quite

different; the motivations for the killings in Rwanda and the Tutsi and moderate Hutu

targets were obviously different than the motivations for the deaths of U.S.

peacekeepers in Somalia. These were two events that were characteristically quite

different, yet based on Scheffer's reflection, they still clicked in decision makers' minds.

Perhaps, then, Somalia was not generating fear, necessarily, but provided ample

defense for drawing U.S. and U.N. peacekeepers out of Rwanda – it generated the

"confidence not to rush into each and every humanitarian catastrophe," as Scheffer

reports[39]. So then why was the shadow of the Mogadishu killings a reason that decision-

makers like Scheffer could confidently give in successfully arguing for a "reason-

headed approach"? For the dual-process theory of System 1 and System thinking,

Kahneman argues that "When uncertain, System 1 bets on an answer, and the bets are

guided by experience. Then rules of the betting are intelligent: recent events and the

current context have the most weight in determining an interpretation"[40]. Recent events

and current contexts constitute data that System 1 may automatically draw upon –

Kahneman's description of this phenomenon does not require that the data be a certain

type. By extending Kahneman's argument to Somalia, we see that events that are

chronologically proximate but that are not strongly causally related can still influence

decision-making, even if they are only related by one dimension – chronological

proximity.

So there is one explanation for the undue influence of Somalia – the conflation

of differences between Somalia and Rwanda based on one dimension. Another possible

psychological explanation for the undue influence of Somalia on risk assessments is the

tendency for humans to construct *causal* relationships between only correlated events. Kahneman has conducted experiments that show how people will construct causal relationships, if they are simply provided with two words next to one another on a page[41]. Can decision makers locate causal relationships between crises or events in two different regions, when these crises or events do not have a strong causal relationship to one another? Given our tendency to see relationships between things or events that may not be, this is a possibility.

Yet Scheffer and the other decision-makers were not oblivious to the influence of Mogadishu, and were experts in the field of international atrocity law and genocide response; simply noting that Scheffer did not recognize a link between Somalia and Rwanda for decision-making would be a reductive analysis, because experts often *do* recognize these links. Two things are relevant for more fully painting a picture: first, Mercier has argued that "expert reasoning is responsible for some of the most stunning human achievements, but also for some of the most disastrous decisions ever made"[42]. Even experts are prone to disastrous mistakes, and it is not always the case that a layperson's decision about the same issue will be worse than an expert's. For experts that have worked on several conflicts, patterns and habits of response tactics may be questioned less often as they become more ingrained.

Second, Scheffer was not called upon to defend his confidence in deciding not to "rush into each and every humanitarian catastrophe," so he did not have to defend the cognitive link between information about Mogadishu, and the feeling of confidence in the decision *not* to intervene in Rwanda. The report, too, did not provide him with the argumentative material with which he could have defended any type of interventionist

action, by questioning the link between Somalia and Rwanda. In the vein of a dual-process theory of thinking, the lack of pressure on Scheffer to defend his decision, or define the criteria and data on which he based his decision, let System 1 seamlessly relate Mogadishu and Kigali on the basis of one dimension of similarity – their chronological proximity.

This points to an important place where report-writers may intervene on the behalf of eliciting better decision-making. Scheffer may not have been able to report so confidently that rushing "into each and every humanitarian catastrophe" was a bad idea if the undue influence of Somalia on decision-making about Rwanda was made explicit to him and other decision-makers. The reason that the report should have directly and explicitly addressed Somalia is because deliberate reasoning offers a powerful way to question the System 1 linkages that conflated differences between the deaths of peacekeepers in Somalia, and speculative risk assessments for the fates of peacekeepers in Rwanda. This is because deliberate reasoning engages System 2 thinking, asking the audience to think through the dimensions they are using in order to evaluate the set of choices they are faced with.

It is one task to evaluate the action that you believe exist for any one decision, but another issue pervading the issue of Somalia for Rwanda, based on Scheffer's reaction, was the constriction of the set of available actions believed to exist for acting on Rwanda. Scheffer recalls that "we were not going to rush into each and every humanitarian catastrophe," but "rushing into a humanitarian catastrophe" is only one choice of a much wider set of actions and powers that the U.S. government had to use at

their disposal. Dallaire, importantly, was offering a much simpler solution – the addition of approximately 5,000 troops in order to mitigate the violence[43].

What Scheffer illuminates is that he felt confident basing an argument for inaction on the rejection of an actually quite narrow set of actions – those of direct intervention. Scheffer's feeling of confidence in inaction is a reaction to the type of intervention that took place in Somalia, rather than a reaction to the types of action that were possible in the face of violent conflict in Rwanda. That Scheffer felt confident in this reasoning shows how previous conflicts that precede the conflict of interest can influence the calculus for inaction and make inaction a more achievable scenario.

One of the criterion for each of the reports that are considered in this thesis is that they are addressed to decision makers who still hold power to act. While a small intervention would not have likely quelled all the violence in Rwanda in April 1994, Romeo Dallaire had continually offered an additional 5,000 troops at this point in the genocide, who could have mitigated the number of Rwandans killed[44]. This was a solution that the U.S. could have implemented, even though diplomatic efforts at the Arusha Accords had failed prior to the genocide.

By explicitly using the potential effect of Somalia to invent arguments about the onset of the genocide in Rwanda, a report could have introduced the possibility for decision makers to factor the influence of chronologically proximate events into their risk calculations. Report-writers are not prophets, but writing may be a means through which to make present the factors that may elicit irrational decision-making. Additionally, just because the deaths of U.S. soldiers in Somalia were different than the

Rwandan genocide in a number of ways does not mean that the report-writer can't use the tragedy of these deaths as a starting point for argumentation.

The curated report as a rhetorical product should consider that the writer captures the attention of his or her interlocutor through giving the audience reason to pay attention to his or her arguments. One might argue that a report that explicitly dealt with Somalia from the outset might have been met with aversion, given that Somalia had sparked U.S. aversion in African peacekeeping operations as a whole. However, it is undeniable that the U.S. deaths in Mogadishu struck U.S. decision makers strongly, and that the deaths of Rwandans *should* have been striking the national conscience. Finding a source of rhetorical inventiveness could have leaned on principle of equal human lives, illustrating the tragedy of the Rwandan genocide while engaging decision makers who were emotionally struck by Blackhawk Down.

It is not a simple rule that rhetors should constantly seek to tease apart the relationship between chronologically proximate events on the principle that objective analyses requires looking at only one event at a time, because sometimes the relationship that is posited is beneficial for decision-making processes. What does matter, however, is that decision makers engage in deliberation and System 2 thinking in order to defend the criteria they are using in order to posit relationships between crises, and in what manner.

One might note that conflating differences between two African countries on the basis of one dimension might be characteristic of a neo-colonial framework, and more troubling is the possibility that two broad criteria – that Somalia was also an African country and contained U.S. peacekeeping forces – would be enough for some decision

makers to conflate differences between Somalia and Rwanda for risk assessments. Writing about confidence, the same feeling that Scheffer attributes to his own defence of non-intervention in Rwanda to other decision-makers, Kahneman sketches the affective underpinnings of many of our thoughts: "Confidence is a feeling, which reflects the coherence of the information and the cognitive ease of processing it"[45]. U.S. decision makers should be extremely well-versed on the diversity and particularities of each African country, in order to avoid conflating important differences between African countries simply based on one or two criteria.

Another troubling aspect to the reception in Washington to the ICRC report is that the influence of Somalia and Rwanda is not an isolated circumstance of using recent contexts to judge current events in African countries. There is ample evidence to suggest that U.S. decision makers have let recent events influence decision-making processes about African countries several times with negative consequences. Brown documents that the decision to evacuate Americans from the U.S. Embassy in Bangui following intelligence that Séléka forces were marching from the north of the Central African Republic was influenced by "the September 2012 assault on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya – an attack that had led to the death of four Americans, including the U.S. Ambassador, Christopher Stevens"[46]. Brown documents the effect that this attack had on the decision to evacuate Americans from Bangui: "as one official later acknowledged, Benghazi 'was so much part of the bloodstream at that point, that it pretty much laid the groundwork' for the decision" and that "One NGO official was less charitable, later describing the decision as a 'knee-jerk response' to Benghazi"[47].

The pattern recurs today, following Bangui; after an ambush in Niger that killed four Americans in the Fall of 2017, the Pentagon prompted "an ongoing Pentagon assessment of Special Operations forces worldwide"[48]. The generalizability of fear for all military missions around the globe, given an incident in a particular country at a particular time, is reason for concern, and not because the deaths of American soldiers are any less relevant or serious. What is relevant are the stakes of failing to question the validity of extending our reactions to American deaths in a particular place, at a particular time. Perhaps for certain circumstances, the validity of reacting to peacekeeping or military missions in neighboring states, regions, or proximate spaces of conflict as a reaction to a singular event is a legitimate and reasonable decision, but there are potential consequences for failing to introduce conscious deliberation about the reasons and basis for extending this validity. As with Rwanda, the reaction to Somalia arguably prevented peacekeepers in Kigali from mitigating violence.

