Geostrategic Trends and Atrocity Risk

Understanding the Risk of Mass Atrocities in a Changing Global and Regional Context

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Executive Summary

Genocide and mass atrocities are, short of major war, the most catastrophic forms of violence that afflict the world today. As a middle power that seeks to uphold the rules-based international order, Australia recognises the importance of atrocity prevention as core to that order. This paper focuses on geostrategic trends and atrocity risks and offers an analysis of how issues facing the international system—such as great power competition, climate change, and urban warfare—affect the risk of genocide and mass atrocities. Greater understanding of these developments is critical for Australian strategic interests in the 21st century.

In order to set the context and provide a comprehensive theoretical understanding of these types of crimes, the paper first explores the risk factors that may lead to mass atrocities and genocide. Internal factors include non-democratic regime type, social upheaval, and radical ideologies. Further, external influences, such as diplomatic, economic and military support, can play a crucial role in setting the parameters of genocide. External actors may also intervene to prevent or end genocide. External influence has been critical to genocides and politicides during the 20th and 21st centuries. Great or regional power competition has incentivised permissiveness or active support for catastrophic atrocities from great power patrons based on ideological alignments or strategic interests.

The impact of climate change on conflict and atrocity crimes is a contentious issue, with non-linear relationships that vary depending on context. Evidence suggests that competition for resources, such as water or arable land, increases the risk of conflict, especially in societies already experiencing conflict. Climate-related shocks can exacerbate existing conflicts and make it difficult to sustain peace. Temperature variations amplify existing risks of conflict but are not a causal factor in new conflicts. Climate change induced mass migration is also thought to be a source of conflict, but evidence is contested. The extent to which climate change will exacerbate risks to peace is dependent on how societies develop and address non-climatic drivers of conflict, as well as how future outbreaks of violent conflict are managed. With increasing international instances of resource scarcity and competition being weaponised against target groups, the relationship between climate change and atrocity crimes is a burgeoning area of study.

There has been less attention given to the relationship between urban warfare and mass atrocities, in particular how civilian protection or mitigation of atrocities can be achieved in urban warfare. The concentration of global populations in urban areas, combined with the growing trend of urban warfare, increases the potential for mass atrocities, especially when combatants use civilian populations as human shields. Schools and civilian infrastructure are often used for military purposes during urban-based fighting, putting large numbers of civilians at risk. As the world continues to urbanise, more attention needs to be paid to the intersection between urban warfare and mass atrocities.

The following section of the paper focuses on the role of armed forces in mass atrocities and the operational implications of these trends and risks for the Australian Defence Force (ADF). The participation of armed forces in mass violence is a crucial factor in determining whether such acts amount to genocide or mass atrocities. The military's kinetic and logistical capacity can deliver genocidal consequences in ways not ordinarily achievable by non-military means. Further, militaries can attain the territorial control necessary to carry out sustained and widespread violence. Conversely, the military's absence or impartiality can also have a dampening effect on violence and potentially bring it to an end. Militaries are of course critical to interventions where use of force is required, though the examples of such interventions are few.

To further examine the role of these geostrategic trends, this paper considers a series of case studies and assesses the intersection of trends in atrocities in the past two decades. The case studies selected are those of Myanmar, Ukraine, Sri Lanka and Mali. These case studies, included in Appendix 2, help illuminate the relevance of such changes and can help understanding and prevention of mass atrocities.

The ADF has a long history of engagement in civilian protection under the auspices of United Nations peacekeeping operations (such as in Somalia or Rwanda) and in multilateral missions such as INTERFET. The lessons learned from such past engagements, including the opportunity to work with partner or host country militaries, offer opportunities for the ADF to improve preparedness for future possible operations. Specifically, they provide the basis upon which to generate atrocity prevention tools that are adapted to future operational requirements. With the increasing urbanisation of warfare, future atrocities may look distinctly different from atrocities in the past, especially in the Indo-Pacific littoral. Therefore, operational responses will need to adapt to address the nature of the new risks faced by civilians. For example, new and emerging technologies such as autonomous weapons and cyberwarfare likely have an important role to play in future prevention of atrocities and in the protection of civilians during military operations. Foreshadowing these challenges, this paper proposes policy and operational recommendations to be implemented by Army, Defence and associated foreign affairs and intelligence agencies.

Introduction

Global geostrategic trends directly impact Australian foreign and defence policy in a variety of ways. For a nation such as Australia, which prioritises defence of the rules-based international order, there are few violations more egregious to confront than genocide and mass atrocities. Nevertheless, genocide has killed at least 84 million civilians worldwide since 1900.[1] Genocide and mass atrocities are not just catastrophic events; they reflect deep ethical and moral failings in society and the international community; they also increase the prevalence of terrorism, civil war, mass displacement, economic destruction and long-term failure to democratise.[2]

This paper uses empirical case studies and a review of the scholarly literature to test the relationship between three major geopolitical themes: great power competition, climate change and urban warfare, and mass atrocity crimes in the 21st century. This research provides a foundation for the Australian Army, the ADF, the Department of Defence and the Australian Government more broadly to prepare for a future where the potential for mass atrocity, both in the Indo-Pacific and elsewhere in the world, remains a serious risk. It provides a series of recommendations which aim to enable better preparation and inter-agency coordination in the interests of atrocity prevention and response.

The paper is divided into four sections: (1) a brief review of the literature on the factors associated with genocide and mass atrocity risk; (2) a review of the literature on selected geostrategic trends and mass atrocities (or closely related outcomes); (3) analysis on the role armed forces play in mass atrocities; and (4) preparing for the future including recommendations. Appendix 1 includes a note on methodology and definitions. Appendix 2 includes three contemporary case studies (within the past 15 years) of genocide or mass atrocity crimes where there has been a demonstrated relationship between the violence and the geostrategic trends under analysis.

Genocide Risk Factors

As defined in this paper, geostrategic trends and mass atrocity crimes are not, broadly speaking, causally related. Rather they are risk or threat multipliers. As such, they may amplify the level of risk beyond that which would otherwise exist. Before looking more deeply at these trends, it is instructive to briefly review the factors widely accepted as contributors to the escalation of genocide risk, specifically non-democratic regime type, upheaval, and radical ideologies. It should be noted, however, that because genocides and mass atrocities are rare events, there are no accepted necessary or sufficient conditions predicting risk. Table 1 provides a summary of the literature concerning non-democratic regime type, upheaval, and radical ideologies.

Table 1. Summary of the literature concerning non-democratic regime type, and radical ideologies

Risk factor	Core principles	Key scholars
Regime type	Non-democracies and anocracies most at risk. Transitions between or towards democracy are high-risk periods.	Rummel, Mann, Nyseth Brehm, Harff, Goemans.
Upheaval	War, terrorism, assassinations, revolutions are all major shocks associated with genocide.	Browning, Semelin, Harff, Valentino, Uzonyi.
Ideology	Elites have a core role in constructing in and out groups. Linked to perceptions of security. Security threats tied to target groups are framed as existential, justifying atrocities.	Semelin, Straus, Leader Maynard, Williams.

Regime Type

Many scholars claim that a state's regime type—autocracy or anocracy—is a powerful underlying driver for the onset of genocide. Rudolph Rummel rephrases Lord Acton, stating that 'absolute power kills absolutely'.[3] Autocracies, by their very nature, include fewer restraints on executive authority and lack the checks and balances provided by a democratic system. Barbara Harff argues that the higher the level of executive constraints on power (specifically in a democratic system), the lower the onset risk of genocide or politicide.[4] In his review of the Holocaust, Timothy Williams argues that autocracy was the most reliable predictor of genocide onset, above all others.[5] Hein Goemans argues that dictators are more likely to engage in genocide if defeat in war threatens their power, their interests and/or their life, as compared to democratic leaders.[6] There is also substantial scholarship demonstrating that the most dangerous regime types for genocide onset are partial democracies, or anocracies, which are often states in transition between autocracy and democracy, or vice versa. In particular, Michael Mann and Hollie Nyseth Brehm both found that partial democracies and transitioning regimes are more likely to commit genocide than non-transitioning autocratic regimes.[7]

Upheaval

The concept of upheaval is generally associated with different types of wars, revolutions, or rebellions. It is also associated with other significant shocks to political institutions—for example, coups or transitions to extremist leaders and elites. The more significant the shock, the higher the risk of onset.[8] Of the types of upheaval most associated with genocide onset, war is considered the most significant risk factor. In *Ordinary Men*, Christopher Browning states:

> *War, a struggle between 'our people' and 'the enemy,' creates a polarized world in which 'the enemy' is easily objectified and removed from the community of human obligation. War is the most conducive environment in which governments can adopt 'atrocity by policy' and encounter few difficulties in implementing it.[9]*

