

The worst genocides of the 20th and 21st Centuries

 scaruffi.com/politics/dictat.html

by [Piero Scaruffi](#) | [Email](#)

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Here is a tentative list of modern mass murderers and the estimated number of people killed by their orders (excluding enemy armies). In many cases (notably Stalin's and Mao's cases) one has to decide how to consider the millions who died indirectly because of their political decisions. Mao's "cultural revolution" caused the death of millions of people, but many died of hunger and ordinary Chinese (who, unlike us, were there) blame Mao's wife rather than Mao himself. Stalin is held responsible for the death of millions by Ukrainians, but "only" half a million people were killed by his order. Khomeini sent children to die in the war against Iraq, but it was a war.

Read the bottom of this page for frequently asked questions on controversial actions such as the atomic bombs, the Iraqi war, etc (that always involve the current superpower and usually the current president of that superpower).

I welcome [feedback](#) if i forgot anything or posted the wrong data, but PLEASE always provide reliable sources: webpages are gossips, not sources (and the WORST one is [Wikipedia](#), edited by anonymous people with wildly biased agendas). Reliable sources are books written by professional historians who spent decades researching the event. Don't embarrass yourself.

An impressive number of readers (mostly from the USA) don't seem to know what "20th century" means and keep sending me emails about the Atlantic slave trade, the Native Americans, the Irish famine, etc.

To assess the impact of a genocide on a nation, one should consider not the absolute number of deaths but a percentage of the population. For example, Tito (570.000) and Suharto (500.000) are blamed for about the same number of deaths, but Indonesia had 5 times the population of Yugoslavia, and therefore Tito killed a much bigger proportion of his people.

See also [Wars and Casualties of the 20th and 21st Century](#): a genocide like the one in Rwanda that was not ordered by anyone is not listed in this page but it is in that page.

Ze-Dong Mao (China, 1958-61 and 1966-69, Tibet 1949-50)	(see note at the bottom of this page)
Adolf Hitler (Germany, 1939-1945)	12,000,000 (concentration camps and civilians deliberately killed in WWII plus 3 million Russian POWs left to die)
Leopold II of Belgium (Congo, 1886-1908)	8,000,000

Jozef Stalin (USSR, 1932-53)	7,000,000 (the gulags plus the purges plus Ukraine's famine)
Hideki Tojo (Japan, 1941-44)	5,000,000 (civilians in WWII)
Ismail Enver (Ottoman Turkey, 1915-20)	1,200,000 Armenians (1915) + 350,000 Greek Pontians and 480,000 Anatolian Greeks (1916-22) + 500,000 Assyrians (1915-20)
Pol Pot (Cambodia, 1975-79)	1,700,000
Yakubu Gowon (Biafra, 1967-1970)	1,000,000
Leonid Brezhnev (Afghanistan, 1979-1982)	900,000
Jean Kambanda (Rwanda, 1994)	800,000
Saddam Hussein (Iran 1980-1990 and Kurds in Iraq 1987-88)	600,000
Tito (Yugoslavia, 1945-1980)	570,000
Suharto/Soeharto (Indonesian communists 1965-66)	500,000
Fumimaro Konoe (Japan, 1937-39)	500,000? (Chinese civilians)
Menghistu (Ethiopia, 1975-78)	500,000
Kim Il Sung (North Korea, 1948-94)	400,000 (purges and concentration camps)
Jonas Savimbi - but disputed by recent studies (Angola, 1975-2002)	400,000
Mullah Omar - Taliban (Afghanistan, 1986-2001)	400,000
Idi Amin (Uganda, 1969-1979)	300,000
Yahya Khan (Pakistan, 1970-71)	300,000 (Bangladesh)

Ante Pavelic (Croatia, 1941-45)	359,000 (30,000 Jews, 29,000 Gipsies, 300,000 Serbs)
Benito Mussolini (Ethiopia, 1936; Libya, 1934-45; Yugoslavia, WWII)	300,000
Mobutu Sese Seko (Zaire, 1965-97)	?
Charles Taylor (Liberia, 1989-1996)	220,000
Foday Sankoh (Sierra Leone, 1991-2000)	200,000
Suharto (Aceh, East Timor, New Guinea, 1975-98)	200,000
Ho Chi Min (Vietnam, 1953-56)	200,000
Michel Micombero (Burundi, 1972)	150,000
Hassan Turabi (Sudan, 1989-1999)	100,000
Siad Barre (Somalia, 1988-1991)	100,000
Milton Obote (Uganda, Operation Bonanza, 1983-85)	100,000
Joseph Kony (Lord's Resistance Army, Uganda, 1989-2016)	100,000
Syngman Rhee (South Korea, 1948-50)	80,000 (various massacres of civilians)
Richard Nixon (Vietnam, 1969-1974)	70,000 (Vietnamese and Cambodian civilians)
Efrain Rios Montt - but disputed by recent studies (Guatemala, 1982-83)	70,000
Jean-Pierre Bemba (Congo Kinshasa, 2002 - Pygmy tribes)	65,000