In many ways, these anecdotes illustrate how myopic we are, both into the future and when looking to the past. Yet they are also illustrations of self-interest; when it comes to saving human lives, the value of life is still connected to preserving one's own "people"; the decisions to evacuate Kigali and Bangui show how national security can also be a type of "knee-jerk reaction" when it comes to U.S. involvement abroad.

Overall, the ICRC report shows how report-writers need to question the settings that decision-makers will be able to make effective decisions in, and tailor the arguments in reports to the actions that they seek. Engaging the individual conscience, like a report addressed to Obama about the decision to launch limited military strikes, is different than the ICRC report, because Obama holds the power to directly implement

strikes. Scheffer, on the other hand, needed to defend action to his colleagues, and the ICRC report should have provided Scheffer with defensible arguments that allowed him to accurately convey the scope, intensity, and importance of the Rwandan genocide. If that the writer seeks come from entire institutions that use decision making processes, the reader should have the ability to place the issue in the discourses of the entire, relevant institution. The repoort also should have responded to the audience's risk assessment for intervening, as influenced by Somalia, as well as the civil war and neo-colonial frameworks used to interpret violent in Rwanda.

Therefore the ICRC report illustrates that while making an individual impact is a success, anticipating the collective and political nature of the required actions means understanding the psychology, frames and risk assessments that permeate decision making bodies during violent conflicts.

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Mapping Ethnic Cleansing in Bosnia

When James P. Finkel presented evidence of Serb ethnic cleansing in Bosnia to Madeleine Albright in the 1990s, he presented evidence *in response* to Albright's existing assessment of Bosnia, how Albright framed the Bosnian conflict, and the psychological limitations of all audiences that Slovic documents. In responding well to these three characteristics of his audience, Finkel was able to create the propensity for action and provide Albright with clear justifications for action.

The Bosnian and Rwandan genocides both took place in the 1990s, and the same key cast of U.S. decision makers were tasked with monitoring both regions. During the Balkan wars, David Scheffer encouraged James P. Finkel to present his evidence of Serb ethnic cleansing, gathered by Finkel and Jon Western in the State Department, to Madeleine Albright. Finkel's presentation was highly successful in engaging Albright and opening the door for action. Finkel describes Albright's reaction:

> I was mostly preoccupied with getting through my admittedly very low-tech presentation at the time and wasn't concentrating on Ambassador Albright's reaction. However, during his recounting of the story of this particular briefing during a conference at Vanderbilt University several years ago, Dave Scheffer claimed that he was watching Ambassador Albright's reaction very closely. He characterized her eyes as I added several layers of information and the pattern began to emerge as "becoming wide as saucers". I recall receiving a hearty thank you from Ambassador Albright when I finished. She asked several additional questions and urged me to produce a formal paper as quickly as possible[1]

In this sense, Finkel's presentation is a prime example of a successful curated report, because it was able to meet the two distinct challenges of a curated report – capturing and shaping attention – while addressing the problems its audience faced.

Finkel joined Jon Western in the U.S. State Department to analyze intelligence arriving from the Balkans[2]. Finkel recalls that

pioneering analytic work on ethnic cleansing in the Balkans was conducted by INR analyst Jon Western (currently the Provost at Mt Holyoke College). Jon's experience working on this question and the events leading to his resignation are recounted in Samantha Power's book, *A Problem From Hell*[3]. The key was that Jon had detected a pattern in the way that the Bosnian Serb combined forces attacked Muslim cities[4]

Finkel was able to persuade Albright that the information he and Jon Western had collected in the State Department reflected systematic ethnic cleansing on the part of the Serb militias tracking through Bosnia.

Finkel's modeling techniques use the temporal revelation of visual information in order to challenge the process through which the explanatory framework of "spontaneous violence" was maintained. Finkel also categorizes his data such that it reflects the stages of a rhetorical speech, and by building to the heart of his argument, Finkel challenges the dominant narrative of "ancient hatreds" by using visual patterns as proxies for the systematic nature of Serb ethnic cleansing. Lastly, by translating data about thousands of atrocities into a visual map, Finkel pioneered a way of displaying data-driven imagery to describe events that also generate statistical information.

In the light of Finkel's description of Albright's reaction, this visual display of information was effective in meeting the argumentative aim of the report – to prove the systematic nature of atrocities. Using visual patterns as proxies for the reality in Bosnia offers a powerful challenge to the cognitive process of psychic numbing, because the visual maps still engage System 1 thinking, but use imagery, rather than statistics, to communicate the extent of the violence and the setting over which the violence occurred.

One of the crucial factors that curated reports should respond to are the explanatory frameworks that the audience is using to interpret the violence occurring in

the country or region of interest. Finkel discusses the prevalence of inaccurate explanatory frameworks that were used prior to his presentation. Finkel specifically cites the prevalence of the "ancient hatreds" and "spontaneous violence" frameworks in U.S. analyses of Bosnia: "The dominant narrative up to that point in the Bosnian War had been that the atrocities where they occurred were singular events mostly arising out of spotaneous violence fueled by 'ancient hatreds'"[5]. The ancient hatreds narrative, which Power has also discussed in *A Problem From* Hell, is not exclusive to Bosnia. Leaders have often invoked the ancient hatreds argument; even Obama, in a press statement about Syria, noted that "the American people have the good sense to know that we cannot resolve the underlying conflict in Syria with our military. In that part of the world, there are ancient sectarian differences, and the hopes of the Arab Spring have unleashed forces of change that are going to take many years to resolve"[6]. Obama's larger point is that violence in Syria is intractable, and one of the reasons he gives for this illustration is the notion of "ancient sectarian differences"; yet difference is not a deterministic precursor of hatred and violence. One of the major flaws of the "ancient hatreds" argument is that it often constructs a deterministic link between difference and hatred.

The argument that conflict is borne from ancient hatreds between different ethnic groups also emphasizes a particular take on history, and de-emphasizes or conflates the power imbalance inherent in situations of mass atrocities or genocides. When mass atrocities and genocides occur, victims and perpetrators are not on equal footing – this defies the definition of mass atrocities or genocides. The term "ancient hatreds" collects the hatreds of both sides in one singular, neat term, de-emphasizing

which hatreds belong to which side, and how these hatreds are mobilized. If it is

impossible to parse out hatreds, and the violent mobilization of hatred, then it is almost

impossible for the determination of mass atrocities to arise from this framework. Like

the civil war framework, grouping hatreds together in an interpretive lens means that it

is harder to determine power dynamics or imbalances in the struggle.

Additionally, the "ancient hatreds" framework attempts to link one's current

understanding of the violence with a general historicity of the region in which the

violence occurs, subverting any knowledge of coexistence to a clash between groups.

As this knowledge is subverted, examples of coexistence fail to fit within the narrative.

Alongside the explanatory framework of ancient hatreds is a framework of

spontaneous violence. When Finkel writes that "the dominant narrative up to that point

in the Bosnian War had been that the atrocities where they occurred were singular

events mostly arising out of spotaneous violence," the spontaneous violence framework

is an interpretive frame that sees and/or seeks no association between atrocities. While

the ancient hatreds framework conflated a power imbalance between the Serb militias

and victims of ethnic cleansing, the spontaneous violence framework posits that

violence is not systematic.

The impetus for Finkel's presentation was that Jon Western, the INR analyst in

the State Department, and Finkel had detected a pattern in the way that Bosnian Serb

forces were moving through Bosnia:

> The key was that Jon had detected a pattern in the way that the Bosnian Serb
> combined forces attacked Muslim cities. I took up Jon's research after he left
> government and incorporated some order of battle, troop movement, map, and
> detention center information into the mix. What I concluded when everything
> was laid out was that rather than being spontaneous, the movements of forces,
> the pattern of attack, the roundups and expulsions of Muslim civilians, the

locations of detention centers all pointed toward a systematic pattern of activity. This controversial finding directly challenged the dominant narrative[7]

Finkel and Western had found that Bosnian Serb forces moved through the cities and the countryside, committing atrocities in a systematic fashion, and this pattern pointed toward ethnic cleansing against Muslims in Bosnia by Bosnian Serb forces. Finkel took this intelligence and stratified different kinds of data from his intelligence analysis; he then constructed a series of clear, layered maps with different types of data for each layer. Finkel layered these maps one at a time in his presentation for Albright, where the base map showed "Bosnia's key cities, main highways and roads, and county boundaries. Layering back then involved literally taking acetate sheets with additional information and laying them one on top of the other on the base map we had chosen"[8]:

> If my memory serves me correctly, one layer involved cities that had been attacked and their ethnic breakdowns, another involved route of march of specific units (the timing and tactics of their attacks, and their upward chain of command, etc as far as they were known at the time). A third layer showed the breakdown of Bosnia's pre-war military districts and the locations of what had to date been identified as key detention centers. Interestingly, the route of march was mostly along one key highway network with one Muslim majority city attacked after another while each military district contained reports and locational information about at least one major detention center. The presentation also included snippets of other supporting information[9]

The method of stratifying data about systematic Serb atrocities into layers of information inscribed onto maps calls upon certain points of agreement with the audience in order to persuade. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca argue that effective argumentation begins by an attempt to establish grounds of agreement with one's interlocutor[10]. By beginning with a base map, the temporality of the treatment as new information was revealed in stages reflects distinct parts of a rhetorical argument. The selection of the "base map," which included "Bosnia's key cities, main highways and

roads, and county boundaries," establishes agreement with an audience: cities, roads, and boundaries are both commonplace features on maps in general, and though boundaries can be a highly contested feature of maps (as in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict), Finkel knew that Albright was receptive to information about atrocities in the Balkans, because "Dr. Albright at that point was UN Ambassador and was one of the more outspoken proponents in the Administration for a more robust response to the atrocities that were taking place"[11]. Therefore, the selection of evidence for the base map that called upon basic features of Bosnia's political geography established a high degree of audience agreement from the outset.

