

CARNEGIE COUNCIL *for Ethics in International Affairs*

A Conversation with David Hamburg: The Commitment to Prevention

U.S. Global Engagement

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Transcript

DAVID SPEEDIE: Good morning. I'm David Speedie, Senior Fellow and Director of the [U.S. Global Engagement Program](#) here at the Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs. As part of our ongoing series on the engagement issue writ large, it's an extraordinary pleasure to have today a very distinguished visitor, Dr. David Hamburg.

David, we could take the whole hour recreating your career and resume, and so I'll just be parochial and say that, of course, for five years I had the great pleasure of your being my boss at [Carnegie Corporation of New York](#) on all manner of items that we'll get into in the course of our discussion.

Dr. Hamburg has published more books than one can recall, including a couple with another distinguished Dr. Hamburg, Dr. [Betty Hamburg](#), with whom you've had a very felicitous collaboration in all manner of things important, David—multiple books, one of which we'll be discussing in some detail.

He is the recipient of the [National Academy of Sciences' Public Welfare Medal](#), the highest award given by the academies. He has received the [Presidential Medal of Freedom](#) from President Clinton, the highest civilian award in our country. So again, I could go on, but I won't.

Welcome, David.

DAVID HAMBURG: Thank you. Very glad to be here.

DAVID SPEEDIE: David, your career at Carnegie—and I'll focus on Carnegie because it's germane to our topic on the prevention agenda, as it were—your career at Carnegie was extraordinary, both in terms of its richness, diversity, and its endurance. The themes that have endured—I think of early childhood education and development, which was really a pioneering effort at Carnegie; the work on Russia, of course, that I was fortunate enough to be involved in with you—really, the work with the Soviet Union, your personal relationship with [Gorbachev](#), and then, after the fall of the Soviet Union, the very creative work that was done on strengthening democracy in fledgling Russia. But, I suppose, the hallmark really, certainly of the last few years of the presidency, was the prevention agenda, the commitment to preventing what you once felicitously called "rotten outcomes," which I thought was a perfect way of putting it.

So this has been a lifetime, obviously. And, just like the executive summary, as it were—I know it's a long story—give us the background of how you came to this both intellectually and also in a more visceral way.

DAVID HAMBURG: Well, I'm happy to do that.

Let me say how much I enjoyed the years of working with you and our continuing friendship and collaborative efforts since then.

It is an odd situation, coming out of a career background in biomedical research and education and patient care in academic health centers, to end up devoted to the prevention of mass violence, which most of the latter part of my career has been.

Very briefly, I was first influenced viscerally by growing up in the shadow of the [Holocaust](#). My grandfather had been a classic pushcart peddler, coming here in 1900, running from anti-Semitic [pogroms](#) in Latvia. He had a dim view of the fate of Jews in Europe from 1900 onward and devoted his whole career to bringing relatives. He'd make a few dollars and bring a relative, make a few dollars and bring a relative. So that I grew up in this atmosphere that there was a menace in Europe evolving. Long before there was [Stalin](#) or [Hitler](#), he foresaw, in some vaguely formulated way, that that menace would be there. As a kid, I took some interest in those matters.

But one of the things that we learned was that one of the greatest countries in the country was Germany; that Germany had a very dynamic, creative, emerging democracy in the [Weimar Republic](#) after World War I; that if you wanted advanced training in the sciences or in medicine, the place to go was Germany; if you wanted advanced work in the arts, the place to go was Germany. And, suddenly, there was this conflagration beyond all imagination in Germany. So that, to say the least, got my attention and the attention of many others. The shocking thing was, how could it happen there?

It was not something that became a focus of my scholarship, although, as an incidental matter, I tried throughout my career to connect with people who had studied that phenomenon. And indeed, shortly after World War II, I urged a number of scholars at the [Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences](#) to study that phenomenon while there were lots of people still alive and the Germans had, in a way fortunately, kept very good records—they were compulsive about their record-keeping. So I urged scholars, historians, political scientists, economists, and others to study how this could have happened in such a seemingly advanced country as Germany. So that was one part of it.

