

Chapter 6

Freedom Virtually Ends Genocide and Mass Murder

The more freedom a people have, the less likely their government will murder them; the less their freedom, the more likely such democide.
----This web site

By shooting, drowning, burying alive, stabbing, torture, beating, suffocation, starvation, exposure, poison, crushing, and other countless ways that lives can be wiped out, governments have killed unarmed and helpless people. Intentionally. With forethought. This is murder. It is *democide*.

The more popularly understood term for government murder is *genocide*, but there is a difference between democide and genocide as described in my "[Democide versus Genocide: Which is What?](#)", and which must be understood: in short, *democide* is a government's murder of people for whatever reason; *genocide* is the murder of people because of their race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, or language. The most infamous example of genocide was Nazi Germany's cold-blooded murder of near 6,000,000 Jews during World War II (see [Table 1.1](#) from my [Democide](#)). Men, women, and children died simply because they were ethnic Jews. In

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[Chapter 1](#), you also have read about the Burmese military genocide of the Karen minority; the Sudanese government's genocide of the Black Southern minority; the Chinese Communist Party's genocide of the Falun Gong; and in [Chapter 5](#) you also read about the Mexican government's genocide of Indians. An example of nongenocidal democide is the Chinese Party and Burma's military murders of pro-democracy demonstrators; the Mexican and, in [Chapter 1](#), the Saudi Arabian government's murders of political opponents; and, in [Chapter 3](#), Stalin's deadly famine he imposed on the Ukraine.



Starving them to death.
The Turkish Armenian genocide

If you have been living in a democracy all your life, you may find it difficult to accept the truth that governments murder people by the thousands and millions. I know that even some of my political science colleagues have

resisted the thought. I could see them wince when at a conference or meeting, for example, I would say outright that Kim Il-sung, the deceased dictator of North Korea, is responsible for the murder of something like 1,700,000 people (see [Table 15.1](#) from my [Death By Government](#)). You can easily call some person a murderer if they kill people in cold blood, as did London's famous "Jack the Ripper," who killed six or seven people in 1888; or the "Boston Strangler," Albert DeSalvo, who in 1962-1964 killed thirteen people. You may resist, however, calling a dictator a mass murderer, even when speaking of Uganda's Idi Amin, who physically took part in some murders carried out by his government, and was responsible for the violent deaths of some 300,000 of his subjects.

Part of this reluctance to call a government or its ruler a murderer comes from the fact that to do so is a new and strange thought. Democide is a black hole in our textbooks, college teaching, and social science research. Few people know the extent to which governments murder people. In the twentieth century, the age of great advances in technology, medicine, wealth, and education, governments nonetheless probably murdered over 170,000,000 people, the worst of these murderous governments are listed in [Table 6.1](#) here.¹ This is more than four times those killed in combat in all international and national wars, including world wars I and II, Vietnam, Korea, the Mexican Revolution, the Russian Revolution, and the Chinese Civil War. The toll could even be more than 300,000,000. This is as though we had a nuclear war, but with its deaths and destruction spread over a

TABLE 6.1
Democide 1900-1987

| REGIMES | YEARS | DEMOCIDE (000)[1] | |
|--------------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|
| | | TOTAL | DOMESTIC |
| MEGAMURDERERS | 1900-87 | 151,491 | 116,380 |
| DEKA-MEGA... | 1900-87 | 128,168 | 100,842 |
| U.S.S.R. | 1917-87 | 61,911 | 54,769 |
| China (PRC) | 1949-87 | 35,236 | 35,236 |
| Germany | 1933-45 | 20,946 | 762 |
| China (KMT) | 1928-49 | 10,075 | 10,075 |
| LESSER MEGA... | 1900-87 | 19,178 | 12,237 |
| Japan | 1936-45 | 5,964 | Nil |
| China (Mao Soviets) [2] | 1923-49 | 3,466 | 3,466 |
| Cambodia | 1975-79 | 2,035 | 2,000 |
| Turkey | 1909-18 | 1,883 | 1,752 |
| Vietnam | 1945-87 | 1,670 | 944 |
| Poland | 1945-48 | 1,585 | 1,585 |
| Pakistan | 1958-87 | 1,503 | 1,503 |
| Yugoslavia (Tito) | 1944-87 | 1,072 | 987 |
| SUSPECTED MEGA... | 1900-87 | 4,145 | 3,301 |
| North Korea | 1948-87 | 1,663 | 1,293 |
| Mexico | 1900-20 | 1,417 | 1,417 |
| Russia | 1900-17 | 1,066 | 591 |
| CENTI-KILO... | 1900-87 | 14,918 | 10,812 |
| TOP 5 | 1900-87 | 4,074 | 2,192 |
| China (Warlords) | 1917-49 | 910 | 910 |
| Turkey (Atatürk) | 1919-23 | 878 | 703 |
| United Kingdom | 1900-87 | 816 | Nil |
| Portugal (Dictatorship) | 1926-82 | 741 | Nil |
| Indonesia | 1965-87 | 729 | 579 |
| LESSER MURDERERS | 1900-87 | 2,792 | 2,355 |
| WORLD TOTAL | 1900-87 | 169,202 | 129,547 |

1. Includes genocide, and mass murder; excludes war-dead. These are most probable mid-estimates in low to high ranges. Figures may not sum due to round off.
2. Guemilla period.

TABLE 15.1
North Korean Democide
1948-1987

| TYPE OF KILLING | DEMOCIDÉ (000) [1] |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| DOMESTIC DEMOCIDE | 1,293 |
| purges | 10 [2] |
| "Open Struggle" campaign | 10 [2] |
| "Collective Guidance campaign | 25 [2] |
| labor concentration camps | 265 |
| corvée/hard labor | 983 |
| FOREIGN DEMOCIDE | 370 |
| of South Koreans | 363 |
| others | 7 |
| TOTAL DEMOCIDE | 1,663 |
| NORTH KOREAN WAR-DEAD | 1,401 [3] |

1. Mid-estimates from table 15A.1

2. This is a low.

3. Includes military action since the Korean War.

century. Yet few know about this obscene slaughter.



There is a good reason why.

The authoritarian and totalitarian governments that do most of this killing

usually control who writes their histories, and what appears in them. Also, democratically free people project onto the rest of the world their own democratic cultural biases. They see governments as doing largely good things for people. Some policies may be wrong, some stupid, but the idea of murdering people because of their politics, religion, or ethnicity, or by quota, is alien. And our political science textbooks tell us that governments have positive functions, such as national defense, welfare, and security--that they provide a legal framework within which people can achieve their own interests. With this conception, it is difficult to conceive of nondemocratic governments as many are: a gang of thugs holding a whole nation captive with their guns, enslaving the people to their whims, and looting, raping, and killing at will.

Moreover, democratic culture predisposes liberal democracies to avoid conflict and seek cooperation with other nations, even those ruled by despots. Democratic governments do not seek to arouse public opinion against other countries that will destabilize diplomatic arrangements and create pressure for hostile action. Seldom do democratic governments point their fingers at those guilty of democide, therefore, unless already in conflict with them and therefore in need of public support. Even then, they often will avoid doing so until the proof is overpowering (as in Rwanda, as discussed below), and even then, democracies will avoid the term murder, or even genocide.



All to be killed in one hour--victims of the Turkish genocide of the Armenians 1915-1918

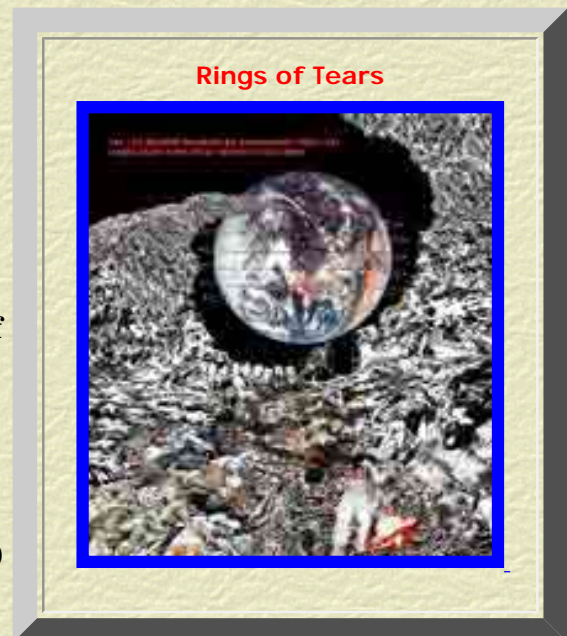
Such, for example, is the case with the many decades long refusal on the part of the U.S. State Department to admit, despite the evidence from its own ambassador

and other diplomats at the time, that during World War I the Turkish government planned and launched a genocidal campaign against its Armenian citizens, murdering as many as 1,500,000 of them. Turkey is a member of NATO, refuses to admit the genocide, and has taken

strong diplomatic action against those who make this claim. Yet Turkey perpetuated the first large-scale act of genocide in the twentieth century, not Russia or Germany.

