CARNEGIE COUNCIL *for Ethics in International Affairs*

Worse Than War: Genocide, Eliminationism, and the Ongoing Assault on Humanity

Public Affairs

Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, **Joanne J. Myers**

Transcript

Introduction

JOANNE MYERS: Good morning. I'm Joanne Myers, Director of Public Affairs Programs, and on behalf of the Carnegie Council, I'd like to welcome you to our breakfast program.

Today our speaker is Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, and he will be discussing his most recent publication, *Worse Than War: Genocide, Eliminationism, and the Ongoing Assault on Humanity*.

This book is one that Mr. Goldhagen said he started thinking about writing 26 years before it was actually published, and he has been working on it for perhaps a decade.

Worse Than War has also been made into a documentary film and will be broadcast on PBS in early January. We will be previewing a clip shortly.

When the 20th century came to an end, it was the close of the bloodiest century in human history. The atrocities and horrors of World War II, Cambodia, Srebrenica, Rwanda, Darfur, and so many more, have been seared in our conscience forever.

In many of these instances, genocidal killing became a deliberate political strategy which was used to eliminate millions of lives. In the end, this type of massive destructiveness caused more deaths in the modern world than military conflict and, as the title of Goldhagen's book implies, was worse than war.

As in his earlier works, once again Mr. Goldhagen disparages bureaucratic "banality of evil" explanations of genocide as he continues his investigation into the subject.

This time he expands on his original argument to focus on a paradigm-changing investigation, in which he spotlights the ideologies of leaders who exploit ordinary citizens' hate-filled beliefs to instigate mass murder, the concept he calls eliminationism.

In addition to the victims and killers themselves, Mr. Goldhagen interviewed politicians, government officials, members of nongovernmental organizations, and others so that he could understand, not only the mindset, but the local and global conditions that can foment genocidal actions.

Drawing on this extensive field work, he explores the anatomy of genocide, explaining why genocides begin, are sustained, and end; and, finally, why societies support them, why they happen so frequently, and how the international community should and can successfully stop them. In doing so he challenges fundamental things we thought we knew about human beings, society, and politics.

Mr. Goldhagen is the author of the landmark international best-seller *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, as well as *A Moral Reckoning*. His essays and columns on past and current affairs have appeared in many journals and newspapers around the world, including the United States, Germany, Britain, France, Spain, Italy, and Israel. In addition, he has appeared on television and radio programs, including *The Today Show*, *The O'Reilly Factor*, and *Charlie Rose*, and has been profiled on *Dateline* and on Focus TV Germany.

As he has done before, *Worse Than War* seeks to change the way we think about mass murders and to offer new possibilities for a better world. As he writes in the book's introduction: "We can focus on this scourge; understand its causes, its nature and complexity, and its scope and systematic quality; and, building upon that understanding, craft institutions and politics that will save countless lives and also lift the lethal threat under which so many people live."

Mr. Goldhagen makes a convincing case that preventing genocide requires only a modest effort by leaders of democratic nations and the United Nations so that, hopefully, we might at last begin to eradicate this greatest scourge of humankind.

Please join me in welcoming our guest today, Daniel Jonah Goldhagen.

Remarks

[Showing of clip from forthcoming documentary film]

DANIEL JONAH GOLDHAGEN: I must tell you I get terribly moved whenever I see this, because the subject is so serious, and it also brings me back to making the film and being in all these locations, talking to the people I did, Elie Ngarambe, the perpetrator whom you saw, among others, and many, many victims.

What I have sought to do, what I'm seeking to do, with the film and with the book that we're here to talk about is recast our understanding of genocide in almost every way, and not only to do that, but really to have anyone who wants to read the book have his or her life change. My hope is that it will change the way you look at the world, because the way we typically look at the world regarding these issues is fundamentally skewed and wrong.

So let me tell you some of the things that are in the book that I think would lead to a radical reconsideration of much of what we know about genocide and mass slaughter, but also about politics more generally in our time.

Most of all, I am seeking to tell certain truths and provide a different understanding of genocide, clear up misperceptions, falsehoods, and also just simply educate people, because we collectively are ignorant about the real nature of the problem.

As you've heard in the film, more people have died at the hands of mass murderers during our time—that is, from the beginning of the 20th century until now—than have been killed in war—that is, in conventional military operations. This fact is almost entirely unknown. It should be at the center of our understanding of our world and at the center of international security discussions and foreign

policymaking.