Finkel arranged the layers of the maps such that the presentation, taking place linearly through time (in the same way that one would read a report), builds to the determination of systematic ethnic cleansing. Finkel used a linear variable (time) in order to prove the emergence of a pattern. The revelation of information through time reflects modes of communication that also take place linearly through time, such as reading or speaking. It is important to note, however, that the presentation does not use the time variable in order to construct a timeline and point out recent events as they occurred in temporal order. As time proceeded in the presentation, different stratified layers of data were revealed, even though data points on each map layer reflected events that occurred at different points in time of the recent past. Therefore the type of presentation, in which Finkel mimics a written text or a speech that moves through time, calls upon the fact that atrocities accumulate over time; whereas the selection of evidence that builds to an emergent pattern from layered maps assigns a specific characteristic to the accumulation of these atrocities – their systematic nature.

Brilliantly, the accumulation of atrocities over time is something that Albright had already been observing, because she was attuned to the crisis in Bosnia, as were many officials in the State Department at the time. Thus the presentation still calls upon this term of agreement about the evidence presented, even as it challenges the ancient hatreds and spontaneous violence frameworks by building to an emergent pattern. Thus evidence selection challenges the notion that atrocities were isolated moments of cruelty, and that each side equally committed atrocities.

In addition, by translating data about thousands of atrocities into a visual map, Finkel pioneered a now-common way of using imagery to elicit an emotional reaction from events that require statistical description, suggesting that this presentation was effective in eliciting the emotional reaction or willingness to help that psychic numbing and pseudoinefficacy usually suppress. Finkel could have reported statistics of the atrocities that were taking place in Bosnia, and then argued that based on intelligence about movements from the army, the Bosnian Serbs were generating statistical deaths of Bosnian Muslims. Instead, by translating intelligence about atrocities onto a two-dimensional, visual-spatial representation, Finkel created a presentation that still engaged System 1 thinking, but in a different way than our reactions to simple statistics.

Kahneman sketches some of the automatic bases of System 1 that have relevance for the emergence of a pattern in Finkel's presentation: "I describe System 1 as effortlessly originating impressions and feelings that that are the main sources of the explicit beliefs and deliberate choices of System 2. The automatic operations of System 1 generate surprisingly complex patterns of ideas, but only the slower System 2 can construct thoughts in an orderly series of steps"[12]. It is not hard to see that automatic

pattern recognition and attention paid to new visual input are therefore the domain of System 1 thinking. Finkel has stated that he spoke to Albright and explained the maps as he layered them, introducing the deliberative power of System 2, giving coherent, reasoned form to the System 1 visual recognition of shapes, lines, patterns, single words, and other characteristics of the maps. The pairing of these two systems provided a powerful way to interpret the imagery that Albright was provided with, and so part of the effectiveness of Finkel's presentation is due to the way that he paired reasoned deliberation with the interpretation of data that represented thousands of atrocities in Bosnia.

Because System 1 and System 2 are not separate channels of cognitive processing, the ability to use System 2 in order to interpret System 1 impressions shows the power of reasoning and deliberation, as Mercier envisions it. When Mercier writes that the argumentative view of reasoning "can act as a bridge between the cognitive and the social approaches to reasoning," he suggests that there is a link between our cognition, and the speech we take up in social settings[13]. In the social setting of the meeting with Albright, Finkel provided visual patterns that engaged System 1, while providing reasoned deliberation about the emerging patterns in order to challenge the simple System 1 reactions associated with psychic numbing.

It is important to notice that not all reports about mass atrocities have been failures, or even partial failures. Finkel's argumentative aim was not to persuade Albright of drastic measures, like bombing Serb militia forces, but it is easy to see how Finkel's report persuaded others of Serb atrocities and directed attention toward them. If Albright had not ordered that attention be directed toward Bosnia, the U.S. may not

have become sufficiently interested in the war atrocities, Srebrenica, Sarajevo, and the

prolongment of the war to have intervened with NATO forces in the 1990s. The

economist Richard Lanham has argued that attention is a precious commodity, and that

due to the scarcity of attention, certain issues will take precedence over others[14]. The

success of Finkel's presentation is that it curated the propensity for action, and by doing

so, likely influenced the actions that would follow. This probably prevented many more

atrocities from taking place.

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[1] Jim Finkel, Personal communication with the author, March 2018.

[2] ibid.

[3] Samantha Power, *A Problem From Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (NewYork: Basic Books, 2002): 1-640.

[4] Jim Finkel, Personal communication with the author, March 2018.

[5] ibid.

[6] Barack Obama, "Statement by the President on Syria," United States White House Office of the Press Secretary, August 31, 2013, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/31/statement-president-syria.

[7] Finkel, Personal communication with the author, March 2018.

[8] ibid.

[9] ibid.

[10] Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 65.

[11] Jim Finkel, Personal communication with the author, March 2018.

[12] Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow,* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 21.

[13] Hugo Mercier, "The Argumentative Theory: Predictions and Empirical Evidence," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 20 no.9 (September 2016): 690.

[14] Richard Lanham, *The Economics of Attention: Style and Substance in the Age of Information* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press Books, 2006), 1-326.

Writing In Dissent: The U.S. State Department Memo on Syria

Bashar al-Asad's campaign of chemical weapons atrocities against Syrian civilians has prompted decision makers to write influential reports about U.S. policy toward Syria. One of these important reports is a dissent memo released by more than fifty State Department officials in 2016[1]. By releasing the memo through a dissent channel, U.S. officials used the motion of dissent to draw attention to Obama's foreign policy, and advanced reasoned judgments to justify limited military strikes in Syria. Critically, the officials used mass atrocities in Syria as a foundation from which to advance their argument for policy change.

Syria presented the toughest of dilemmas for Obama, who was wracked over decisions about whether to intervene or not. Due to the drastic escalation in the Syrian war between Asad's Ghouta attack in 2013, and the release of the dissent memo, there were powerful reasons for not getting involved in Syria in 2016. Russia's relationship with the Syrian regime had tightened, the proxy nature of the warfare ballooned and intensified, Da'esh grew to exert more power and influence, the spillover of refugees into Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey grew, and the conflict between Turkey and Kurds demanded hard choices about strategic American involvement. Against this backdrop, the memo makes an important argument: allowing atrocities to continue only secures an insecure future. The fate of international security is contingent on judicious actions to quell the violence, the memo says, and without action, the U.S. will eventually experience security risks that stem directly from the Syrian war.

The main action that the dissent memo calls for – limited military strikes against the Syrian regime – is borne from a separation of powers between the State Department

and the President. As Commander-In-Chief, Obama could order strikes against al-Asad. Although Obama had given speeches advocating for military strikes against Syria following al-Asad's August 2013 chemical weapons attack in Eastern Ghouta[i], he thereafter decided to seek Congress's approval for these strikes and did not enforce his red line. Although Obama has been harshly criticized for failing to take military action after the Ghouta attack, he was not resistant to the principle of international humanitarian action. Importantly, he was the first president to place issues of atrocity prevention "for the first time squarely at the center of an Administration's agenda"[2]. A presidential study directive that Obama released in 2011 highlighted the lack of a "comprehensive policy framework and a corresponding interagency mechanism for preventing and responding to mass atrocities in genocide"[3].

Obama's effort to defend strikes to Congress in 2013 is representative of domestic efforts to act on atrocities overseas, lending support to Samantha Power's observation that "it is in the realm of domestic politics that the battle to stop genocide is lost"[4]. Syria certainly demonstrates that the question of foreign intervention will always be influenced by domestic politics. Obama was cognizant that America was tired of war when he made his case for military strikes in 2013, and a poll in 2013 by CNN/ORC revealed that nearly 70% of Americans believed it was not in U.S. national interest to become involved in Syria; the same poll revealed that more than 70% of Americans believe airstrikes in Syria would "not achieve significant American goals"[5].