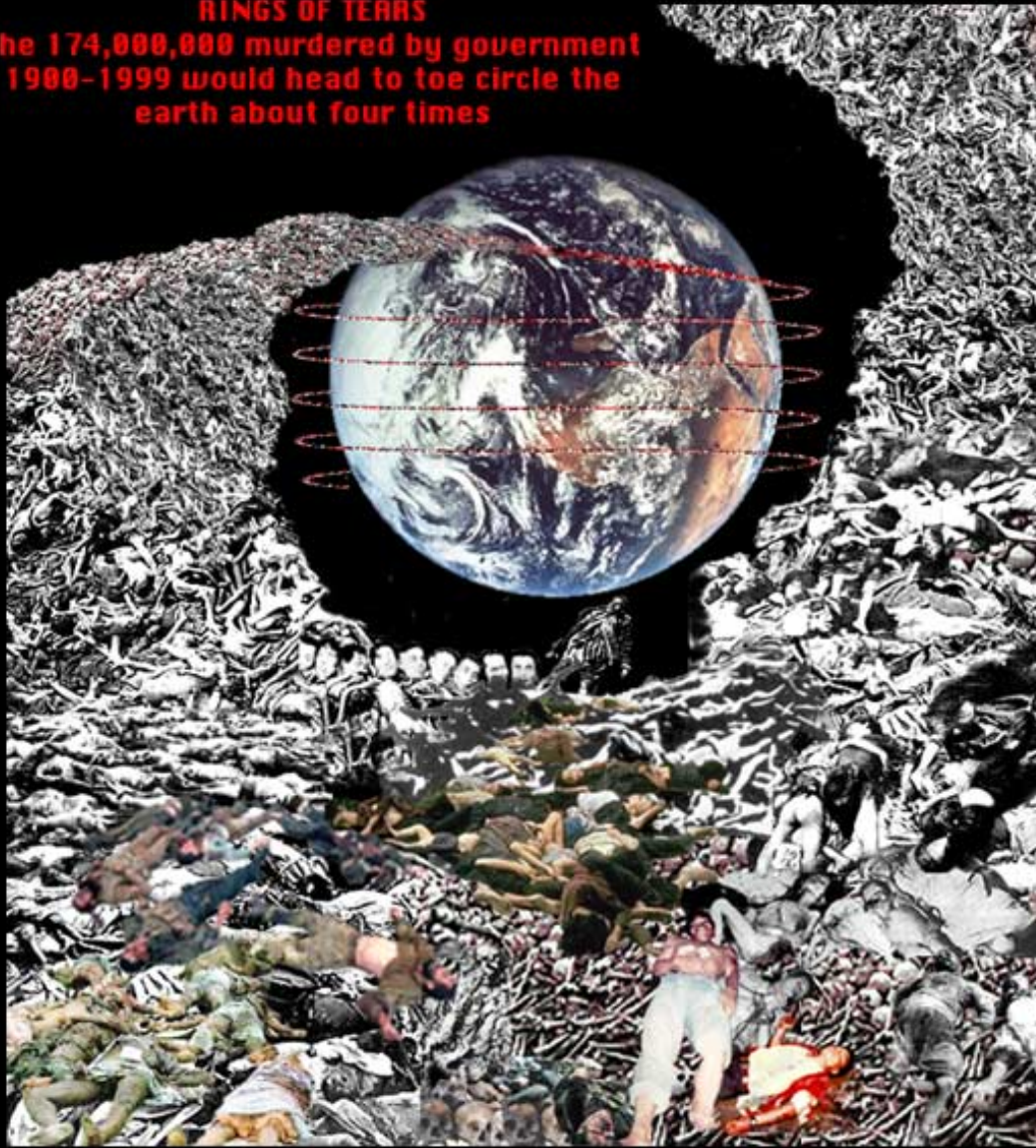
A few examples of democide will suffice too show the nature and extent of this abominable and utterly inhumane practice. One is the Rwanda's Great Genocide of 1994, which involved the plotted murder in four months of over 600,000, perhaps 800,000, even possibly as many as 1,000,000, Tutsi and Hutu, at least 14 percent of the population. In people killed within such a short amount of time, it is one of the twentieth century's worst acts of democide. The second example will be that of the largely non-genocidal democide committed by the Khmer Rouge government in Cambodia, 1975-1979. This killer regime murdered about 2,000,000 Cambodians in four years, or a little less than one-third of the population. Many more were killed than in Rwanda, but over a much longer time. I also will give briefer examples from Stalin and Mao's vast democides.

Before describing the Great Genocide, it should be noted that with regard to various totals I will present, such as of 100,000 or 200,000 murdered, the meaning in terms of human beings killed is hard to grasp. To feel what 100,000 dead means, think of lying down 100,000 corpses, head to toe, in a line alongside a straight road. Assume, since many were babies, young children, and short adults, that each corpse averages a little more than 5 feet long. Now, if you were to drive a car down this road along these 100,000 bodies, how far would you have to drive to reach the last one? Almost 100 miles. This gives you a simple multiplier. Two hundred thousand murdered would stretch head to toe nearly 200 miles, and a million murdered would be almost 1,000 miles. Maybe then you can feel how incredible, how horrible, it is that 100,000 human beings, or even 1,000 (end to end, a little less than a mile), each a separate soul like you, would have their precious lives wiped out. Each death also leaves countless loved ones to die of heartbreak, thus multiplying the toll. This human misery is not in the numbers, but numbers are necessary for recounting the sad tale of crime on a gargantuan scale.



The Rwandan Great Genocide of 1994, though by far the largest in the country's history, was only one of many acts of genocides carried out by different Rwandan governments in decades before 1994 and that have continued to be done by her governments since. Located in the south-central region of Africa, and bordered by Burundi, Zaire, Uganda, and Tanzania, Rwanda is smaller than the State of Maryland (see [map and statistics](#), and [world map](#)). In 1999, its population was about 7,200,000, one of the most densely populated countries, and one of the poorest. One important ethnic group was the small minority of Tutsi, who made up 15 percent of Rwandans, and who tended to be tall and thin. The overwhelming majority of

RINGS OF TEARS
The 174,000,000 murdered by government
1900-1999 would head to toe circle the
earth about four times



Source: <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~rummel/>

CENTRAL AFRICA



Rwanda

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Area | 26,338 sq km --slightly smaller than Maryland |
| Population | 7,229,129 |
| Ethnic groups | Hutu 84%, Tutsi 15%, Twa (Pygmoid) 1% |
| Religions | Roman Catholic 65%, Protestant 9%, Muslim 1%, indigenous beliefs and other 25% |
| Languages | Kinyarwanda (official) universal Bantu vernacular, French (official), English (official), Kiswahili (Swahili) used in commercial centers |
| Life expectation | 39.34 years |
| Literacy | 60.50% |
| Purchasing power parity | \$720 (1999 est.) |
| Government | republic; presidential, multiparty system |
| Freedom rating | unfree for 1998 |

Rwandans, over 80 percent, are ethnic Hutu, more likely to be short and stocky.

The Western media have greatly misunderstood the 1994 genocide as a tribal meltdown, as ethnic hatred and intolerance run amok. The mental picture is of a Hutu running widely down a street swinging a machete at any Tutsi he can catch. This is a myth. Rather, the genocide was a well-calculated mass murder planned by Hutu government leaders. Surely, individual Hutu who hated Tutsi, or had grievances against certain Tutsi, joined in the blood fest, and undoubtedly, sadistic Hutu just saw this genocide as an excuse to kill. We also should not overlook the many Hutu who refused to kill, and protected Tutsi even at the risk of their lives. But this genocide was, pure and simple, part of a political struggle to maintain power, as was the "ethnic cleansing" that happened later in Bosnia and Kosovo. It exemplified the iron law of human behavior: power kills.

Centuries ago, the Tutsi migrated from the north to Rwanda and proceeded to dominate the Hutu with a feudal system, but without the strict tribal or ethnic divisions one sees in Rwanda today. At the time "Hutu" and "Tutsi" distinguished social and political groups, instead of ethnic. Generally, Tutsi were cattle owners and members of the court, while Hutu were farmers. Nor were these differences indelible: Hutu could become Tutsi, and vice versa. Nor was Tutsi political domination absolute. Hutu chiefs became part of the hierarchy, and custom required Tutsi governors to recognize certain obligations to the Hutu. In many ways there was a sharing of power, and eventually, both Tutsi and Hutu spoke the same language, generally were Catholic in religion, and shared the same culture. Even after the end of colonization, they went to the same schools, worked together, and drank at the same bars.

Then came colonization. Germany first took Rwanda in the 19th Century, and then after the defeat of Germany in World War I the victors turned Rwanda over to Belgium as a protectorate. As did Germany, Belgium tried to rule at a distance by indirectly governing through existing Rwandan political institutions, which largely meant working through the Tutsi. Certainly colonial authorities thought the Tutsi to be more intelligent and vigorous, more like Caucasians, and therefore favored them in government, education, and business. In effect, Belgium promoted a more rigid and pervasive Tutsi rule over the Hutu. Since the difference between Tutsi and Hutu was not always readily evident, the colonial authorities defined a Tutsi one who owned ten or more cows, and a Hutu as anyone with less. Moreover, Christian missionaries, particularly of the Roman Catholic Church, taught that the Tutsi were Hametic rather than Negroid in origin, possibly from Ethiopia, and with Christian roots. Where the difference between Tutsi and Hutu had been unclear before colonization, hardly stressed in social affairs and interaction, it now became a precise government and social matter. In 1926, Belgium introduced identity cards indicating whether the holder was Tutsi or Hutu.

After the end of World War II, there was much talk about equality and freedom. Western intellectuals began to spread the word about the benefits and justice of democracy, Christian missionaries joined in this new ideological wave promoting democracy and equality among the Hutu. Yet for all the teaching about social justice, the Hutu were still required to carry ethnic identity cards; and behind the scenes, the colonial authorities continued to support Tutsi

control over all governmental functions. All this did much to aggravate Hutu and Tutsi differences, therefore, while encouraging the wish for self-government among the great majority of Hutu.

Independence and self-determination were the irresistible cry during the 1950s, and Belgians came to see Rwandan independence as inevitable. This raised the question of what kind of government an independent Rwanda would have. Being members of a democracy themselves, colonial authorities wanted to give more power to the Hutu majority and prepare free elections and a democratic government. They therefore changed colonial policy and began to prepare the Hutu for a large role in government by encouraging their education, and phasing them in more and important official positions. This further encouraged the belief among Hutus that by right, the government belonged to them.

In 1959 this rising sentiment culminated in a Hutu rebellion against both Belgium and the Tutsi government and elite. The Hutu massacred about 10,000 Tutsi and the next year forced 100,000 to 200,000 to flee the country with their king. The Hutu then declared a republic, and in 1962 Belgium granted Rwanda full independence.

