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This brief summarizes the primary findings of the conference as interpreted by the rapporteur, Christine Evans, chair, David J. Scheffer, and roundtable organizer, Rachel Gerber. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this brief. Therefore, it should not be assumed that every participant subscribes to all of its recommendations, observations, and conclusions.

Structuring the US Government to Prevent Atrocities: Considerations for an Atrocities Prevention Board

In August 2011, the Obama administration mandated under a Presidential Study Directive (PSD-10) the creation of a standing interagency Atrocities Prevention Board (APB) to coordinate a whole-of-government approach to mass atrocity prevention and response. This directive builds on the recommendations of the 2008 Genocide Prevention Task Force (GPTF) and reflects a level of administration priority for atrocity prevention previously noted in many key strategic documents, including the State Department and the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) 2010 Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR).

As part of its 52nd annual Strategy for Peace Conference, the Stanley Foundation convened some 30 US government officials and mass atrocity specialists near Washington, DC, on October 13-15, 2011, to discuss the prospects and challenges confronting the ongoing interagency review that will inform the design and approach of the APB, as well as ways in which QDDR implementation might reinforce the APB's broader interagency process.

This dialogue, chaired by Ambassador David Scheffer, sought to make sense of the architecture for atrocities prevention emerging from these two separate but related efforts.

Joining external expertise with perspectives that spanned the US government interagency structure, participants considered the immediate and future needs of an Atrocities Prevention Board, concurrent implementation of the QDDR, and how each of these processes might most effectively promote US government efforts to prevent mass atrocity crimes.

Key Recommendations

- Tailor APB structure and activities to **proactively mainstream atrocity-focused policy approaches** across government agencies and root atrocity prevention as an instinctive element of day-to-day operations.

- **Foster a sense of ownership** in the APB process among relevant actors outside its core planning group, across government agencies, and in both functional and regional roles.
- **Frame the APB as a resource** for operational players (i.e., country teams and regional bureaus) and encourage their feedback on how it can best help them address atrocity risk and support ongoing crisis management efforts.
- Consider not only the relationship between the APB and existing or potential ad hoc interagency mechanisms for imminent, high-profile crises, but also **how this relationship might evolve** at different points along the crisis continuum. When should the APB “lead,” and when should it provide “input”? Should “lead” authority ever transfer to or from the APB? If so, when and how? Should the APB be structured to lead policy responses to crises that transitioned from low to high risk (and attention) while on its agenda? Or should it trigger the creation of a dedicated, ad hoc mechanism to address such cases?
- Actively promote expansion of the multilateral architecture for atrocity prevention—not only to build external capacities, multiply impact, and maximize multilateral resources, but also to **generate external sources of momentum** that can **sustain internal focus, energy, and engagement** on these issues beyond the current administration.
- Embed APB processes within this multilateral architecture. Focus should be on forging links at the **macro level of norms, political momentum, and overarching policy**, as well as at the level of **operational doctrine** and field-based engagement.
- As part of the effort outlined above, channel existing momentum from the APB process into **direct support to other governments** that seek to coordinate a whole-of-government approach to internal and external mass atrocity risks, such as those which have identified national-level “focal points” to implement the Responsibility to Protect principle. Partnerships with governments of the Global South might merit particular focus.
- Clearly identify the ways in which QDDR implementation reinforces the efforts and objectives of the APB, and use this clarity to **reinforce stakeholder buy-in** to both processes.
- Engage Congress on the objectives of both PSD-10 and QDDR implementation, clearly **indicating how developed reforms advance the recommendations of the 2010 concurrent congressional resolution on mass atrocity prevention** (S. Con. Res. 71) and maximize administration efforts to prevent atrocities in a budget-neutral environment.
- Undertake concerted outreach beyond the US government and **partner with the expert and NGO communities to generate media and public interest** in atrocity prevention as a national security priority. Particular attention should be paid to fostering support among both Republican and Democratic constituencies.
- Encourage the creation of a coalition of non-governmental “friends” of the APB. This group could focus on policy analysis and input, as well as serve as an external “watch group” to **ensure continued accountability** to the objectives of the board.
- Message clearly that the APB is a process rather than a fixed structure and **develop appropriate, but flexible, metrics for success** that manage internal and external expectations.
- Underscore the long-term relevance of the board by framing its establishment as an **act of the US government**, rather than that of an individual administration.

The Role of an Atrocities Prevention Board: Promise and Challenges

Examining the current landscape and future potential of US government efforts to prevent mass atrocities, participants sought to define the most effective role for an Atrocities Prevention Board as outlined by its guiding Presidential Study Directive (PSD-10). With the process of board development moving quickly from theoretical exercise to immediate reality, participants noted the urgency to isolate what added value the APB could bring to the US government’s atrocity prevention efforts, and thus elaborate its core roles and functions.

Broadly, participants described the APB as an enabling mechanism for a larger system. By providing a locus for resources, attention, and cross-agency linkages, the APB should enhance the range of tools and policy options available to the existing interagency system; give voice to executive priority

on atrocity issues when weighed against competing interests; communicate the relevance of an atrocity-focused approach to the day-to-day efforts of diplomacy, development, and other US government functions; and serve as a support structure and resource base for policy development and implementation.