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[i] Asad's strategy has been to besiege this area and continually strike the neighborhoods east of the capital Damascus. These neighborhoods are collectively known as Eastern Ghouta; the Ghouta chemical attack was one of the most deadliest chemical weapons attacks in the course of the Syrian war, and took place during August 2013. Bombs containing sarin gas were launched into Eastern Ghouta, and 1,400 Syrians died in the attack.

The dissent memo, as the product of domestic efforts to address mass atrocities, is highly inventive in how it responds to Obama's framing of the Syrian crisis to an American public. Due to the memo's ineffectiveness in persuading Obama to act militarily on Syria, the aim of this chapter is to provide a rhetorical judgment of the effectiveness of the memo by discussing its arguments, and how these arguments engage with prior public statements about military intervention in Syria. Providing a rhetorical judgment of the memo's effectiveness is relevant for understanding the relationship between broader discussions about mass atrocities and the specific arguments that are made about military engagement or disengagement.

Like the other reports considered in this thesis, the Syria dissent memo fits three important criteria: it deals with documented and systematic mass atrocities, intelligence existed to prove that these atrocities were occurring, and decision makers held various forms of power to act on this intelligence. While the memo discusses various topics alongside mass atrocities, including the role of Da'esh in the Syrian region, a humanitarian imperative lays at the heart of the memo.

Due to important political powers, I will argue that Barack Obama was the primary audience member that the dissent memo tried to persuade, based on the asymmetry in power between the State Department and the President, and Obama's prior support for military strikes, despite not having authorized them. Obama's unique powers that gave him the right to launch military strikes were the exact actions that the dissent memo sought. So even though the dissent memo is addressed to the "Director of Policy Planning," the formal, stated recipient of a rhetorical text may significantly vary

from the audience the text desires to influence, and Obama was arguably the primary audience for the arguments the memo advances.

Like the ICRC report issued from Kigali, Rwanda, the dissent memo is only partially effective at addressing three crucial factors of audience that should matter in the process of argument invention for a curated report. In terms of eliciting direct actions and meeting the argumentative aim it sought, the memo fails, because Obama ultimately refrained from directly launching strikes at al-Asad. Methodologically, it is difficult to measure changes in Obama's adherence to the belief that limited military strikes launched by the U.S. would have helped the course of the Syrian war. While difficult to pinpoint why Obama decided not to act in wake of the memo, the memo fails to fully respond to the way that Obama framed the Syrian war, his risk assessment for intervention, and psychic numbing.

Arguments that push for military strikes in the memo fail to resolve a relationship between the risks Obama anticipated, and the explanatory frameworks he used for U.S.—Syria relations. One of the main rhetorical devices that the memo relies on is cause-and-effect arguments; the memo posits that due to a "cause," or limited military strikes, certain "effects" will take place that are favorable to U.S. leadership and the U.S. in general. The writers almost exclusively rely on imaginative future scenarios in order to illustrate the outcomes, or "effect" side, of these cause-and-effect arguments. While these scenarios strengthen the framework of US stability and Syrian instability that Obama used to interpret the conflict to the American public, they do not adequately address Russia, Libya, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Because Russia, Libya, Iraq, and Afghanistan significantly shaped Obama's assessment of the risks of intervening

militarily in Syria, the cause-and-effect strategy of argument fails to resolve the risks Obama anticipated with the explanatory frameworks he used. An inadequate treatment of the risks of intervention threatens the viability of the cause-and-effect arguments the authors use in order to anchor their justification for military strikes.

The memo also attempts to resolve a dichotomy between national security and international humanitarian action that Obama continually posited prior to the memo's release. As anecdotal evidence for imperative-driven decision making, and specifically what Slovic denotes the *prominence effect*[6], Obama continually defended both national security and inaction in Syria by making the risks of intervention salient (and by failing to make the risks of nonintervention salient). In response, the writers of the dissent memo place national security and international humanitarian action under an organizing moral framework, in order to argue for action, rather than inaction. However, the report relies heavily on statistics in order to describe mass suffering in Syria. The selection of statistics as evidence for suffering fails to support the memo's effort to resolve the dichotomy between national security and humanitarian action, due to the inability of statistics to generate the affect that underpins moral action[7].

Is the dissent memo a complete failure? While the relationship between different arguments, and certain types of selected evidence, are faulty, in many ways the dissent memo displays a clear and concerted effort to respond to Obama's prior public statements about Syria. Whether this was a conscious effort by the officials to identify characteristics of the audience they were trying to influence or not, it is an adaptation to audience. Particularly, the dissent memo responds to characteristics of Obama's

rhetoric, including his framing of the U.S. as a stable actor and Syria as an unstable actor.

As a whole, Obama's rhetoric about Syria can not be understood without understanding the implications of the red line that he drew in a 2012 press conference, because this red line became a precedent for judging his foreign policy toward Syria. When fielding a question by Chuck Todd, Obama said: "We have been very clear to the Asad regime, but also to other players on the ground, that a red line for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized. That would change my calculus. That would change my equation"[8]. Obama places value on clarity and precision in his answer, emphasizing that "we have communicated in no uncertain terms" and that the use of chemical weapons would "change my calculus significantly"[9]. The repetition of terms like "clear," "calculus," "equation," and "no uncertain terms" use the language of mathematical precision in order to characterize the potential U.S. response. By clearly defining the U.S. response and placing the "red line" within a larger "calculus," the red line itself becomes part of a system that is clearly perceived – both now and in the potential future – by Obama. This certainty is connected to U.S. perception and response, so uncertainty and chance are framed as those qualities which the U.S. reacts to.

Obama also distances America from responsibility for the instability of the Syrian crisis by casting the American response in clear, certain terms; this characterization contrasts the uncertainty and volatility of the conflict itself. In the press conference, Obama stated: "We have put together a range of contingency plans"[10]. Obama emphasizes the clarity of the process around constructing contingency plans,

though, rather than the clarity of the contingency plans themselves. This clarity, too, is communicated in a mathematical lexicon, which suggests a type of absolute, calculated clarity. Obama's assertion of absolute clarity on the American side fulfills a sense of security about knowledge and information. Obama extends this clarity to the potential way that he would conditionally act, given a chemical weapons attack.

After Al-Asad launched his chemical weapons attack into Eastern Ghouta, Obama's speech on August 31, 2013 reiterated this framework of American stability, but introduced a vantage point that considered Asad's atrocities in Damascus: "we are the United States of America, and we cannot and must not turn a blind eye to what happened in Damascus. Out of the ashes of world war, we built an international order and enforced the rules that gave it meaning"[11]. The U.S., in this representation, is similar to 17th century Miltonic representations of God, wherein form, shape, and geometry are taken and carved from Chaos in order to make an universally satisfactory order. The U.S. is both the creator and the enforcer of the "international order" that was shaped from "the ashes of world war," and Asad's atrocities introduce instability by threatening this order and the rules that represent it.

In echoing the way that Obama framed the U.S. as a certain, stable actor reacting to an unstable, volatile Syria, the dissent memo describes both nations similarly: "Asad's systematic violations against the Syrian people are the root cause of the instability that continues to grip Syria and the broader region"[12]. A reader will note that the term "grip Syria" is a metaphor that uses a motion – to "grip" something – to imply how al-Asad's actions have ramifications for Syria as a whole. To "grip" something is an experience understood by an individual body, and thus the dissent

memo uses common sensory experiences to gauge the extent of the conflict, in a similar way to the ICRC report. The category of "instability" is more easily assigned to an entire diplomatic, geospatial entity if that entity is singularized and concretized through the associations of its signifier – that of the individual body.

It is a rhetorical choice to characterize the U.S. as a stable entity, from which stable actions flow, and the Syrian regime as an unstable actor that creates regional volatility. Thus the memo responds to the categorical designations of stability and instability that Obama ascribed to the U.S. and Syria respectively by echoing this framework when referring to Syria. But the memo does not just respond to this framework by arguing that "instability…continues to grip Syria and the broader region"[13]. One of the two main recurring argumentative strategies the officials use in this memo are cause-and-effect arguments, which serve to strengthen the impression of US stability.

Cause-and-effect arguments are typically strong ways to advance an argument. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca argue that "among the sequential relations, the causal link plays, without dispute, an essential role, and its argumentative effects are as numerous as they are varied"[14]. According them, the causal argument is type of argumentation "which relies on the intervention of a causal link to try, with a given event as starting point, to increase or decrease the belief in the existence of a cause which would explain it, or of an effect which would result from it"[15]. In the dissent memo, the "given event" serving as a "starting point" are limited military strikes, and the memo tries to increase the audience's belief that various effects stem from these

strikes, which include a greater likelihood for a diplomatic solution, bolstered military support for the fight against Da'esh, and U.S. leverage in the Middle East.