Civil war is more commonly associated with genocide, given the inter-communal nature of such conflict. Esteban, Morelli and Rohner found that almost one-third of civil wars between 1960 and 2000 featured mass

killings of civilians, while almost no comparative mass killing occurred in interstate wars.[10] While not every genocide has occurred during a time of war, and very few wars result in genocide, 'almost all genocides of the last half-century occurred during or in the immediate aftermath of internal wars, revolutions, and regime collapse'.[11] There are many reasons why genocide often occurs in times of war, as Jacques Semelin points out:

> [W]ar's peculiarity is to push the mobilisation of the group to extreme limits, pitting the cohesion of the self against the enemy 'them' … War rapidly destroys old solidarities, annihilating any remaining community of social links with the previously designated victims.[12]

Scott Straus describes the motivation to participate in the Rwandan genocide:

> [T]he war that took place during the genocide was intense and defensive. The war thus created a climate of acute uncertainty and insecurity. That context was critical to why some individuals fomented violence; to why those who fomented violence gained the upper hand; and to why many individuals agreed to take part in the killing.[13]

Another interpretation of the genocide–war nexus is Benjamin Valentino's contention that mass killings are 'final solutions' that occur because they are the outcome of a process where alternative strategies to achieve the perpetrator's goals failed, and the attempted annihilation of the victim group was the only remaining logical step. These 'solutions' can also be considered final because they remove any future threat.[14]

Upheaval, however, is broader than war. Political change in the form of attempted or successful coups d'état, assassinations and revolutions provide environments conducive to genocide. Internal crises (such as a coup d'état) are known to increase the risk of genocide. Harff argues that the likelihood of genocide increases especially in circumstances where an ideologically extreme regime takes power.[15] Gary Uzonyi found a 722 per cent increase in the risk of genocide following a coup d'état.[16] Assassinations like the killing of Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana (which marked the beginning of the Rwandan genocide) and threats to the broader leadership structure of a regime increased the risk of genocide onset.[17] Nyseth Brehm found that these forms of upheaval do not have to be successful, citing a strong correlation between failed coups, assassinations, revolutions and civil wars and the onset of genocide.[18] The overall level of threat also matters, as Uzonyi found that the higher the number of ethnic

groups in conflict with the state, the more likely the state is to pursue genocide as a strategy.[19] It is the upheaval which is important, not just its outcome. The common theme across types of upheaval is that they pose a direct threat to the leadership of the state.

Ideational Factors

The role of ideational factors is also an important, heavily debated factor in genocide and mass atrocities scholarship. It is hard to imagine the Holocaust without the ideology of national socialism, or the Rwandan genocide without Hutu power. Semelin focuses on the idea of the 'political imaginary', where the ideology of leaders has its roots in reality but the narrative is distorted to invoke fear and loathing, blurring the line between myth and reality.[20] Ideational frameworks that create in-group and out-group populations can be a significant factor in increasing the risk of genocide. Even so, the relationship between ideology and genocide is not consistent. Montalvo and Reynal-Querol, and Esteban, Morelli and Rohner found that ethnic polarisation (generally understood to be a majority ethnic group with a large minority group) increases the risk of mass killings.[21] Although some form of ethno-religious or other communal divide often seems to coincide with the onset of genocide, the understanding of the causal processes of such violence is complicated.

Straus's theory on founding narratives offers a compelling contribution to the debate. Straus argues that, in crisis situations, elite decision-makers are critically influenced by the pre-crisis ideological constructs of the state. Using comparative case studies as illustrations, Straus shows that the onset of genocide is less likely in states with an inclusive founding narrative—such as Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and Senegal—that embrace ethnic, religious, tribal and political diversity under a single national identity. In comparison, the 'leap of imagination'[22] to genocide is more likely in states like Sudan and Rwanda that are founded on a clear dominant political group, where those outside the group are excluded from the political imaginary of the nation. Johnathan Leader Maynard conceptualises the role of ideology within a theory of radicalised security politics. The perception of real or imagined threat from a group can be used to augment strategies for managing internal challenges.[23] This reality highlights the important role of ideational factors in understanding genocide risk.

Geostrategic Trends

Great Power Competition

Despite a significant and persistent pattern of external influence across the 20th and 21st centuries, the study of genocide and mass atrocities suffers from what Martin Shaw describes as 'systematic neglect and understatement of its international dimensions'.[24] Ernesto Verdeja describes the international context as one of the five contributing factors of genocide. Verdeja describes how diplomatic, economic and military support can all drive the potential for genocide, noting that 'foreign support, indifference or hostility plays a crucial role in setting the parameters of genocide'.[25] External actors may also intervene to prevent or end genocide. Manus Midlarsky argues that in many cases, state support (either economic or diplomatic) has facilitated genocide. He cites the role of Germany in the Ottoman genocide against the Armenians, and Vatican support for or acquiescence to Nazi Germany in the Holocaust.[26] In a similar although opposite vein, Straus argues that 'international allies may exert a restraining influence over client states'.[27]

In discussing what is *required* for mass atrocities to occur, Alex Bellamy identifies opportunity as a key factor, 'whether enabled by a weakening of domestic institutional restraints or the support and/or acquiescence of external actors'.[28] Bellamy notes that in genocides committed during the Cold War, the relative power of external critics was fundamentally important:

> [C]lient states that perpetrated mass atrocities effectively had a constituency of one. Latin American states needed only to persuade the USA of their cause and communist states only the Soviet Union in order to win the support of a sufficiently large bloc of international society.[29]

Harff notes that actors who have decided to perpetrate genocide have predetermined there are insufficient external constraints or costs to deter them from pursuing such a strategy.[30] Matthew Krain argues that this situation is reflective of an international context that is permissive to atrocities rather than prohibitive.[31] On the issue of arms, Fein explicitly discusses the importance of external actors' potential to enable genocide:

> *The many 'coincidences' of war and genocide and the devastating toll of victims and of refugees puts a grave responsibility and onus on states arming perpetrators of genocide and reinforcing the level of armaments in civil wars (wars in which genocide is most likely to occur); they may be accessories to genocide. Rather than contributing to maintaining domestic order, patron states are contributing to death, refugee flows, and famine.[32]*

There are important accounts of genocides which either wholly or partly focus on external influence and provide detailed research on the role of external actors. These accounts relate to events in Armenia, Cambodia, Guatemala, East Pakistan, Indonesia, Rwanda and Zimbabwe. In each case, the role of great or regional power competition is evident. For example, during the Armenian genocide, Germany (as an ally of Ottoman Turkey during World War I), was highly permissive, even instrumental, in the massacre of Ottoman Armenians in Eastern Anatolia. In this instance, the Turkish role in the war was central to the Triple Alliance's war efforts in the North African and Middle Eastern theatres. Here, the perception of Armenians as a fifth column for Russia (an Ottoman and German enemy) further conditioned a permissive attitude towards the genocide of Armenians.[33] In the Cambodian example, inter-communist rivalry between China, Vietnam and the USSR was key to China's ongoing support for the Khmer Rouge despite its genocidal campaign against Cambodia's own civilian population. The reasons for this ongoing support were complex. Specifically, China so was threatened by the USSR's support to Vietnam, and Vietnam's conflict with Democratic Kampuchea, that China instigated a short war against Vietnam after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978 which ended the genocide. Lasting just three weeks, this war was ostensibly launched by China to punish Vietnam and to demonstrate to the Soviet Union that it could not protect its South-East Asian ally.[34]

While there is almost no literature covering the relevance of great power competition to the onset of genocide, there is a substantial body of literature on the related phenomenon of civil war. There is also considerable literature concerning third-party intervention in civil wars that explains how external third-party intervenors (actors who are not original parties to the conflict) influence the course of civil wars; this process is often referred to as the internationalisation of civil war. Internationalised civil wars are both longer and deadlier than non-internationalised civil wars.[35] As Patrick Regan found, the form of intervention necessary to respond to such wars does not necessarily require the deployment of international military forces but instead may necessitate increases in military aid to conflict actors.[36] Research on third parties and civil war attempts to explain what motivates third parties to intervene, as well as the likely outcomes of their interventions.

From a foundational perspective, third-party intervention is the tip of the spear of foreign assistance. As Hans Morgenthau theorised, foreign assistance from great powers is inherently political. It is designed to shape the recipient's political and economic structures as well as its processes and orientations.[37] Douglas Lemke and Patrick Regan argue that three types of states are most likely to intervene in civil wars: neighbours, allies, and former colonial powers.[38] At both the international and domestic levels, states' motivations are either economic or political. For example, Alexis Heraclides outlines the main motivations for third-party support to separatist groups in the following terms: 'the main constraints on becoming involved— or becoming more openly or deeply involved can be classified somewhat narrowly as economic, domestic and international political considerations and consequences'.[39] This position is affirmed by Mark Mullenbach and Gerard Matthews's analysis of several US interventions. They found that, whereas both domestic and international factors influence interventions, these factors vary in importance depending on the type of intervention and context.[40] Moreover, political and economic motivations are not confined to the state that is the subject of intervention. As Jacob Kathman found in his studies, surrounding states may take measures to contain the conflict in order to prevent it spilling over their borders and thereby damaging their collective national interests.[41] The outcomes of interventions depend significantly on the relative strength of actors involved, which may distort our understanding of their effect. Stephen Gent argues that rebel strength is a key variable leading to misinterpretation of pro-government interventions, and claims that third parties only intervene on a government's behalf where

the government is at genuine risk of defeat. Similarly, analysis strongly indicates that pro-rebel third parties will only intervene where the rebels have a high chance of victory.[42] Accordingly, pro-government interventions appear to be less effective than pro-rebel ones, but this is a function of third-party strategy and case selection.