Then, nevertheless, I had a strong attraction to medicine. I went into medicine. When I was early in my specialty training in psychiatry at Yale, where I met Betty and we worked together, I got interested in stress research. A single professor, a refugee from Hitler who is now teaching in Canada, came to visit and gave a lecture on his animal research on stress. It opened up the biology, and to some extent the psychology, of stress.

That was very timely, in the aftermath of World War I, when there were some people in psychiatry, in medicine, in psychology, who had been very much interested in stress responses; for example, the responses of our military people in both the Atlantic and Pacific [theaters](#). A few very important, mostly clinical, but very careful and creative, contributions were made. I went to work with one of the people who had done that.

But I got interested in seeing whether one could develop some of the biological responses of stressful experience—hormonal responses, cardiovascular responses. What was the overall response of the body to stressful experience? Those stressful experiences included anxiety and depression and anger. So anger was my pathway into the field of violence. I, after some years, later created a laboratory at Stanford, the Laboratory for Stress and Conflict, which I headed for some time, an interdisciplinary laboratory, which looked at both biological and psychological aspects.

Betty and I, to some degree you might say, invented the field of [coping](#) and [adaptation](#). There was

virtually no literature on how it was that people would cope with very serious stressful experiences that included reactions of anxiety, depression, and anger. So there was the psychological aspect and the biological aspect.

We in this laboratory came to study different levels of conflict—at the family level, then at the community level, and then later at the national and international level.

The latter was enormously stimulated by the [Cuban Missile Crisis](#). I happened by chance to be in Washington when the Cuban Missile Crisis occurred. I was there for a meeting evaluating biomedical research proposals at the [National Institutes of Health](#) on a visit from Stanford. But it made it terribly vivid about the danger. From then on, I was to some degree obsessed with trying to understand what was the nature of the danger: Was it even greater than we knew (as it turned out to be)? As you know, that was part of Carnegie's program, to clarify.

I made it my business over the succeeding years, after 1962 when the missile crisis occurred, to get in touch with scholars like [Alexander George](#) at Stanford, [Graham Allison](#) at Harvard, and [Ole Holsti](#) at Duke, people who had studied various crises, including the Cuban Missile Crisis, and try to understand about the nature of that crisis and then what could be done, first, to manage similar crises should they occur in the future, and then, when we realized the enormous difficulty of that, to move on to crisis prevention: How could we avoid a recurrence of a crisis like the Cuban Missile Crisis? Even if we still had enormous piles of nuclear weapons, even if there was still great animosity between us and the Soviets, couldn't we learn it was in our own national interest, we and the Soviets, to keep back a few steps from the precipice of a nuclear confrontation, which probably could not be managed again? So that was an important theme, an important stimulus.

It led, of course, to direct contact with some Soviet scholars and scientists, and then also to an interest in arms control as well as crisis prevention. So there were a number of years in which that stimulus embedded into the prior interest in human stress, which, of course, the quintessential example was in leaders in a nuclear confrontation—what could be more stressful than that?

But in the background—I'll stop in a moment—but in the background, as I went through medicine, I became more and more impressed with the value of preventive medicine and public health. It wasn't my primary field, although it has become the primary field of my [daughter](#), who is a leader in world public health. But I began to think about the application of the preventive medicine and public health approach to issues of human conflict. That has been an intellectual framework that has helped me, at least, to have the courage to pursue these issues in international conflict.

DAVID SPEEDIE: The "ounce of prevention, pound of cure" syndrome, as it were?

DAVID HAMBURG: Right. I came to say "ounce of prevention, ton of cure."

DAVID SPEEDIE: "Ton of cure," that's right. Well, I suppose we shouldn't undersell ourselves, for sure.

Tell us a little bit about the Africa experience and how that led in a fairly linear way to the thinking that went into the prevention work at the Corporation and then in the [Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict](#) that we'll also explore.

DAVID HAMBURG: Yes, that's very true.

In this multifaceted work on human aggression, which was in a way my hallmark, as I say—from

family, to community, to national and international conflict—and coming from a biological background, I thought it would be extremely interesting to understand something about the evolution of human aggression, if it would be possible to do that.