Right now, genocide and mass slaughter are treated as being a terrible problem, things that happen sometimes in faraway places that we do or we don't really understand.

But when you look at it as I have, and when you see these numbers, you see that it is a systemic problem of our world. It's a systemic problem of the international system in which we live. So we need to recast our entire orientation and say quite clearly that genocide and mass slaughter is the major problem of lethal violence in the world today, and we need to start treating it that way.

One of the reasons we don't treat it that way is because of the obfuscations about it. It's seen as something that has been with humanity, something that happens in faraway places. Ethnic conflicts spill over or get out of control and people start killing each other; there's not much we can do about it—how can we ever stop this? Of course, most people don't want it to happen, but they feel somewhat helpless in thinking about what can be done.

But I think that that's a false characterization of the nature of genocide and that, once we understand properly what produces it, we can actually fashion effective policies relatively easily to put an end to the killing, or at least radically reduce its incidence.

The first thing we need to do is recast even what the major problem is. I've told you more than 100 million people, genocide, and so on. Genocide is treated as being a thing of its own, different from other forms of politics, when in fact it is actually a form of politics.

And I don't mean it in the superficial sense in which people typically say, "Oh yes, of course genocide is politics, there are states involved," and so on and so forth. I actually mean that it is a political instrument that is used to achieve a clear set of political goals, and the goal for which it is an instrument is to rid a country or people of another group or series of groups or a population that they want to get rid of for one reason or another.

It is actually a form of politics which can be called eliminationism—that is, the desire to eliminate unwanted groups of people, groups that are deemed to be deleterious or threatening or an impediment to the good life in the future, or what have you.

What you find is that many regimes, many states, engage in eliminationist politics, and they use a variety of instruments in order to achieve their goals or to bring about their goals. Mass killing —genocide, which is the term we reserve for the largest of mass killings—is but one of those instruments. The others are severe repression; forced incarceration, concentration camps; reproductive prevention, preventing groups from reproducing themselves; expulsion; and killing, with genocide the term reserved for the largest of killings. These are the five principal forms of eliminationism.

This is not just a semantic shift, to say we should shift away from talking about genocide to eliminationism and to the politics of eliminationism. There are two reasons why it's an important shift.

One is because regimes that decide to eliminate targeted groups always use a variety of these different means at the same time. The mixture of means they use, including mass killing, comes about owing to pragmatic considerations, calculations on their part about what's the best way to get rid of the population. So this means that when we see people being expelled from their homes or from their regions or from their countries, even if the regime is only killing a few thousand or a few tens of thousands at a time, we should say: "Aha, this is like that. This is like genocide." In fact,

genocide is but the most extreme form. It would be the executionist policy with the largest number of deaths.

So if we reconceptualize genocide to be eliminationism, it means we should also expand the international community's, such as it is, anti-genocidal efforts, to include all eliminationist assaults upon people, all forms of eliminationist politics, because right now, even though the international community does very little to prevent genocide, and even to stop it when it begins, it does next to nothing to deal with other eliminationist assaults.

I don't need to emphasize that, even if the perpetrators are not killing you or your family, if they are expelling you violently from your home with all kinds of brutality, this is a life-destroying moment that you and your family will suffer, assuming that all of you even survive.

So we need to make this conceptual shift to eliminationism. And we need to tell the truth about it, because a lot of people don't want to hear the truth, because it means that much more needs to be done.

We need to tell the truth about the perpetrators, the people on the ground. You heard Elie Ngarambe [in the film clip] telling you telling you quite clearly about how he and others hacked people to death.

This film, as far as I know, is the first film that actually deals with the phenomenon of genocide itself, not just what happened—not the Holocaust, not Rwanda, not individual genocides—and how to prevent it. And as far as I know, it's the first time that there are perpetrators like Elie telling what they did and why they did it.

This, in itself—and I have lots of testimony like this in the book—suggests how little attention we've actually paid to the problem. It's really amazing, if you step back and think: genocide, mass murder, eliminationist assaults, have taken place pretty much at all times during our lifetime, all over the world, people make lots of movies and so on, and yet this hasn't been done before. Why? It seems so obvious that it needs to be done.

