

what political scientist Barbara Harff calls “politicide,” mass killing for political reasons: Stalin’s Soviet Union, Mao’s China, the Khmer Rouge’s Cambodia, Guatemala, and Soviet-occupied Afghanistan. By emphasizing cases of politicide over those of genocide, Valentino stacks the deck in favor of his politics-centered argument from the start.

He convincingly demonstrates how communist collectivization in the Soviet Union and China led to unparalleled mass murder, but his case is weaker for some of the other instances of politicide. What begins as rational political opposition to an insurgency can expose cultural fault lines of irrational ethnic hatred. In Guatemala, for example, an anti-communist counterinsurgency turned into a genocidal war against the Mayan Indians who supported the communist guerrillas. Whole Mayan villages were slaughtered, men, women, and children—yet Valentino denies the racial, ethnic aspect of the war. In Afghanistan, too, he downplays the ethnic, religious, and nationalistic roots of the resistance to Soviet occupation.

Valentino’s argument is least successful in accounting for genocide. As causes of genocide, he believes that dehumanizing attitudes, a nondemocratic government, and ethnic hatred are “secondary to deeper political and military conflicts,” though other scholars have shown them to be strong predictors. The Holocaust and the Armenian and Rwandan genocides were last resorts, Valentino contends, undertaken only after emigration and deportation failed to bring about ethnic cleansing of the respective societies. But he doesn’t adequately address why ethnic cleansing was the goal to start with; Jews, for example, were no threat to German survival except in Hitler’s fantasies. Mass killing, moreover, wasn’t a mere last resort: The Turks deported Armenians into the Syrian desert as a method of genocide, not an alternative to it, and Hutu extremists allowed no Tutsi to escape from Rwanda in 1994.

Rational means, Max Weber observed, can be adopted to achieve the most irrational ends. The meticulous planning of the death camps was a rational means to an utterly irrational end, a Jew-free Europe. Valentino minimizes the fact that the irrational ends of genocide mostly arise out of nationalism, ethnic hatred,

religious intolerance, and racism.

Despite its shortcomings, Valentino’s strategic perspective on mass killing produces an extremely useful conclusion: The best strategy for prevention is to remove those leaders likely to commit mass murder. But regime change by international intervention has not yet become an accepted norm, even to stop genocide. Some 5,500 heavy infantry with a strong mandate might have prevented the genocide in Rwanda. Instead, the United Nations withdrew. In Darfur, we see that the lessons of Rwanda haven’t yet been learned.

—GREGORY H. STANTON

WELLINGTON’S RIFLES:
*Six Years to Waterloo with England’s
Legendary Sharpshooters.*

By Mark Urban. Walker. 351 pp. \$27

The way to the Duke of Wellington’s victories against Napoleon’s forces in Portugal and Spain in the opening years of the 19th century was paved with British defeats in the American Revolutionary War. American sharpshooters with accurate rifles took advantage of cover to torment the well-drilled British ranks and kill their officers. In response, the British deployed sharpshooting Americans who had remained loyal to the Crown. Once the war was over, many of these loyalists deemed it prudent to depart with the British. Some of them remained in the army, where they joined thoughtful British officers to build a specialized corps of riflemen.

These riflemen were to prove invaluable in the wars against Napoleon. Dressed in somber green with black buttons (rather than the shining brass ones that could give away a position), they blended with the landscape. Deployed as skirmishers in ones and twos ahead of the stolid lines of British infantry, they repeatedly decapitated French attacks by killing the officers and sniping at the gunners of the redoubtable artillery.

The French, too, had developed a new style of warfare that relied heavily on skirmishers. Their armies used their excellent and highly mobile artillery (modernized under the monarchy) to bombard the drilled ranks of their enemies, then deployed swarms of skirmishers (known as *voltigeurs*, or leapers) to torment the battered ranks further. The differ-



At Waterloo, the Duke of Wellington's victory owed much to his well-armed British riflemen.

ence was that the *voltigeurs* used smooth-bore muskets, barely accurate even at 30 yards, whereas the British sharpshooters had sturdy Baker rifles. Although their rate of fire was much slower, British riflemen were usually sure of a kill at 200 yards. Wellington won battle after battle by using his riflemen to repel the *voltigeurs*, posting his ranks of infantry behind the brow of a hill to protect them from French artillery, then deploying the infantry in double lines so that each man could shoot (only the front ranks in the French columns could fire).

This is the context for the highly readable and entertaining book by Mark Urban, a former British officer turned journalist. He uses memoirs, hitherto-unpublished diaries, and French archives to give a detailed account, focusing on six soldiers of the celebrated 95th Regiment. He describes their campaigns in Portugal in 1809, through Spain and into southern France in 1814, and finally at Waterloo in 1815.

Urban reproduces a British recruiting poster of the day: "You will carry a Rifle no heavier than a Fowling-Piece. You will knock down your enemy at Five Hundred Yards, instead of missing him at Fifty. Your clothing is GREEN, and needs no cleaning but a BRUSH." In fact, with extra rounds, spare shoes and socks, mess tin, water, and other supplies, each rifleman had to carry more than 70 pounds. Once, to reach the battlefield of Talavera, in Spain, the sharpshooters

marched 30 miles uphill in 24 hours. And, marching at the quickstep, they moved markedly faster than the standard infantry.

Much of this is familiar territory for Urban, whose last book was *The Man Who Broke Napoleon's Codes*, a fascinating account of the Peninsular War through the exploits of the staff officer who learned to read Napoleon's "Great Paris Cipher." But the riflemen make for a better story, offering at once a broader yet more focused canvas that illuminates the way all armies at the end of the 18th century sought tactics to cope with the massive killing power of the new artillery and the massed musketry fire of well-trained troops. Wellington consistently beat the French because the riflemen gave him the means to do so, just as the American sharpshooters had frustrated and beaten the redcoats.

—MARTIN WALKER

LIBERIA:

Portrait of a Failed State.

By John-Peter Pham. Reed Press.
252 pp. \$24.95

Liberia aspired at its birth to be a beacon of light and progress for all of Africa, but ended up sliding into absolute anarchy a century and a half later. A civil war starting in 1989 lasted more than a decade, killed five percent of the population and displaced two-thirds, destroyed the fragile infrastructure of the state, and made criminality the