Over the next decades, Tutsi would continually invade one border area of Rwanda or another to overthrow the Hutu government. In the years between 1961 and 1967 alone, they tried this ten times. The resulting fighting and genocide over the years forced Tutsi from their homes, and increased the number of refugees to about 600,000, among whom the men became ready fighters in new Tutsi incursions. In 1963 they launched the most serious of these invasions, this one from Uganda, and for the first time threatened to bring down the government. But they were soon defeated, and only succeeded in provoking another Hutu massacre of Tutsi who had remained in the country. Also, during this and other invasions of this period, Tutsi carried out their own genocide, murdering some 20,000 Hutu.

Regardless of their lack of success in defeating the Hutu government, the Tutsi refugees would not give up. Under German and then Belgian colonial rule, they had come to believe that they were superior to Hutu in all-important ways, and that it was only right that they, and not the Hutu, rule the country.

Among themselves, the Hutu were split between the north and south, as shown in 1973, when Defense Minister General Juvenal Habyarimana overthrew the president, accusing him of favoritism for southern Hutu, and made himself president. His new power was not secure either, but he did defeat a coup against him in 1980, and remained in power until the beginning of the Great Genocide. Added to the political difficulties of his rule was the collapse in the international market for coffee, the principal crop of Rwanda, which led to famine in some areas. Moreover, President Habyarimana drove the government deeply into debt, forcing him to turn to the World Bank for aid. This he got in return for the promise to liberalize the economy from government controls, but he spent the money on building up the army, and ignored the World Bank's stipulations.

President Habyarimana's government allowed Rwandans virtually no freedom. He created a

strict one-party state with the intention of being able to control and quickly mobilize the population. The government divided people into communes, and if a citizen wanted to move in or out of his assigned commune, he had to report to the police. All citizens had to register, and, as in Burma, the government forced everyone to do a certain amount of forced labor: building roads, clearing brush, digging ditches, and so on. Also, they had to take part in weekly propaganda meetings to glorify the party. Rwandans have been among the least free in civil and political rights. On a scale of 2 (free) to 14 (unfree), [Freedom House](#), a non-profit, nonpartisan organization promoting democracy and human rights and based in Washington, D.C., rated the Rwandan people as 13 in lack of freedom for 1993, and a bottom 14 for the following year during which the Great Genocide occurred.

In the midst of Rwanda's economic troubles, Tutsi refugees again invaded the country in 1990. With the help of the Ugandans, they had formed a political and military force they named the Front Patriotique Rawndais (FPR, sometimes called the RPF), but were again defeated, this time with the help of Belgium, and French troops. The FPR tried to hold on to parts of the country and would periodically resume its offensive until the government launched the Great Genocide in 1994.

And while this civil war was devastating part of the country, economic troubles increased. Inflation, along with personal and government debt, rose sharply. Coffee prices dropped so low that the government destroyed coffee trees and replaced them with other crops. Upon being asked again, the World Bank tried to help, and provided more funds toward overcoming Rwanda's huge national debt.

By this time, Hutu extremists had resurrected the old non-Black, Ethiopian theory about Tutsi origins that Belgium had once used to justify Tutsi rule, only now, the Hutu used this myth to their advantage. Extremists claimed that the Tutsi did not belong in Rwanda, that they were outsiders who had invaded the country and subjugated the Hutu. They argued for the total expulsion of all Tutsi. Government anti-Tutsi propaganda also made much of the genocide of Hutu by the Tutsi in neighboring Burundi. There, the ethnic division was about the same as in Rwanda, but the Tutsi were in control. In 1972, the Burundi government responded to a Hutu uprising by massacring about 150,000 Hutu, and after another Hutu uprising in 1988, the Tutsi massacred as many as 200,000 Hutu. The Hutu Rwandan government regularly cited this genocidal slaughter by the Burundi Tutsi as a reason why they could not allow the Tutsi within their own borders to take or share power.

However, the United Nations, United States, Belgium, and other African nations were applying considerable pressure to President Habyarimana to come to terms with the FPR and end the civil war. Badly in need of more foreign aid, in 1992 he agreed to form a coalition government with all political parties, and to share power with Tutsi leaders until he could hold an election. This hardly sat well with the Hutu political and military elite and extremists, but in any case, President Habyarimana found one reason or another to delay fulfilling this agreement--perhaps in order to prepare for the Great Genocide. Also, the United Nation's mandate for overseeing this accord was to expire in April 1994; then UN troops would have to withdraw. Meanwhile, Tutsi FPR forces, helped by Ugandan military, continued the civil war, broken by

occasional cease-fires.

By April of 1994, events had prepared the way for the Great Genocide. The economy was a mess, and tensions between Hutu and Tutsi were at a boiling point due to the continuing FPR assaults. The country was so beleaguered that it began to look as though Habyarimana would finally surrender to foreign pressure and allow the Tutsi to share power. Radical Hutu elite and top governmental leaders, however, had other plans.

In April 1994, a plane carrying Habyarimana and Burundian President Ndadaye crashed under mysterious circumstances. The prevailing theory was that Habyarimana's own Presidential Guard shot it down. Whether radical Hutu planned this assassination or not, it triggered the Great Genocide.

As the Great Genocide was unleashed, there was bloodlust in the air, and some Hutu and Tutsi alike now felt free to settle scores and kill those they resented. Overall, however, the government--that is President Habyarimana's wife, a few close advisors, and three brothers-in-laws--had prepared for the Great Genocide before Habyarimana's death. Their middle-level organizers numbered about 300 to 500 officials and bureaucrats. The police and a special Hutu militia (*interhamwe*) of 7,000 to 14,000 Tutsi-haters at their command did the dirty work. Officials in on the plan had specifically organized the militia to murder Tutsi, and they succeeded very well: some may well have killed as many as 200-300 people. Militia killers also encouraged--and sometimes at gunpoint ordered--Hutu civilians to kill their Tutsi friends and neighbors. Hutu who refused, or who showed reluctance, were themselves murdered. Insiders had also trained a Palace Guard of about 6,000 Hutu to help the militia and exterminate Hutu and Tutsi political opponents and their supporters. Even Hutu moderates did not escape death. Meanwhile, every day a radio station from the capital exhorted Hutu, as their patriotic duty, to grab whatever weapon they had and kill Tutsi without mercy.



Genocide victims



A machete, the weapon used to slaughter hundreds of thousands of Rwandans

Note that at the workers' level, this was not an act of massacre by the uneducated, undisciplined masses, ordinary folk easily misled and aroused. As with the Holocaust, when Nazi killing squads were often led and composed of Ph.Ds and other professionals, the claims of the powerful and authoritative easily swayed the well educated to murder. In the Great Genocide, Hutu lawyers, teachers, professors, medical doctors, journalists, and other professionals, made their contribution to the methodical annihilation of the

Tutsi or defiant Hutu.

Since most Rwandans were Christians, the country had many churches in which the Tutsi sought refuge. Not to be deterred, the Hutu killers simply surrounded the churches and set them on fire, or forced their way in and systematically butchered all inside. Hospitals were also a favorite target, since they not only hired many Tutsi but also were places where the Hutu killers could easily find and kill wounded Tutsi. For example, on April 23 militia and soldiers from the Rwandan army killed 170 patients and medical personnel at the Butare Hospital. Dr. Claude-Emile Rowagoneza, a Tutsi, gave testimony on what he saw happen in and outside the hospital:



More genocide victims

The massacres were delayed until April 20th. That day everyone was asked to stay at home except those working in the hospital. Medical staff was transported to the hospital. Nurses had to walk and many were stopped at the checkpoint, asked to show their identity cards, and killed if they were Tutsi. There were 35 doctors at the hospital of which four were Tutsi. Because of the danger all four Tutsi stayed at the hospital, as did some nurses. Drs. Jean-Bosco Rugira and Jean-Claude Kanangire are known to have been killed, and the fate of Dr. Isidore Kanangare who was hiding in the hospital and may have been evacuated by the French, is unknown. In mid-May injured soldiers from the Kanombe barracks started being brought to Butare Hospital and no more civilians were being admitted. They also started deciding who were Tutsi on the basis of their features, looking at the nose, height, and fingers because the identity cards were no longer accurate. Some of the doctors at the hospital risked their lives by helping threatened staff by hiding and feeding them.... When the patients' wounds had healed some of the doctors--the "bad" doctors--expelled the Tutsi although everyone knew they would be killed outside. At night, the interhamwe and the soldiers came in but these doctors were colluding willingly. If people refused to go, they were taken out at night. They could be seen being killed by the interhamwe waiting at the gates. Later the Prime Minister came down to Butare...and while here he had a meeting with medical staff. They all said peace had returned and told the patients that it was safe to return home.... Those who did were then killed.... My wife was taken twice by interhamwe but neighbors insisted that she was Hutu....My sister, mother, and father fled to Burundi but all my aunts, uncles, and in-laws were killed except for my mother-in-law. In other words, more than 40 of my relatives were killed.

By June 6, eight weeks later, this deliberate Great Genocide had already taken some 500,000 Rwandan lives, mostly Tutsi. Whole families were massacred, including babies. As the Great Genocide progressed, the United Nations, Belgium, and particularly the United States, showed extreme caution in calling this genocide a genocide. Not could they decide whether to remain engaged in the country. In the first few days, Belgium withdrew completely when Hutu killed ten of its soldiers. Not understanding what was going on, the UN reduced its peacekeeping soldiers from 4,500 men to 270, and fully restricted the action of even this small contingent. As

UN troops retreated from one base after another, waiting Hutu militia set upon and massacred the Tutsi families that had huddled under the UN flag for protection.

It took the Clinton Administration three weeks--by which time hundreds of thousands had already been massacred--to declare a state of disaster in Rwanda. Even then, they characterized the situation as one of tribal killings, with crazed Hutu civilians roaming the streets with machetes hacking away at any Tutsi within reach. In actuality, this genocide was no less planned than the Holocaust or Turkey's World War I genocidal slaughter of their Armenians.