What particularly intrigued me was the discovery that, as genetics was expanding, the genetic composition of chimpanzees was very similar to our own. It turns out to be 98–99 percent the same genes. It's hard to account for our differences with so few genetic differences. But in any case, I was very intrigued to study the behavior of chimpanzees as giving some insight into the origins over millions of years of human aggression, since the story of the historical record, just a matter of thousands of years (short by evolutionary standards) indicated that human aggression was a very prominent feature of our adaptation for a long, long time. So where did that come from?

So, after some difficulty, I found a way to study chimpanzees in their natural habitat, and also to set up a semi-natural laboratory at Stanford, where they had plenty of land that they were willing to let me use for this purpose.

But you couldn't set up a semi-natural laboratory until you knew something about a day in the life of a chimp. And so it wasn't clear whether it was at all safe to study chimps.

I found from the great anthropologist [Louis Leakey](#) that a student of his, then young British zoologist [Jane Goodall](#), was beginning the study of chimps. I hooked up with her and we established a pattern of study to which I sent postdoctoral fellows and graduate students, and later undergraduate majors in human biology, to work with Jane in Tanzania. I would go over twice a year, spend most of the summer, typically taking one or another of my children with me and on one occasion my wife.

DAVID SPEEDIE: It must have led to good "what I did in the summer" back-to-school essays.

DAVID HAMBURG: Right. We had that for some years, through much of the 1960s and 1970s.

And then, on May 19, 1975, when I wasn't there, I got a slew of messages that four of my students had disappeared. In the middle of the night, 40 heavily armed men had come off the lake where our camp was, a mountain lake about the size and shape of [Lake Michigan](#) in this country, and across that lake was then [Zaire](#), now [Congo](#), with mountains rising steeply out of the lake.

I raced over to Africa to find out what had happened. Were they alive or dead? If they were alive, where were they? Who had taken them? To make a long story short, it turned out that they had been taken across the lake, up into the mountains of Zaire, by a man named [Laurent Kabila](#) and his colleagues.

Kabila, some 25 or 30 years later, got together all the enemies of [Mobutu](#), the dictator of Zaire, and overthrew him, just as he had said he would.

I had long discussions out 1,000 miles from nowhere in the bush trying to negotiate for the freedom of my students, who were held hostage altogether for several months. Kabila and his colleagues anticipated that someday they would overthrow Mobutu. It turns out, incidentally, that it was followed by a decade in which about 5 million people were killed, wars in which a number of African countries got involved, looking for resources, particularly the diamonds, in Congo. To this day it is a very nasty place, particularly in eastern Congo.

But in the course of that hostage episode I was really on my own. Our government had largely disengaged itself. I didn't know why and was, needless to say, very disappointed. It turned out, I

learned shortly afterwards, that we were in the process of starting up the war in Angola as a way of teaching the Soviets a lesson, so we thought, and Mobutu was our strongman, so the last thing in the world that they wanted was Americans talking with enemies of Mobutu.

I had no idea. Well, I was on my own. But I did in fact get some help from a couple of wonderful people in our embassy in Tanzania, despite the fact that they were instructed not to help. But anyway, eventually, we got the students out.

In the course of that, I was just intensely involved in the worst problems of the world—hatred and violence and severe poverty and disease and all of that. This was 1,000 miles from the Indian Ocean, in the interior of Africa, in one of the poorest areas of Africa and a very violent area.

So it made me reconsider what I wanted to do with the rest of my life and whether there would be some possibility of engaging with the policy issues that brought about that hatred and violence and ignorance and disease and severe poverty.

So I accepted a job that I had turned down just a short time before the hostage episode, which was to be president of the Institute of Medicine at the National Academy of Sciences, where it was possible, first, to set up international and global health work that focused largely on Africa, and then to set up something called CISAC, Committee on International Security and Arms Control, in 1980, which related to the Soviets and gave me a vehicle for pursuing the crisis prevention and arms control interests with U.S. and Soviet scientists, using our academy and their academy as the best way to make a connection. That went on for some years. In fact, it still goes on, but it now involves China, India, and other countries with our academy.