When you listen to the perpetrators, they tell you quite clearly, and when you listen to the victims even more they tell you quite clearly, about how they hated the victims, about what they thought of them. And if you look at their actions and you listen to their words—that is, of the perpetrators and the victims—and you analyze what they've actually done and the choices they made, it's impossible to come to the conclusion that these are robots who are merely being pushed forward by a powerful hand, a powerful controller, who is getting them to do these things. These are self-willed killers who have come to believe that the victims deserve to die, and they come to believe this in a variety of ways and through a variety of mechanisms. But they actually believe that what they are doing is right.

Listen to Ann, a Tutsi survivor from the Rwanda genocide, who first had to watch the Hutu pursuers, as she was hiding in the bush, "kill all my children in front of me, and they slashed my right arm. Then, while they were raping me, they were saying that they wanted to kill all Tutsi so that in the future all that would be left would be drawings to show that there were once a people called Tutsi."

So that was their conception of what they were doing: they were going to wipe the Tutsi off the face of the earth.

Why did they want to obliterate the Tutsi? I asked Elie, "Why did you want to do it?"

He explains, and these are his words: "The killers did not know that the Tutsi were human beings, because if they had thought about that they wouldn't have killed them. Let me also include myself as someone who accepted it. I wouldn't have accepted that the Tutsis are human beings."

And Elie is emphatic that this was the common view—not an idiosyncratic view, but the common view—among the killers: "As I was hearing it, I had the same perception as others at the time. No Hutu could swear and lie to you that he did not know that."

And what was the effect upon him? He's a fascinating guy, unlettered, brilliant guy, who had enormous insight—he has changed after all these years—into what they did.

He explains the effect of these beliefs upon him and others: "It is a cloud that came into people's hearts and covered them and everything became dark, because to see someone standing in front of you without any energy, and you hold your machete high or your club and hit him, it is something difficult that was done with a lot of anger and rage. I mean this genocide." And that's what we have to keep in mind.

In the book I talk about policy, I talk about reconceptualizing genocide, I talk about the mechanisms, but also there is an enormous amount of focus on the killers. We have to keep in mind what they do, because only by doing that can we come to understand how they can bring themselves to do it. I mean that's what he said: "It's a hard thing to do."

You have to realize that in almost all mass slaughters it is a person facing another person, at some point deciding to raise his arm and strike the person down or to shoot him or her at point-blank range, in scenes of unspeakable gruesomeness. I imagine that some, if not most, of you will have trouble reading some of the descriptions or watching them on the screen. Imagine how difficult it would be to do it, if you were actually there and it was your task to do. Where does the psychological and emotional energy come from—not just to do it, but to do it in the way that they did it, with so much energy and zeal?

One of the things that I bring out that has been lost in our discussion of genocide more generally, which is so focused on the killing, because the killing is overwhelming, is the vast cruelty the perpetrators perpetrated upon the victims.

They are not clinical killers trying to dispatch their victims with as a little pain as possible. They inflict typically an enormous amount of what one could call excess cruelty, cruelty that is not necessary for the commission of the deed. They torture their victims, they beat them, they brutalize them, they rape them, and they rape them—rape is a complicated phenomenon in genocides—in ways that it's clear that they are intending to inflict punishment and suffering upon their victims. They say it and that's what they do. They often mutilate their victims.

So we have to keep the perpetrators in mind and understand what moves them. And as I said, it varies. It's not the same in every genocide or eliminationist assault. But belief in the rightness of what they do is their common property.

In the book, as you may have discerned here, I range widely over many genocides and eliminationist assaults—in fact, all of them in our time—although I don't treat them systematically. It's really a thematically based investigation.

I try in the book to bring out both similarities or commonalities in eliminationist assaults, but also to describe and analyze the differences. Why was the Holocaust singular in certain ways, which it was?

Why is there more cruelty in these kinds of eliminationist assaults rather than other ones?

So the book pays attention to both: common mechanisms, because we need to try to figure out the commonalities to try to fashion policy, but also respecting and bringing out the singular features of different mass slaughters.

So we need to focus on the perpetrators, but we need also to focus on the victims. I need hardly say that they were human beings, but I do need to say that we have to humanize them, just as we do the perpetrators.

I'll go back to the perpetrators for a moment. In the book one of the things I seek to do is to say these are human beings, to show their humanity. They did horrific things, things we all condemn, but they are human beings who made decisions. They are not the caricatures that many of the theories with which you may be familiar about genocide treat them as. I try to humanize them and understand them and to do the same with the victims.