More genocide victims

The American declaration provided unintended cover for the Hutu government to continue its Great Genocide. Even when the deliberate nature of the government's action became too blatant to ignore, the Clinton Administration refused to call it genocide. To do so would have required foreign signatories of the Genocide Convention, including the United States, to immediately get involved. The Clinton Administration also continued to delay agreeing to the details of a UN dispatch of troops, and prevented any foreign action until June 8, nearly three months into the Great Genocide. Then, the Security Council finally received U.S. agreement, and authorized troops to enter Rwanda and prevent further genocide. These troops backed the Tutsi FPR, helped defeat the Hutu conspirators, and caused their government to collapse. An FPR-backed government then took power, and installed a dictatorship as severe as the one it replaced.

At this point I should stress that the Tutsi were not blameless in the Great Genocide. Tutsi civilians and the FPR retaliated against the government's actions against them by killing Hutu, sometimes at random. For innocents on both sides this was a historically unprecedented catastrophe. As mentioned, over 1,000,000 might have died, and around 2,000,000 Hutu were forced to flee their homes, with possibly some 1,200,000 ending up in Zaire alone. All would live miserable lives in refugee camps, often in danger. They suffered from hunger, disease, and attacks by armed gangs of Tutsi. Localized cholera epidemics were frequent; just one of these killed 20,000 refugees. Still, Hutu were unwilling to leave the camps, fearing Tutsi reprisals. When the new Tutsi government tried to close one camp in southwestern Rwanda, for example, troops opened fire on unarmed crowd of Hutu protesters, an act which the United Nations claimed killed 2,000.

Overall, perhaps one-third of a 1993 population around 7,300,000 died or fled the country during the Great Genocide and the subsequent fighting. Though foreign troops and the FPR had ended the Great Genocide, itself, the killing was not over. Several thousand Hutu rebelled against the new government, and with the support of the local Hutu population, they continued to attack and murder Tutsi. To deny these rebels cover, soldiers cleared rebel areas of banana plantations, particularly in the northwest, all but destroying the local economy. From May 1997 to March 1998, these hostilities killed about 10,000 Tutsi and Hutu in this

region alone.

These are just numbers, of course. At the personal level, one can more easily feel what these facts mean for one Tutsi small businessman, Immanuel Sebomana. He was on a bus in northwestern Rwanda when Hutu rebels stopped it. Sebomana jumped from a window immediately and ran for his life into the bush. The rebels then surrounded the bus, set it on fire, and killed any of the remaining passengers who tried to escape. Meanwhile, Hutu civilians joined the soldiers gathered around the bus, cheering, and singing while 35 passengers died.



Rwandan refugees in Zaire 1994

Rwanda represents a clear case of genocide by a government trying to maintain power. The incredible killing that took place in Cambodia from 1975 to 1979 is different. First, it is an example of large-scale, nongenocidal mass murder, and only secondarily of genocide. Second, this democide was part of an attempt by communists to impose a revolution on the country. They tried to abolish its religion; eradicate its culture; totally remodel its economy; communize all social interaction; control all speech, writing, laughing, and loving; exterminate anyone with any ties to Western nations, Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand; and eliminate all who had any connections to the previous government or military. Because of all this, it is necessary to focus on the intended revolution itself to explain how and why this one government, in four years, could and would murder more than one-quarter of its population.

A little smaller than Oklahoma, Cambodia is located in Southeast Asia, bordered by Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and the Gulf of Thailand. Cambodia's population in 1970 was about 7,100,000, slightly smaller than Rwanda's, and almost wholly Buddhist (see the contemporary [map and statistics](#), and [world map](#)).

The devastating history of Cambodia during the 1960s and 1970s is intimately bound up with the Vietnam War. Communist North Vietnamese provided military aid and soldiers to Cambodia's own communist guerrillas, the Khmer Rouge or Red Cambodians. Cambodia was an avenue for war supplies from North Vietnam to the Viet Cong guerrillas fighting under their command in South Vietnam against South Vietnamese and American troops. As a result, the United States systematically bombed Khmer Rouge guerrillas and Viet Cong supply routes, and in a final attempt to destroy these routes, invaded Cambodia from South Vietnam. But, American Congressional and public opinion hostile to the invasion soon forced American forces to retreat back to South Vietnam.

In proportion to its population, Cambodia underwent a human catastrophe unequaled by any

SOUTHEAST ASIA



Cambodia

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Area | 181,040 sq km--slightly smaller than Oklahoma |
| Population | 12,212,306 |
| Ethnic groups | Khmer 90%, Vietnamese 5%, Chinese 1%, other 4% |
| Religions | Theravada Buddhist 95%, other 5% |
| Languages | Khmer (official) 95%, French, English |
| Life expectation | 71.49 years |
| Literacy | 89.90% |
| Purchasing power parity | \$710 (1999 est.) |
| Government | multiparty coalition government under a constitutional monarchy |
| Freedom rating | unfree for 1998 |

other country in the twentieth century (see [Figure 1.2](#) of my *Death By Government*). It probably lost slightly less than 4,000,000 people to war, rebellion, manufactured famine, and democide--genocide, nonjudicial executions, and massacres--or close to 56 percent of its 1970 population. Between 1970 and 1980, from democide alone, successive governments and guerrilla groups murdered almost 3,300,000 men, women, and children, including 35,000 foreigners. Most of these, probably as many as 2,400,000, were murdered by the communist Khmer Rouge, both before and (to a much greater extent) when they took over Cambodia after April 1975. These statistics are shown in Table 6.2 here.²

The United States had supported and supplied the Cambodian military government of General Lon Nol. But the American Congress ended all aid to him with the

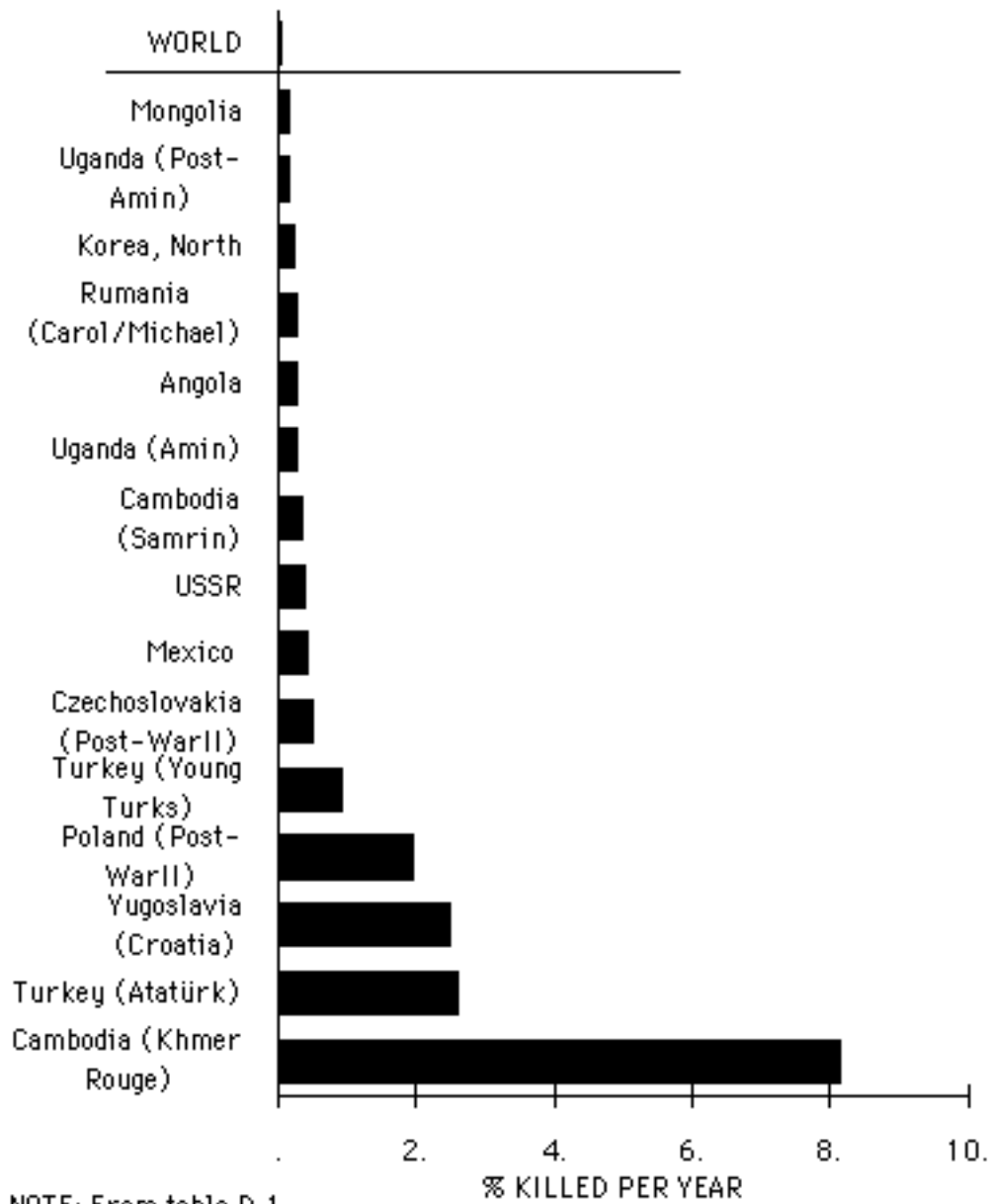
withdrawal of the United States from the Vietnam War in 1973. After successive retreats, Lon Nol could no longer even defend the capital, Phnom Penh, against the Khmer Rouge guerrillas. The Cambodian army then declared a cease-fire and laid down its arms. On April 17, 1975, a rag-tag bunch of solemn, black-pajama-clad teenagers with red scarves and Mao caps, carrying arms of all descriptions, walked or were trucked from different directions into Phnom Penh. They were part of an army of 68,000 Khmer Rouge guerrillas that had achieved victory for a Communist Party of only 14,000 members against an army of about 200,000 men.