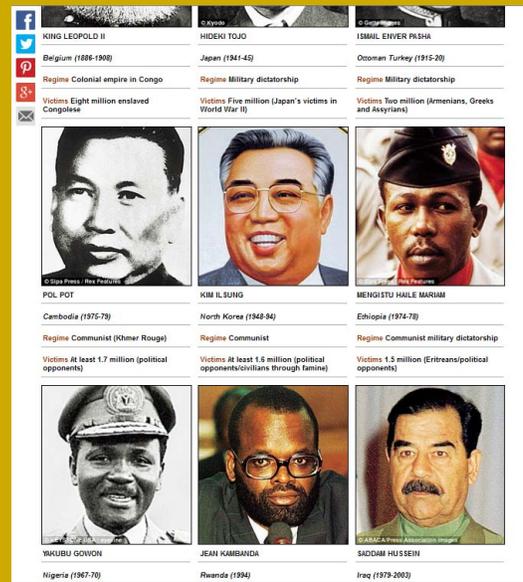
Kayumba Nyamwasa (Rwanda, 1994-97)	60,000
Papa Doc Duvalier (Haiti, 1957-71)	60,000
Rafael Trujillo (Dominican Republic, 1930-61)	50,000
Bashir Assad (Syria, 2012-13)	50,000
Getulio Vargas (Brazil, 1930-1964)	50,000
Francisco Macias Nguema (Equatorial Guinea, 1969-79)	50,000
Hissene Habre (Chad, 1982-1990)	40,000
Mahinda Rajapaksa (Sri Lanka, 2009, Tamil civilians)	40,000
Chiang Kai-shek (Taiwan, 1947)	30,000 (popular uprising)
Vladimir Ilich Lenin (USSR, 1917-20)	30,000 (dissidents executed)
Francisco Franco (Spain)	30,000 (dissidents executed after the civil war)
Fidel Castro (Cuba, 1959-1999)	30,000
Lyndon Johnson (Vietnam, 1963-1968)	30,000
Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez (El Salvador, 1932)	30,000
Hafez Al-Assad (Syria, 1980-2000)	25,000
Khomeini (Iran, 1979-89)	20,000
William McKinley (Philippines, 1899-1901)	20,000
Robert Mugabe (Zimbabwe, 1982-87, Ndebele minority)	20,000

Rafael Videla (Argentina, 1976-83)	13,000
Guy Mollet (France, 1956-1957)	10,000 (war in Algeria)
Harold McMillans (Britain, 1952-56, Kenya's Mau-Mau rebellion)	10,000
Jean-Bedel Bokassa (Centrafica, 1966-79)	?
Slobodan Milosevic (Yugoslavia, 1992-98)	8,000
Paul Koroma (Sierra Leone, 1997)	6,000
Osama Bin Laden (worldwide, 1993-2001)	3,500
Augusto Pinochet (Chile, 1973)	3,000

I don't know if i have to be angry or honored that the Daily Mail (a newspaper that is famous for moralizing articles) plagiarized this old page of mine in October 2014:

As usual they also copied errors that i have since corrected on my own page ([their unauthorized copy](#)).





For a list of casualties in wars, see [this page](#).

Main sources:

Notes:

1. [Matt Ray's ongoing research](#) has updated data and discussion.
2. Mao is widely credited in the West with tens of millions of killings (49-78,000,000) but the sources are generally vague and contradictory. It is particularly difficult to pin down the deaths of the Cultural Revolution on him. Even assuming that the numbers are correct (and living witnesses saw very few people die during those years), Mao certainly started it, but after a few months he had lost control over the events, and there is no evidence whatsoever that he ordered or approved the many killings committed in the name of the Cultural Revolution: they were not carried out by the army or the police but by radicals. Crimes committed by the "red guards" cannot be automatically blamed on him. His wife Jiang Qing is widely despised in China and considered to have exerted an evil influence on those events (and was eventually arrested). In 1968 Mao called for "Big Unity" between the radical and conservative factions that were fighting all over China (not for more blood but for less blood). Before dying he appointed Hua Guofeng, a provincial governor, as his successor bypassing all the senior officials who were responsible for the excesses of the Cultural Revolution. The Cultural Revolution indirectly caused starvation, but the number of people who died of that starvation is probably lower than Westerners thought (again, judging from living witnesses) and he can only be considered indirectly responsible for them. A failed policy does not constitute "genocide" (otherwise this list of genociders would be much longer).