For the victims, with whom we all have sympathy, what we need to do is to keep each one in mind. It is easy to become numb to their plight, to become numb to the numbers. But that is doing a disservice to them and to ourselves and to the future if we do that. We need to keep in mind that every time we read about a genocidal moment, assault, the numbers, each one is composed of a huge number of individual humans who died, who suffered, who were tortured, were brutalized, many of whom were children.

We need to do that because that is the right way to understand what happens, because that is their experience, but also because it's the way in which we can develop and sustain appropriate empathy for them so that we begin to see their condition and their lives and the lives of future victims to be no less valuable than our own, so that we—us here, political leaders, everyone—can start responding to eliminationist politics abroad in the same way we would or with the same urgency that we would if our own people, however we define them, were being slaughtered here.

In making this film, I talked for hours and hours to victims. You sit there and you think, "I can't imagine suffering for five minutes what this person has suffered for years," if the person was in captivity, or "I can't imagine the nature of the losses," if a woman sits across from me, as one Cambodian survivor did, and said the Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge killed her ten children. How do you respond to that? I mean it's unimaginable.

Again, I could tell you story after story—and I tell these stories not to horrify you—and I could go into grisly detail—but to get you to understand the issues, that these are human beings that we have to keep as individuals before us.

The question that I would ask, and I do ask, and I think that it should be asked by all those in the media who care about what we do or don't do regarding eliminationist assaults, is: Is the life of a Tutsi in Rwanda—I'll just keep talking about Rwanda because I started. I could talk about Bosnians or I could talk about lots of other victims—is the life of a Tutsi in Rwanda any less valuable than the life of an American? Do the lives of ten Tutsis equal the life of one American—or of a hundred, or of a thousand?

What's the number? What's the number that is enough to get us to mobilize ourselves to start saving lives? There has to be a number. It's a grisly calculus. But this, whenever we are facing genocidal assaults—such as in Darfur right now—is the question that needs to be posed to every person of conscience.

So tell me, what is your answer? We should ask the people in Washington, "What is your answer?" Let's have a frank discussion about it. If it's a hundred, if it's a thousand, if it's a million, then say it. If you want to defend the number of a million, go ahead and defend it. It's a hard number to defend.

We need to reframe how we talk about this, to push the issues onto people, to force them to confront this, so that we can't all hide behind the do-nothingness of the international community, which is what happens now.

In addition to the perpetrators and the victims, we need to rethink how genocides begin and why they begin.

It's not ethnic conflict, as it's commonly put. It's not things that spin out of control. It's a political policy that is used by political leaders to achieve clear-cut political goals of power and social transformation or a variety of other things, and it is a decision that is taken at a specific moment by one leader or a small group of people to engage in or to begin an eliminationist assault, including mass murder.

I could tell you the leaders' names, the places where they decided it, and the number of people who were slaughtered and expelled and so on. It is a decision, a political decision.

It is amazing to me that this point has not been made, and not made forcefully, because once you recognize that it is politics and a political decision that leaders undertake because they calculate correctly that it will bring them more benefit than incur them costs—in other words, it will be a winning policy—then you can say: "Well, we know how to deal with this. We can fashion political policies to get political leaders to make different decisions." We know how to do that, and we're not doing it at all.

It starts because a few people make the decision. In virtually every instance of mass slaughter, if someone or a small group of people had decided otherwise, which they could have, the mass slaughter would not have occurred and millions or hundreds of thousands or tens of thousands of people would not have died or had their lives ruined.

So it's politics and it's a decision. And what do we do about it now? Next to nothing.

I could go through the sordid history of the international community, of the United Nations on this issue, of the Genocide Convention, of the failure to get anyone to do anything.

In fact, the United Nations and the Genocide Convention actually are a hindrance to preventing mass killing because they provide the appearance that there is a mechanism and an institution that will do something, when in fact both are set up to do nothing. And the United Nations—and this could be a long discussion—is more an enabler of genocide and eliminationist assault than it is an institution to stop or prevent them.

It's not the only reason that nothing is done. It's also that there's a great deal of cynicism on the part of political leaders and the notion that they should be following the national interests or state interests narrowly construed, however they define it.

But let us ask: If we look at the world and we look at the international system where genocide is a systemic problem, we see the following situation: the powerful and wealthy countries of the world, who are by and large against genocide—they genuinely are—look upon these weak and poor countries and regimes slaughtering people and they don't do anything.

You have to ask, what is going on here? There is something just fundamentally wrong. The equation doesn't add up.