So that was a life-changing experience, and I threw myself full-time into these issues. I continued for some years with the health interest as it applied to particularly the African problem, but I learned a lot about negotiation and conflict resolution in that circumstance. But I also learned the scope of the problems that existed in the world in a way that I didn't really know before.

DAVID SPEEDIE: That's a pretty hands-on learning experience.

So then, to apply this to the later experience at Carnegie, which is where we made some mischief together, really, I think, looking back, prevention really underscored or carried across the entire program. I remember when I came in 1992 the title of the program was modestly "Avoiding Nuclear War," which we succeeded in doing. I also reflect, somewhat ruefully, that we were maybe one of the few foundation programs, or programs of any kind, that counted as its successes things that didn't happen. You know, we were aiming to avoid things happening.

So the arms control work—"The Prevention of Proliferation" was the name of the task force—prevention really, as I say, undergirded the whole approach in the international security program at Carnegie. But clearly, the hallmark, or the apogee as it were, was the Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, which, I guess, lasted for about five years and then reported out and so on.

Speak just a little bit about the Commission, and particularly what you see as the legacy of that Commission, what has been carried forth.

DAVID HAMBURG: Let me say quickly a word about the background of the Commission that flowed into it.

You mentioned earlier my relationship with Gorbachev. That came about through a kind of art form

that I began to develop even before I came to Carnegie. But particularly, when I came there in late 1982, I had some money to put where my mouth was. That was to set up groups of scientists and scholars between the Soviets and ourselves, since that was the most dangerous conflict in the history of the world.

And then, through the Soviet scientists, I got to meet Gorbachev shortly after he came to power, and we became friends to this day. Through his scientific advisors and then through American groups that I was able to bring or send to meet with him and his colleagues, we had a chance—a marvelous, almost unbelievable chance—to help shape his thinking in the first couple of years when he was developing the "new thinking." He has said in public speeches over the years it didn't just develop in the Kremlin, but in places like the Carnegie Corporation and Stanford University and Harvard University and so forth. He was open to outside thinking, very much interested in it.

And then, in turn, we found, to the surprise of some people, that [Ronald Reagan](#) also was interested in getting this [Cold War](#) over with if he could. He had learned after he came to office, he told me, the enormous dangers of nuclear weapons. They both came to conclude rather quickly that these were not useful weapons of war; they were weapons of mutual suicide, or what I've come to call humanicide. So it was in a way pushing on an open door much more than we anticipated.

So in the mid-1980s—well, he came to power in 1985, Gorbachev did. In the ensuing few years, we had a very active track to diplomacy, or at least a line of communication, that was welcomed in the White House by [Jack Matlock](#), who was the Soviet advisor to Reagan at that time, and by Reagan himself; and, on the Soviet side, to Gorbachev himself, plus [Yakovlev](#) and [Arbatov Sr.](#) and [Shevardnadze](#), the foreign minister.

So we had a really powerful experience beyond anything we could have anticipated, and serving a useful communicative function on paths toward conflict resolution as well as the crisis prevention approach and arms control formulations, which were ready. When we first got them ready, no political leaders were interested. But it turned out that Gorbachev and Reagan were interested, and so those arms control ideas were useful.

Well, then that emboldened me to look at other situations. If we could do something useful even at the margin in this fantastic conflict of the Cold War, we should look to other things that might follow the Cold War. One of those was, partly alerted to me by my Soviet scientist friends but partly by friends at the [World Health Organization](#), that there were likely to be ethnic and religious and other inter-group conflicts of a serious nature both in and around Russia and in the former Soviet empire.

One of the most dangerous places was [Yugoslavia](#). And so we made an effort to understand how dangerous was Yugoslavia. One of our grants, as you know, was with the [Aspen Institute](#) for a program that brought together members of Congress with independent experts. We convened independent experts on Yugoslavia and nearby Eastern European countries in 1986, I believe it was. They concluded the danger was really very great.

[Tito](#) died in 1980. As my Yugoslavian friends at the World Health Organization had told me, there was a danger of violent disintegration. This was confirmed by our grantees, who were independent experts. It was very persuasive to the members of Congress, and they asked me to go and take the message to [George Shultz](#), the then-secretary of state, and [John Whitehead](#), who had been a Carnegie trustee before and after then, who was [deputy secretary of state](#) and had responsibility for Eastern Europe.

