

“The Cruise Missile Left”: Samantha Power and the Genocide Gambits

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In-depth Report: [CRIMINALIZE WAR](#)

This article written nine years ago in May 2004 brings to light the position of so-called “Progressives” which Edward Herman describes as “The Cruise Missile Left” pertaining to humanitarian intervention.

The word “genocide” is often used to describe crimes committed by countries which are the victims rather than the perpetrators of war. The issue is rarely raised in relation to the crimes committed by the United States and Israel.

This article is of particular relevance to stance of US Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power, who is pushing for a military intervention in Syria on “humanitarian” grounds.

Professor Herman refers to Samantha Power’s earlier book *“A Problem From Hell”: America and the Age of Genocide as follows(emphasis added)*

Power never departs from the selectivity dictated by the establishment party line. That requires, first and foremost, **simply ignoring cases of direct U.S. or U.S.-sponsored (or otherwise approved) genocide**. Thus the Vietnam war, in which millions were directly killed by U.S. forces, does not show up in Power’s index or text. Guatemala, where there was a mass killing of as many as 100,000 Mayan Indians between 1978 and 1985, in what Amnesty International called “A Government Program of Political Murder,” but by a government installed and supported by the United States, also does not show up in Power’s index. ...

Power engages in a similar suppression and **failure to recognize the U.S. role in her treatment of genocide in Iraq**. She attends carefully and at length to Saddam Hussein’s use of chemical warfare and killing of Kurds at Halabja and elsewhere. ...But she does not mention the diplomatic rapprochement with Saddam in the midst of his war with Iran in 1983, the active U.S. logistical support of Saddam during that war, and the U.S. approval of sales and transfers of chemical and biological weapons during the period in which he was using chemical weapons against the Kurds. She also doesn’t mention the active efforts by the United States and Britain to block UN actions that might have obstructed Saddam’s killings.

The killing of over a million Iraqis via the “sanctions of mass destruction,” more than were killed by all the weapons of mass destruction in history, according to John and Karl Mueller (“Sanctions of Mass Destruction,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 1999), was one of major genocides of the post-World War 2 era. **It is unmentioned by Samantha Power. Again, the correlation between exclusion, U.S. responsibility, and the**

view that such killings were, in Madeleine Albright's words, "worth it" from the standpoint of U.S. interests, is clear. There is a similar political basis for Power's failure to include Israel's low-intensity genocide of the Palestinians and South Africa's "destructive engagement" with the frontline states in the 1980s, the latter with a death toll greatly exceeding all the deaths in the Balkan wars of the 1990s. Neither Israel nor South Africa, both "constructively engaged" by the United States, show up in Power's index.

Samantha Power's conclusion is that the U.S. policy toward genocide has been very imperfect and needs reorientation, less opportunism, and greater vigor. **For Power, the United States is the solution, not the problem.**

Gr. Editor M. Ch. , September 21, 2013

The Complete Edward S. Herman article below

"The Cruise Missile Left": Samantha Power and the Genocide Gambits

by Edward S. Herman,

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Establishment politicians, media, and intellectuals use the word genocide with great abandon, but with a hugely politicized selectivity. It is an invidious word, like terrorism, so that attaching it to an enemy and target is helpful in demonizing, thereby setting up the target for bombing and invasion, and establishing a case for pursuit of its leaders via assassination squads or tribunals. Genocide was used often to describe the "killing fields" of Pol Pot, but not the killing fields of Vietnam where the United States ravaged the country, killed many more people than did Pol Pot, and left a destroyed country and chemical warfare heritage of hundreds of thousands of children with birth defects.

The word was never used in the U.S. mainstream to describe Indonesian operations in East Timor, where the invasion of 1975 and murderous occupation killed off between a quarter and a third of the population, a larger fraction than in Cambodia and not attributable, at least in part, to a prior war and its after-effects (as in Cambodia). But in the one mention of the word "genocide" in reference to East Timor in the New York Times (February 15, 1981), veteran reporter Henry Kamm explained that this was unwarranted "hyperbole"—that the situation was "complex" and there were multiple causes of all those deaths (presumably in contrast with Cambodia, where Kamm and the Times never found any complexity or causes other than Pol Pot's policies).