Or if you think it does because you have such a cynical—and I'm not saying that's wrong—view of the leaders of our countries, we can at least say, "This equation has to be changed."

So what do we do? We need to think about how to stop this in a hardheaded way and devise policies.

Any anti-eliminationist system would include three principal components: a prevention system, an intervention system, and a justice system or punishment. Right now there is no prevention system; very little intervention, very little; and there is a justice system centered in the International Criminal Court, which is a good thing, but which is slow and ineffective and does not really represent or does not carry out the functions of justice or punishment in any way approaching to what you would want or what we have in our own society.

If we want to emphasize one or another, we should emphasize prevention, for the obvious reason that the goal is that these eliminationist assaults never begin. And we also need to create a prevention system that would operate naturally, that wouldn't need particular application at a given moment, because sometimes you know only too late, they've already started.

And you want the prevention system to operate so effectively that it would change the leaders' cost/benefit calculation, so that they themselves would think, "You know, this is not a good idea. We will lose if we do this."

Now, there are a lot of things you can do to change their cost-benefit calculation. I'll just tell you a few.

We need to raise the cost to them personally and imperil their hold on power. There is actually quite a simple way to do this, which I'll tell you beforehand may sound a little radical, but then I'll try to tell you why it isn't.

If the leaders knew that in starting a genocidal assault or an eliminationist assault that they would be declared the enemies of humanity—there's actually a legal doctrine for this—that they are fair game for anyone to attack them, to hunt them down, and if they knew furthermore that there would be bounties on their heads—sizable bounties, $10 million on a leader, on the president or prime minister or whatever people call themselves; $1 million on every cabinet member, military leader at a certain level, police leader at a certain level—and that these bounties would be offered and that they would stay in effect until the leaders either are killed or they turn themselves in, how many political leaders would think twice about whether it's a good idea to start an eliminationist assault?

How many leaders in the countries where the genocides and eliminationist assaults happen could be sure that their own bodyguards wouldn't even turn on them for rewards like that?

A second thing we can do is something that's quite effective, and we know it's effective, which is we can as a deterrent say that we will bomb the military forces of any regime that begins an eliminationist assault—not civilian infrastructure, not civilians, but degrade the military forces on which most of these eliminationist leaders rely. It would give them pause, because they can't defend themselves, and the military forces are critical for their power and their understanding of their own well-being.

This actually worked when we did it in Bosnia in 1995. We brought Milosevic to the negotiating table within three weeks of beginning a serious bombing campaign. If we had done it three years earlier when he began his eliminationist assault, tens and tens of thousands would be alive and hundreds of thousands of people would not have been brutalized and been expelled from their homes.

I asked President Haris Silajdzic, the former President of Bosnia, if Milosevic—he knows Milosevic very well—would have ever started the eliminationist assault if we had had a bounty on him. He said, "No, I don't think he would have. He counted on the international community to accept the status quo that he would create and he thought he would get away with it." Again, it doesn't mean Silajdzic is right, but it's powerful testimony from someone who I should say was somewhat reluctant about this kind of intervention. But he was quite explicit; he did not think Milosevic would have done it.

I asked the Rwandan Minister of Justice, Tharcisse Karugarama, "What would have happened if there had been bounties on the Rwandan leaders? Would they have ever initiated the slaughter of so many Tutsi? Would it have been effective in preventing the genocide?" He said to me, "Definitely, definitely, definitely, definitely—many times definitely."

I should add that he is a man who has spent probably more time—he's a brilliant guy—dealing with the issues and thinking about the issues of genocide than any political leader of our time. He has overseen the processing of 1.2 million people suspected of having been perpetrators in Rwanda.

He then said, "If people knew that at the end of the day they'll be the losers, they'd never invest in a losing enterprise, because genocide, as you correctly point out, is a political enterprise, it's a political game. But again, it's a power play, it's wealth, it's everything. So if people involved knew that at the end of the day they'd be the losers, they would not play the game, that's for sure." He was emphatic on this point.

So I ask you, what is the radical policy? Having low-cost bounties? This something we can do, and it's a lot easier than getting the U.S. Army to intervene or the European Union's forces to intervene and assert themselves in countries. Once it begins, it's hard to stop.

What is the radical policy? To extend the existing Rewards for Justice program that exists in the United States for terrorists? So if a terrorist kills a few dozen people, a bounty would be put on his head—and this has been done under Republican and Democratic administrations, and the Obama Administration itself still has this program.

