



THE SENTINEL PROJECT FOR GENOCIDE PREVENTION

Concept Note for United States Institute for Peace CfP priority grant program

Contact Person:

PROPOSAL SUMMARY

The Sentinel Project for Genocide Prevention is a young, fast-growing non-profit based in Toronto, Canada. Its core mandate is to develop a framework to assess the risk of genocide affecting a given state or community that will allow analysts to systematically monitor conditions and provide targeted early warnings to strategic partners, the public, and threatened groups. The goal is a day-to-day threat tracking and assessment process that is synthesized from existing academic research and leverages a deployment of modern ICT tools for data collection, reporting, and analysis.

The Sentinel Project processes information flows at a *strategic* rather than *tactical* level—the goal is to understand how operational processes that are essential to triggering planned violence can emerge from the political and socio-economic trajectory of a region. Our approach tracks, for example, factors such as the content, funding sources, and impact of media propaganda in a given country. It is complementary to tactical approaches, such as using satellite feeds to assess troop movement trends.

This approach is embodied by **ThreatWiki**, an ICT platform being designed by the Sentinel Project. ThreatWiki is a data visualization and threat assessment decision support system. It integrates data from a region's communication ecosystem into a coherent narrative illustrating the emergence of key operational processes and their systemic causes. Several innovations in the system's design make it highly scalable, accessible, and reactive.

ThreatWiki is a truly new and innovative approach in tracking the treat of genocidal violence and would be a useful complement to other grantees in the CfP learning group. The Sentinel Project seeks a grant to support its development and pilot deployment.

BACKGROUND: GENOCIDES AND THEIR CHANGING COMMUNICATION ECOSYSTEMS

Genocide was the single greatest destructive force in terms of lives lost during the last century, and it has followed humanity into the present one. Decades ago, researchers began studying historical incidents of genocide to identify the key operational processes and systemic factors that drive these horrific events. Over time, patterns have been identified in the underlying processes that drive the development of all genocides.

One of the challenges in the past was that information about events on the ground in volatile regions was too limited for analysts to predict the escalation of events in enough time for capable institutions to intervene. However, volatile regions today exist in a very different context: they are now connected to common, global communications systems. People in countries torn by crisis are reaching out to the world using Internet and SMS enabled phones, publishing their experiences to online social forums such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube.

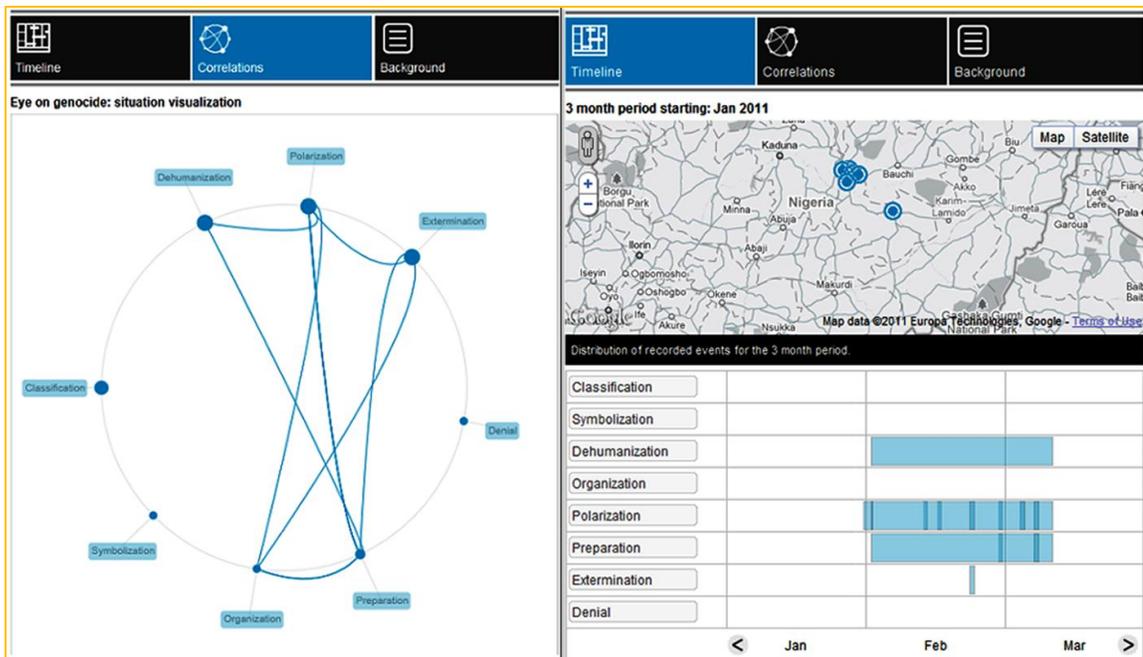
Within this new context, the Sentinel Project has applied existing research towards a framework to identify, track, and assess the root causes of genocide. The framework will be used to analyze