The word genocide is rarely if ever applied to Turkish ethnic cleansing and massacres of its Kurds, and in fact Turkey was mobilized to participate in the 78-day NATO (de facto U.S.) bombing war against Yugoslavia in 1999, supposedly to terminate "genocide" in Kosovo, although Turkey's attacks on its local Kurds were far more deadly than any pre-bombing-war Yugoslav violence against the Kosovo Albanians. The obvious explanation of the varying word usage is that Turkey was a U.S. ally, and its ethnic cleansing and killings were facilitated by greatly increased U.S. (Clinton administration) military aid, just as Indonesia's violence in East Timor was greatly helped by greater U.S. (Carter administration) aid to the

killer state. Yugoslavia, on the other hand, was a U.S. target. Amusingly, as Noam Chomsky points out in *Hegemony or Survival*, when Turkey failed to cooperate in the invasion-occupation of Iraq, suddenly the U.S. media began to report on Turkey's "ghastly record of torturing, killing, and 'disappearing' Turkish Kurds" that had previously been kept under the rug, although they continued to keep under the rug the fact of massive Clinton administration aid facilitating that "ghastly record."

The word genocide has been used often by establishment politicians, media and intellectuals to describe Saddam Hussein's behavior in the 1980s, notably his resort to chemical warfare to kill Iraqi Kurds; but it is never used in the mainstream to describe the "sanctions of mass destruction" that are credibly estimated to have killed over a million Iraqis. The establishment institutions have avoided all but passing mention of the numbers dead, and they suppress even more completely the evidence that the killings were a consequence of deliberate actions, including the U.S. and British use of the sanctions system to block the import of medicines and equipment to repair water and sanitation systems that were destroyed with full recognition of the disease-threatening consequences.

"Genocide" was applied frequently to describe Serb actions in Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s, actions supposedly the basis of "humanitarian intervention" and a major tribunal operation to bring Serbs to book. The link here between Western target, invidious word usage, focus of attention of the "cruise missile left" and mainstream news and commentary, and dedicated, long-lasting and expensive tribunal pursuit of the chosen villains, is dramatic. The intellectual apologists for Western imperialism have pretended that the Yugoslavia Tribunal is not fully politicized, but is rather pursuing justice, as they skirt by the facts that nothing happened to Tudjman, Izetbegovic, or any other non-Serb high officials guilty of war crimes in the Balkans. (These would properly include Clinton, Blair and their top associates, guilty of aggression, and whose bombing tactics even Human Rights Watch, a notorious apologist for NATO policies in the Balkans, condemned as violations of "international humanitarian law"). The apologists claimed that the global reach of justice was approaching institutionalization in the 1990s—that human rights "has taken hold not just as a rhetorical but as an operating principle in all the major Western capitals" (David Rieff)—pointing beyond the Yugoslavia Tribunal to the Spanish effort to bring Pinochet to book, the Belgian case brought against Ariel Sharon, and the installation of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). They slighted the facts that nothing happened to Pinochet, that the case against Sharon was ended by a change in Belgian law (under U.S. pressure), that no tribunal was organized to deal with triple genocidist Suharto, and that the ICJ is repudiated by the United States despite groveling and compromising efforts to accommodate U.S. demands for assured exemption from ICJ jurisdiction.

So it remains a power-out-of-the-gun truth that only a U.S. target can commit "genocide" or even engage in "ethnic cleansing," while the United States can commit blatant aggression with only slightly delayed UN accommodation, and it and its clients don't aggress, ethnically cleanse, or commit genocide. (In ratifying the "Genocide Convention," with a 40-year time lag, the U.S. Senate wrote in a U.S. exemption to its application; the U.S. insistence on an above-the-law status is long-standing.)

It is truly Orwellian to see the Yugoslavia Tribunal struggling to pin the "genocide" label on Milosevic, and to have done that already against Bosnian Serb General Radislav Krstic. In Milosevic's case, the prosecutor, sensing that only 4-5,000 bodies—from all causes and on all sides—having been found in Kosovo after a bloody war, would not sustain a charge of

genocide, decided to try to make him responsible for all Bosnian Serb killings in Bosnia, something the Tribunal had forgotten to do over the five previous years. This effort has been a notorious failure.