So we should have it for a terrorist who kills a few dozen people, but if you slaughter as a mass murderer a few hundred thousand people, nothing happens?

What is the radical policy? What I'm suggesting or what we're doing now, letting hundreds of thousands and millions of people be slaughtered? If you knew that such a program could have prevented the Rwandan genocide, would you say that we should have done it? Would anyone say that we shouldn't have had such a program?

And if you think that it could have, if you agree with Kurugarama, that it could have prevented the Rwandan genocide, if you think seriously just that it might have, or there's some good chance it would have, then how can we not have such a program and take other serious deterrent measures to prevent the next Rwanda and the next one after that?

I'll just end by saying that many people say, "Come on. Genocide, it's been around forever. What can you do? These are things that are out of control. How can we stop it?"

In fact, as I said, the policies seem to exist that can maybe not stop every eliminationist assault, but many. Think of all the lives we save if we stop just one.

And they're easy to implement, because just as it takes a few political leaders or one political leader to initiate these eliminationist assaults, it takes just a few moral men and women to start to fashion an anti-eliminationist system in the world, the most important of which is the president of the United States. He and a few leaders of European countries, the major European countries, if they wanted to, could change the entire genocidal equation.

Now, I'm not saying that they're going to go out and do it tomorrow. But they could. And they could fashion political policies that could deal with this problem. So that's why we should be hopeful about it.

And we should be hopeful for another reason. Let me just take you back—and I'll end with this. If you had asked people in 1900 whether imperialism will ever end, they would have said, "No, of course not. It's part of the human condition. It has been around forever." Imperialism is, by and large, over. We do not live in a world of imperialist powers anymore. There are some local imperialists, but, by and large, it's over with.

If you asked people, "Can you foresee a time when war would not be a principal means by which states relate to one another?" they'd say, "Of course not. That's what states do. That is a condition of the international system." But, in fact, that is what has happened for a large percentage of states in the world.

If you had said in 1900 that in many, many countries around the world what we would call today human rights and political rights would be respected, people would say, "It seems quite unlikely that that will be the case."

And yet all these things have occurred. There is no reason that we can't do the same for genocide that we've done for these and other very, very large political matters, problems, conditions. And we can do it relatively simply, for the reasons that I have said.

So instead of, as we typically do, throwing our hands up and feeling terrible and hoping that somebody will do something and saying, "Well, what can we do? It's futile," it is clear that we have a path forward that can be easily achieved with great effect.

This is why I've written this book, to transform how we understand the subject and to get people to start talking differently and thinking very hard-headedly about different policies that will finally save an enormous number of people's lives and not let the next Rwanda and the next Darfur happen.

Thank you.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION: Using your definition of eliminationism, I suppose that the Allied bombings of Dresden and Hamburg and the American dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki would also fall within that definition, which would mean that we, or at least our parents because we were probably too young at the time, should be regarded as perpetrators, and that, using your solution, we ought to have imposed bounties on people like Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill. If you are not willing to come to that conclusion, how do you distinguish between what was done by the Allies in terms of the civilian populations in the Axis countries and what is done in situations like Rwanda

and Bosnia?

DANIEL JONAH GOLDHAGEN: I think it is a form of eliminationism. Let me give you the example:

If our country, the United States, had established a beachhead in Japan and said to the Japanese leaders, "We are going to start shooting tens of thousands of Japanese civilian men, women, and children until you surrender"—and so in a day or two days they shot the same number of people who died in the dropping of the nuclear weapon or the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. The Japanese government doesn't surrender. Then, a few days later, they say, "Fine, we'll pick it up again," and they start shooting men, women, and children in the number that they killed people in Nagasaki.

At what point would we start calling this mass murder? After another nuclear weapon's worth, another nuclear weapon's worth? Or is just the first enough? It's hard to distinguish when you're targeting civilians, when your explicit purpose is to kill civilians, no matter whether it looks like a conventional military operation—it's very hard to distinguish that from mass murder.

One of the things that may trouble people about my book is that I am completely fair—"fair" is not the right word—but I tell it straight. There are unflattering, unheroic—indeed, criminal—episodes in the pasts of many countries that people don't want to look at. We should own up to it and be truthful about it.

I can just throw the question back to you. It's easy to answer rhetorical questions. If an American leader today would decide to carpet bomb or use incendiary bombs, firebomb Tokyo or some other city in a war, what would we all say? We would say that this is mass murder. It seems quite obvious.