Yet cause-and-effect arguments are not only strong because the presence of both a "cause" and an "effect" can give the impression of predictive certainty – a comforting notion when faced with a dilemma. There is also a psychological basis for why cause-and-effect arguments in the memo may be a strong way to advance an argument. Kahneman argues in *Thinking, Fast and Slow* that our automatic, intuitive realm of System 1 thinking constructs causal relationships between events that may only be randomly associated with one another. Kahneman notes the associative powers of System 1 thinking by showing how System 1 can treat "the mere conjunction of two words as representations of reality"[16]. As Kahneman explains, "The mechanism that causes these mental events has been known for a long time: it is the association of ideas"[17]. Cause-and-effect arguments, then, speak well to the tendency of System 1 thinking to construct concrete, causal relationships between information that is made present to the audience. Further, since Kahneman also argues that we often don't think about all of the data that we do not see in front of us – he calls this phenomenon "What You See Is All There Is"[18] – so the very act of selecting certain data and juxtaposing this data alongside other information in a report may be enough for System 1 to assume that these data sets are (causally) related.

The memo uses cause-and-effect arguments as a primary argumentative strategy to justify military strikes against Syria. For example, the memo states: "Initiating targeted military strikes in response to egregious regime violations of the CoH would raise the cost for the regime and bolster the prospects for a real ceasefire – without cities

being bombed and humanitarian convoys blocked – and lead to a more serious

diplomatic process, led by the United States"[19]. Due to a cause, limited military strikes,

certain effects will follow. The effects that the memo states here are relatively clear:

military strikes would deter further humanitarian violations, and increase the probability

of diplomatic talks led by the U.S.

While the memo clearly states these effects, and draws a clear causal link

between military strikes and the heightened likelihood of diplomatic solutions, these

effects rest on a number of assumptions that one can put into question without much

difficulty: the willingness of parties involved to defer leadership for a diplomatic

process to the U.S., the probability that Asad would be significantly deterred by *limited*

military strikes in a full-blown regional war, that the targeted military strikes would be

successful, and that retaliation from powers like Iran and Russia would be insignificant

enough in the aftermath of the strikes to allow for an environment where diplomatic

talks can occur. In many ways, due to the proxy nature of the conflict, strikes against

Asad are also primary or secondary strikes against Iran, Russia, and other major allies

of Asad in the region. Therefore by emphasizing effects that are clear, certain, and do

not address the tangled network of messy proxy relations, the cause-and-effect

argument foregrounds U.S. stability in action. Therefore these future scenarios are used

to argue for limited military strikes based on the outcomes they represent, and these

future scenarios respond to the way that Obama characterized the U.S. as a certain,

stable actor.

Many cause-and-effect scenarios throughout the memo echo a high degree of

certainty – both in the effects that strikes will generate, and more specifically in the

deterrent power of military strikes: "impeding or ending such atrocities will not only save lives but further our political objectives"[20]. This example also illustrates confidence in U.S. political clout and leverage following strikes. The memo continues: "Shifting the tide of the conflict against the regime will increase the chances for peace by sending a clear signal to the regime and its backers that there will not be a military solution to the conflict"[21]. While the proposed action is military strikes, the memo confidently asserts that this will "shift the tide of the conflict against the regime," echoing another statement from the memo, in which the authors assert that "U.S. military power would serve to promote regime compliance with the CoH [Cessation of Hostilities], and in so doing save lives and alter battlefield dynamics"[22].

Two flaws, however, in these cause-and-effect arguments illuminate how they fail to meet the argumentative aim of the report. First, the effects of limited military strikes are not vividly painted. Admittedly, "vividness" is a complicated theoretical and philosophical term to put into practice. Kind asks how we are supposed to "understand the phenomenology of imagining," and argues that "the notion of vividness ultimately proves to be so problematic as to be philosophically untenable"[23]. Yet despite this problem of definition, in practice it is easier to see how the cause-and-effect lack vividness when considering excerpts from the memo. The memo argues that strikes "would have a direct, mitigating impact on the refugee and IDP crisis," and that the "calm that would ensue after the regime's warplanes are grounded would lessen the importance of armed actors"[24]. If we consider vividness to include the ability of the audience to envision a scene, these "impacts" are too abstract, because they lack specifics about implementation and time frames. For a President preoccupied with the

possibility of mission creep, specifics relating to time frame of implementation would have been important to address.

The second, main flaw of these cause-and-effect arguments has to do with how the authors handle the nature of causal arguments – the "cause" is limited military strikes, and so they begin in the prospective future, and thus the "effects" extend even further into the future. Sole reliance on this argumentative strategy fails to account for the recent contexts of the past that mattered to Obama when making a risk assessment for intervening militarily: Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan. One can seriously question whether the memo does an effective job at dispelling the risks of Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan, so that Obama would believe in the humanitarian precedent the memo puts forth.

It is an issue that the memo buries the issues of Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan by only referring to them obliquely, because conflicts in these three Middle Eastern countries were great weights on Obama's back, and arguably reasons he ended up not launching strikes against Asad. Libya, Iraq, and Afghanistan all factored in Obama's assessments of the risks of intervening militarily in Syria.

Obama had campaigned for his first term as President on the promise of bringing American troops home from Iraq and Afghanistan. The legacy of Iraq and Afghanistan, combined with prospect of becoming mired in another Middle Eastern war, factored heavily into his dilemma of military intervention in Syria. In a speech following the 2013 Ghouta attack, in which Obama tried to justify military strikes but still sought Congress's approval, he said: "First, many of you have asked, won't this put us on a slippery slope to another war? One man wrote to me that we are 'still recovering

from our involvement in Iraq.' A veteran put it more bluntly: 'This nation is sick and tired of war'"[25]. Obama compares prospective involvement in Syria with the "slippery slope" of mission creep that has characterized the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is undeniable that one of Obama's perceived risks for launching military strikes in Syria was the threat of being unable to defend military involvement in Syria to an American public. The two dimensions of similarity between Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria that Obama addresses are U.S. mission creep and the fact that all three of these countries are located in the Middle East.

As with the influence of Somalia on Rwanda, it is troubling that we do not scrutinize the certainty we place on our predictions for involvement in certain regions (i.e. Syria), given the outcomes of U.S. involvement in other regions (i.e. Iraq and Afghanistan). While Iraq and Afghanistan are undoubtedly examples of mission creep and American involvement in the Middle East, the isolated instance of chemical weapons attacks by Asad, and the proposal for military involvement put forth, differed significantly from the U.S. reaction to the "conclusion" that weapons of mass destruction existed and were worth invading Middle Eastern countries for. Kerry attempted to combat equating the Bush Administration's reaction to weapons of mass destruction with a reaction to chemical weapons attacks by using consilience to legitimize the intelligence inquiry that occurred after the Ghouta attack, but Obama ultimately held the power to launch strikes and has since reflected on how torn he felt about the decision in the wake of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Therefore one of Obama's central dilemmas was balancing promises and commitments he had made about wars in the Middle East, and the struggle of deciding

whether to act with his military when al-Asad launched chemical attacks against civilians. Obama said in a speech about Syria following the 2013 Ghouta attack that "A country faces few decisions as grave as using military force, even when that force is limited. I respect the views of those who call for caution, particularly as our country emerges from a time of war that I was elected in part to end"[26].

Russia also factored into Obama's risk assessment; when proposing military strikes in the same speech, Obama said: "this initiative has the potential to remove the threat of chemical weapons without the use of force, particularly because Russia is one of Asad's strongest allies"[27]. The spiderweb of relations that has been spun from the Syrian war is a result of the proxy nature of the warfare, and degraded U.S. relations with Russia would have more implications that simply watered-down U.S. diplomatic leverage or reach in the Middle East. On September 14th, 2013, the U.S. and Russia reached an "framework deal," in which both countries "asked the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to approve procedures for Syria's chemical weapons programme to be destroyed, and for 'stringent verification' that this has taken place"[28]. Because this framework deal placed U.S.-led strikes on hold, the memo's argument for military involvement would have had to address these deals, and Russian complicity and lawlessness in Syrian operations, since the 2013 attack.

Perhaps even more worrisome for Obama than Iraq, Afghanistan, and Russia, however, was the legacy of Libya, and how Libya much more closely resembled Syria in terms of the impetus for military action and its chronological proximity to Asad's Ghouta attack. Obama defended the intervention in Libyan in explicitly humanitarian terms – the goal, as Obama said, was to preserve lives in the face of impending

atrocities: "Not only did Qaddafi endanger the momentum of the nascent Arab Spring, which had recently swept away authoritarian regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, but he also was poised to commit a bloodbath in the Libyan city where the uprising had started, said the president. 'We knew that if we waited one more day, Benghazi – a city nearly the size of Charlotte – could suffer a massacre that would have reverberated across the region and stained the conscience of the world'"[29]. As Kuperman argues, however, following the joint operation in Libya, "Libya…failed to evolve into a democracy; it has devolved into a failed state"[30]. While certain dimensions of similarity connected Iraq and Afghanistan with Syria for the purposes of decision making, the humanitarian dimension strongly connected the legacy of Libya with Syria. On the eve of his Presidency in 2016, it was even more unlikely that Obama was going to risk intervening in Syria, if Libya was an illustration of how a track record of humanitarian interventions in the Middle East would just spell failure once again.