In the Krstic case, the genocide charge was based on the Srebrenica events of July 1995, where some substantial but uncertain number of Bosnian Muslims were killed, some in fighting and some executed. Here again the number of bodies in the discovered grave sites in the Srebrenica area is under 5,000, and certainly includes large numbers killed in the fighting during July. The Tribunal court claimed a Bosnian Serb plan and intent to kill all military age Srebrenica males, although no document or credible witness statement was found sustaining this charge, although thousands of Bosnian Muslim soldiers were allowed passage to safety, although many wounded Bosnian Muslims were allowed repatriation, and although the Bosnian Serbs made a number of actual deals and broader proposals for a prisoner exchange.

The alternative view, that there was no such plan, only a vengeance motive and an intent to locate and execute the Bosnian Muslim cadres responsible for the killing of several thousand Serbs in the Srebrenica vicinity over the prior three years, was quickly dismissed by the Tribunal court. Vengeance as a motive is only acceptable for Western-backed killers (and David Rieff and company have relied on this to explain away the massive ethnic cleansing in Kosovo under NATO auspices). It is also well-known and conceded by the court that all the Bosnian Muslim women and children in Srebrenica were helped to safety in Bosnian Muslim territory, strange behavior with a genocidal intent. The Tribunal reasoning is that in a patriarchal society, the removal of males is especially important for making community survival difficult. Of course, the idea of genocide in one small town is also a pathbreaking idea, perhaps to be followed by genocide in one household. But for such a noble enterprise as putting the Serbs in their place, and making "humanitarian intervention" palatable, creative thought is useful.

The contrast between the treatment of Yugoslavia and Israel-Palestine remains truly dramatic. For one thing, Israeli ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from the "promised land" has been going on for half a century, and it is clear that the steady expropriations, demolitions, and killings of the Palestinians is for the benefit of Jewish settlements, not for "security." So this is as pure an illustration of ethnic cleansing as can be found on the face of the earth; Israeli historian Benny Morris, in his recent acknowledgement of this "ethnic purification," complained only that it hadn't gone far enough. By contrast, the Serb attacks on Kosovo Albanians before and during the 1999 bombing war were never to provide room for Serb settlements, they were a feature of an ongoing civil war (stoked by outsiders), so that this wasn't true ethnic cleansing at all. There was ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Croatia, but it was carried out by all parties, struggling to establish land control in an externally encouraged civil war. Nevertheless, the phrase ethnic cleansing was used lavishly to describe Serb actions in Kosovo, as well as Bosnia, but it is rarely applied to Israeli behavior.

In the Genocide Convention of 1948, the word genocide was defined loosely, as any act "committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group as such." Genocidal acts included causing serious "mental harm" or inflicting "conditions of life" aimed at such destruction. Can anything be clearer than that the Sharon government is trying to destroy the Palestinians as a national group by creating intolerable "conditions of life"? Under "Operation Defensive Shield" Israel carried out a "systematic process of demolition of Palestinian public and private property, and mass expropriation of

Palestinian land on behalf of settlers” (Appeal by 153 Israeli academics); “the Israeli army deliberately trashed the inside of every Palestinian institution that it did not entirely destroy—schools, charities, health organizations, banks, radio and TV stations, even a puppet theatre” (Gila Svirsky). As Rania Awwad has said, “Sharon’s solution is to depopulate as much as possible the Occupied Palestinian Territories by making life for its citizens unbearable. And what could be more unbearable than watching your children cry themselves to sleep from hunger, night after night?” The Israeli leadership is not trying to exterminate all Palestinians, but they are prepared to kill them freely, take away their land, and make life so harsh that they will die off or leave. That this is a genocidal process is sometimes suggested in the Israeli media, but not in the Free Press.

The cruise missile left also adheres closely to the party line on genocide, which is why its members thrive in the New York Times and other establishment vehicles. This is true of Paul Berman, Michael Ignatieff and David Rieff, but I will focus here on Samantha Power, whose large volume on genocide, “A Problem From Hell”: America and the Age of Genocide won a Pulitzer prize, and who is currently the expert of choice on the subject in the mainstream media (and even in The Nation and on the Bill Moyers show).