There are also insights to be gleaned from related literature on the role of development and military aid in human rights abuses. A number of scholars have investigated the effects of foreign aid and its potential for incentivising government-sponsored violence.[43] According to Amira Jadoon, different types of aid can have very different effects. Between 1989 and 2011, US military aid had a persuasive effect on recipient states, decreasing incentives to avoid civilian targeting. By contrast, development aid had a predatory effect on recipient states, increasing the likelihood of civilian targeting.[44] Reed Wood and Emily Molfino found that aid also changes the incentives to control territory. Specifically, areas where humanitarian aid provision was concentrated tended to experience more violence between government and rebels.[45] These studies demonstrate that poorly targeted aid, both military and non-military, can have adverse consequences for the civilian population of the recipient state.

Contemporary civil wars have become increasingly internationalised. As of 2016, nearly 40 per cent of civil wars were subject to external intervention, the highest level since 1946.[46] Additionally, Mark Toukan found that interstate rivalry increases the risk of civil war in other states. Competition between rival states increases polarisation and the likelihood of civil war, whereas external intervention increases their intractability.[47] If great power competition is reasserting its place as central to the future of international peace and security, the potential for small wars and irregular warfare is exacerbated. Indeed, fuelled by foreign military assistance, insurgency and counterinsurgency have now become the predominant forms of violent conflict and military action.

Climate Change

An ongoing debate around climate change has implications for the risk of genocide and mass atrocities. While generally discussed in relation to civil war and mass atrocities, conflicts in Syria, Sudan, Kenya, Nigeria, Mali, South Sudan and Yemen suggest a causal link between drought and conflict. As competition for resources (such as water or arable land)

increases, there is an associated higher risk of conflict between groups.[48] Nevertheless, the relationship between climate change and conflict is non-linear and contested. Halvard Buhaug and Nina von Uexkull predict that the most severe impacts of climate change on armed conflict will be in driving the further vulnerability of societies already experiencing conflict. Climate change contributes to a vicious cycle of violence and vulnerability where countries already experiencing conflict are more likely to see peace agreements fail and conflicts resume. Relevantly, the authors note that 'climate related shocks that put the fragile society under an even greater socioeconomic pressure may thus make it even more difficult to sustain peace'.[49] Quansheng Ge et al. used machine learning and time-series data to demonstrate that armed conflict risk is primarily derived from background contexts, and temperature and precipitation extremes are associated with increased risk of armed conflict.[50] Burke et al. found that, for every half a degree of warming, the risk of conflict increased on average 10 to 20 per cent.[51] However, variations in modelling produce varied results. Stijn van Weezel's analysis of climate change and conflict revealed that two standard variations in temperature results in a 31 per cent increase in conflict risk. Even so, while local climate effects are strongly linked to increased conflict risk,[52] temperature variations appear to exacerbate existing conflicts but not to trigger the onset of conflict. These results suggest that climate amplifies existing risks of conflict but is not a causal factor in new conflicts.

The nature of the relationship between climate and conflict is challenging to demonstrate. In some of the more obvious cases, such as farmer–herder ethnic conflicts in the Sahel, the causal mechanism of conflict is contestable. Eberle, Rohner and Thoenig found that a 1 degree increase in warming led to a 54 per cent increase in conflict risk in areas of the Sahel with mixed-use agriculture—for example, areas where farmers and herders may at times both use arable land.[53] Tor Benjaminsen et al. cast doubt on the strength of evidence between conflict over land and climate change, using the Mopti region of Central Mali as a case study. They found that weak governance is a more powerful explanation of conflicts in the region than climate variation or extremes.[54] In a study of inter-communal violence in Ethiopia and Kenya, van Weezel found that declines in precipitation are linked to an additional 1.3 conflict events per district.[55] While instructive, these findings are not sufficiently generalisable and there is a risk of overstating the link between climate and conflict.

There is a widespread view among policymakers and scholars that climate-induced mass migration will be a source of conflict. Some have argued that internal migration within Syria was a contributing factor to the 2011 Arab Spring uprising and the civil war that followed. This migration was partly caused by Syrians leaving agricultural areas following historic droughts.[56] Some of the violence in South Sudan's southern Equatoria state has been blamed on mass migration from areas near the White Nile that have faced large-scale flooding displacing whole populations, including ethnic militias and herders who clash with host communities.[57] However, this idea is contested and lacks clear empirical evidence according to systematic analysis.[58] As Buhaug et al. note:

> The extent to which climate change will increase severe risk to peace in the future is dependent on whether and how societies develop and address non-climatic drivers of conflict, and how future outbreaks of violent conflict are managed by local institutions, states, and the international community.[59]

Many variables will be relevant to the effect of climate change on future conflict risk. The geopolitics of mitigation, climate action and the renewable transition are critical in this respect. How much warming the climate experiences will also significantly affect the dimensions of risk amplification. Preparedness and investment in projecting long-term risk are therefore key to managing the wide variety of scenarios.[60]

The relationship between climate change and atrocity crimes is a burgeoning area of study.[61] Genocide has often been associated with what Ben Kiernan describes as 'cults of antiquity'.[62] In many situations of genocide there has been an associated deification of farmers and agriculture as core to the nationalist identity being espoused. This situation was prominent during the Holocaust, where the pursuit of Lebensraum ('living room') was at the core of Nazi ideology, motivating the capture of Poland and Ukraine as highly fertile agricultural land.[63] Similarly, during the Cambodian genocide the role of rice cultivation was centrally important to the Khmer Rouge.[64] The general relationship between these ideological movements—agriculture (or antiquity) and genocide—is where the target group is defined and where it is placed in order to represent a central threat to the perpetrating group. The logic of the ideological necessity of a target group's destruction is premised on the idea that, in order to return to that utopian depiction of the past, the target

group (who threaten this aspiration) must be eliminated. In these events we can, at least theoretically, see the effect that climate change may have on atrocity risk. The potential clearly exists for increased resource scarcity and competition to be weaponised against target groups.

In the Indo-Pacific, climate change as a threat amplifier may raise different considerations to those commonly analysed in literature concerning conflicts over water in drought conditions. Storms that cause significant destruction in island states have been linked to a higher chance of declining democracy and the rise of autocratic regimes. These movements have been described by Rahman, Anbarci and Ulubaşoğlu as 'storm autocracies'.[65] As exogenous shocks, storms offer opportunities for regimes to entrench their power through disaster support. Of course, there is a considerable gap between the rise of an autocratic island regime and a mass atrocity. Given the linkages between both non-democracy and upheaval, however, this relationship should be accounted for in future analysis of mass atrocity risk, especially in the Indo-Pacific. This is particularly relevant given that, as the effects of climate change intensify, the frequency and severity of storm events, cyclones, hurricanes and typhoons will likely increase.

While there is some evidence of a relationship between environmental factors and theatres of mass violence, their causal relationship with conflict will continue to be debated. As Vesselin Popovski argues:

> The causes of conflict are primarily political and economic, not climatic. Warlords, who foster conflict, may exploit drought, flooding, starvation, agricultural, or natural disasters in their strategies, like they did in Somalia and Darfur. But what will drive their fight is not the rain, the temperature, or the sea level: They will always fight for goals such as power, territory, money, revenge.[66]

Urban Warfare

Much like the literature on great power competition, there is very little literature directly linking urban warfare and mass atrocities. Even in a major volume on the ethics of urban warfare, the topic is largely neglected.[67] Only Maciek Zajac tackles the subject directly, when he focuses on how the civilian deaths in the siege of Mosul may have been prevented through the use of autonomous weapons systems. Zajac makes the case that the

massive civilian casualties in the siege of Mosul constitute a future model of urban warfare for non-state actors or especially malign state actors who may hold entire urban populations hostage. Weighing the significant legal and ethical concerns regarding autonomous weapons (compared to existing aerial capabilities or the likelihood of massive troop losses in direct urban warfare scenarios) Zajac suggests that autonomous 'warbots' could be used as an alternative to deploying troops in urban conflict zones. While he does not discount the significant moral and ethical work that needs to be done before the use of these technologies could be considered, Zajac suggests that lethal autonomous weapons systems could reduce civilian casualties and mitigate risks to troops in instances such as hostage sieges.[68] As the global concentration of populations in urban areas continues, with the likelihood that 70 per cent of the global population will live in cities by 2050, there is parallel growth in the trends towards urban warfare.[69] Notable recent theatres of urban operations include Aleppo and Raqqa in Syria, Mosul in Iraq, Marawi in the Philippines, and Mariupol and Bakhmut in Ukraine. Where civilian populations are unable to escape these areas, the potential for mass atrocities is high. This is especially true in cases where combatants base themselves among the civilian population, often forcing civilians to provide a human shield. As Cecilia Jacob notes of the vulnerability of children in urban warfare:

> *The character of contemporary urban warfare has increased the likelihood that armed conflict will result in mass atrocities, and the use of schools and civilian infrastructure is directly associated with steep increases in the incidence of atrocities committed against children. The widespread use of schools as military staging grounds, temporary bases, detention centres, sniper posts and centres for torture and the interrogation of adults and children by armed groups during urban-based fighting puts large numbers of children at risk, both directly in the line of crossfire, and in embedding them in urban spaces subject to open warfare.[70]*

In recent years, urban warfare has become an important focus for war studies and the study of armed conflict more broadly. As observed by Andrew Graham:

> In a twenty-first century characterized by an increasingly urbanized world, adversaries, whether conventional or irregular, are likely to seek out urban spaces both for their strategic importance and the advantages the urban environment offers, especially to the defender. Those advantages include cover, complexity, and concealment; the opportunity it gives to mitigate technological advantage; and the complications and considerations that the presence of civilians brings into play.[71]

Despite the revitalisation of study in the field of urban warfare, there remains remarkably little scholarly analysis on the topic of how to achieve civilian protection or atrocity mitigation measures during urban warfare. There are many possible explanations for this. The siloed nature of different studies, and their goals, often precludes the exploration of interrelated themes. In this regard, much of the urban warfare literature is either based on warning and the need for preparedness, or focused on how such wars can be won. In either instance, the frame of reference is ordinarily the strategic implications of kinetic operations.[72] This military strategic focus is understandable given the core rationale of much of the research. Another reason for the lack of research is the problem of determining intent in mass atrocities.

Despite the observed relationship between urban warfare and mass killing, it can be difficult to establish the requisite *mens rea* to substantiate crimes like genocide or other mass atrocities. This is because insurgents are often embedded within civilian populations, making it difficult to distinguish instances of deliberate civilian targeting from a lack of care or precision capacity. Therefore, demonstrating that non-combatants were the primary target of attacks, and not unintended casualties, can be particularly challenging. As the world's population continues to urbanise, more attention needs to be paid to the intersection between urban warfare and mass atrocities.

The Role of Armed Forces in Genocide and Mass Atrocities

There is a widespread view among scholars that the involvement of armed forces in targeted mass killing is a key determinant as to whether such events are defined as genocide or mass atrocities. Militaries play a central role in most cases of genocide, largely because they add critical kinetic capacity to this type of violence. In most targeted mass killings (inclusive of but not exclusive to genocide), armed forces—or paramilitary and rebel forces that conform to the characteristics of an organised military— are responsible for the majority of killings.[73] Because the perpetrators see it as such, genocide is a politico-military strategy deliberately used to retain or reinforce their power. As Valentino puts it, 'perpetrators see mass killing as a means to an end, not an end in itself'.[74] In Sudan, Indonesia, Burundi, China, Ethiopia, Iraq and Sri Lanka, genocide was instrumental in helping perpetrator groups successfully secure power, at least for a time. As Browning observes, however, 'atrocity by policy' has a mixed history.[75] For example, the Rwandan, Cambodian and East Pakistan genocides all backfired spectacularly, failing to support the perpetrators' efforts to maintain power and control over the affected civilian populations.

Armed forces' participation in mass atrocities is not limited to direct kinetic operations. Logistics are an important element of any strategy to destroy an apparent threat. Having highly organised logistical systems, with specific operational capacity, armed forces are uniquely designed and equipped for mass killing.[76] As Yuri Zhukov explains:

Logistics make organized violence possible. One cannot kill without the means to reach a target. Without transport and open lines of communication, combatants cannot easily deploy their forces, reload their weapons, refuel their vehicles, repair their equipment, feed their troops, evacuate their wounded, or send detainees to camps.[77]

The higher the level of violence, the greater the need for resources. An important finding from Zhukov's research is that logistics matter regardless of conflict type. While many may assume that logistics is more important to traditional large-scale warfare, it also plays an important role in determining the level of violence that can be committed against civilian populations. Whether it is the violence of Stalin's great terror, Hitler's occupation of Belarus, or modern African civil wars, the intensity of violence closely matches logistical strength. Moreover, the intensity and severity of violence decreases as the physical distance from logistical supply lines increases.[78]

An act of industrial-level killing, such as genocide, requires a significant degree of organisation. As Straus points out, 'genocide requires some capacity to organize and sustain multi-agency, multi-level coalitions of violence across time and space'.[79] This implies a requirement for territorial control. Territorial control is necessary in order to carry out sustained and widespread violence. Without securing the ground, a group will have insufficient logistical or organisational capacity to define, designate and target populations. Territorial control is acquired through central state structures or through coordination and/or collaboration with local actors. When examining mass violence in Indonesia, Mark Winward found that there was a correlation between variations in the intelligence capacity of the Indonesian Army and levels of mass violence. Low intelligence capacity in certain areas meant the army was reliant on local elites who could use the campaign to destroy the Indonesian communist party and sympathisers to settle personal and political scores. This reliance led to the expansion of targeting criteria and higher levels of killing in particular areas.[80] Winward notes that 'security forces must separate and frequently screen an intended subset of a broader population group … forces are only able to collect sufficient private information when they have high intelligence capacity'.[81]

The degree to which armed forces are absent from—or remain impartial in the face of—mass killing events affects mortality rates. In Kenya's 2007–08 post-election violence, the absence of action from Kenyan armed forces was arguably critical to what otherwise may have devolved into a series of mass atrocities. Post-election violence was perpetrated by armed personnel and state actors, including the Kenyan police, but the Kenyan military remained neutral. There is insufficient research to fully explain the reason for its impartiality; however, it is relevant that no single tribe dominates the Kenyan military. While Kikuyus predominate in the officer class, Luo, Kalenjin and other smaller tribes make up the majority of the army's foot soldiers.[82] The military's apolitical stance, including its decision to limit involvement to providing support to police security operations, was instrumental in preventing the outbreak of mass violence.[83] The Waki Report on the post-election violence commended the army for the limited role it played.

As the Kenyan example illustrates, the relationship between the military and the government executive determines the state's capacity to constrain or encourage genocide. Michael Colaresi and Sabine Carey found that regime type, and the degree of executive constraint, has a direct bearing on the likelihood of security forces acting as a stabilising element or as a predatory actor. The fewer constraints on the executive, the higher the chances of the security forces being involved in the onset of genocide.[84] These findings are supported by Stephen McLoughlin, who analysed events in Burundi and Guyana during their respective democratic transitions. He observed that independence from political parties assisted in the peaceful transition of power during a period of heightened risk.[85] In both states, the military had been synonymous with the authoritarian government, carrying out its bidding including the repression and killing of civilians. McLoughlin found that a series of reforms within the broader Guyanese public sector, including the appointment of Indian Guyanese to the ranks of the police and discipline (armed) forces, helped ensure that the armed forces remained neutral during the transition of power. This reform appears to have averted mass killing at a time of heightened risk. By contrast, in Burundi the political allegiances of the Tutsi majority army had the opposite effect. When Hutu political parties were democratically elected in 1993, the Tutsi-led army launched a coup and was a dominant perpetrator of the mass atrocities that followed.[86]

There are instances in which interventions by international militaries have helped reduce bloodshed. Examples include the NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999, INTERFET's intervention in East Timor also in 1999, the intervention of France in Côte d'Ivoire in 2011, and the preventive deployment of UN troops to Macedonia in 1992. Further, foreign intervention definitively ended genocide or mass atrocities in the cases of the Indian Army's intervention in East Pakistan in 1971 and the invasion of Cambodia by Vietnam in 1979. Outside of limited examples such as these, however, there is no direct correlation between the intervention of foreign militaries and a reduction in extreme violence or mass atrocity events.