TABLE 6.2
Cambodian Dead 1967-1987

| SOURCE OF DEATHS | FROM | TO | DEAD |
|--------------------------|---------------|-------------|------------------|
| WAR/REBELLION [2] | Mar-70 | 1987 | 514 |
| FAMINE/DISEASE [3] | Mar-70 | 1987 | 280 |
| DEMOICIDE [4] | Mar-70 | 1987 | 3,186 |
| By Regimes | Mar-70 | 1987 | 2,292 |
| Sihanouk [5] | 1967 | Mar-70 | 12 [8] |
| Lon Nol | Mar-70 | Apr-75 | 15 |
| Khmer Rouge | Apr-70 | Jan-79 | 2,035 |
| domestic | Apr-70 | Jan-79 | 2,000 |
| foreign [5] | Apr-70 | Jan-79 | 35 [8] |
| Samrin | Jan-79 | 1987 | 230 |
| By Guerrillas | Mar-70 | 1987 | 372 |
| Khmer Rouge [5] | 1967 | Mar-70 | 1 [8] |
| | Apr-70 | Apr-75 | 211 |
| | [5] Jan-79 | 1987 | 150 [8] |
| Other groups [5] | Jan-79 | 1987 | 10 [8] |
| By Foreigners [6] | | | 522 |
| South Vietnam [5] | Mar-70 | 1973 | 1 [8] |
| North Vietnam [7] | Mar-70 | 1987 | 461 |
| United States | Mar-70 | Aug-73 | 60 |
| Khmer Rouge Total | Mar-70 | 1987 | 2,397 [9] |
| Overall Dead | Mar-70 | 1987 | 3,979 [9] |

1. All figures from Statistics of Democide on this site.
2. Figure for war-dead, excluding democide.
3. Non-democidal only; includes death from malnutrition.
4. Includes democidal famine/disease and military action (e.g., bombing).
5. Estimated democide low.
6. In Cambodia.
7. Vietnam after 1975.
8. This is a low estimate.
9. Includes 35,000 foreign dead.

FIGURE 1.2
Democide Lethality



At first, the people hardly knew what to make of these victorious guerrillas. After all, the war was over, the killing had stopped, and people who had chafed under the Lon Nol government were relieved and happy. Many intellectuals and middle-class Cambodians were disgusted with the everyday corruption of the government, and were willing to try anything that brought change, even Communism. The Khmer Rouge was cheered, and there were public and private celebrations.

But before the people could settle down and enjoy a few days of peace, the Khmer Rouge began doing the unimaginable: they turned their weapons on the 2,000,000 to 3,000,000 inhabitants of the capital and with angry yelling, shouting, hand-waving, threats of immediate death, and actual shooting, demanded that everyone get out of the city. In this and all other newly occupied cities and towns, their order to evacuate was implacable. Including those in other cities and towns elsewhere, the Khmer Rouge kicked into a largely unprepared countryside near 4,240,000 urban Cambodians and refugees, even the sick, infirm and aged. Even for those on the operating table or in labor with child, the order was absolute: "Go! Go! You must leave!"



From top to bottom: victorious Khmer Rouge enter Phnom Penh; forced evacuation of 2-3 million; on the road, where hundreds of thousands die; ghost town.

Families evacuated any way possible, carrying what few possessions they could grab. The wealthy or middle-class rode out in cars, soon to be abandoned, or stolen from them by the Khmer Rouge. Some left on heavily loaded motor scooters or bicycles, which would also soon be confiscated. The vast multitude of pathetic urbanites and refugees only had their feet, and formed barely moving lines extending for miles. Some ill or infirm hobbled along; some thrown from hospitals crawled along on hands and knees. According to a British journalist who, from the safety of the French embassy, watched the slowly moving mass of evacuees, the Khmer Rouge was "tipping out patients [from the hospitals] like garbage into the streets.... Bandaged men and women hobbled by the embassy. Wives pushed wounded soldier husbands on hospital beds on wheels, some with serum drips still attached. In five years of war, this is the greatest caravan of human misery I have seen."

Failure to evacuate meant death. Failure to begin evacuation promptly enough meant death. Failure of anyone in the mass of humanity that clogged the roads out of a city and in the neighboring countryside to obey Khmer Rouge orders meant

death. Failure to give the Khmer Rouge what they wanted--whether car, motor scooter, bicycle, watch, or whatever--meant death.

The direction the people exited the city depended on the side they were on when they received the evacuation order. The Khmer Rouge told refugees to return to their home village; but for the mass and particularly the urbanites, where they went after evacuation and what village the Khmer Rouge eventually settled them in depended on the whim of the soldiers and cadre along the way. People were jumbled together, trudging along for days or weeks, usually with whatever clothes, covering, and provisions they could snatch at the last moment. Many had minimal supplies, since they had believed the Khmer Rouge who, to minimize disorder, told them that the evacuation would only be for a few days. The very young and old, and those already sick, injured, or infirm soon died on the roads or trails. One of these trudging millions, a medical doctor named Vann Hay, said that every 200 meters he saw a dead child.

Including those killed outright, the toll from this outrageous and bloody evacuation is in dispute. Whether 40,000 to 80,000 evacuees were murdered or died, as one scholar sympathetic to the Khmer Rouge claimed, or 280,000 to 400,000 as the CIA estimated, the sheer horror of this urban expulsion is undeniable.

Primarily, this was done as a matter of ideology. The Khmer Rouge saw the city as the home of foreign ideas, capitalists, and their supportive bourgeoisie intellectuals; and as thoroughly corrupt and requiring a thorough cleansing. And those the Khmer Rouge believed the city had corrupted, its professionals, business people, public officials, teachers, writers, and workers, must either be eliminated or reeducated and purified. And to the Khmer Rouge, the best way of remaking those "corrupted minds" that they allowed to survive was to make them work in the fields along side pure peasants. Consider the slogans broadcast over Radio Phnom Penh and given at meetings at the time: "what is infected must be cut out.... What is rotten must be removed.... What is too long must be shortened and made the right length.... It isn't enough to cut down a bad plant, it must be uprooted." This inhuman



Pol Pot

expulsion was an opening salvo in the Khmer Rouge campaign to utterly remake Cambodian culture and society, and to construct pure Communism forthwith. Pol Pot and a few henchmen, who organized and loosely commanded the Khmer Rouge, planned all this. (Pol Pot was a Cambodian communist revolutionary who had received his higher education and radical ideas in France, and helped found the Khmer Workers party--Khmer Rouge--in 1960, which he then headed. He subsequently organized and led the guerrilla attacks on Prince Sihanouk's Western oriented government in the 1960s, and against the American supported General Lon Nol government that overthrew it in 1970.)

As the pitiful evacuees reached their homes or assigned villages, there was usually no relief from the horrors already suffered. The situation was just different in kind. However, it should be noted that under Khmer Rouge rule, Cambodia was not one totalitarian society dictated by one set of doctrines or rules, except at the most abstract and general level. How the Khmer Rouge applied such abstractions, under what rules, and with what punishment for violations, varied from one district or region to another. This is why I write that Pol Pot "loosely" commanded.

Nonetheless, Pol Pot and his henchmen managed to hold the initiative, establish control throughout the country, and create the surprising uniformity in most regions shown here in Table 6.3.3
They collectivized peasants everywhere--95 to 97 percent of the population eventually forced into collective farms--and expected evacuees and peasants to work solely for the communist revolution. They forbid all political, civil, or human rights. They prohibited travel without a pass from village to village. They forced Cambodians to eat and sleep in communes, and ordered even young children to work in the fields. In some regions, they made peasants work from about 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 or 10:00 p.m., with time off only for "political education." They



closed permanently all primary, secondary, and technical schools, as well as colleges and universities. They shut down all hospitals and automatically murdered Western-trained medical doctors. They prohibited sex between the unmarried, and in some places, they threatened boys and girls with death for as little as holding hands. Also at risk of death, unauthorized contact was forbidden even between those married. The Khmer Rouge allowed no appeals, no courts, no judges, no trials, and no law. They eliminated all money, businesses, books, and newspapers. They banned practicing lawyers, doctors, teachers, engineers, scientists, and all other professionals, because whatever truths these professions contained, the peasant could pick up through experience.



Haing Ngor

This is all incredible and some details on this may help its digestion. Just consider how the Khmer Rouge controlled personal relations. They made showing love to a relative or laughing with them dangerous, since they might perceive this as showing less dedication to, or poking fun at, the Great Revolution. It

TABLE 6.3
Conditions of Life
Under the Khmer Rouge

Civil/Political

- no freedom to travel abroad or from village to village
- no freedom to choose employment
- no freedom of speech
- no freedom of organization
- no freedom of religion—no religion allowed
- no courts, judges, or appeals
- no codified law or rules

Social/Cultural

- no public or private worker rights
- no independent work or living (all in collectives).
- no skilled private or public medical care
- no foreign medicines
- no mail or telegrams
- no radio, television, or movies
- no international telephones or cables
- no newspapers, journals, or magazines
- no books or libraries
- no general schooling
- no holidays or religious festivals

Economic

- no money (all money eliminated)
- no banks
- no wages or salaries
- no markets
- no businesses
- no restaurants or stores

Personal

- no independent eating (all cooked and ate collectively)
- no personal food
- no regional gastronomic specialties (all ate the same)
- no private plots to grow food
- no personal names (one had to give up his old name)
- no independent family life
- no sexual freedom
- no music
- no freedom from work after the age of five
- no personally owned buses, cars, scooters, or bicycles
- no personal clothes, pots, pans, watches, or anything
- no freedom to cry or laugh
- no private conversation

was even dangerous to use some term of endearment, such as "honey," "sweetheart," or "dearest," for a loved one. The doctor Haing Ngor tried to so refer to his wife, for example, and a spy overheard and reported him for this, as well as the fact that he had eaten food he picked in the forest, instead of bringing it into the village for communal eating. The local head cadre interrogated him about these sins, and told him, "The *chhlop* [informers] say that you call your wife 'sweet.' We have no 'sweethearts' here. That is forbidden." Soldiers then took him to a prison where cadre severally tortured him, cut off his finger, and sliced his ankle with a hatchet. He barely survived.