3. I read *Burying Mao*, *The Unknown Story* and many other books on China. I also happen to travel frequently to China (3 months total over 2014-15) and have Chinese friends both in the USA and China who grew up during the Cultural Revolution. I am obviously not a fan of the Chinese regime (my website was banned in China for a while) but my view is that we still don't have a clear understanding of what happened under Mao. None of my Chinese friends and none of their parents know someone who was killed during the 1950s/60s: not a family member, not a friend, not a neighbor, not even a friend's friend's friend. Contrast with the Holocaust: virtually every older German and Pole knows of at least one Jewish family that disappeared during World War II. Nonetheless, all books on Mao published in the West routinely talk of millions killed under Mao. But there is really no study to justify those numbers. Whenever you read that he is responsible for 10, 20, 30... 70 million deaths, you should notice that they don't provide any evidence that would fly in a court of law. We literally don't have the names of those 70 million people who supposedly were killed under Mao (we do have the names of the people killed in Hitler's death camps, and the names of the people killed in Stalin's gulags). The avalanche of anti-Mao books started in the 1980s after Deng Xiaoping launched an ideological campaign against the legacy of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Ye Jian Ying's speech in 1979 and Liu Zeng's report of 1981 (both attacking the Great Leap Forward) were widely publicized by the Communist Party. Many books published in the West are simply quoting the figures published by Deng's clique back then without realizing that Deng's agenda was not to tell the truth but to defeat his opponents within the Communist Party. His enemies were the ones who had worked with Mao on the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, therefore Deng had to discredit both events. We cannot trust any study published in China in the 1980s, at the peak of this ideological war, but most Western books are based precisely on those "revelations". The first major Western "studies" about Mao's massacres came out in the *China Quarterly*, and to this day those "studies" are routinely plagiarized in books and magazines. Well, we now know that this journal was covertly funded by the CIA (*London Review of Books*, Volume 23, no. 10, 24 May 2001). That magazine never funded any study aimed at defending Mao. It only funded studies to discredit him. Eyewitness accounts cited by Jasper Becker, Jung Chang, and others are just not enough to conclude that tens of millions of people were killed. At most, an impartial jury would reach the conclusion that Mao is responsible for a few thousand deaths (keeping aside the civil war during which atrocities were committed by both sides). I respect historians like Richard Baum, Frank Dikotter, Jung Chang, Judith Banister, Richard MacFarquhar, etc but for every book that alleges Mao is responsible for those deaths one could write a book alleging the opposite. It is just that in the West we don't have historians interested in defending Mao. It wouldn't be difficult to write a book showing that the Great Leap Forward actually improved China's economy and that life expectancy in the 1960s increased (a number that is hardly consistent with the claim that 70 million people died a premature death). I could list dozens of papers published over the years by economists, sociologists and technologists who had no political agenda but happen to reach conclusions that one could use to paint a brighter picture of Mao's era. (I have no interest in doing this because I don't like Mao, and wouldn't want to spend the rest of my life defending those papers). In other words, we tend to be victims of China's own anti-Mao propaganda, taking for literally true what was originally a project to marginalize Mao's allies. That project succeeded, but it doesn't mean that Mao's allies were lying and that Mao's enemies were telling the truth. We don't really scrutinize anti-Mao books the same way we scrutinize books on other subjects. Banister, for example, assumes "under-reporting of deaths" and unilaterally decides

how many people died. She is not saying "people reported x number of deaths" but "people did not report x number of deaths" and then goes on to conclude that millions died. Chang claims to have interviewed Mao's English teacher Zhang Hanzhi, not knowing that Zhang read the New York Times, and, having found out about that claim, she wrote to the newspaper that she never even met Chang. If this had been a book attacking George W Bush, Fox News would have spent days hammering it. But nobody does it when it's a book about Mao.

4. The numbers for Stalin have decreased in recent years by admission of the Ukrainian authorities. If you have read a book published before 2010, that book was not aware of this recent admissions. It is not clear how many deaths were caused by the famine of 1946-47 and by the forced settlements, and how much responsibility can be placed on him.
5. The atrocities committed by right-wing dictators have always been easier to track down than the crimes against humanity committed by communist leaders, so the figures for communist leaders like Stalin and Mao are mere guesses. We also don't know how many dissidents have been killed by order of Kim Il Sung in North Korea, although Westerners suspect many thousands.