Of the cases analysed by the Mass Atrocity Endings project, the majority ended 'as planned' or 'moderated'. These findings indicate that foreign intervention has rarely halted atrocities. Instead perpetrators generally decide for themselves when the violence begins and ends.[87] The explanation for this lies in the complexity and unpredictability of civil wars. The case of the 2011 NATO intervention in Libya is a key example. While initially successful in stopping a seemingly imminent campaign of mass atrocities in Benghazi, the intervention ultimately failed to provide a stable foundation for regime change and indeed created the conditions that led to the Libyan civil war. These unintended consequences in Libya then spread beyond Libyan territory. Specifically, after the fall of Gaddafi in 2012, the return to Mali of Tuareg militias (who had been armed and trained by and worked for the Gaddafi regime) sparked rebellion in that country.[88]

Preparing for the Future — Planning for Atrocity Risk

The preceding analysis has provided an overview of the risks of mass atrocities that emanate from major geostrategic trends and challenges. It has demonstrated that the confluence of multiple 'threat amplifiers' is likely to increase the risk of genocide and mass atrocities in the decades to come. While geostrategic trends are not a predictive tool, they nevertheless inform assessments of probabilities and underscore the need to understand the circumstances in which genocidal events have occurred in the past and may therefore occur in the future. In that context, this section offers observations to assist the Australian Government and the ADF to prepare for a future distinguished by increased atrocity risk.

Atrocity Prevention Working Group

A national approach to atrocity prevention requires a whole-of-government approach including high levels of political will, coupled with investment to develop the necessary expertise and capabilities. Several like-minded partners are at various stages of developing atrocity prevention within their foreign policy, notably core allies the US and the UK.[89] Preventing mass atrocities is both the morally right thing to do and much less costly than intervening in a large-scale, protracted humanitarian crisis.

The Australian Government should support further research and consider proposals for potential models to strengthen whole-of-government atrocity prevention capabilities. Measures could include establishing a standing interdepartmental mechanism on atrocity prevention, developing a national

strategy on atrocity prevention, or mainstreaming atrocity prevention into external missions. The opportunity is ripe for the Australian Government to turn these capabilities into an operable strategy on prevention.

Recommendation: *The Australian Government should consider the need for an atrocity prevention strategy and working group.*

Adopting an 'Atrocity Prevention Lens' in the Indo-Pacific Region

With the heightened risk of several threat multipliers, including extreme climate change events and great power competition, there is a risk of mass atrocities occurring in the Indo-Pacific region. Given Australia's strategic interests in the security and stability of its near neighbours, the adoption by government of an 'atrocity prevention lens' is therefore prudent. As Bellamy notes, the adoption of an atrocity prevention lens, 'focuses on injecting atrocity prevention considerations into existing policies, programs, and capabilities and, when necessary, 'convening' or 'coordinating' these assets for prevention purposes'.[90] This is not to say that all policies, programs or operations require an atrocity prevention focus. Rather, such a lens helps to identify otherwise unforeseen risks and helps to generate options for prevention. A model of this was developed in the US under the Obama administration's Atrocity Prevention Board.

Ideally, an interdepartmental team would focus on the policies, programs and operations that could mitigate this risk. However, given the important role played by armed forces in mass atrocity events, developing this focus within the ADF should also be a priority. The Department of Defence, the Defence Intelligence Organisation, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Australian Federal Police and the Office of National Intelligence would have integral roles.

Recommendation: *The Australian Government should consider models of coordination such as the Atrocity Prevention Board.*

Partner and Host Country Risk Monitoring

There have been times in Australia's history when the mission of an ADF deployed force has diverged starkly from the operational focus of the host nation's armed forces. A key example is Australian participation in the UNAMIR II mission following the 1994 Rwandan genocide. There Australian forces were placed in an impossible situation of attempting to facilitate the repatriation of refugees from Zaire to Rwanda at Kibeho in 1995. Specifically, on 22 April, Rwandan troops massacred 4,000 civilians within a refugee camp. The motivation for the attack was the presence or threat posed by génocidaires operating within the refugee population.[91] Australian and Zambian forces were faced with the choice of leaving civilians at the mercy of the Rwandan troops, or instead engaging against the host nation's army.

This example demonstrates clearly the difficulties faced by international forces when a partner or host military violates the principles humanitarian law. Similar challenges have arisen in more contemporary Australian missions such as those in South Sudan, Mali, Iraq and the Philippines. In response to such challenges, operational planning must consider how the ADF can protect civilians from both non-state actor armed groups and host country or partner militaries who may pose a risk to civilian populations. Such assessments need to be incorporated into the review and development of rules of engagement. Given the inevitable political and diplomatic sensitivities of such operational decisions, planning will involve inter-agency consultation.

Recommendation: *The ADF should ensure that rules of engagement planning and development includes consideration of the risk of atrocity perpetration by a partner or host country.*

Early Warning

As discussed in this paper, genocide and mass atrocities are characterised by distinct risk factors that can be tracked and monitored. In parallel with existing military guidelines and doctrine, the opportunity exists for the ADF to expand its tools of analysis by operationalising the UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes, the primary document which sets out the risk factors most associated with genocide and mass atrocities.[92] Within this document there are specific research tools that can be integrated into

forward planning and preparation for atrocity prevention. These include quantitative models which forecast the risk of genocide and mass atrocities. Relevantly, the Australian National University's Atrocity Forecasting Project has produced three- to five-year forecasts on a regular basis with a high degree of accuracy, identifying high atrocity risk in Ethiopia, Central African Republic, Syria and Libya well before the onset of atrocities in those cases.[93] In addition to the raw value of the forecasts themselves, Nanlohy, Butcher and Goldsmith's 2017 paper outlines the core policy uses of quantitative atrocity forecasting.[94]

Recommendation: *The ADF should integrate the UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes into protection of civilians planning, and quantitative forecasting models into future risk preparedness.*

Civil-Military Guidelines

Existing Australian Department of Defence and related agency documentation provides the core framework for considering how Army can uphold its responsibilities to protect civilians from mass atrocities. The Australian Civil-Military Centre (ACMC) Australian Guidelines for Protection of Civilians (2015) and Protection of Civilians Manual (2020) remain the primary reference documents to underpin operational planning for protection of civilians.[95] Of the three Australian focus areas, Army and the ADF more broadly will be engaged primarily in focus area two, 'provision of physical protection' and focus area three, 'establishment of a protective environment'. Focal area two provides a comprehensive set of operational considerations that should remain the basis of planning for operations where protection of civilians is mandated. The tools of analysis for perpetrators and threats offers a clear and replicable set of considerations. If not already utilised, this guidance should be integrated into Joint Military Appreciation Process activities where protection of civilians is a possible consideration for an operation.

Recommendation: *The ADF should ensure that the ACMC Guidelines for Protection of Civilians are integrated into procedures for peace operations, civil military operations and military contributions to humanitarian operations.*

Military Doctrine

Given the pivotal role played by armed forces in either contributing to mass violence or preventing it, it would be valuable for the ADF to generate its own version of the US Mass Atrocity Response Operations (MARO) handbook.[96] The MARO handbook was developed by the US Army War College in 2010 and remains a core planning document for military responses to mass atrocities. No similar public manual or handbook exists in the Australian context and, while there are similarities with humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations, operational responses to mass atrocities differ significantly in many key respects. The MARO handbook outlines how military responses to mass atrocities differ from conventional operations and provides guidance on analysis, operational courses of action, design, and implementation of operations.

The MARO handbook is written from a US perspective and is now over 10 years old. The technology available is also a decade further advanced than was considered by the authors of the MARO handbook. In November 2022 Australia, along with 80 other states, endorsed a declaration against the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.[97] The existence of such international commitments, combined with the exigencies of a rapidly changing strategic environment, suggest that an Australian version of the MARO handbook, specifically adapted to ADF doctrine and capabilities, would be a timely development.

Recommendation: *The Department of Defence should consider the development of an updated MARO handbook.*

Urban Warfare Operations

The ADF has a long history of planning and conducting urban operations. Yet explicit planning for the protection of civilians and prevention of mass atrocities has not featured clearly or prominently in its publications. For example, in the landmark *Future Land Warfare Report 2014*, there is no explicit mention or discussion of protection of civilians, mass atrocity risk or atrocity prevention. The report recognises:

Contemporary trends suggest future conflict will increasingly involve multiple diverse actors, all competing for the allegiances and/or acquiescence of targeted populations. Consequently, the outcome of conflict will be influenced by the perceptions of these populations rather than solely the results of battlefield action.[98]

The protection of civilians must be considered as a central mechanism for gaining the trust and/or allegiances of target populations.

Operations in highly populated civilian areas may require more limited uses of weapons systems, in particular heavy weapons and high-calibre weapons or systems. Counterinsurgency operations in Mosul and Marawi are examples of non-state actor armed groups embedding themselves within civilian populations and using them as human shields. Jenna Allen and Deane-Peter Baker have suggested a greater role for autonomous and semi-autonomous weapons systems in urban environments such as these. The benefit of such capabilities is that they offer enhanced intelligence capacity that is crucial to distinguishing combatants and non-combatants in areas where targeting is highly challenging.[99] While use of these systems for warfighting may be highly advantageous, it is accompanied by significant ethical risks, especially where weapons systems are fully automated with humans out of the loop.[100] Military wargaming, planning and training could integrate specific civilian protection missions for urban warfare theatres.