This deadly communist revolution created pitiful human dilemmas. Think about what this same doctor Haing Ngor went through when his wife suffered life-threatening complications during childbirth. To help her deliver her baby would mean death, since the Khmer Rouge forbid husbands from delivering their wife's babies. In any case, to use his medical skills to save her would in effect tell the cadre that he was a doctor, and would result in his death, and possibly that of his wife and newborn child. To do nothing might mean their death anyway; still, if he did nothing, the wife might pull through. He chose to do nothing, and perhaps he could do nothing anyway since he had no proper medical instruments. Mother and baby soon both died, then, leaving a gaping wound in his heart that never healed. (He subsequently came to the United States after the defeat of Vietnam to be noted below, became an actor, and received an Academy Award for his performance in "The Killing Fields," the movie about the murderous Khmer Rouge regime. In 1996 he was murdered for money as he arrived home in Los Angeles, for which three members of the Oriental LazyBoyz street gang were subsequently tried and convicted).

But even if Ngor's child had been born, he could not have kept it for long. The Khmer Rouge took children away from their parents and made them live and work in labor brigades. If the children died of fatigue or disease, the cadre were good enough to inform their parents; then, what emotion the parents showed could mean their life or death. If they wept or displayed extreme unhappiness, this showed a

bourgeois sentimentality--after all, their children had sacrificed themselves for the Great Revolution and the parents should be proud, not unhappy. Similarly, a wife expressing grief over an executed husband--an enemy of the Great Revolution--was explicitly criticizing the Khmer Rouge. This unforgivable act of bourgeois sentimentality could mean her death.



Throughout Cambodia, fear was a normal condition of life. The Khmer Rouge systematically massacred people because of past positions, associations, or relatives. When the cadre

discovered someone who had been a top military man under a previous government, a former government official or bureaucrat, a business executive or high monk, they and their whole families, including babies, were murdered, sometimes after extended torture. This root-and-branch extermination of the tainted even reached down to cousins of cousins of former soldiers. For instance, Khmer Rouge cadre came to believe that the villagers of Kauk Lon really were former Lon Nol officers, customs officials and police agents. Troops then forced every villager--about 360 men, women, and children--to march into a nearby forest. As they walked among the trees, waiting soldiers ambushed and machine-gunned them all down. Similar slaughter often awaited those who had had any relations with the West or Vietnam, even sometimes the Soviet Union, or who had ever opposed the Khmer Rouge. The Khmer Rouge even might execute those found with Western property, such as books, or those who spoke French or English--even those who had been schooled beyond the seventh grade. Even in some areas wearing glasses was a capital offense.

Then there was the killing of people for laziness, complaining, wrong attitudes, or unsatisfactory work. I will give only one example of this, but as a teacher, it is for me the most hideous of all the accounts I have read. This is the Buddhist monk Hem Samluat's description of an execution he witnessed in the village of Do Nauy:

It was . . . of Tan Samay, a high schoolteacher from Battambang. The Khmer Rouge accused him of incompetence. The only thing taught the children at the village was how to cultivate the soil. Maybe Tan Samay was trying to teach them other things, too, and that was his downfall. His pupils hanged him. A noose was passed around his neck; then the rope was passed over the branch of a tree. Half a dozen children between eight and ten years old held the loose end of the rope, pulling it sharply three or four times, dropping it in between. All the while they were shouting, "Unfit teacher! Unfit teacher!" until Tan Samay was dead. The worst was that the children took obvious pleasure in killing.⁴

The scale of these murders can be gauged from the admission of Chong Bol, who claimed that as a political commissar at the end of 1975 he had participated in the killing of 5,000 people. Think about this for a moment. If this murderer had been a citizen of a democracy and had admitted killing even one-tenth this many people in cold blood, historians would record him as history's most monstrous murderer. As an officer of a government, as with the Nazi SS, soldiers, Soviet death camp managers, and Chinese commissars, who also exterminated thousands, these will be noted as acts of their respective regimes, and history will forget the individual murderer. Such heinous crimes are depersonalized, their horror lost among general abstractions. They are just statistics.

Not only did the Khmer Rouge run amok massacring their people, but also everywhere the Khmer Rouge tried to destroy the very heart of peasant life. Hinayana Buddhism had been a state religion, and the priesthood of monks with their saffron robes was a central part of Cambodian culture. Some 90 percent of Cambodians believed in some form of Buddhism.

Many received a rudimentary schooling from the monks, and many young people became monks for part of their lives. The Khmer Rouge could not allow so powerful an institution to stand and therefore set out with vigor to destroy it. They exterminated all leading monks and either murdered or defrocked the lesser ones. One estimate is that out of 40,000 to 60,000 monks only 800 to 1,000 survived to carry on their religion. We do know that of 2,680 monks in eight monasteries, merely seventy were alive in 1979. As for the Buddhist temples that populated the landscape of Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge destroyed 95 percent of them, and turned the few remaining into warehouses or allocated them for some other degrading use. Amazingly, in the very short span of a year or so, the small gang of Khmer Rouge wiped out the center of Cambodian culture, its spiritual incarnation, its institutions.

This was an act of genocide within the larger Cambodian democide, and it was not the only one. In most if not all the country, simply being of Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai, or Lao ancestry meant death. As part of a planned genocide campaign, the Khmer Rouge sought out and killed other minorities, such as the Moslem Cham. In the district of Kompong Xiem, for example, they demolished five Cham hamlets and reportedly massacred 20,000 that lived there; in the district of Koong Neas only four Cham apparently survived out of some 20,000. The cadre threw the Cham Grand Mufti, their spiritual leader, into boiling water and then hit him on the head with an iron bar. They beat another leader, the First Mufti, to death, tortured and disemboweled the Second Mufti, and murdered by starvation in prison the Chairman of the Islamic Association of Kampuchea (Cambodia). Overall, the Khmer Rouge annihilated nearly half--about 125,000--of all the Cambodian Cham.

As to the other minorities, the Khmer Rouge also slaughtered about 200,000 ethnic Chinese, almost half of those in Cambodia--a calamity for ethnic Chinese in this part of the world unequalled in modern times--additionally, they murdered 3,000 Protestants and 5,000 Catholics; around 150,000 ethnic Vietnamese (over half); and 12,000 ethnic Thai out of 20,000. One Cambodian peasant, Heng Chan, whose wife was of Vietnamese descent, lost not only his wife, but also five sons, three daughters, three grandchildren, and sixteen of his wife's relatives. In this genocide, the Khmer Rouge probably murdered 541,000 Chinese, Chams, Vietnamese, and other minorities, or about 7 percent of the Cambodian population.

As though this was not enough, by threat of death the Khmer Rouge forced ordinary Cambodians to labor to the point of life-endangering exhaustion, and fed them barely enough to keep them alive while further weakening their bodies through extreme malnutrition. The Khmer Rouge fed their hard laborers an average of 800 to 1,200 calories per day, where as for even light labor a worker requires an average of 1,800 calories at a minimum. Nor did the Khmer Rouge provide them with protection against the dangers of exposure and disease. Even Pol Pot admitted in 1976 that 80 percent of the peasants had malaria. In many places people died like fish in a heavily polluted stream. The horror is that people are not fish, but thinking, feeling, loving human beings.

As one would expect, in this hell the Khmer Rouge did not spare each other the fear of death either, but often executed their soldiers and cadre for infractions of minor rules. More

important, as the Pol Pot gang maneuvered to consolidate its rule over Cambodia, the struggle for power at the top, and the paranoia of top leaders increased. Not only was there the usual despot's fear of an assassin's knife in the night, but an intensifying fear that dissident Khmer Rouge might destroy the communist revolution. Increasingly, the Pol Pot gang saw sabotage, and CIA, KGB, or Vietnamese operatives, behind all production failures and project delays.

Purge after purge of high and low Khmer Rouge followed. They increasingly filled the cells of the major security facility in Phnom Penh, Tuol Sleng, with communist officials and cadre. Pol Pot's gang had these people tortured until they fingered collaborators among higher-ups, who were then executed. Confessions were the aim of most torture, and the gang would even arrest, with all the lethal consequences, interrogators who were so crude as to kill their victims before getting a confession. On the suffering of the tortured, one such interrogator reported.



Two of 20,000 tortured and executed in Tuol Sleng prison

I questioned this bitch who came back from France; my activity was that I set fire to her ass until it became a burned-out mess, then beat her to the point that she was so turned around I couldn't get any answer out of her; the enemy then croaked, ending her answers....[5](#)

The sheer pile of confessions forced from tortured lips must have further stimulated paranoia at the top. The recorded number of prisoners admitted to Tuol Sleng was about 20,000, suggesting how many were tortured and made such confessions. Only fourteen of them survived this imprisonment--fourteen. And this was only one such torture/execution chamber, albeit the main one in the country.

In sum, the Cambodia of the Khmer Rouge was a giant forced labor and death camp, in which all suffered the torments of hell.

Turning to foreign relations, Pol Pot and his people hated their neighboring communist Vietnamese and felt no fraternal loyalty to them. They saw the Vietnamese as racially inferior, and as the foremost danger to the Khmer Rouge revolution. Even before their victory over Lon Nol, the Khmer Rouge had tried to purge their ranks of those trained in Hanoi, and had carried out the pogrom against ethnic Vietnamese described above. It was not long after their victory that they began to attack Vietnamese territory across the border. In many of these incursions they fought pitched battles with Vietnamese units, attacked and burned Vietnamese

villages, and murdered their populations.

