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Director's Speaker Series

Jessica Stern

"Perpetrators of Atrocity: A Work in Progress"

Thursday, February 28, 2013

3 p.m.

Mershon Center for International Security Studies
1501 Neil Ave., Columbus, OH 43201

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Jessica Stern is a fellow at the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Human Rights at the Harvard School of Public Health, an advanced academic candidate at Massachusetts Institute of Psychoanalysis, and a senior research fellow at the Center on Terrorism at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. She was included in *TIME* magazine's series profiling 100 people with bold ideas. She advises a number of government agencies on issues related to terrorism and has taught courses for government officials, and served on President Clinton's National Security Council Staff in 1994-95.

She is author of [Denial: A Memoir of Terror](#), named a best non-fiction book of 2010 by the *The Washington Post*, [Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill](#), selected by *The New York Times* as a notable book of the year; [The Ultimate Terrorists](#); and numerous articles on terrorism and weapons of mass destruction.

Stern is a member of the Hoover Institution's Task Force on National Security and Law, the Trilateral Commission, and the Council on Foreign Relations. She has also been named a Council on Foreign Relations international affairs fellow, a national fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, a fellow of the World Economic Forum, and a Harvard MacArthur fellow. She previously worked as an analyst at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.

Stern has a bachelors degree in chemistry from Barnard College, a master's degree in technology policy from MIT, and a doctorate in public policy from Harvard University.



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Abstract

"Perpetrators of Atrocity" is a project involving detailed interviews with individuals who have been indicted or convicted of war crimes by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). The goal of the study is to learn about the motivations and personal histories of those individuals who are currently standing trial, awaiting appeal, or serving sentences post-conviction.

The project is unique in that nobody has ever sought to interview individuals indicted by the ICTY or any other war crimes tribunal on such a large scale, and in a manner that concerns not their alleged crimes, but rather elements of their personal and family histories. The ultimate goal is the publication of a book about the interviews.

The project diverges from the majority of the current literature on the former Yugoslavia, most of centers on the political situation, both domestic and international, that led to the 1990s war and its aftermath. If the conflict is explored at a more individual level (itself a rare prospect), such exploration generally involves only victims, examining the crimes committed and their effects on those who suffered them.

"Perpetrators of Atrocity" centers instead on the alleged perpetrators of war crimes, focusing not on their crimes, but on their personal lives, with the aim of identifying personal-level risk factors that may have made them susceptible to recruitment and participation in the conflict. Jessica Stern, the study's principal investigator, is particularly interested in studying instances of "intergenerational transmission of trauma," and analyzing the long-term impacts of violence upon a person, their children, grandchildren, etc.

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