They took it very seriously indeed, contacted their European counterparts to try to do something

about it; for example, to set up an international forum in Geneva, which might last for a year or so, and bring together all the factions of Yugoslavia.

Well, that failed. The Europeans didn't take it seriously. They told us to keep out of it. Europe was then nothing like it is now. Indeed, Yugoslavia was a very important learning and growth experience for the [European Union](#).

But [Cyrus Vance](#), who had been a good friend of Carnegie and involved in Carnegie activities, was designated by the [secretary-general](#) of the United Nations to represent the United Nations in what became the Bosnian [conflict](#). He tried to prevent it, and [David Owen](#), his opposite number representing the European Union. They tried very hard and then failed.

They actually didn't fail. They got an [agreement](#). The only agreement between the Bosnians and the Serbs and the Croats was by them. A very brief period. It was brushed aside by the United States. When that happened, the whole thing fell apart quickly, and then came the Bosnian war, a terrible experience.

It was two years later that [Dayton](#) finally got some settlement for the Bosnian war, but only after many more were killed and vast numbers were forcefully displaced, ethnic cleansing and all of that stuff. The agreement that was reached was much less satisfactory than the Vance–Owen agreement.

So it was a heartbreaking tragedy, although it was later made to look like a success. And in some sense it was a success, but a very belated one, and fundamentally a missed opportunity for prevention.

So when Vance and I discussed all that, we decided it would make sense to get experts together and expand our thinking about what could have been done to prevent the Yugoslavian wars and [genocide](#). These problems are not limited to Yugoslavia. Why not really take a worldwide look at particularly the civil wars, the intrastate wars, that were flourishing in the 1990s? And Africa was clearly becoming a very dangerous site, as well as Eastern Europe.

So we got 16 world leaders and great scholars on the commission, we got 35 world leaders and great scholars as an actively engaged advisory group, and we had meetings in different parts of the world to try to gather up the best ideas around the world on prevention and to stimulate thinking about prevention. It was, in fact, a very low-priority subject. It was very hard to get ideas on prevention because they weren't out there, and the commission itself had a very hard time shifting its thinking from salvage operations to prevention. But it lasted for five years, indeed.

The commission itself had a major [report](#), as we did our gymnastics to shift to thinking about prevention. And then, we set in motion many studies, partly through the grant program, thanks to you, and partly through the commission itself, thanks to [Jane Holl Lute](#) and Cyrus Vance and Alex George, and myself. We were the ones who were most interested in generating publications. There were about 20 books and a number of monographs and professional and scientific papers, a total of 70-some publications between the Carnegie regular grant program and the commission. They got around the contours of this vast subject of preventing deadly conflict.

So that was a major undertaking, and it had a big impact on a number of world leaders. Among others, Gorbachev and [Jimmy Carter](#), but particularly [Kofi Annan](#) and the United Nations. Even before Kofi Annan, [Boutros-Ghali](#) was quite interested, but he wasn't there long enough to do much in the way of implementation, although it did influence his [Agenda for Peace](#), which was a very

important statement for the United Nations and has a continuing influence on the UN. But Kofi Annan was there for 10 years, and in his final remarks to the General Assembly on prevention he said the greatest influence was the Carnegie Commission.

A little bit later, a number of democratic governments were strongly influenced by it, Sweden particularly, but also Britain and Japan and Canada, some others. Sweden developed its own action plan in which I was involved, and then they took me to the European Union because they thought some of what we were doing needed the broad scope of the European Union. So I worked particularly with [Javier Solana](#), who is in effect the [foreign minister](#) of the European Union. Solana, like Annan, was deeply impressed by the Carnegie Commission.

In turn, I was asked by Annan and Solana to chair committees, one for the European Union, one for the United Nations, on prevention of genocide. I recommended a center in each of those international organizations that would be a concentration of talent, fundamentally of knowledge and skill and best practices with respect to prevention of genocide. The one at the United Nations is up and running. The one at the European Union is just getting up and running, and they want to cooperate. So we have a resource in those two international organizations that didn't exist before. Nothing like it ever existed before.