These attacks grew in intensity and became, in effect, a war against Vietnam. The Vietnamese first responded vigorously to these attacks; then, apparently to buy time for war preparations, they tried to negotiate Khmer Rouge border complaints, and to find a basis for cooperative relations. This phase lasted until December 1979, when Vietnam launched a full-scale invasion of Cambodia. Her heavily armed troops, with gunships and tanks, easily rolled over the fewer and lightly armed Khmer Rouge defenders. In the next month, the invading forces occupied Phnom Penh. As Vietnamese troops approached one village after another, most peasants rebelled against the local Khmer Rouge cadre and troops, killing them with their own weapons, with farm tools, and sometimes with their own hands. Surviving Khmer Rouge, along with possibly 100,000 people they forced to move with them (vengefully killing many on the way), retreated to a mountainous region along the Thai border. From there and from refugee camps they soon controlled in Thailand, they carried out a guerrilla war against the Vietnamese and their puppet Samrin regime, and then against the government Vietnam established when it completely withdrew from the country. Only in the last decade would they finally be defeated.



Some remains of Khmer Rouge rule

The human, social, and cultural cost to Cambodian of the Khmer Rouge years is incalculable. In democide alone, the Khmer Rouge probably murdered 600,000 to 3,000,000 Cambodians by execution, torture or other mistreatment, malnutrition, famine, exposure, and disease, as listed in Table 6.2. ">. A most prudent estimate is 2,000,000 dead, or about one-third of the 1975 population. In addition, some 352,000 refugees also escaped the country.

As wholesale murderers, the Khmer Rouge is in a class with the Rwandan Hutu government. For rapidly killing a high proportion of their population, they have no competitors. Not even Stalin or Mao could come close. Even Hitler might be shamed by the poor performance of his killers compared to Pol Pot's gang or the Hutu government.

And, yes, the Khmer Rouge were racists: they believed in the racial superiority of the dark-skinned Khmer over the Vietnamese, Chinese, Moslem Cham, and others. This racism underlay the genocide they committed against these minorities, but also played a role in their vicious incursions into Vietnam and massacre of its citizen. This being noted, the basic reason for most of their democide was ideological. The Khmer Rouge were fanatical adherents to a new variant of communism, one which combined the Maoism of the destructive Great Leap Forward and communes, the Stalinism of the Soviet collectivization period in the early 1930s and later Great Terror, and an obsessive and deadly nationalism. To create their revolution, the Khmer Rouge were willing to kill millions of Cambodians--even, they said, until no more than a million remained--as long as they were able to do three things in a few short years. One to totally reconstruct Cambodia; to fully collectivize it; and to exterminate all class enemies, capitalists, monks, former power holders, and anything foreign. All others would work and eat

communally, and the Khmer Rouge would satisfy their every need. All would be equal; all would be happy.

Second, the Khmer Rouge wanted to immediately create a thoroughly independent and self-sufficient Cambodia. For the Khmer Rouge, the key idea was "independence-sovereignty." They wanted to end any dependence on other nations for anything, whether food or newsprint or machinery. As crazy as it was--all nations depend on trade--this was a basic, constantly repeated fixation.

Finally, they wanted to recover the ancient glory of the Khmer Kingdom. Part of this glory, they felt, lay in the pure soul of the Khmer that existed then, a soul that modern life and Western influence had corrupted. The Khmer Rouge believed that by emptying the cities, and ordering the millions of urbanites to work like oxen in the fields to absorb the simple peasant life, they were purifying the people and the nation. During the evacuation of Phnom Penh, a political official explained to the French priest François Ponchaud: "The city is bad, for there is money in the city. People can be reformed, but not cities. By sweating to clear the land, sowing and harvesting crops, men will learn the real value of things. Man has to know that he is born from a grain of rice!" Ideas do have consequences, as the Cambodian death toll under these ideologues well attests.

Other governments have murdered many more of their citizens than did the Rwandan Hutu government and the Khmer Rouge, but over a longer period and with a much larger population. The most murderous of these have also, like the Khmer Rouge, been communist governments, as shown in Table 6.4 below. While discussing in [Chapter 4](#) Lenin's famine, Stalin's collectivization campaign and forced starvation of the Ukrainian in the early 1930s, and Mao's land reform and collectivization in the 1950s, I also described their democide of millions. I also described the similar democide of Lenin's Peasant War in the [last chapter](#). Here I want to further illustrate the shocking consequences of their absolute power for human life through three examples of specific democides in Stalin's Soviet Union and Mao's China.



Stalin in 1935

During the 1930s, Stalin ordered a number of purges against presumed enemies of the people. These were carried out by the NKVD (predecessor to the KGB), which on the flimsiest of presumptions, and in many cases without any evidence of any wrongdoing at all, would arrest and torture citizens until they would admit to whatever the interrogator demanded. Then the NKVD would shoot them to death. Sometimes, the NKVD would murder people on no pretext at all--simply to meet a quota.



Stalin's signature (upper right) on a NKVD proposal to kill captured Polish officers and other POWs --over 14,000 then shot

Top communists believed that there was a certain percentage of the population that opposed the Communist Party, and therefore had to be eliminated. But in typical communist fashion, this was not something that could be left to the discretion of low-level cadre. After all, to ensure that lower level cadre were correctly guided in their work, the Party had to put a production quota on iron, steel, pigs, wheat, and virtually everything else of an economic nature. Thus it is logical that officials would also be given

quotas of people to murder. Furthermore, it was consistent with the communist idea of central planning and control. From Moscow NKVD headquarters the order would go out to a village or town to kill so many "enemies of the people," and soon enough the local henchmen would report back that the task was completed.

That such orders would be given is incredible enough, and that the local official would obey them is also unbelievable. Vladimir and Evdokia Petrov, in their book appropriately titled *Empire of Fear*, asked as to why "quite ordinary decent human beings, with a normal hatred of injustice and cruelty" would carry out these merciless purges and executions? The answer: simple: sweating, trembling, fear. They wrote about what a friend, they called M--, said of his experience, as an NKVD official in a country town in the Novosibirsk region:

The number of victims demanded by Moscow from this town was five hundred. M--went through all the local dossiers, and found nothing but trivial offenses recorded. But Moscow's requirements were implacable; he was driven to desperate measures. He listed priests and their relatives; he put down anyone who was reported to have spoken critically about conditions in the Soviet Union; he included all former members of Admiral Kolchak's White Army [an anti-Communist force in the Civil War of 1918 to 1922]. Even though the Soviet Government had decreed that it was not an offense to have served in Kolchak's Army, since its personnel had been forcibly conscripted, it was more than M--'s life was worth not to fulfill his quota. He made up his list of five hundred enemies of the people, had them quickly charged and executed and reported to Moscow: "Task accomplished in accordance with your instructions."

M--...detested what he had to do. He was by nature a decent, honest, kindly man. He told me the story with savage resentment. Years afterwards its horror and injustice lay heavy on his conscience.



One of >1 mil. Soviet-Germans deported east by Stalin in WWII--1/5 to 1/4th died as a result.

But M-- did what he was ordered. Apart from a man's ordinary desire to remain alive, M-- had a mother, a father, a wife, and two children.⁷

During this period, as I described in [Chapter 4](#), Stalin also forced upon the Ukrainian peasant mass starvation as a means to defeat their nationalism and opposition to collectivization, thus murdering within a couple of years around 5,000,000 of them. It is as though the American Federal Government purposely starved to death or killed by associated diseases, everyone in Maryland, Minnesota, or Wisconsin. Yet he was not satisfied with this and also struck at Ukrainian nationalism in other ways, as by directly murdering those who communicated the Ukrainian culture--he ordered shot Ukrainian writers, historians, composers; and even itinerant, blind folk singers. The following from the memoirs of composer Dmitri Shostakovich, has its own chilling horror.



Victims of Stalin's mass murder

Since time immemorial, folk singers have wandered along the roads of the Ukraine....they were always blind and defenseless people, but no one ever touched or hurt them. Hurting a blind man--what could be lower?

And then in the mid thirties the First All-Ukrainian Congress of Lirniki and Banduristy [folk singers] was announced, and all the folk singers had to gather and discuss what to do in the future. "Life is better, life is merrier." Stalin had said. The blind men believed it. They came to the congress from all over the Ukraine, from tiny, forgotten villages. There were several hundred of them at the congress, they say. It was a living museum, the country's living history. All its songs, all its music and poetry. And they were almost all shot, almost all those pathetic blind men killed.

Why was this done? ...Here were these blind men, walking around singing songs of dubious content. The songs weren't passed by the censors. And what kind of censorship can you have with blind men? You can't hand a blind man a corrected and approved text and you can't write him an order either. You have to tell everything to a blind man. That takes too long. And you can't file away a piece of paper, and there's no time anyway. Collectivization. Mechanization. It was easier to shoot them. And so they did.⁸



Pro-Mao Cultural Rev. Poster

As to communist China, its so-called "Cultural Revolution" during the 1960s was a tumultuous period. The Great Famine that the Chinese Communist Party caused in the late 1950s to early 1960s that I mentioned in [Chapter 4](#) helped split the Party.



Red Guards

Many communists militantly and fervently supported Chairman Mao's desire to continue his Glorious Revolution. Opposed to him were powerful pragmatists, the "capitalist roaders," who wished to liberalize the economy. This Party rupture became a

violent and very bloody conflict for power between these two groups, and broke into outright civil war in 1966. Military units fought each other, even with cannon and tanks; students waged pitched battles with machine guns and grenades given them by military sympathizers. The victors in one battle or another would then often systematically purge the opposition, subjecting them to torture and mass execution. The estimates of how many were murdered in this democidal civil war vary widely. A prudent estimate is 1,600,000 Chinese, though the toll may have reached even 10,000,000 or more. Another 500,000 may have died in battle. In the ebb and flow of power and the utter lack of compassion for human life and suffering, this civil war of the 1960s was like the Mexican Revolution played out in a much larger population over a vastly larger land area.