Recommendations:

The ADF should update the analysis in the Future Land Warfare Report to explicitly consider the risk of atrocities and the requirements for civilian protection in urban warfare, specifically with regard to rules of engagement, weapons system types and explosive ordnance use.

The ADF should focus on civilian protection and atrocity prevention where the use of autonomous weapons systems is being considered, including in training, wargaming and the Joint Military Appreciation Process.

Cyber Operations

The cyber domain poses unique planning considerations for the Australian Army in any response to mass atrocities. In concert with other strategies, cyber operations are generally far lower cost, more rapidly actionable and potentially highly effective in preventing atrocities. As the ADF continues to expand and develop its offensive cyber warfare capability, it has the growing potential to launch or contribute to what Rhiannon Neilsen describes as 'cyber humanitarian interventions'.[101]

As Neilsen demonstrates in her research, perpetrators of atrocities are already heavily utilising cyberspace. Meanwhile response efforts are largely focused on recording atrocities instead of directly targeting perpetrators' means and motivations. Using offensive cyber capabilities, the opportunity exists to block communications, delete propaganda, freeze financial revenue and prevent malware attacks. Australia is already well equipped and has experience in offensive cyber where non-state armed actors pose a clear risk to civilians. Operation GLOWING SYMPHONY against ISIS was highly successful. While this operation was conducted largely by the Australian Signals Directorate, a similar offensive approach could be taken by Army Cyber Warfare Division to oppose or interdict atrocities.[102]

Using Neilsen's framework, Army should seek to integrate cyber humanitarian interventions into future operational planning both in terms of cyber-only operations (where ADF deployment is highly unlikely) and as a core element of land operations (where Army or ADF assets are deployed). Cyber operations may also play a critical role in urban warfare, where the presence of civilians increases the complexity of efforts to deter and disrupt non-state actor armed groups. Australia could play an outsized role in atrocity prevention through integration of cyber operations into strategy and planning.

Recommendation: *The ADF Cyber Warfare Division should integrate cyber humanitarian intervention strategies and operational guidance into planning and future operations.*

Professional Military Education and Training

Given the huge personal, economic and cultural cost of mass atrocities, prioritising the obligation to protect civilians under international law should remain a *necessary* component of ongoing ADF professional military education. In this regard, focused education around the risk factors for genocide would be of considerable benefit to the ADF. Every year the ADF hosts military personnel from many Commonwealth and partner countries, including from the Indo-Pacific region, at training courses conducted at the Australian Defence College. By incorporating a focus on risk factors and responses to mass atrocity into existing courses, the ADF may make a very real contribution to preventing mass atrocities in the region. This is especially relevant with respect to countries where the ADF is likely to deploy and where the risks of mass atrocity are relatively high. This situation exists in several countries within the Indo-Pacific.

Beyond professional military education, ongoing training in atrocity risk management is equally relevant. The ADF may one day be called upon to intervene in a mass atrocity event potentially in our own region. Consequently, training in mass atrocity response operations, using either existing resources like the MARO handbook or following the development of an Australian operational handbook, is a practical step towards mitigating such a disaster. Such training should focus on the theatres involving large civilian populations or where 'protection of civilians' mandates are explicitly invoked. Additionally, training in atrocity risk factors could be key in the collection of useful information during deployments, which could then be fed back into active intelligence assessments of atrocity risk.

Recommendation: *The ADF should integrate focused military education and training on the issue of mass atrocities and atrocity response, with a focus on external knowledge exchanges with partner militaries.*

Summary of Recommendations

Given the strategic and political context within which military deployments occur, planning for atrocity response on operations needs to start at the government and inter-agency levels. The following tables provide a summary of policy and military operational recommendations and concepts that could be implemented to improve whole-of-government responsiveness to mass atrocities as well as enhancing prevention capabilities.

Recommendation	Action	Stakeholders
Atrocity prevention working group	Develop a whole-of-government atrocity prevention capability, such as establishing a standing interdepartmental mechanism for atrocity prevention, developing a national strategy on atrocity prevention and/or mainstreaming atrocity prevention into external missions.	Department of Defence (DoD)—Army; Strategy, Policy and Industry Group; Joint Capabilities Group; Defence Intelligence Group Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) Australian Federal Police (AFP) Intelligence agencies—Office of National Intelligence (ONI), Australian Signals Directorate (ASD), Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS)
Adoption of an 'atrocity prevention lens'	Inject atrocity prevention considerations into existing policies, programs and capabilities and, when necessary, convene or coordinate these assets for prevention purposes.	DoD—Army; Strategy, Policy and Industry Group; Joint Capabilities Group; Defence Intelligence Group DFAT AFP Intelligence agencies—ONI, ASD, ASIS
Integration of UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes and quantitative early warning models	Integrate the UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes into protection of civilians planning, and quantitative forecasting models into future risk preparedness.	DoD—Army; Strategy, Policy and Industry Group; Joint Capabilities Group; Defence Intelligence Group DFAT AFP Intelligence agencies—ONI, ASD, ASIS

Recommendation	Action	Stakeholders
Integration of Australian Civil-Military Centre Guidelines for Protection of Civilians	Ensure that the ACMC guidelines are integrated into consolidated doctrines for peace operations, civil-military operations and military contribution to humanitarian operations.	DoD—Army; Strategy, Policy and Industry Group; Joint Capabilities Group
Atrocity prevention in partner or host country rules of engagement and planning	Ensure that rules of engagement planning and development include consideration of partner or host country risk of atrocity perpetration.	DoD—Army; Strategy, Policy and Industry Group DFAT
Mass atrocity response operations	Prepare an Australian Army focused, updated version of the Mass Atrocity Response Operations handbook.	DoD—Army; Strategy, Policy and Industry Group; Joint Capabilities Group; Defence Intelligence Group
Development of civilian protection strategies as part of urban warfare planning with specific consideration of use of autonomous weapons systems	Update analysis in the Future Land Warfare Report to explicitly consider the risk of atrocities and the requirements for civilian protection in urban warfare, specifically with regard to rules of engagement, weapons system types and explosive ordnance use. Focus on civilian protection and atrocity prevention where the use of autonomous weapons systems is being considered, including in training, wargaming and the Joint Military Appreciation Process.	DoD—Army; Strategy, Policy and Industry Group; Joint Capabilities Group; Defence Intelligence Group
Development of cyber humanitarian intervention strategy	ADF Cyber Warfare Division to integrate cyber humanitarian intervention strategies into operational guidance.	DoD—Army; Strategy, Policy and Industry Group Intelligence agencies—ASD
Education, training and exchange	Integrate education and training regarding mass atrocities, including contributing factors and responses, into Australian Defence College training, and focus on external knowledge exchanges with partner militaries.	DoD—Army; Strategy, Policy and Industry Group; Joint Capabilities Group

Conclusion

In its role in support of the Australian Government's defence, security and foreign policy objectives, the Australian Army faces a future distinguished by multiple overlapping challenges. As the world faces myriad geostrategic threats, all of which can interact and be instrumentalised by malign actors to perpetuate existing conflicts, there is a higher than average risk of mass atrocity crimes. As a middle power that seeks to uphold the rules-based international order, Australia must be prepared for this risk. To achieve this, Army must integrate atrocity risk awareness into its operations.

This paper has provided an overarching review of the existing literature on three geostrategic threats and their relationships with genocide and mass atrocities: great power competition, climate change and urban warfare. It has illustrated gaps in our collective knowledge of these relationships and, through a series of case studies, has demonstrated how the identified trends can act as threat multipliers in cases where conflict is present. The paper has also examined the broader role of armed forces, both as potential perpetrators and as intervenors, articulating the complexity of atrocity crimes and efforts to subvert them. Based on the analysis, the paper has proposed sets of operational and policy recommendations to be implemented by Army, Defence and associated foreign affairs and intelligence agencies.

This paper should be viewed as an introductory piece of research setting the broad agenda for examination of a topic that is currently underdeveloped in Australian defence policy. Additional work to craft the development and implementation of this agenda is critical. As seen in Ukraine, Myanmar, Ethiopia and elsewhere in recent years, the risk of atrocity is not one of a distant past. The threats and challenges outlined in this report show that this risk is likely to increase in future. This why Australia, and the Army in particular, must be well prepared to respond.