DAVID SPEEDIE: I want to get specifically to the prevention-of-genocide topic in a moment because I want to plug your book. But two quick postscript thoughts on the commission and the legacy.

First, it really did create what I came to call a library of prevention. That literally had not existed before, as you said. The commission went out on a fact-finding mission and had to eventually, to a large extent, create its own thinking. That became the legacy of the commission.

The second thing, to underscore the importance of the mission, the intrastate conflict question, I remember at one point in the 1990s someone had documented there were something like 110 conflicts ongoing in the world, and all but two were intrastate. There were only two interstate semi-active or active conflicts going on. It was all intrastate. So that clearly spoke to the criticality of the commission's mandate.

Of late you've dedicated yourself to the prevention of the ultimate mass violence, genocide. This remarkable book, *Preventing Genocide: Practical Steps Toward Early Detection and Effective Action*—there's so much that one could say about this. But, rather than me, let me quote [Elie Wiesel](#), the great humanitarian/human rights/Holocaust scholar and [Nobel Peace](#) laureate: "Anyone who knows Professor Hamburg's life and work will say in a resounding voice, 'No one is better qualified to show, as he does in this lucid and well-documented book, what to do, what nonviolent pressures to use, in order to stop a menace whose deadly shadow already broods over the new-born 21st century.'" Eloquent.

And then, that is echoed by—you quote Kofi Annan when he was Secretary-General speaking at the [Stockholm Forum](#) in January 2004: "There can be no more important issue and no more binding obligation than the prevention of genocide. Indeed, this may be considered one of the original purposes of the United Nations."

Clearly, the amazing thing here, David, is that you have taken on this book. I think the two critical points that I took from it are, first of all, that genocide is imminently preventable. As you argue and you demonstrate from history, there is a drumbeat of negative activity and signals that precede the outbreak. This is not something that takes the world by surprise.

And, what is most important about the book, it seems to me, is what you call the practical steps that can be taken, "the pillars of prevention." This is not something that sneaks up on us. It's preventable, and it can be taken on.

What I have noticed, perhaps one of your most sterling qualities over the years, is that you are never discouraged. You take on these most apparently intractable and, for much of the population, incredibly depressing issues, and yet you have an upbeat approach—"We'll take this animal, we'll tackle it, we'll solve it." I guess that's what keeps you going, and that's for the practical steps.

DAVID HAMBURG: Well, when I became president of the Carnegie Corporation, at the first board meeting, I said, "The only promise I can make to the board is that I will bring you intractable problems."

But on the genocide, you're right, it's the ultimate degradation and, therefore, the most serious challenge. Now, of course, it is embedded in the broader field of preventing mass violence altogether. And indeed, when you take the prevention approach, you look for early warning signals that don't really say "this is going to be genocide." Instead they say "something bad is going to happen if you keep on this slippery slope that you are on in a particular country or region, something terrible is going to happen. Whether it's going to be intrastate war or interstate war or periodic mass atrocities of one kind or another or genocide isn't clear. And if you don't like mass slaughter, well, fine. Prevent. The earlier stage, the better." But it is true.

A very important point that has been neglected—and, indeed, denied—is that you always have warning time. A very common thing that political leaders have said in the last 10, 20, 30 years about signs of genocide is that "You never can tell until the last minute, and then it's too late to do anything. The only thing you could do at that point would be some massive military intervention. Nobody wants to do that or can do it." It simply isn't true, not in the least.

The warning signs are always measured in years, and usually in decades. I mean by that really bad stuff, like periodic outbreaks of mass violence, periodic massacres—first small, then medium, then large, then—oh, my God—the ultimate, over a period typically of decades. That was true with the [Armenian genocide](#), which I document in the book; it was true with the Holocaust; it was true with [Rwanda](#). I saw some of the precursors to Rwanda myself in 1972 when we were doing our work in Africa, because we were very near Rwanda, in our research on chimpanzees.