In this struggle, Mao and his supporters could trust no intellectual or scientist of any sort, especially in the governing of any organization. Therefore, the Party put fanatical communist radicals, regardless of their inexperience or ignorance, in charge of universities, schools, scientific institutions, hospitals, and intellectual associations. Consider the following experience, related by a Chinese scientist regarding the Party's appointment of Shan Guizhang, a fanatic and ignorant communist, to head the prestigious Changchun Institute of Optics and Precision Instruments.



Wang Guangmai—beaten by Red Guards for once having gone abroad

Shan had read *Tales of the Plum Flower Society*, a fictional



Shouting revolutionary slogans

thriller about the Party's effort to uncover a spy network in the Academy of Sciences. The book, unfortunately, gave the imaginary chief spy the name Peng Jiamu, which also was the name of a real scientist at the institute. Incredibly, Shan thought that the real scientist Peng was the make believe spy in the book. So, Shan had 166 scientists at the institute arrested as spies, along with local accountants, police, workers, and even nursery attendants. Enough proof of spying was a radio or camera at home, or ability to speak a foreign language. Security forces beat some of the "spies" to death; some others committed suicide. After Shan

successfully rid the institute of these "spies," the Party promoted him to a provincial Party committee.

Few would deny any longer what these examples attest, that communism--Marxism-Leninism and its variants--meant in practice bloody terrorism, deadly purges, lethal prison camps and forced labor, fatal deportations, man-made famines, extrajudicial executions and show trials, outright mass murder, and genocide. In total as I have calculated in Table 6.4 here,⁶ communist regimes may have murdered near 110,000,000 people from 1917 to 1987. This greatest of human social experiments was not only a complete failure, but the most costly in human lives and misery.

The Khmer Rouge example gives you insight into why communists believed it necessary and moral to massacre so many of their fellow humans. Their absolutist ideology was married to absolute power. They believed that they knew the truth, without a shred of doubt;



that they would bring about the greatest human welfare and happiness; and that to realize this Utopia, they must mercilessly tear down the old feudal or capitalist order and culture and then totally rebuild a communist society. Nothing could be allowed to stand in the way of this achievement. Government--the Communist Party--was above any law. All other institutions, cultural norms, traditions, and sentiments were expendable.

The communists saw the construction of this Utopia as a war on poverty, exploitation, imperialism, and inequality--and as in a real war, noncombatants would unfortunately get caught in the battle, and their were necessary enemy casualties: the clergy, bourgeoisie, capitalists, "wreckers," intellectuals, counterrevolutionaries, rightists, tyrants, the rich, and landlords. In a war, millions may die, but these means may well be justified by the end, as in the defeat of Hitler in World War II. To many communists, the goal of a communist Utopia was such as to justify all the deaths.

TABLE 6.4
Communist Democide 1900-87

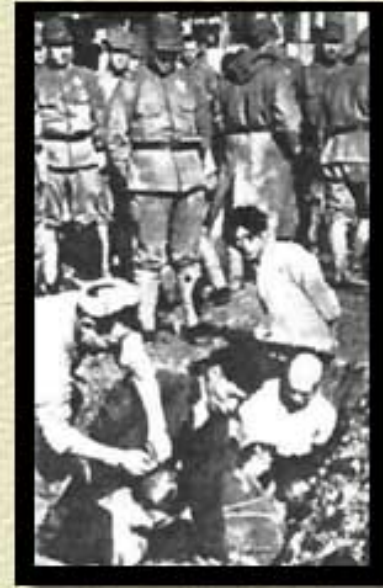
| REGIME | YEARS | DEMOCIDIE (OOO) |
|-------------------------|---------|--------------------|
| Afghanistan | 1978-87 | 228 |
| Albania | 1944-87 | 100 |
| Angola | 1975-87 | 125 |
| Bulgaria | 1944-87 | 222 |
| Cambodia (K. Rouge) | 1975-79 | 2,035 |
| Cambodia (Samrin) | 1979-87 | 230 |
| China | 1949-87 | 35,236 |
| Cuba | 1959-87 | 73 |
| Czechoslovakia | 1948-68 | 65 |
| Ethiopia | 1974-87 | 725 |
| Germany (East) | 1948-87 | 70 |
| Grenada (Coup) | 1983 | 0.106 |
| Hungary | 1948-87 | 27 |
| Korea, North | 1948-87 | 1,663 |
| Laos (PDR) | 1975-87 | 56 |
| Mongolia | 1926-87 | 100 |
| Mozambique | 1975-87 | 198 |
| Nicaragua (Sand.) | 1979-87 | 5 |
| Poland | 1948-87 | 22 |
| Rumania | 1948-87 | 435 |
| USSR | 1917-87 | 61,911 |
| Vietnam (Hanoi) | 1945-87 | 1,670 |
| Yemen, South | 1967-87 | 1 |
| Yugoslavia | 1944-87 | 1,072 |
| SUBTOTAL 1900-87 | | 106,267 |
| COM. GUERRILLAS 1900-87 | | 4,019 |
| COMMUNIST TOTAL 1900-87 | | 110,286 |
| WORLD TOTAL 1900-87 | | 169,199 |

The irony of this is that communism in practice, even after decades of total control, did not improve the lot of the average person, but usually made their living conditions worse than before the revolution. As I have noted, it is not by chance that the greatest famines have happened within the Soviet Union (about 5,000,000 dead during 1921-23 and 7,000,000 from 1932-3, including 2,000,000 outside Ukraine) and communist China (about 27,000,000 dead from 1959-61). Almost 55,000,000 people died in various communist famines and associated epidemics; a little over 10,000,000 of them were intentionally starved to death, the rest died as an unintended result of communist agricultural policies. This is as though the whole population of the American New England and Middle Atlantic States, or California and Texas, had been wiped out. And that something like 35,000,000 people escaped communist countries as refugees, was an unequalled vote against communist, utopian pretensions. It was as though everyone had fled California, emptying it of all human beings.

There is a supremely important lesson for human life and welfare to be learned from this horrendous sacrifice to one ideology:

No one can be trusted with unlimited power. The more power a government has to impose the beliefs of an ideological or religious elite or decree the whims of a dictator, the more likely human lives and welfare will be sacrificed.

Certainly, as listed in Table 6.1, above, communism does not stand alone in such mass murder. We have the example of totalitarian [Nazi Germany](#), which exterminated some 21,000,000 Jews, Poles, Ukrainians, Russians, Yugoslavs, Frenchmen, Germans, and other nationalities. Then there is the fascist [Nationalist government](#) of China under Chiang Kai-shek, which murdered near 10,000,000 Chinese from 1928 to 1949, and the fascist [Japanese militarists](#) who murdered almost 6,000,000 Chinese, Indonesians, Indochina's, Koreans, Filipinos, and others during World War II. There also are the 1,000,000 or more Bengalis and Hindus murdered in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in 1971 by the fascistic [Pakistan military](#). Nor should we forget the mass expulsion of ethnic Germans and German citizens from Eastern Europe at the end of World War II, particularly by the authoritarian, pre-communist [Polish government](#) as it seized the German Eastern Territories, murdering perhaps over 1,000,000 of them. In [Chapter 5](#), you already have seen the mass murder before and during the Mexican Revolution, and in [Chapter 1](#) that by the governments of Burma and Sudan. And I could go on and on to detail various kinds of non-communist democide, as I did in my [Death By Government](#).



Chinese to be buried alive by Japanese soldiers



Waiting Nazi execution

What connects all these cases of democide is this: as a government's power is more unrestrained, as its power reaches into all the corners of culture and society, the more likely it is to kill its own citizens. As a governing elite has the power to do whatever it wants, whether to satisfy its most personal wishes, or to pursue what it believes is right and true, it may do so whatever the cost in lives. Here, power is the necessary condition for mass murder. Once an elite has full authority, other causes and conditions can operate to bring about the immediate genocide, terrorism, massacres, or whatever killing the members of an elite feel is warranted.

All this provides a solid, life oriented argument for freedom:

Freedom preserves and secures life.

That which preserves and protects human life is a moral good. And, as I have showed, freedom is already a moral good for promoting human welfare and minimizing internal political violence. I now will add to this list the moral good of saving human lives.

I have saved a discussion of another moral good until the next chapter. It even may be more surprising to you than the life-preserving aspect I have described here.

NOTES

* Written for this web site. I am indebted to Judson Knight for his careful editing and helpful comments on this chapter.

For the statistics on and details on the Khmer Rouge and Cambodia covered here, see Chapters 9 of my [Death By Government](#) and Chapter 4 of my [Statistics of Democide](#); for those on the Soviet Union, see my [Lethal Politics](#); and for China, see my [China's Bloody Century](#).

For the statistical analysis using a variety of techniques to test the relationship of freedom to democide, see on this site Part II of [Statistics of Democide](#) and the [Appendix](#) to this book.

1. For the genocidal component and the democide as a percent of the population, see [Table 1.2](#) from my [Death By Government](#).

2. This is from [Table 9.1](#) of my [Death By Government](#).

3. From Table 9.2 of my [Death By Government](#).

4. John Barron and Anthony Paul, *Peace With Horror: The Untold Story of Communist Genocide in Cambodia*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, pp. 148-149. American Edition titled *Murder of a Gentle Land*. New York: Reader's Digest Press--Thomas Y. Crowell.

5. Arch Puddington, "The Khmer Rouge File," *The American Spectator* (July): pp. 18-20.

6. From my ["How many did communist regimes murder?"](#)

7. Vladimir and Evodkia Petrov, *Empire of Fear*. New York: Praeger, 1956, pp. 75-76.

8. Quoted in Oksana Procyk, Leonid Heretz, and James E. Mace, *Famine in the Soviet Ukraine 1932-1933: A Memorial Exhibition*. Widener Library, Harvard University Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986, pp. 53-54.