Power never departs from the selectivity dictated by the establishment party line. That requires, first and foremost, simply ignoring cases of direct U.S. or U.S.-sponsored (or otherwise approved) genocide. Thus the Vietnam war, in which millions were directly killed by U.S. forces, does not show up in Power’s index or text. Guatemala, where there was a mass killing of as many as 100,000 Mayan Indians between 1978 and 1985, in what Amnesty International called “A Government Program of Political Murder,” but by a government installed and supported by the United States, also does not show up in Power’s index. Cambodia is of course included, but only for the second phase of the genocide—the first phase, from 1969-1975, in which the United States dropped some 500,000 tons of bombs on the Cambodian countryside and killed vast numbers, she fails to mention. On the Khmer Rouge genocide, Power says they killed 2 million, a figure widely cited after Jean Lacouture gave that number; his subsequent admission that this number was invented had no effect on its use, and it suits Power’s purpose.

A major U.S.-encouraged and supported genocide occurred in Indonesia in 1965-66 in which over 700,000 people were murdered. This genocide is not mentioned by Samantha Power and the names Indonesia and Suharto do not appear in her index. She also fails to mention West Papua, where Indonesia’s 40 years of murderous occupation would constitute genocide under her criteria, if carried out under different auspices. Power does refer to East Timor, with extreme brevity, saying that “In 1975, when its ally, the oil-producing, anti-Communist Indonesia, invaded East Timor, killing between 100,000 and 200,000 civilians, the United States looked away” (146-7). That exhausts her treatment of the subject, although the killings in East Timor involved a larger fraction of the population than in Cambodia, and the numbers killed were probably larger than the grand total for Bosnia and Kosovo, to which she devotes a large fraction of her book. She also misrepresents the U.S. role—it did not “look away,” it gave its approval, protected the aggression from any effective UN response (in his autobiography, then U.S. Ambassador to the UN Daniel Patrick Moynihan bragged about his effectiveness in protecting Indonesia from any UN action), and greatly increased its arms aid to Indonesia, thereby facilitating the genocide.

Power engages in a similar suppression and failure to recognize the U.S. role in her treatment of genocide in Iraq. She attends carefully and at length to Saddam Hussein’s use of chemical warfare and killing of Kurds at Halabja and elsewhere, and she does discuss the

U.S. failure to oppose and take any action against Saddam Hussein at this juncture. But she does not mention the diplomatic rapprochement with Saddam in the midst of his war with Iran in 1983, the active U.S. logistical support of Saddam during that war, and the U.S. approval of sales and transfers of chemical and biological weapons during the period in which he was using chemical weapons against the Kurds. She also doesn't mention the active efforts by the United States and Britain to block UN actions that might have obstructed Saddam's killings.

The killing of over a million Iraqis via the "sanctions of mass destruction," more than were killed by all the weapons of mass destruction in history, according to John and Karl Mueller ("Sanctions of Mass Destruction," Foreign Affairs, May/June 1999), was one of major genocides of the post-World War 2 era. It is unmentioned by Samantha Power. Again, the correlation between exclusion, U.S. responsibility, and the view that such killings were, in Madeleine Albright's words, "worth it" from the standpoint of U.S. interests, is clear. There is a similar political basis for Power's failure to include Israel's low-intensity genocide of the Palestinians and South Africa's "destructive engagement" with the frontline states in the 1980s, the latter with a death toll greatly exceeding all the deaths in the Balkan wars of the 1990s. Neither Israel nor South Africa, both "constructively engaged" by the United States, show up in Power's index.

Samantha Power's conclusion is that the U.S. policy toward genocide has been very imperfect and needs reorientation, less opportunism, and greater vigor. For Power, the United States is the solution, not the problem. These conclusions and policy recommendations rest heavily on her spectacular bias in case selection: She simply bypasses those that are ideologically inconvenient, where the United States has arguably committed genocide (Vietnam, Cambodia 1969-75, Iraq 1991-2003), or has given genocidal processes positive support (Indonesia, West Papua, East Timor, Guatemala, Israel, and South Africa). Incorporating them into an analysis would lead to sharply different conclusions and policy agendas, such as calling upon the United States to simply stop doing it, or urging stronger global opposition to U.S. aggression and support of genocide, and proposing a much needed revolutionary change within the United States to remove the roots of its imperialistic and genocidal thrust. But the actual huge bias, nicely leavened by admissions of imperfections and need for improvement in U.S. policy, readily explains why Samantha Power is loved by the New York Times and won a Pulitzer prize for her masterpiece of evasion and apologetics for "our" genocides and call for a more aggressive pursuit of "theirs."

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