In any case, there is warning time. That is not the issue. The issue is that nobody has known what to do. Leaders don't want to be caught in a situation where they have no knowledge of what to do, cannot be effective, and have no constituency for prevention. So they are paralyzed. Therefore, they say, in effect, to their legal people, "Tell me it's not genocide." And they do. Their legal people accommodate and say, "Well, it's very difficult because the definition of genocide is not precise." So you could always have a way out: "It's terrible, but it's not genocide," or "We're not sure it's genocide." It doesn't matter. You want to prevent the terrible thing that's coming down the pike.

The reason for having these centers—although that's not the only issue—is to have together what the world knows and what skills exist and what best practices exist for prevention of mass violence in its various forms so that it can stimulate many agencies of the United Nations throughout the world, many agencies and elements of the European Union, which actually reaches far beyond Europe, and the democracies of the world. I say democracies because you don't expect any help from dictators—they're the ones who typically conduct the genocides or other mass violence.

It's catching on. There was a [report](#) generated primarily by the [United States Institute of Peace](#) to the

new administration just a few months ago saying: You should set up what amounts to a center on prevention of genocide in the State Department, perhaps an interagency unit (State, Defense, whatever, National Security Council). Anyway, the United States government should have what it has never had before, some centralized unit with the knowledge. Not that the United States would do it all by any means—it says quite clearly we have to have international partners—but we should at least have the knowledge.

It does involve, as you say, my pillars of prevention. Some are very early, early preventive diplomacy, even pre-preventive diplomacy—but there isn't time to go into that—anyway, what Kofi Annan did in [Kenya](#) earlier this year: When there is an outbreak but before it is catastrophe, massive civil war followed by genocide, which might well have happened in Kenya, there is an intervention.

So preventive diplomacy is now growing rapidly, I think in considerable part as the stimulus of the Carnegie Commission and subsequent activities, training for preventive diplomacy at middle and high levels in the United Nations and in the European Union and the [African Union](#) and elsewhere. That leads naturally to working toward democratic governance, building democratic understandings and attitudes and institutions for the longer term, and concomitant with that building economic development.

But it's not really accurate any more to say "economic development." You must say "equitable socioeconomic development," because if you don't say that you get these terrible disparities in wealth and deep animosity, and development doesn't do you much good if it's blown away in an outbreak of violence. So concomitant with the fostering of democracy comes the fostering of equitable socioeconomic development for girls and boys alike, men and women alike, and really with the [human development/human security](#) approach to it, not simply foster economic growth.

And then, there is education for survival. Badly neglected. In other words, education for conflict resolution, for violent prevention, for mutual accommodation. To some degree, in democratization we take that for granted, but we shouldn't. We need to teach it. There needs to be an explicit understanding of how it is we can achieve education for mutual accommodation, which amounts to, in the world as it is today, education for survival in this century.

We also say something about international systems of justice that are evolving to prevent massive human rights violations. The most advanced is a system of courts in Europe, which was a reaction to World War II and the Holocaust. That is most advanced. Our mutual friend, [Shirley Williams](#), has been a leader in that. And now there is an [International Criminal Court](#).

It isn't clear how preventive these functions are, but they probably have some preventive function, especially if they are made public. The evidence is that where there have been courts of that kind, or [truth and reconciliation commissions](#) like [Desmond Tutu](#) headed in South Africa, that if it is open to the public it has a very startling, stunning educational effect that has preventive implications.

And then, of course, an ultimate pillar is to get some handle on weapons. The world is covered with deadly weapons, weapons of mass destruction, and euphemistically called "small arms and light weapons," which are actually extremely lethal automatic weapons for the most part. There are a lot of good ideas about that, but very little implementation.

So those are pillars of prevention that have to be built and that can be built by the community of established democracies, by some elements of the United Nations, by the European Union and others. The movement to build those pillars of prevention is spreading throughout the world, now more into Asia and Latin America and Africa.

But it will take decades and generations for the most part. Some things can be done quickly, like Annan did in Kenya. But to get fulfillment on the prevention agenda is a matter of decades and generations.

So you have to maintain a degree of optimism to pursue that agenda.

DAVID SPEEDIE: You have done that admirably.

