

FROM RISK ASSESSMENT TO EARLY WARNING: IDENTIFYING CURRENT HIGH RISK CASES

This chapter is concerned with risk assessment, not with early warnings as such. Risk assessments identify situations in which the conditions are present for a particular kind of conflict or humanitarian disaster - in this study, geno/politicide. They are not precise predictions in the sense that is usually meant by the terms "forecast" or "early warning" because risks are assessed on the basis of background and intervening conditions - the conditions that establish the potential for humanitarian disaster. Whether or not risks are realized depends on whether the preconditions remain unchanged *and* on the occurrence of accelerating or triggering events. Early warnings, by contrast, are derived from monitoring the flow of political events in high-risk situations, with special attention to actions that are likely to push a conflict over the threshold into mass murder. Risk assessments provide the context. Early warnings are interpretations that the outbreak of systematic killings in a high-risk situation is likely and imminent.

Seven countries that currently are high on most or all the risk factors for genocide and politicide are listed in Table 2. Afghanistan and Burma are the only ones in which all six risk factors are present. In Pakistan five of the six factors are present; in Indonesia, Algeria, and China four of the six; and in Burundi three of the six. These are more specific observations on the risks and the circumstances in which they might be activated.