About the Authors

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Appendix 1: Methodology and Definitions

For the literature review, the research employed systematic review, a standardised, rigorous process of searching, reviewing and analysing academic literature to obtain a full picture of the available scholarly literature.[103] This process involves reviewing, at the title level, the works cited in the bibliography of selected papers and the works in which that paper is cited as shown in Google Scholar. Where there was insufficient literature relating to the trend in mass atrocities or genocide, the scope of review was broadened to incorporate closely related outcomes such as mass killing, repression, and civil war. Through this process, a picture of the current state of the evidence and literature on these trends, along with a 'gap map' identifying where future research is required, was obtained.[104]

Case Study Selection

The process of case study selection for analysis was limited to cases within the last 10 to 20 years, where the intersection between geostrategic trends and genocide and/or mass atrocities has been recorded. We used the publicly available Targeted Mass Killing (TMK) dataset to confirm cases of genocide.[105] From the list of TMK events from 2000 onward we prioritised cases from 2008 to 2023. Using this shortlist, an evaluation of the intersection of geostrategic trends and cases of either genocide or TMK was undertaken to select the final case studies.

Case Study Analysis Method

Following the case selection process, we used the structured focused case comparison method, which allows for case study comparisons in a structured way 'to guide and standardize data collection, thereby making systematic comparison and cumulation of the findings possible'.[106] This necessitates the collection and organisation of qualitative data in the same structured way to develop qualitative datasets from which the effects of the independent variables (great power competition, climate change, urban warfare and new technology) on the dependent variable (genocide and other mass atrocities) can be observed. Some cases involve more than one geostrategic trend; in others there might be only one.

In research on genocide and mass atrocities, definitions are critical to conceptualising and understanding how this extreme form of violence is distinct from other forms of political violence. There are many competing and contested definitions of genocide. Mass atrocities is a blanket term which encompasses genocide, whereas war crimes and crimes against humanity also include a multitude of other crimes. For the purposes of this research, we use the definition established by Barbara Harff and Ted Gurr of genocide and politicide:

> *Genocides and politicides are the promotion and execution of policies by a state or its agents which result in the deaths of a substantial portion of a group. The difference between genocide and politicide is in the characteristics by which members of the group are identified by the state. In genocides the victimized groups are defined primarily in terms of their communal characteristics, i.e., ethnicity, religion, or nationality. In politicides the victim groups are defined primarily in terms of their hierarchical position or political opposition to the regime and dominant groups.[107]*

This definition is commonly used in political science research on genocide. Mass atrocities are defined as 'large-scale, systematic violence against civilian populations' and include genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.[108]

Appendix 2: Case Studies

In order to observe the effects of major geostrategic trends in genocide and mass killing, empirical evidence and analysis is crucial. We are only seeking to observe associations between these trends and events and do not claim a causal relationship. However, these trends appear to be threat amplifiers. Genocide and mass atrocities are rare events. As the effects of particular trends, notably climate change, are more recent, and as geopolitical competition varies in severity over time (but has been higher in the past decade than at any time since the end of the Cold War), the combination of varying trends and small sample size makes quantitative analysis impractical. The purpose of the following case studies is to demonstrate how these trends have interacted with and amplified existing conflict dynamics. They are contemporary examples and were chosen because they provide a modern context with the greatest utility. In each case, genocide or mass atrocities clearly took place and involved at least one geostrategic trend as an amplification factor.

Myanmar

Risk period: 2017–2023

Risk factors present: Non-democracy, civil conflict, terrorism, exclusive ethnic elite ideology

Geostrategic trends: Geopolitical competition

Targeted groups: Rohingya (2017–2023), anti-junta groups (2021–2023)

International response: Targeted sanctions, prosecutions

Recognition of genocide: Yes (United States—21 March 2022)

Myanmar is a critical case that illuminates some of the core dynamics at play in this paper. The leadership and political elite of Myanmar, now principally the Tatmadaw, have used mass atrocities as a strategy against minority ethnic groups for a variety of purposes. In the case of the Rohingya, the 'clearance operations' launched in August 2017 in Rakhine state killed at least 6,700 civilians. The Tatmadaw and local militias carried out scorched-earth operations and forced up to one million Rohingya to flee into Bangladesh.[109] These events were subsequently recognised as genocide by the United States.[110] The Rohingya have faced cycles of violence and repression since the 1970s and were formally made stateless by Myanmar in the 1980s. The atrocities were in part a counterinsurgency operation against a relatively small and weak non-state armed actor, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). ARSA's coordinated attack on police outposts was the formal trigger for the military operation against the Rohingya population, though given the pre-positioning of the Tatmadaw and the swift response to ARSA, it is widely considered a pretext for a long-planned campaign. Aside from the systematic abuse of a stateless minority the genocide was, according to Eelco van der Maat and Arthur Holmes, largely the outcome of rivalry within the Tatmadaw. General Min Aung Hlaing, a key architect of the genocide, consolidated his power within the command centres of the Tatmadaw by locking critical battalions into the violence and subsequently into his command.[111] Chris Wilson also argues that the genocide was the outcome of inter-elite rivalry, though he believes it was the transition to democracy, and the threat to the political and economic status of the Tatmadaw, that incentivised the severe repression of the Rohingya as a strategy to maintain the status of the Tatmadaw as the 'guardian of the nation'.[112]

The domestic dynamics of radical security politics, combined with ethnic conflict, may have been sufficient for the Tatmadaw to pursue genocide as a strategy against the Rohingya. In addition, however, it is critical to consider how great power competition affected the risk dynamic and the determination of the military in this case. Myanmar is subject to significant geopolitical competition between international great power actors as well as regional powers. Their most significant patron is China, though the relationship is not always friendly or entirely stable. Meanwhile the US, Russia, India, and Japan all play important roles and compete for influence in the region. The competition for influence in Myanmar

coalesces with domestic dynamics, in particular the transition to democracy. In the post-2010 period when Myanmar sought to democratise, its relationship with the US deepened. During the Obama administration, Myanmar had been on a path to political liberalisation. Myanmar's response to surges in intercommunal violence in Rakhine state in 2012, 2015 and 2016 was different to its response in 2017, when the Trump administration pursued a more isolationist approach to foreign policy. Matteo Fumagalli suggests that this was because 'the Myanmar authorities plausibly felt constrained by the much-needed international assistance that was crucial to political change'.[113]

During the Trump administration, US interest in democracy promotion waned and both China and Russia reasserted their interests.[114] The ability of the Tatmadaw to avoid international intervention, shielded principally by China and Russia at the UN Security Council but also not being rebuked by other great and regional powers like India, gave them latitude to perpetrate atrocities without significant fear of external responses. Domestically this was also easier as the National League for Democracy and Aung San Suu Kyi did not offer significant opposition to the atrocities in Rakhine. To varying degrees, they did not accept or value the place of the Rohingya in Myanmar. The lifting of most sanctions on Myanmar in October 2016, and the policy drift and ambivalence of the United States, exacerbated by the permissive acquiescence of China, India and Russia, only increased the risk of unrestrained violence.[115] During Myanmar's political liberalisation, China clearly sought to retain its influence by tripling its arms exports to Myanmar from 2011 to 2015 before beginning to reduce them from 2016.[116]

In September 2017, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi sided with Aung San Suu Kyi in her depiction of the ongoing operations as a security issue, while Russia and China blocked resolutions at the Security Council.[117] This was in part due to India's competition for influence in Myanmar with China, and partly based on India's interest in being able to manage its own internal affairs with respect to ethnic minorities.

The case of the Rohingya remains highly pertinent for present risk analysis, as the threat of mass atrocities against various ethnic and political groups has worsened since the February 2021 coup. As the Tatmadaw escalates conflicts in ethnic minority regions, notably in the states of Kachin, Kayin and Mon, it now poses a significant threat to a wider number of ethnic minority groups.[118] Civilians protesting in major cities against the junta also face

significant risk of politicide.[119] While Myanmar has faced sanctions during this period, the Tatmadaw has maintained its power in part through the patronage of illiberal regimes in China, Russia and to an extent India. Russia in particular has deepened its relationship with the junta in return for reciprocal support for its illegal invasion of Ukraine.[120] The risk of large-scale atrocity is even greater today as the power of the Tatmadaw is under consistent and significant threat from multiple challengers. For example, as of February 2023 the Tatmadaw controls less than half of Myanmar.[121] This, in theory, allows for the creation and perpetuation of perceived or actual existential threats to the junta's rule, necessitating, at least in the mind of the junta, the need for extreme group destructive violence.

Ukraine

Risk period: 2014–2023

Risk factors present: Non-democracy, civil conflict, exclusive ethnic elite ideology

Geostrategic trends: Great power competition, urban warfare, climate change

Targeted groups: Ukrainians

International response: Targeted sanctions, security assistance, economic sanctions, prosecutions

Recognition of genocide: Yes (Canada, Republic of Ireland)

Following the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the ongoing war demonstrates the risk of mass atrocities as an outcome of urban warfare where civilian protection is not prioritised, as is the case with Russia. There is an active debate on whether to describe the actions of Russia as genocidal.[122] While it is unlikely to be formally determined in the short term, there are elements of the conflict which suggest an intent to destroy, in whole or in part, the national identity of Ukrainians. Official and semi-official state media in Russia has repeatedly called for the destruction of the Ukrainian nation. President Vladimir Putin has also stated his belief that Ukraine is not a country distinct from Russia.[123] The massacres of civilians in Bucha and Borodianka, among many others, show a pattern of systematic violence against the people of Ukraine.[124] One of the clearest demonstrations may be the removal of Ukrainian

children, taken to Russia and adopted by Russian families.[125] There is clear evidence of attempts to destroy Ukrainian cultural heritage, which aligns with a Lemkinian definition of genocide—that is, the destruction of group culture, to be replaced with the culture of the perpetrator.