6. I often get asked if Hiroshima/Nagasaki qualify as a genocide. I disagree. First of all, why only nuclear weapons? The carpet bombings of German cities and of Tokyo killed the same numbers of people. Second, Winston Churchill and Harry Truman did not start that war: they ended it. It is even debatable if these bombings killed or saved lives: Hiroshima probably saved a lot of Japanese lives, because a long protracted invasion like the one that took place in Germany would have killed a lot more people (Germany lost 2 million people, Japan only 300,000, because Japan was never invaded, while Germany was invaded from all sides). Actually, more Japanese died in two weeks of battles with the Soviet Union in Manchuria than in the two nuclear bombings. As horrific as it sounds, I suspect that a nuclear bomb on Berlin would have killed 100,000 people but caused Germany to surrender right away, thus saving many German lives. (I know, it is gruesome to count dead bodies like this; but, again, I didn't start that war, Germany and Japan started it).

The USA had a casualty rate of 35% in the battle of Okinawa: they expected to lose one million soldiers in a land invasion of Japan, and the estimates were that Japan would lose the same number of soldiers and many more civilians. Most historians believe that it was the atomic bomb that convinced Japan to surrender, and it was the second one: after the first one, there were still members of the Japanese cabinet who were opposed to surrender (the cabinet had to be unanimous in order for the emperor to surrender). The dissenters who wanted to continue the war even tried a coup to overthrow the emperor rather than obey the order to surrender. After the first bomb, Nishina (head of the Japanese nuclear program) was asked if it were possible that the USA could build another atomic bomb within six months: obviously the people who asked him the question were not going to surrender unless a second bomb was possible. Koichi Kido, advisor to emperor Hirohito, said: "We of the peace party were assisted by the atomic bomb in our endeavor to end the war." Hisatsune Sakomizu, chief secretary of Cabinet, said that the atomic bombs were a "golden opportunity given by heaven for Japan to end the war." Thus the Japanese themselves (those who wanted to surrender) seem to indicate that the two atomic bombs were indispensable to end a war that was killing hundreds of thousands of people per battle (the battle of Okinawa killed more Japanese than the atomic bomb on Nagasaki).

It is also estimated that throughout Japan-occupied Asia about 200,000 civilians were dying every month (of disease, hunger, etc): if the atomic bombs helped Japan surrender even just six months earlier, that saved the lives of one million Indonesians, Indochinese, Philipinos, Chinese, etc. (Notable dissenting voices were the two most powerful USA generals, Dwight Eisenhower and Douglas MacArthur, who both felt that the atomic bombs were unnecessary to finish Japan).

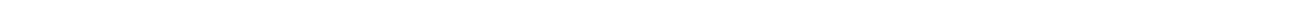
People die in wars. During the previous world-war, millions died of everything from guns to chemical weapons. The fact that a more or less efficient weapon is used to fight a war does not constitute genocide, per se. It is not the weapon, but the intent. Churchill's and Truman's intent was to end the war, not to exterminate the peoples (which they could have done easily, had they wanted to). In fact, I think that Churchill and Truman are exemplary of how to treat a defeated enemy: instead of annihilating the enemies, they helped Germany and Japan to rebuild themselves and become stronger and wealthier than they had been before the war. It may have been the first time in history.

Furthermore, we know that Werner Heisenberg in Germany and Yoshio Nishina in Japan were working on an atomic bomb: what if they had had the time to complete one? Heisenberg in Germany had failed to correctly calculate the critical mass of uranium required to sustain a chain reaction, but Nishina in Japan had just done that in 1944. It was a matter of time before German and Japanese scientists would find

out the right recipe. Thus the first bomb saved a lot of lives, probably millions of lives (not just Japanese lives, but lives of all the nations that were being massacred by the Japanese). Last but not least, the USA dropped 720,000 leaflets on Hiroshima and other cities two days earlier, warning of the impending destruction of the city. It is certainly debatable, instead, if the second atomic bomb was necessary. The USA only waited three days to see the effect of the first atomic bomb and of its leaflets. Today sitting in our living rooms we can calmly debate this issue forever. Of course, it was a different kind of decision for the man sitting in the White House in the middle of a world war that had been raging for four years.