The cause-and-effect arguments in the dissent memo respond to a framework of U.S. stability and Syrian instability, but fail to adequately address Obama's assessment of the risks of limited military strikes, as heavily influenced by Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Russia. Nowhere in the memo do the officials address Libya, Iraq or Afghanistan; the simple failure of failing to address these important risk factors is the failure to address a significant part of Obama's risk assessment for invervention.

Additionally, the cause-and-effect arguments do not adequately address potentially degraded relations with Russia. Even when the memo brings up the issue of Russia, it is buried in the structure of the report. One of the points that addresses Russia begins with "U.S. military power would serve to promote regime compliance with the

CoH, and in so doing save lives and alter battlefield dynamics"[31]. Under this point, near the end of the report, the memo argues: "We are not advocating for a slippery slope that ends in a military confrontation with Russia; rather, we are calling for the credible threat of targeted U.S. military responses to regime violations to preserve the CoH and the political track, which we worked so hard to build"[32]. Yet slippery slopes are slippery by the fact that involvement escalates, beginning with a targeted intervention and slipping into prolonged war over time, not because politicians advocate for slippery slopes from the start of their deliberations. The memo, in addressing Obama, should have addressed the threat of Russia, *given* limited military strikes, rather than assume that the possibility of a slippery slope was diametrically at odds with their proposal for strikes.

Therefore writers do not adequately address the issue of Russia, because they bury a specific discussion of Russia in the visual and written structure of the report. Because Russia is a threat to the stability of US diplomatic relations, Russia threatens the framework of US stability; this means that cause-and-effect arguments don't resolve a key tension between Obama's formulation of the risks of involvement, and the characterization of the U.S. as a stable actor reacting to a volatile, instable Syria.

Another example of when communications about genocide "buried the issue" in the structure of the report is a fax sent by Romeo Dallaire, who was a Canadian General in command of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) forces in Kigali before and during the Rwandan genocide[33]. After talking with a high-level informant from President Habyarimana's government, who cited "inside information from a 'top level trainer' for a pro-regime militia group known as the Interahamwe,'"

Dallaire wrote a fax to the U.N. office in New York that was quickly dismissed[34]. This fax is famous because the genocide could have arguably been prevented if the U.N. office had allowed Dallaire to act quickly and granted the informant refuge, as he had requested. On the second page of the fax, Dallaire wrote:

> 6. Principal aim of Interahamwe in the past was to protect Kigali from RPF [Rwandan Patriotic Front]. Since UNAMIR mandate he has been ordered to register all Tutsi in Kigali. He suspects it is for their extermination. Example he gave was that in 20 minutes his personnel could kill up to 1000 Tutsis.
>
> 7. Informant states he disagrees with anti-Tutsi extermination. He supports opposition to RPF but cannot support killing of innocent persons. He also stated that he believes the president does not have full control over all elements of his old party/faction.
>
> 8. Informant is prepared to provide location of major weapons cache with at least 135 weapons. He already has distributed 110 weapons including 35 with ammunition and can give us details of their location. Type of weapons are G3 and AK47 provided by RGF. He was ready to go to the arms cache tonight – if we gave him the following guarantee: he requests that he and his family (his wife and four children) be placed under <u>our</u> protection[35]

The subject line Dallaire used for the fax is "Request for Protection for Informant." Within the context of U.S. and U.N. – Kigali relations, this subject line as a starting point for argumentation is ineffectual. The informant had broken with Habyarimana's government to supply Dallaire with the information about impending genocide, but the U.S. had made the decision to support the Arusha Accords, a diplomatic agreement. As a result, faith in the Arusha Accords meant that the U.S. had extended faith in a diplomatic agreement that legitimized Habyarimana's government[36]. The government was a key actor for what the U.S. perceived as what Levinger calls a "formal power-sharing agreement,"[37] and thus the fax *begins* by presenting information that contradicts the political aims of the U.S. in Rwanda.

If the U.S. was committed to the Arusha Accords, the risks were subjectively defined as those actions and events that threaten the diplomatic course of action. The informant, by symbolizing a break with government and relaying news of violence that the Accords were supposed to quell, meant that there were perceived consequences of going along with the informant. This may have contributed to the report's failure, in addition to the way that information about the extermination of Tutsis is placed beneath a broader leading headline, as in the dissent memo's treatment of Russia. The extermination of Tutsis is placed beneath leading information about the "Principal aim of the Interahamwe," and even so, this information about Interahamwe is placed on the second page of the report. This does not address, from the outset, the immediacy of the threat. Just as the issues specific to Russia are buried beneath larger, more general, abstract points about strategy, burying the issue of extermination is problematic, as it posed an imminent threat in Rwanda.

The memo also does not address Libya, Iraq, or Afghanistan adequately, simply because the memo does not mention Libya or the risks of specifically humanitarian interventions. There is a strong confidence on the part of the authors that, for example, "impeding or ending such atrocities will not only save lives but further our political objectives"[38]. Here is a point in which the phantom of Libya rears its head, pressing against the certainty of success with the political will of a humanitarian intervention, and the possibility to lose Obama's belief in the viability of the plan is further cemented.

As the Syria war has demonstrated, too, a vicious proxy war defies the simple and neat comparison of actions stemming from one domestic sphere (America) and landing on one international entity. As a reaction to the 2013 speeches, the memo is

clear-eyed in its response to certain aspects of Obama's rhetoric, but as a reorganizing principle, is inadequate to deal with the ripple effects of diplomatic ties that come from an intervention into a conflict that is a proxy web, rather than a conventional "us" versus "them" war. This tactic therefore doesn't capture the proxy nature of the conflict. The cause-and-effect chains in the dissent memo, by simplifying the causal relationship between the actions of one domestic sphere (the U.S.) and one receiving region (Syria), simplify the proxy network of relationships generated by the Syrian conflict.

In a more speculative fashion, a counter-argument to this dissent memo might question the extent to which the demonstrated faith in these posited cause-and-effect chains – that limited military strikes will achieve x, y and z – is simply a blind faith in the narrative that the U.S. is a dominant actor that achieves objectives when carrying out superior military operations. The cause and effect chains here might feel consistent because they are consistent with this prevalent nationalistic narrative, but of course there are many examples in history where the US carried out fruitless military operations, or deployed the military in a limited way at first, which then led to mission creep.

The Language of Moral Humanitarian Intervention and the Memo's Effort to Resolve the Prominence Effect with Statistics

The second primary effort the dissent memo undertakes to argue for limited military strikes is to use a moral framework to resolve tension between national security and humanitarian action. Slovic and Slovic discuss Obama's rhetoric about Syria as anecdotal evidence for the prominence effect, which is an example of imperative-driven

decision making that specifically considers national security and international

humanitarian action as values that are pitted against one another[39]. While Obama stated

in Presidential Study Directive 10 that "preventing mass atrocities and genocide is a

core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the United States,"[40] his

public statements about Syria specifically shed greater light on national security

priorities.

Alongside the examples of Obama's rhetoric that Slovic and Slovic provide in

their discussion of the prominence effect in *Numbers and Nerves,* several more

examples in Obama's rhetoric, prior to the release of the memo, bolster Slovic and

Slovic's conclusions. These examples suggest a dichotomous relationship between

national security and international humanitarian action. Brown asks in his report about

the Central African Republic: "If atrocity prevention really was a core national security

interest, both external critics and certain APB participants wondered, why was the

Administration so selective in acting on it?"[41]. Brown provides an excerpt of a 2013

interview with Obama, that "offered one possible answer" to this question; an extended

excerpt of Obama's response that Brown provides in his report is as follows:

> What I have to constantly wrestle with is where and when can the United States
> intervene or act in ways that advance our national interest, advance our security,
> and speak to our highest ideals and sense of common humanity. As I wrestle
> with those decisions, I am more mindful probably than most of not only our
> incredible strengths and capabilities, but also our limitations. In a situation like
> Syria, I have to ask, can we make a difference in that situation? Would a
> military intervention have an impact? How would it affect our ability to support
> troops who are still in Afghanistan? What would be the aftermath of our
> involvement on the ground? Could it trigger even worse violence or the use of
> chemical weapons? What offers the best prospect of a stable post-Asad regime?
> And how do I weigh tens of thousands who've been killed in Syria versus the
> tens of thousands who are currently being killed in the Congo? Those are not
> simple questions....You make the decisions you think balance all these equities,

and you hope that, at the end of your presidency, you can look back and say, I made more right calls than not that I saved lives where I could[42]

Obama inverts a question-and-answer format. He frames the struggle first, the decisions that he has to "constantly wrestle with," and the questions second, as if the arrangement of his answer means that the questions stem naturally from the articulated struggle that precedes them.

