

Duration: A fourth guideline concerns the duration of a group's victimization. The physical destruction of a people requires time to accomplish: it implies a persistent, coherent pattern of action. Thus table 1 includes only episodes that lasted a number of months. Brief episodes of killings such as the massacres of Palestinians at the Chatilla and Sabra camps in Beirut in 1982 are not listed, though some observers have called them a genocide. Like many other massacres, they do not meet the criteria used here for geno/politicide. They were spontaneous eruptions of mob anger or one-time acts by armed bands or out-of-control soldiers, not part of a sustained campaign carried out by or with the acquiescence of authorities. At the other end of the time spectrum are attacks on a group that recur episodically and reflect the objectives of different regimes within a single state. We treat events such as a series of Iraqi campaigns against Kurds from 1961 to 1975 as a single episode of victimization. The Iraqi Kurds were targeted again in 1988-1991, long enough after the previous killings ended to be treated as a new episode.

Threat to Group Survival: It is wrong to assume that most or all members of a group have to be killed before we conclude that a genocide or politicide has occurred. It is enough to "take the life of out of a group"—in other words to eliminate or disperse so many people that the group ceases to function as a social or political entity. Therefore "body counts" do not enter into the definition of what constitutes an episode of victimization. A few hundred killed constitutes as much a genocide or politicide as the death of tens of thousands if the targeted group is small in numbers or if the victims are chosen to maximize the destructive effect for the group. This is especially important in cases where the destruction of small groups goes without note, for example when it occurs in the context of larger episodes of massive state repression. Table 1's list of victimized groups probably omits some such small groups.

The list of episodes in Table 1 excludes some cases that might meet the guidelines if we had sufficient information about them. One example is a campaign of reprisal killings of southerners in Chad 1985-86 by a newly empowered regime dominated by northerners: we probably never will know enough to add it to the case list. An example that is included as a possible case occurred during the rebellion which began in eastern Zaire in October 1996. Rebel forces under the nominal leadership of Laurent Kabila massacred Rwandan Hutu refugees because they sheltered militants responsible for the Rwandan genocide of 1994. It is plausible to regard Kabila's movement as a "contending authority" because it seized power in May 1997. But the killings were reportedly perpetrated by Rwandan Tutsis acting under cover of the rebellion, and UN efforts to document the scope and nature of the killings have failed.

Other cases are well documented but difficult to interpret. One instance is the indiscriminate killings of civilians during the two Russian assaults on Chechnya in 1994-95 and 1999. In this and similar cases the difficulty lies in detecting malicious intent in practices which lead to a group's victimization. Sometimes what starts as a violent encounter between military forces and opponents leads to a coherent policy of repression that culminates in geno/politicide, as in southern Sudan, Iraq, and many other civil wars. In other such conflicts the state targets rebels in such a way that many unarmed civilians are killed but does not pass the threshold between sporadic killings and geno/politicide. This is our interpretation of conflicts in Chechnya, as of this writing, and also in Turkish Kurdistan—authorities did not cross the threshold between repression and group destruction.