Again, this book, *Preventing Genocide: Practical Steps Toward Early Detection and Effective Action*, I think is really a unique book, in the sense there have been other books on the politics and the history of genocides, but this really is almost a manual of how to prevent and address this issue.

In closing, David, this is, after all, the Program on U.S. Global Engagement, so I ought to ask you a little bit, if I may, about the United States and the prevention agenda. You mentioned perhaps this interagency center—I hadn't heard of this—that presumably would have some possible beneficial link with the EU center and the UN center and so on.

Clearly, the United States, I suppose, does not have a record of unalloyed success in recent years in the whole area of human rights in general. We have not signed on wholeheartedly to the International Criminal Court, for example, which you just mentioned. President [Obama](#), actually when Senator Obama, during the campaign said "the United States should cooperate with ICC investigations that reflect American sovereignty and promotion of national security interests," a little bit of a cautious endorsement, shall we say, of ICC.

Can you speak a little bit about the role of the United States in all this, where we might see some improvements?

DAVID HAMBURG: Well, the new administration offers a great opportunity. Of course, it's heartbreaking that it comes in the midst of the worst economic condition since the Great Depression of the 1930s. As I speak, there is no obvious indication that we are yet getting out of it. It will take quite a while. That casts a pall over almost any other initiative you can think of.

However, to be concrete, I will say that I had a very nice note from [Hillary Clinton](#) after she became secretary of state about this book and a very nice note from [John Kerry](#) after he became chairman of the [Foreign Relations Committee](#) about this book. They both want to discuss with me what might be the implications for U.S. policy.

Now, I would think that the president probably has a generally sympathetic attitude toward the prevention agenda. In one debate, he did mention, when asked about [Darfur](#), that we should do what we can about Darfur—he's very sympathetic with the problem—but that we should also think about prevention of future Darfurs. He said something like that. Now, he didn't say what that would involve. I don't think he has ever had occasion to get into the weeds of prevention. But I imagine he would be sympathetic to it.

In any case, the fact that the secretary of state is interested and that the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is interested—and they are clearly both interested in the context of international cooperation—not that we would be so presumptuous to try to do it ourselves or tell others exactly what they must do, but to work with them collaboratively in a way that we have almost—in a way that we were accustomed to doing at an earlier time, like in the days of the [Marshall Plan](#) and what led to the European Union. I think we are moving back toward that kind of approach.

There will be certainly opposition. But on the whole, I think there is a remarkable opportunity in the next few years to get in motion a collaborative American participation in international cooperative efforts to prevent mass violence. That will have to start with considerable education of ourselves, of our own policy-makers.

You know, we had one or two sessions of the Aspen Institute on prevention. One was on the commission itself. But we need much more of that for American policy-makers who are sympathetic to the approach but don't know much about it, who haven't had the opportunity to learn much about it—I think they desire to learn. I think that the institutions like this one, the Carnegie Council, have a real opportunity to get an interaction between scholars and policymakers on issues of preventing mass violence, not only genocide—but genocide is so vivid and horrible that in a way it captures the attention.

There is some popular movement on the Darfur issue and some residual popular movement on the Holocaust that gives some basis for thinking that a constituency for prevention might be built in this country if institutions like this one and many others would pursue the agenda.

DAVID SPEEDIE: Well, we are of course the Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs. It's not much of a stretch to argue the ethics of getting into the genocide question, prevention of genocide.

I had mentioned in the beginning that this, we are hoping, will be the first, the launch event, as it were, in a series of discussions about the genocide question, which will become part of our fare here at the Council.

David, it has been an enormous pleasure. We could have taken double or triple the time. I had to reach for the water a few times myself. You've been most generous. For this and for your collegiality and support over the years, I really appreciate it.

DAVID HAMBURG: I thank you very much and thank the Carnegie Council.

DAVID SPEEDIE: Thank you very much, David.

Audio

David Speedie interviews David Hamburg on the prevention agenda of the Carnegie Corporation of New York and its legacy of preventing interstate conflict, genocide, and threats to global health.

Video

David Speedie interviews David Hamburg on the prevention agenda of the Carnegie Corporation of New York and its legacy of preventing interstate conflict, genocide, and threats to global health.

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