By invoking the pathos of the war in Afghanistan to an American audience, and the weariness associated with an ongoing war with committed American troops, Obama emphasizes the risks of American military involvement. By using "our" to refer to "America," the risks posed by his questions concern the potential risks to America's national security. Importantly, Obama does not simply emphasize national security in and of itself, but national security values become explicitly domestic as they enter in conflict with those values that underpin international action. Obama asks: "Would a military intervention have an impact? How would it affect our ability to support troops who are still in Afghanistan?"[43]. If military intervention is the international action, then the implied risk of this militaristic humanitarian action is framed in terms of America's "ability to support troops who are still in Afghanistan"[44]. Notably, too, threats to American national security stem from an instability and uncertainty that comes from without, not from within.

The effect of separating national security from humanitarian action in Obama's response is the failure to give the risks of *nonintervention* salient footing. In contrast, the risks of intervention are given salient footing by invoking the common knowledge of Afghanistan for an American audience. Obama was deeply thoughtful about issues of international ethics, and a statement following the 2013 Ghouta attack shows how

Obama was aware of the risks of nonintervention, but again, he fails to make them salient through illustration and appeal to the collective memory of his audience: "if we really do want to turn away from taking appropriate action in the face of such an unspeakable outrage, then we must acknowledge the costs of doing nothing"[45]. Acknowledging the "costs of doing nothing" is a reflection of the fact that Obama was well-aware of the trade-offs inherent in every decision, and that there will always be costs associated with either side of a dilemma; bringing the risks of nonintervention to the fore facilitates better decision making, but here they still lack salience – in comparison, they do not carry the pathos of war weariness from Afghanistan.

Slovic's research on the prominence effect in high-level political deliberations about mass atrocities appears to be a strong explanation for the patterned way that Obama defended national security over humanitarian action. As discussed previously, the prominence effect describes how "lofty humanitarian values are systematically devalued in the decision-making process. When intervention to protect thousands of nameless, faceless lives in a distant land is seen to increase risks to national security, security invariably wins. Decisions in support of security appear vastly more defensible than decisions to protect distant lives"[46].

In responding to the separation between national security and humanitarian action that underlies Obama's defense of national security, the memo conceptualizes the relationship between national security and international humanitarian action by consistently applying an organizing moral framework in the memo; this moral framework folds both international ethical action and national security under its wings.

The memo's most frank discussion of atrocities is one touchstone for understanding this organizing moral framework. The memo invokes a "moral rationale":

> With over 400,000 people dead, hundreds of thousands still at risk from regime sieges, and 12 million people from a population of 23 million displaced from their homes, we believe the moral rationale for taking steps to end the deaths and suffering in Syria, after five years of brutal war, is evident and unquestionable. The regime's actions directly result in broader instability and undermine the international system responsible for protection of civilians, prevention of mass atrocities, and accountability for grave violations. The strategic imperatives for taking steps to end the bloodshed are numerous and equally compelling[47]

Strategic imperatives and a moral rationale are not at odds with one another, as they are "equally compelling"[48]. While the authors use a "moral rationale" to defend the humanitarian imperative, they argue that a failure to enforce this humanitarian imperative will end with increased international security concerns, including "broader instability" and the undermining of "the international system"[49]. This security extends to national security when the rest of the memo spells out the strategic imperatives; for example, following this excerpt the authors argue that "impending or ending such atrocities will not only save lives but further our political objectives"[50]. Given that saving lives is continually given a moral basis, the memo argues that political objectives and the moral imperative are not at odds with another, but simultaneously beneficial.

The discussion of Da'esh (or ISIS) in the memo is also one touchstone for understanding this organizing moral framework:

> "Tolerating the Asad regime's continued gross human rights violations against the Syrian people undermines, both morally and materially, the unity of the anti-Da'esh coalition, particularly among Sunni Arab partners. Failure to stem Asad's flagrant abuses will only bolster the ideological appeal of groups such as Da'esh, even as they endure tactical setbacks on the battlefield"[51]

While Obama was less committed to military involvement in Syria, he had made

countering Da'esh a priority in foreign affairs, and spoken several times about the threat

of Da'esh to American national security. Terms like "gross human rights violations"

communicates that these violations are a deep moral wrong, and that they threaten those

who are fighting for American national security. A threat to morality in terms of

humanitarian violations is also a threat to national security, then, and thus using morals

in argumentation to marry national security and international humanitarian action is an

adaptation to the audience for which the memo was intended.

The way that the memo employs an organizing moral framework seems to

reflect the way John Kerry's use of rhetoric in his public statements following the

August 2013 Ghouta attack. In a public speech in August 2013, Kerry uses vivid

imagery in a strategic way, to consciously address the recent, collective memory of Iraq

and Afghanistan for his American audience. Before advocating for a retaliatory

response to Asad's attack, Kerry paints a strong picture of the bodies laying in rows

following the Ghouta attack:

> With our own eyes we have seen the thousands of reports…All of them show
> and report victims with breathing difficulties, people twitching with spasms,
> coughing, rapid heartbeats, foaming at the mouth, unconsciousness and
> death…Instead of being tucked safely in their beds at home, we saw rows of
> children lying side by side, sprawled on a hospital floor, all of them dead from
> Asad's gas and surrounded by parents and grandparents who had suffered the
> same fate. And just as important, we know what the doctors and nurses who
> treated them didn't report – not a scratch, not a shrapnel wound, not a cut, not a
> gunshot wound. We saw rows of dead lined up in burial shrouds, the white linen
> unstained by a single drop of blood[52]

Kerry's imagery calls to attention the value of family, which reflects how the American

audience shapes the chosen imagery. The children lie "side by side…surrounded by

parents and grandparents," invoking the relationships of family, but in a fashion that

shows the dual degradation and preservation of family values in the wake of the tragedy. Republicans formed an essential component of Kerry's composite audience; though he addressed the American public, Kerry was advocating for military retaliation, and Republicans were often openly against military involvement in Syria. Therefore Kerry calls upon a construction of imagery that reflects the speaker's enshrinement of family values by representing their degradation as a tragedy and a threat. There are many possible ways that deaths can be framed: by choosing to focus on family values, Kerry adapts his argumentation to one of his particular audiences – Republicans – that often enshrines the traditional family as a value in and of itself. At the same time, the pathos associated with the deaths of innocents appeals to the bipartisan nature of the issue at stake, showing Kerry's desire to demand Republican reception, but also strive to encompass a more universal American audience with his rhetoric.

In this passage, Kerry uses different vantage points in order to communicate the same scene. Kerry uses the terms "with our own eyes," and "we know what the doctors and nurses who treated them didn't report"[53]. While subtle, the decision to include different vantage points supports Kerry's attempt to legitimize intelligence that had been analyzed about Asad's use of chemical weapons, which the U.S. considers weapons of mass destruction. Recognizing that intelligence about weapons of mass destruction had been handled poorly in the case of Iraq and Afghanistan, Kerry uses consilience in his speech to build the case for the legitimacy of the intelligence he was reporting. Even within images of suffering, using different vantage points around data revealing the use of chemical weapons reflects Kerry's larger strategy of pulling from many different sources that corroborate his conclusions.

The use of pronouns supports Kerry's use of consilience, as well. Kerry's refrain of "we know" is essential for understanding the structure of Kerry's argument for military strikes: Kerry first determines what "we know," before he moves to arguing for military engagement. While Kerry explicitly mentions Iraq and Afghanistan, the structure of moving from collective knowing, emphasized by the repetition of the phrase "we know," to the advancement of action based on this collective knowledge of "we know," specifically addresses the decision to invade Iraq based on inadequate evidence about weapons of mass destruction. Because Kerry deploys this imagery, and the refrain of "we know that" before advocating for a retaliatory response, Kerry structures his speech so that it moves from proof to argument, rather than from argument to proof. This is a direct response to Iraq and well-informed about how chronologically proximate events might affect the perception of his American audience. It also attempts to mobilize the American conscience *toward* international action, rather than invoke collective memory of failure.

While Kerry uses rich imagery and American symbolism in his speeches, there is a critical flaw in the way the memo applies an organizing moral framework, however, and this flaw is founded in the types of selected evidence meant to prompt moral action. This is because the memo relies on large, vague statistics that describe Syrian casualties and Syrian refugees in numbers. This presents a central problem for the persuasiveness of the dissent memo, because Slovic has clearly shown that large, vague statistics do not convey the necessary affect in order for decision makers to find the numbers meaningful:

> large numbers have been found to lack meaning and to be underweighted in decisions unless they convey affect (feeling). This creates a paradox that rational

models of decision making fail to represent. On the one hand, we respond strongly to aid a single individual in need. On the other hand, we often fail to prevent mass tragedies…We believe that this occurs, in part, because as the numbers get larger and larger, we become insensitive; numbers fail to trigger the emotion or feeling necessary to motivate action[54]

Moral action depends on finding meaning in the information that one wants to act on, and so using statistics as the evidence for an organizing moral framework is faulty.