7. I've been asked why i blame the USA only for part of the civilian deaths in Vietnam while i blame the Soviet Union for all of the civilian casualties in Afghanistan. The USA "invasion" of Vietnam is not as clearcut as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan:
 1. Even today many in Vietnam think that the aggressor was North Vietnam, not the USA, at least at the beginning, whereas everybody in Afghanistan blames the Soviet Union for that invasion. Nobody welcomed the Soviet Union, whereas about half of Vietnam welcomed the USA.
 2. When the Soviet Union withdrew, almost no Afghan followed them, whereas, when the USA withdrew, about eight million Vietnamese left with them and about three million ran away from Vietnam in the following decades risking their lives (the "boat people").
 3. There are documented large-scale atrocities by the North Vietnamese against their own population (read the Black Book of Communism) while i haven't seen evidence of any large-scale atrocity by the Afghan fighters against their own population
 4. The Soviet Union tried to invade the WHOLE of Afghanistan. The USA never tried to invade the northern part of Vietnam: it simply fought the Vietcong that wanted to annex south Vietnam to north Vietnam (if you read the history of the country, north and south Vietnam have fought wars for more than 1,000 years: go to the [Timeline of Indochina](#) and look for Annam and Champa. the ancient names of the two kingdoms). When the USA bombed civilians in North Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia (countries that had never attacked the USA nor anyone else), then i consider it a war crime. (Germany and Japan had attacked their neighbors and killed millions of them - carpet bombing German and Japanese cities was a way to protect those millions of people from further massacres).

8. The most frequently asked questions are always about current unpopular USA presidents: Reagan, Bush I, Clinton, Bush II... The moment the USA elects a new president, i start receiving emails asking to add him to the list of "genociders". The moment the president leaves office the same people forget about him and jump on the next one. Can we consider George W Bush a genocider due to all of the civilians killed in Iraq under his watch? I don't think so, because the vast majority of civilians killed in Iraq were NOT killed by US troops and certainly not by his order. It is genocide, but the "genociders" are others, and the situation is still too murky to decide who exactly killed those 100,000 civilians. (If Bush is indirectly guilty of it, then certainly Islam is too). The USA bears some clear responsibilities for the chaos, but ineptitude, miscalculation, ignorance, etc do not qualify as genocide. Otherwise the United Nations and France would be responsible for the genocide in Rwanda (900,000 people). Even if one wanted to count all the civilians killed in that civil war as Bush's and Blair's responsibility, it would be (as of 2013, long after the USA and Britain withdrew) 120,000 people in ten years, i.e. 12,000 a year. In 20 years Saddam Hussein was responsible for the killing of 600,000 people (that he personally ordered), an average of 30,000 a year plus the victims of his invasion of Iran. Therefore, technically speaking one could argue that the war, by removing Saddam, saved lives. Putin would be a better candidate for "genocider", since the vast majority of Chechen civilians killed under his watch were killed by Russian troops. However, i have never received a single email nominating Putin...
9. Specifically about Bush II (the hot topic between 2003 and 2008). I have seen no evidence whatsoever that he or anybody working for him or the British prime minister or the Australian prime minister wanted to kill Iraqi civilians. And even less evidence that Iraqi civilians were killed in any large number by US soldiers. The Iraqi civilians killed by US soldiers are estimated at about 4% of all deaths, which is a little over 5,000. With all due respect for those families, a seven-year war that kills only 5,000 people (less than 1,000 a year) does not register anywhere in the history of the world. All the other civilians were killed by militias, suicide bombers, etc. and almost always in the name of Islam (so it would be more appropriate to vent your anger at that religion than at the USA). In fact, documents show that some caution was taken by the US and Britain to avoid mass civilian casualties. Compare with Vietnam, when the US bombed densely populated areas knowing that thousands of civilians would die. In fact, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan might be the first large-scale wars in which the winners went out of their way to avoid mass civilian casualties. Compare with any other war. Future generations (who will face other crises and will be more concerned with their presidents than with Bush II) may see more clearly who is responsible for those killings. Most of them were killed by fellow Iraqis or at least fellow Muslims, not by US soldiers. Once we remove all the personal emotions against this or that politician, it is self-evident who/what killed those Iraqi civilians. If you simply scream hysterically against the president of the USA, you are not helping solve the real problem of those places.
10. Coming to more serious issues, Lothar von Trotha massacred the Herero and Namaqua in Namibia in 1904-1907. That episode is not listed here (despite the large number of victims) because the German government never ordered those massacres. Once the facts became known, outrage in Germany among the political class forced the Kaiser to fire Von Trotha. So i consider this event the folly of one overzealous and racist man rather than a real genocide.
11. Slobodan Milosevic's responsibility for the Yugoslavian civil war is probably proven beyond doubt but he's involvement in the genocides is not clear. Radovan Karadzic and his general Ratko Mladic were responsible for the genocide in Bosnia. Kosovo was not quite a genocide.



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