While the war continues and outcomes remain uncertain, there continues to be high atrocity risk in Russian assaults on urban areas. These have come in two forms. One is the sustained aerial bombardment of cities like Kherson and Mariupol, where thousands of civilians were killed during Russian attempts to capture the city.[126] These Russian operations echoed Russian strategies used in Syria, focusing the bombardment on civilian infrastructure with little consideration for civilian life.[127] They symbolise the critical risk to civilians in urban warfare where the perpetrator has aerial and mortar capability. In this case a powerful state actor (Russia) ambivalent about the targeting of civilians directly targets civilians and civilian infrastructure as a deliberate strategy to terrorise and subdue populations, or as a less costly option than close combat in an urban theatre that may place its soldiers at higher risk. The war does of course have significant external dimensions. Ukraine's capacity to defend itself, with unexpected success, reflects the extraordinary level of support from partners in the West, in particular the US. Russia has faced massive economic sanctions, as well as targeted sanctions that have isolated its economy and made it more dependent on Chinese and Indian trade. As Ukraine is fighting for its right to exist, as long as external support to both Ukraine and Russia are maintained, the conflict will also likely continue.

Although it is not immediately obvious, the war in Ukraine also exhibits climate-related conflict and atrocity dynamics. Environmental dynamics, not necessarily caused by climate change, have intersected with Russian strategies in targeting Ukrainian civilians. The deliberate targeting of Ukrainian critical civilian infrastructure, notably energy grids during what is generally a brutally cold Ukrainian winter, appears to be part of the broader strategy to demoralise the Ukrainian population. Climate change does not just interfere with atmospheric temperatures; it also increases the likelihood of more extreme weather events, including extreme cold and storms. It is therefore possible to combine attacks on critical infrastructure with extreme cold to threaten the survival of a civilian population.

Overall, all the major trends considered in this paper are present in the Ukraine war in varying forms. As a potentially escalating conflict, the war in Ukraine will remain at the core of concerns about international peace and security for the foreseeable future.

Sri Lanka

Risk period: 2009

Risk factors present: Non-democracy, civil conflict, terrorism, exclusive ethnic elite ideology

Geostrategic trends: Geopolitical competition

Targeted groups: Tamils

International response: Targeted sanctions, prosecutions

Recognition of genocide: No

In May 2009, Sri Lanka's long-running civil war, principally fought between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Government of Sri Lanka, ended with a sustained large-scale bombardment of the only remaining area under LTTE control. Militarily defeated, the LTTE held up to 300,000 civilians, largely against their will, in a small area of coastline in north-east Sri Lanka.[128] Rather than pursuing a counterinsurgency strategy focusing on specific targeting of rebel leaders and fighters (and encouraging international engagement to push for the LTTE to surrender) the Government of Sri Lanka endorsed a deliberate campaign of targeted mass killing of Tamil people. Civilians were ordered to move into 'no-fire zones' to avoid the fighting, at which point government forces conducted relentless mortar and aerial bombing campaigns of those zones, resulting in mass atrocities against Tamil civilians.[129] According to UN expert panels, in the final months of the war between 40,000 and 70,000 Tamil civilians were killed.[130]

Great power competition, in this case between regional power rivals India and China, is among the multiple factors why the mass atrocities at the end of Eelam War IV took place. It also explains why there was no external intervention or especially strong action from the international community. Due to its support for the first Tamil rebels, India was a pivotal player in Sri Lanka's civil war, before intervening in a disastrous peacekeeping

mission later described as India's Vietnam.[131] After taking a largely hands-off approach to the conflict for over a decade, India then sided with the Sri Lankan Government. India provided defensive military aid, joint naval operations critical to the interdiction of LTTE naval operations, and logistics and intelligence used in the final years of the war. This support was significant in turning the tide of Sri Lankan counterinsurgency capacity.[132] However, Indian support was eventually dwarfed by Chinese military aid. It is believed that over one billion dollars annually, making up 80 per cent of military assistance to Sri Lanka, was provided by China.[133] China sought to cement its influence in Sri Lanka as a component of its 'string of pearls' strategy.[134] In March 2007, Sri Lanka and China signed eight agreements on closer economic cooperation. Sri Lanka negotiated a funding loan agreement with China for the Hambantota port.[135] The port is located in the hometown of then President Mahinda Rajapaksa and was 85 per cent funded by China.[136] The joint communiqué between the two countries explicitly set the stage for Chinese support for Sri Lanka's counterinsurgency. It affirmed that both states were 'resolved to fight tirelessly against the three evil forces of terrorism, separatism and extremism and will step up consultation and coordinating on regional and international counter-terrorism action'.[137]

Despite significant aid provided by China, it was Indian non-intervention that played a crucial role in the success of Sri Lankan Government forces.[138] As admitted by then defence minister Gotabaya Rajapaksa, competition between India and China was used by the Sri Lankan Government to ensure a steady supply of military equipment and later non-intervention. The wider international community was largely ambivalent regarding the atrocities being committed at the end of the Sri Lankan civil war. This appears to be strongly linked to the terrorist attacks committed by the LTTE and the ongoing war on terror internationally.[139] Few Western governments were willing to weigh into a conflict where few Western interests directly existed. Moreover, India was considered the major power in the region and Western intervention could have been cast as support for a terrorist group. Consequently, Tamil civilians were left almost defenceless. In their final assault to destroy the LTTE, Tamil civilians were directly targeted by the Sri Lankan military while also being preyed upon by the LTTE, which used them as human shields.

Mali

Risk period: 2013–2023

Risk factors present: Non-democracy, civil conflict, terrorism

Geostrategic trends: Geopolitical competition, climate change

Targeted groups: Fulani and pastoralist groups

International response: Targeted sanctions

Recognition of mass atrocities: No

Since 2013, the Central Mali Government, military and, in recent years, military junta have been fighting local insurgencies from Tuareg groups and Islamic fundamentalist terrorist organisations (including Islamic State, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and al-Qaeda) in the lands of Islamic Maghreb. Atrocities have been committed as part of intercommunal conflicts in central Mali between farming communities and nomadic groups, with militias forming on both sides. The conflict became internationalised with the involvement of French forces; a UN peacekeeping mission, MINUSMA; and private military contractors. However, in August 2022, French forces under Operation Barkhane withdrew from Mali.[140] Over the nearly 10 years of civil war, one of the largest atrocities committed in Mali occurred in March 2022, when over 300 Fulani civilians were killed in the town of Moura. The perpetrators of the killings included a combination of Malian Armed Forces and Russian private military contractors from the Wagner Group.[141] Mali is fast becoming a new theatre in geopolitical competition for influence between Russia and the West.[142]

The intersection of the Malian conflict and climate change is complex. Climate change in Mali has manifested in increased severity of droughts, which in certain areas has serious effects on the livelihoods of vulnerable populations. This has created greater incentives for recruitment to armed groups, including criminal organisations, extremist actors and self-defence militias. Where the central government or local administration is unable to provide basic services and goods to the broader population there have been serious failures of governance. This has led a number of researchers to propose climate change as a factor in the conflict in Mali.[143] The Sahel region has historically experienced prolonged drought and desertification; however,

greater rainfall has resulted in intense re-greening.[144] Britt Koehnlein and Ore Koren have shown that areas of the Sahel with seasonal climate variation, rather than constant harsh or extreme climate conditions, are more likely to experience civilian targeting.[145] This indicates that Mali may be an important case example to observe regarding the intersection of climate change, endogenous factors and other exogenous shocks.

As Benjaminsen notes:

> *An association between climate change induced scarcity and increased conflict levels cannot … be entirely dismissed … Whether people will fight over scarce resources or cooperate more, is, however, an open question. The implied Malthusianism and climate reductionism in the dominant narrative seem, however, to assume simple causal mechanisms where in reality there may be complex webs of explanation.[146]*

However, climate is not the only factor operating in Mali to increase the risk of civilian atrocities. As the Malian Army is now backed by Russia rather than France, and is less beholden to the principle of avoiding civilian targeting, the risk that it will target civilians is considerably higher. Indeed, according to Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) data tracking on violence against civilians, civilian deaths caused by Malian Armed Forces increased six-fold between 2021 and 2022, coinciding with the exit of French troops.[147] In this case, while climate change may exacerbate existing conflicts in Mali, climate change in and of itself is not the sole cause of the conflicts.

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