The organizing principle of morality that the authors use to bring national security and international humanitarian together in the memo, then, is not supported by the type of evidence that they use. Consider the specific evidence used to try and marshal Obama's support for the humanitarian imperative that the memo demands: "With over 400,000 people dead, hundreds of thousands still at risk from regime sieges, and 12 million people from a population of 23 million displaced from their homes, we believe the moral rationale…"[55]. Even though Obama is a highly intelligent thinker and leader, with years of training at prestigious institutions of higher learning, it is still impossible for the most intelligent of us to comprehend the feeling of large statistics: "Even the most mathematically gifted human beings are psychologically limied when it comes to attaching feeling to numerical information"[56]. As a result, "important numerical information (e.g., numbers of deaths resulting from war or genocide) comes across as 'dry statistics,' lacking the affect necessary to motivate proper action"[57]. Since the action proposed is morally framed, the report does not respond to the psychological characteristics of the audience when advancing an argument for action based on a moral, humanitarian imperative through its use of large statistics.

Anyone who has seen a photo of Syrian civilians from Eastern Ghouta wrapped in white cloth will have likely felt strong, if not a visceral, sense of emotion. This is

proper and correct, and yet the dissent memo is trapped in its use of statistics. One can argue that suffering is not fully real to those who have not suffered, but to motivate decision makers to action, report-writers can not strip their reports of emotion. As the body of Paul Slovic's research shows, and as the humanistic vein of argumentation and rhetoric also argues, it is ludicrous to assume that objectivity and emotion are at odds with one another. And as Slovic and Peters additionally note, we continually use emotion in order to navigate the world in highly rational ways[58]. Eliciting emotion in a carefully calibrated rhetorical argument is not taking a detour from leading the reader toward the grail of objectivity, but rather making the path more personally meaningful for the reader who decides to continue.

How do we experience moral rightness or wrongness? The Albright-Cohen report, released in 2008, provided a blueprint of preventing mass atrocities for the next President who would take office. In the report, the authors argue that mass atrocities "constitute a direct assault on universal human values," and "threaten core U.S. national interests"[59]. Implementing the idea that preventing mass atrocities is a moral goal and security achievement at once is a necessary argument, but the argument will fail unless people feel emotionally committed to the cause.

[1] "Dissent Channel message to the Director of Policy Planning," U.S. State Department Dissent Channel, accessed from *The New York Times,* June 17, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/06/17/world/middleeast/document-state-dept-syria.html?_r=0.

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[3] ibid.

[4] Samantha Power, *A Problem From Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (NewYork: Basic Books, 2002): xvii.

[5] Leigh Ann Caldwell, "Did Obama answer these 5 questions about Syria?" *CNN Politics,* September 11, 2013.

[6] Paul Slovic and Scott Slovic, *Numbers and Nerves: Information, Emotion, and Meaning in a World of Data* (Corvallis: OSU University Press, 2015), 53.

[7] Paul Slovic and Ellen Peters, "Risk Perception and Affect," *Current Directions in Psychological Science,* 13 no.6 (2017): 325.

[8] Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President to the White House Press Corps," White House Office of the Press Secretary, August 20, 2012, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/08/20/remarks-president-white-house-press-corps.

[9] ibid.

[10] ibid.

[11] Obama, Barack, "Statement by the President on Syria," White House Office of the Press Secretary, August 31, 2013, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/31/statement-president-syria.

[12] "Dissent channel message," U.S. State Department.

[13] ibid.

[14] Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 263.

[15] ibid.

[16] Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow,* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 51.

[17] ibid.

[18] Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow,* 85.

[19] "Dissent channel message," U.S. State Department.

[20] ibid.

[21] ibid.

[22] ibid.

[23] Amy Kind, "Imaginative Vividness," *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* (2017): 32-33.

[24] "Dissent channel message," U.S. State Department.

[25] Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria," White House Office of the Press Secretary, September 10, 2013, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/10/remarks-president-address-nation-syria.

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[27] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[28] "Q&A: Syria chemical weapons disarmament deal," *BBC News,* January 30, 2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-23876085.

[29] Alan J. Kuperman, "Obama's Libya Debacle: How a Well-Meaning Intervention Ended in Failure," *Foreign Affairs,* 2015, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/libya/obamas-libya-debacle.

[30] ibid.

[31] "Dissent channel message," U.S. State Department.

[32] ibid.

[33] Romeo Dallaire and Brent Beardsley, *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda,* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2005).

[34] "Genocide Fax: Part I," *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum,* https://www.ushmm.org/confront-genocide/cases/rwanda/turning-points/genocide-fax-part-i.

[35] ibid.

[36] Matthew Levinger, "Why the U.S. Government Failed to Anticipate the Rwandan Genocide of 1994: Lessons for Early Warning and Prevention," *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 9 no. 3 (2016): 36.

[37] Levinger, "Why the U.S. Government," 36.

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[43] ibid.

[44] ibid.

[45] Obama, "Remarks by the President."

[46] Slovic and Slovic, *Numbers and Nerves,* 57.

[47] "Dissent channel message," U.S. State Department.

[48] ibid.

[49] ibid.

[50] ibid.

[51] ibid.

[52] John Kerry, "Secretary of State John Kerry's Remarks on Syria on August 30," Speech transcript provided by *The Washington Post,* accessed January 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/running-transcript-secretary-of-state-john-kerrys-remarks-on-syria-on-aug-30/2013/08/30/f3a63a1a-1193-11e3-85b6-d27422650fd5_story.html?utm_term=.55c10c34b9dd.

[53] ibid.

[54] Slovic and Slovic, *Numbers and Nerves,* 27.

[55] "Dissent channel message," U.S. State Department.

[56] Slovic and Slovic, *Numbers and Nerves,* 7.

[57] Slovic and Peters, "Risk Perception and Affect," 325.

[58] Slovic and Peters, "Risk Perception and Affect," 322.

[59] Madeleine K. Albright and William S. Cohen, "Preventing Genocide: A Blueprint for U.S. Policymakers," *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, The American Academy of Diplomacy, and the Endowment of the United States Institute of Peace* (2008): xv, https://www.usip.org/genocide-prevention-task-force/view-report.

Conclusion

This thesis has considered the ideal of a *curated report* and its implications for mass atrocity prevention and response. As humans, we are symbol-using and symbol-abusing creatures; we live in a world where some leaders have chosen to abuse symbols and language to exterminate others. As Burke argued when he delved in the rhetoric of Hitler's "Battle,"[1] unless there is a sincere effort to learn how leaders use symbols and language to condone mass atrocities, they will continue to occur. The U.S. has never truly confronted atrocities it has committed abroad, like Hiroshima and Nagasaki, covert C.I.A. torture operations, and atrocities in Vietnam. Just as importantly, slavery, the genocide of Native Americans, and modern-day racism and discrimination are examples of atrocities that are stitched into the very fabric of the U.S. Using a selective understanding of history that passes over the role of these atrocities in American life does a disservice to the future of the U.S.

The U.S. will continue to suffer unless each institution makes atrocity prevention and reflection a priority in American life. Educational institutions should holistically review the way they teach history, because learning from history means scrutinizing hard issues that many Americans have buried, or obscured, in the national conscience. In this light, it isn't hard to notice that American exceptionalism can extend to discussions of mass atrocities. Even Samantha Power, in *A Problem From Hell,* does not sufficiently address the human rights abuses and mass atrocities that the U.S. has regularly committed.

It is hard to continually focus our attention on atrocities. Yet if we consider non-violent peace as a state of society that is maintained, rather than passive, we start

realizing that the thinking patterns and approaches toward peace and violence that we anchor in principles, morals, and ethics are the result of constant effort and learning. So learning from mass atrocities is perhaps one of the surest ways to launch an effort to preserve our humanity.

This thesis has employed an understanding of rhetoric, risk, psychology, and decision science in order to address one way in which communication may make a difference in the future – through communicating information about the escalation of atrocities to those who have the power to act. The case studies of reports issued from Rwanda, Bosnia, and Syria show how writing reports to decision makers in the US about mass atrocities requires an understanding of three crucial factors of the audiences to which these reports are addressed: the audience's assessment of the risks of intervening in the region of interest, the explanatory models the audience uses to frame the violence, and the audience's psychological limitations when receiving information about events that are distant and involve large numbers of victims.

Further research should continue to link emerging research on our perceptions of risk, and events that are distant (both psychologically and geographically), with rhetoric. Strategic communications in the field of atrocity prevention and response is a rapidly evolving field – especially given that the methods of data collection and analysis must be increasingly tailored to a big data age.

When it comes to feeling deep empathy and compassion for others, it is not that we are simply stuck in the prisons of our own individual bodies. We can feel deep empathy and compassion for individual lives. So if report-writers in the future take nothing but one message from this report, it is that we need to invent ways to harness

our compassion for the individual in the light of Slovic's important research on psychic numbing, pseudoinefficacy, and the prominence effect[2]. It will be impossible to truly face the impending challenges of the 21st century without a sincere effort to combat our inability to comprehend the meaning of these events for human lives.

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[1] Kenneth Burke, "The Rhetoric of Hitler's Battle," in *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1941): 191-220.
[2] Paul Slovic and Scott Slovic, *Numbers and Nerves: Information, Emotion, and Meaning in a World of Data* (Corvallis: OSU University Press, 2015).

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