Sometimes it is hard to distinguish between conventional military operations and where you go over the line. But in so many cases it's not hard. I'm happy to have a long discussion about drawing lines.

But the problem that the world faces is that in all the easy cases of eliminationist assault and mass murder we basically do nothing. So let's focus on trying to get something done and save a lot of lives, and then we can worry about where we draw the lines and whether we go too far or not too far in certain instances.

QUESTION: What I'd love to hear more from you is what activates the system, because that's the problem with the Genocide Convention as it stands. Here you have this indictment of Bashir, but—it didn't occur to me until somebody pointed it out—our justice system only works if there are police to bring the indictee in. There are no police.

So forgetting about police for a moment, is it a unilateral decision by the United States or one of these bodies, or is it a community? If it's a community of decision makers, how do they not fall into the same inertia that currently plagues the system that's in place?

DANIEL JONAH GOLDHAGEN: I'll just pick up on your mention of the police for a moment before I answer your question.

The structure of the international community right now with regard to eliminationist assaults—and I say elminationist assaults, but let me just emphasize, aside from genocide, the rest of it is almost not even on the radar screen for the international community to act forcibly or effectively to try to do anything about it.

The situation of the international community would be roughly analagous to our society without a

police force. Social life would be virtually or probably totally impossible if we didn't have police and a criminal justice system which provides order and suggests to most people that they shouldn't even think about committing crimes, which certainly many would otherwise contemplate committing if there were no punishment potentially waiting for them out there.

So that's the nature of the international system today. There are no police. So what we need to do is try to provide the kind of underlying fundamental deterrent that police provide here.

Most people don't not commit a crime because they think, "Hmm, so I really want to commit this crime? Let me think about if I can do it. But no, I could get caught." There are plenty of people who do that, but for most people it's just that they live in a world where crime gets punished, and so they don't begin this whole thought process about whether they might commit this crime or another crime. So that's what we have to do for the international system.

The United Nations is not the institution, not the agency, where this can be done. The United Nations is—and as I said, there could be a long discusssion about it—I'll just say for now that it has shown that it is ineffective at marshaling the energies of the world to stop genocide.

My view is that anyone should be able to do it. Any democratic country should be able to, alone or in concert with others, save the lives of other people.

I should remind you that NATO's intervention in Bosnia was deemed illegal by most international legal experts. There was no international legal authority for that intervention. International law is such that it doesn't provide for individual states or alliances to intervene in other countries to save the lives of the citizens of those countries. We can have a long discussion about international law. I think it's utterly bankrupt in this matter.

I'm concerned with saving lives. So my proposal is that the anti-genocidal democratic countries of the world get together and make a treaty and create an agency, an international watchdog agency, that will quickly decide if an eliminationist assault is imminent or if it has started—which is not hard to do today. We know now. We have satellites, you have the internet, you have cell phones, you see population shifts. It's easy to know when these things are happening.

If they decide that it's happening, which they should do very quickly—because, remember, in a day perpetrators can kill 10,000 people—then that will trigger the interventionist measures.

The idea is that if you seriously did this, and if any of Rwanda's or Serbia's or any other country's leaders would be dumb enough to start an eliminationist assault they would face these consequences, then the next one who would think about it would think twice. Any intervention that is part of an anti-genocidal system that is a credible system would have a self-reinforcing deterrent effect.

So create an agency. It can be two countries. If the United States wants to do it alone, like its Rewards for Justice program, it's fine with me.

Again, people say, "Well, it will lead to intervention here or there'll be too much there." My response is: Nobody does anything.

It's very hard to get any country or an alliance to move at all. Let's start saving lives. I'm happy to worry about the problem of too much intervention or too serious application of these principles if it ever happens—which I don't think it would, because there are enormous disincentives for all the

countries to intervene in this way. The cost and material of even bombing, the political troubles at home of even doing it, are substantial. And states have shown repeatedly that they are egoistic entities that are concerned with their self-defined national interest or self-interest as they understand it.

So let's create an agency and let them do their job.

QUESTION: Eliminationism usually occurs within sovereign states and war between states. How do you deal with the legal ramifications involved with eliminating eliminationism?

DANIEL JONAH GOLDHAGEN: Actually, one of the noteworthy things about eliminationism, or even just mass slaughter, that has occurred is that the locus has shifted from the international realm, or greatly from the international realm, to being within states.

