

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mass atrocities and genocide continue to challenge the world's conscience. Over the past decade—in Darfur, Syria, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Yemen, and elsewhere—hundreds of thousands of civilians have been murdered, raped, beaten, bombarded, and gassed. Tens of millions more have been forced to flee their homes. And as the crisis in Syria so clearly demonstrates, mass atrocities have unanticipated over-the-horizon effects that have a profoundly negative impact on American power and interests. These can include severe economic and resource disruptions, massive refugee flows, weakened national and international institutions, fractured international norms, and the rise of violent extremism.

It has been nearly eight years since the 2008 report of the Genocide Prevention Task Force (GPTF). Five years ago, President Obama issued Presidential Study Directive 10 (PSD-10), declaring that “preventing mass atrocities and genocide is a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the United States” and establishing the Atrocities Prevention Board to coordinate U.S. government (USG) policy. The past decade has seen innovative structural reforms, creative approaches to emerging crises, and the emergence of a small and dedicated cadre of mid-level officials committed to atrocity prevention. Despite these developments, atrocity prevention remains outside the mainstream of U.S. policymaking.

As Americans prepare to elect their next president, the Prevention and Protection Working Group—a coalition of nongovernmental organizations dedicated to improving U.S. government policy on and capacities to prevent mass violence and protect civilians—convened the Experts Committee on Preventing Mass Violence to recommend what should be done over the next four years to strengthen existing atrocity prevention initiatives, develop new measures, and ensure that the issue is institutionalized within the national security bureaucracy.

This report—which is the product of the Experts Committee's deliberations—reaffirms that preventing mass atrocities and genocide is not merely a necessary good, but an achievable one. Prevention is consistent with American values, and early action is far more effective and less costly than late response. Although the United States cannot respond to every current or potential crisis, preventing genocide and mass atrocities must remain a core national security interest and presidential priority.

Building on these principles, the report outlines concrete steps that the next president, Congress, civil society, and relevant federal agencies should take to strengthen U.S. efforts to prevent mass atrocities. Its ten topline recommendations are framed by three overarching themes: *recommit*, *prevent*, and *implement*.

RECOMMIT

1. Demonstrate leadership. If the next president does not demonstrate clearly and often that preventing mass atrocities and genocide is a national security priority, then public promises, policy innovations, and improved tools will mean little. In addition, the next president will need to be willing to respond when the United States has the tools, capacity, and means to help prevent an emerging atrocity crisis from spinning out of control. These are not tasks that can be undertaken half-heartedly; they require a fundamental commitment to prevention and response. Congress also should be prepared to support and, if necessary, push to implement the recommendations outlined in this report. Similarly, civil society has an essential role to play in building public support and encouraging buy-in for these initiatives.

PREVENT

2. Prioritize and institutionalize early prevention. A long-term USG focus on early prevention—which this report defines as *initiatives (including post-conflict stabilization, transitional justice, and reconstruction) that aim to reduce social marginalization and conflict; strengthen legitimacy, accountability and resilience; and promote respect for human rights*—can play a critical role in helping fragile societies develop the capacity and resilience to reduce the risk of mass violence. Policies that emphasize early prevention can help limit the opportunity for atrocities, and in the process save lives, strengthen social norms against violence, and enhance national, regional, and international stability. The next administration also should make funding for strengthening local civil society a major pillar of the early prevention agenda.

3. Ensure dedicated funding. Major initiatives require significant funds, not only to ensure their success but also to force the national security bureaucracy to take them seriously. A commitment to prioritizing early prevention will mean little without a corresponding pledge to allocate sufficient funding and personnel to implement it. It is critical that the next president make a compelling argument that funding early prevention can help forestall open-ended crises that are far more damaging to American interests and power and far costlier to the American taxpayer.

4. Promote international cooperation. U.S. interests are best advanced when the international community is able to work together in a timely fashion to prevent or respond to a crisis. Closer and earlier cooperation and collaboration with the United Nations, regional and sub-regional organizations, international and local civil society, and like-minded partners can help build early international support for effective action, particularly in the realm of early prevention.

5. Develop a consistent approach to countering non-state actor (NSA) violence. In recent years, NSAs have increasingly regarded mass atrocities as a means to advance their broader strategic vision. Despite this, many U.S. officials regard NSAs—especially those who target the United States—as falling outside the atrocity prevention framework. The current USG response—known as countering violent extremism (CVE)—has focused almost exclusively on Islamist radicals. The next administration should affirm that CVE and atrocity prevention are mutually reinforcing initiatives, sharing many of the same strategies, tactics, goals, and outcomes. It also should expand the prevention toolkit to include measures that are more effective in countering atrocities committed by the full spectrum of NSAs.

IMPLEMENT

6. Strengthen and expand policy coordination. At its best, the Atrocities Prevention Board (APB) has served as an incubator for innovative structural reform and creative thinking about emerging crises. When the Board instead served primarily as a mechanism for information-sharing and follow-on discussion, its utility declined precipitously. The next administration should retain the APB but adopt a range of measures—including giving the APB greater authority, using new funds to ease the regional-functional divide, and developing an effective lessons-learned process—that will strengthen the Board's position and, more broadly, help mainstream atrocity prevention into policymaking.

7. Involve and empower U.S. embassies. The Department of State's post-Benghazi tendency to draw down U.S. embassies at the moment when countries are at greatest risk of mass atrocities has meant that even those posts with the capacity to track a crisis often find themselves operating with a skeleton crew at the very moment that the APB is pushing for greater attention and engagement. In many cases, atrocity crises occur in places where the United States has only limited diplomatic representation. The next administration should prioritize providing additional funding to support embassies in countries at risk of mass atrocities so that they can mobilize or manage a more effective on-the-ground response.

8. Strengthen intelligence collection. The Intelligence Community's (IC's) monthly updates provided the APB the timely, actionable intelligence it needed to draw interagency attention to below-the-radar crises. The next administration should strengthen, institutionalize, and expand the IC's capacity to provide targeted support to the APB by creating a new National Intelligence Manager position with responsibility for tracking atrocities and ensuring that relevant IC bodies—including the Open Source Enterprise and the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency—assign full-time personnel to the issue.

9. Revisit targeted sanctions. Although targeted sanctions have been used effectively in certain atrocity situations, the next administration should revisit the idea of a stand-alone sanctions mechanism that can target individuals known to have committed or enabled the commission of mass atrocities without requiring a blanket country designation. For that to happen, agencies—particularly the Department of Treasury—will need sufficient collection and analytic resources to research and sanction those known to be responsible for atrocities.

10. Build an internal constituency. Despite the growth of a small and dedicated cadre of mid-level officials committed to the APB and related initiatives, there are no long-term measures in place to encourage others to regard atrocity prevention as something that can boost their careers. This is particularly true for Foreign Service Officers, many of whom view work on atrocity prevention as unlikely to enhance their long-term professional trajectory. These challenges won't be overcome overnight. Real progress will require a significant change in the way departments and agencies mandate training for and incentivize engagement by mid-level officials.