situations of concern to provide accurate short-term risk forecasts and in-depth mitigation strategies for potential violence.

THE PROPOSAL: THREATWIKI

ThreatWiki is a key part of the Sentinel Project’s monitoring and forecasting framework. It is a software platform to help analysts develop threat assessments by integrating large and disparate event data sets into a coherent narrative. It provides different tools for researchers to analyze and model a situation of concern, which is a country or region with a high risk of genocide, and show the relationships between different entities in the communication ecosystem.

ThreatWiki makes it easy to publicly release this information over the Internet via an innovative data feed and visualization dashboard. It will also enable us to effectively solicit, filter, and incorporate information via crowd-sourcing, allowing increased engagement with communities on the ground and field volunteers.



Prototype screenshots from ThreatWiki’s visualization dashboard.

This system will assist our researchers and analysts in developing in-depth, short-term threat assessments. These will be used to alert strategic partners—groups who have the capacity to initiate on-the-ground responses or launch advocacy efforts—and help to plan mitigation strategies. To help maximize the impact of our reports, we will engage with human rights NGO’s, anti-genocide activism groups, and local organizations and communities.

The overall monitoring and forecasting framework depends on the availability of high-quality sources of data. Thus, part of the implementation process includes field visits to establish grassroots information networks by building relationships with appropriate sources and providing them with SMS, email, and social media accessibility to reach our organization and the outside world.

Over the last 18 months, the Sentinel Project has developed the comprehensive design of the threat monitoring and assessment framework, built a sustainable volunteer organization to support its deployment, and developed a preliminary prototype of the ThreatWiki platform. This grant request is intended to complete the development of ThreatWiki and test it with a real situation-of-concern.

The financial resources provided will specifically address three essential components:

1. A collaborative development environment and situation monitoring center
2. Tool costs: server hosting and maintenance, SMS gateway fees, and software licenses
3. Field activity: a) building a network of local correspondents and b) conducting first hand data collection and evaluation of the effectiveness of threat assessments

The Sentinel Project is requesting a grant total of approximately .

THE ORGANIZATION AND PROJECT TEAM

The Sentinel Project for Genocide Prevention was founded in 2008 and is based primarily in Toronto, Canada. The group has approximately 40 members with diverse, in-depth experiences ranging from genocide research, war crimes investigation, non-profit management, and technology development. Over the past 18 months, the team has developed a prototype early warning system that has received praise from genocide scholars such as Gregory Stanton, the founder of Genocide Watch. The ThreatWiki project team is:

(Co-Executive Director)

is a genocide scholar and the lead designer of the Sentinel Project's early warning framework. He has written and spoken about genocide prevention across Canada and is a member of the International Association of Genocide Scholars. He has a background in military intelligence, crisis response, and disaster management.

(Co-Executive Director)

is a systems engineer and lead designer of ThreatWiki. He has worked at Microsoft, BlackBerry, and IBM developing software for up to 200 million users. He holds several patents, and his work has been featured in the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, and the Globe and Mail, amongst others.

(Research Analyst)

served for 20 years at the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia as an intelligence analyst in various leadership capacities, helping build and pursue cases for the prosecution of war crime suspects. In this role he developed an extensive background in software-based intelligence analysis, information management, and data security management.