So in 1900 or the early part of the 20th century a lot of eliminationism was conducted by states in other countries or other territories. The shift now is such that it's almost always domestic. My response is: All the more reason that we have to think very seriously about sovereignty.

Now, sovereignty has been historically a useful concept in trying to help promote interstate peace. But as it has been understood historically, and to the present day, I think the concept is no longer valuable or needs to be amended quite seriously.

Let me remind you, as you probably know, that sovereignty is not about people, but it's about states. It's the sovereignty of states over their territory, the right to not have other states or countries interfere within your territory.

It seems to me to be almost ludicrous in our democratic age to say that there is such a thing as state sovereignty, as opposed to having the people be sovereign of countries, and to say that if the people are not actually governing themselves, that the state that is governing them is not only unprotected by this principle of sovereignty—and when I say the people governing themselves that means democratically—but in fact such states are illegitimate.

This is one of the problems with the United Nations. The United Nations harbors and has as a large percentage of its members quite obviously illegitimate states.

So sovereignty needs to be amended. We need to reconceptualize what it is. And, whatever we end up with, there is no way that I think a principle of sovereignty can be used to legitimize and justify and enable the slaughter of tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of people.

And so sovereignty, whatever the definition, even if it does afford states some protection, must be abridged by certain kinds of acts. We can define those acts quite clearly—eliminationist acts can be defined clearly—and that's when the protection sovereignty provides will be lifted.

To me that seems like an easy move. I'm not saying politically it's easy, but conceptually and legally it should be quite an easy thing to do, and it seems to me also the only defensible way and set of principles to use to think about what sovereignty should be.

QUESTION: I would like to pick your mind based on your work and making the film, writing the book. I have a simple question for you: How do you bring genocide prevention to be a priority for democratic countries' leaders, politicians?

DANIEL JONAH GOLDHAGEN: As I said before, we could get lucky and have—and I mean that seriously—a president of the United States, this one or the next one, or the leaders of major European countries, who decide that they need to conduct themselves more morally, that this is a serious issue. I'm not going to hold my breath on this, but it's not impossible at all.

One of the extremely disappointing things about the Obama Administration is how little they have done to move in the right direction. In fact, you might argue that they have moved in the wrong direction.

Short of getting lucky, we need to change the discourse. Let's just say for the sake of argument that I'm right in what I'm saying. We need to then say: "Look, there is a way to stop it. Let's put it on the table." Say in a press conference: "Why aren't you doing this? There's an easy solution."

One of the things I propose is let's make handbooks that lay out the responsibilities of every political leader not to do X, Y, and Z, eliminate their populations; and if it starts in their country, to try to thwart it or resign from their positions; and that they will be held accountable in all the ways that I suggested they aren't.

Every political leader who takes office should get this handbook, whether he or she is democratically elected or not. Put them on notice. It should be given out by every international institution. We should start educating everybody and putting people on notice.

And we should tell our leaders: "Okay, look, why aren't you doing this? This is a low-cost effort. Why aren't you doing this? How can you stand by as the people in Darfur are being slaughtered?"

We know there are ways to do this. The media should ask specific questions. Ask the president of the United States, "How many Darfurian lives lost equals the loss of one American life?" Ask the president of the United States this question, ask the president of France, ask the prime minister of Great Britain, and so on. Ask them these questions. Start putting rhetorical and other kinds of pressure on them.

Now again, it's not going to happen overnight. But there are ways to get political leaders to start thinking differently about what is in their interest.

If someone would dare say that the president of the United States or the prime minister of Britain is actually an enabler of genocide, if *The New York Times* or *The Sunday Times* would write such things, that would get people's attention.

So I think that we need to speak extremely plainly, directly, and forcefully about the real facts, the real mechanisms, the real opportunities to stop it, and what people are doing, and force them to confront the questions—and not just the president, but his cabinet members and the people in the various desks who deal with these issues. That's where we need to start. We can't snap our fingers, but this is how it's done.

No one wants to be known as an abettor of genocide. It's a pretty bad term. So let's think about its power.

Thank you, everybody.

JOANNE MYERS: Thank you for giving us the opportunity to think about changing the discourse.

Audio

Rwanda, Bosnia, Cambodia, Darfur, Congo, and more—since World War II, genocide has caused more deaths than all wars put together. Goldhagen analyses how and why genocides start and proposes steps the international community can take to stop them.

Video

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