Rather than seeking to replace or superimpose existing bureaucracy, the APB should facilitate, coordinate, and enable the ongoing work of all relevant actors. Its objective should be the development of integrated strategies and a more robust focus on atrocity prevention across the US government's interagency structure.

Past Lessons and Future Potential

In evaluating the US government's response to atrocity threats prior to the issue of PSD-10, participants noted policy efforts that were both effective and ineffective in tailoring integrated approaches to given crises. The "small group" on South Sudan, formed in August 2010 in response to what was seen as a fragmented US policy in the lead up to the referendum on South Sudanese independence, was described as a model of successful crisis-specific coordination.

Reinforced by earlier efforts to fully staff and empower the office of the Special Envoy for Sudan, the "small group" consolidated under a single umbrella a select spread of key interagency actors within an ad hoc, crisis-specific coordinating structure for policy development. It operated in the context of a "staff surge" devoted to contingency planning and long-range risk assessment and was complemented by field-level engagement undertaken by the State Department's Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS). The group (or, more accurately, the *ad hoc interagency process*) focused explicitly on ensuring a peaceful referendum—broadly defined—as well as on specific and evolving atrocity risk factors.

Participants claimed that, while the existence of a cohesive interagency structure focused on Sudan positioned US government actors no differently on the ground, it successfully maintained high-level policy attention and benefited greatly from close presidential engagement.

The breadth of existing mechanisms and programs, combined with the success of existing models of ad hoc coordination, require that the APB clearly define its potential contribution to the

development of atrocity prevention policy. The board should neither replicate existing assets within the system, nor add layers of bureaucratic complexity, nor bog down processes that already function well.

Once defined, the function and objectives of the APB must be communicated clearly—both across the interagency structure and with key nongovernmental players outside of government. Such communication should proactively expand buy-in to the APB processes and underscore the support the APB can provide those who develop and implement atrocity prevention policies. It should also manage expectations by outlining what success might look like in terms of its contribution.

APB: More Process Than Structure

Noting the urgency of the interagency review process, participants pointed to the challenge in processing genuine lessons learned within the time constraints outlined by PSD-10. Some directly involved acknowledged they often rely more on anecdotal evidence and intuition than hard data. This observation was intended to underscore that the PSD-10 and the APB must be seen as launching an ongoing process, rather than declaring the final word on the US government's approach to atrocity prevention.

The ultimate objective of this process, participants argued, should be to create an architecture that is designed to bring the right questions and issues to the discussion in order to most effectively evaluate competing objectives, prospects, capacities, and contingencies in a given case. Policy development is, and should remain, a dynamic process, better facilitated by (but not routinized within) the bureaucratic dynamics of a formal APB.

Considering this ambitious mandate, participants identified the following potential roles for the developing board, a number of which have been highlighted in the internal review process:

- Generating awareness of atrocity prevention issues and indicating their level of policy priority.
- Adding value to early warning assessments and atrocity "watch lists" by setting priorities that balance levels of concern with potential for impact and account for factors such as case difficulty and competing interests.

- Ensuring high-level attention for cases that lack a dedicated interagency process.
- Coherently rationalizing atrocity prevention and its relationship to related objectives, such as conflict prevention, human rights promotion, peacebuilding, and sustainable development—proactively bridging rather than reinforcing policy silos.
- Setting broad principles, mainstreaming a shared understanding of atrocity prevention policy, and promoting a broad-based recognition of roles and sense of ownership across the interagency.
- Serving as a repository for training, doctrine, capacity evaluation, and contingency planning.
- Developing policy doctrine and guidance for working-level operations, including upstream preventive work.
- Identifying and allocating resources through drawdown authorities.

Interests, Priorities, and Policy Attention

As with all governments, definitions of “national interest” determine how the US government allocates attention and resources. PSD-10 described atrocity prevention as “a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the United States.” Participants noted, however, that this claim was asserted rather than argued by the directive.

While the broader instability generated by mass atrocities is accepted implicitly among thematic experts, some participants suggested that the case for defining atrocity violence in countries of little strategic value to the United States as a threat to US national security needs to be more explicitly and persuasively made to stakeholders outside this core constituency.

This case, they argued, carries implications not only for the credibility of the APB mandate, but also for defining its role and focus. If mass atrocities present a national security threat as such, should the scope of APB engagement extend naturally to all cases of potential atrocity? Or, should the APB limit its focus to situations in which multiple (or more traditional) US security interests are also considered at risk? One participant recommended the unveiling of the APB as a key moment to elaborate the PSD stance on national interest,

both to encourage broader buy-in within and outside government to the APB process, and to more precisely define the parameters of APB focus.

Effectively linking mass atrocities to national interest, however, fails to resolve the more complex problem of *competing interests*, which presents perhaps the greatest obstacle to effective policy development in every area of US global engagement.

Participants recognized significant value in an APB that serves as both a representation of and advocate for presidential priority. Executive priority was considered a critical factor in the success or failure of previous US government efforts to anticipate, counter, or mitigate mass atrocity threats. One participant noted, for example, that presidential investment was key to the “small group” on South Sudan’s ability to consolidate cohesive policy and mobilize across government agencies.

Rooted in the National Security Council (NSC) and established by presidential directive, the APB signals that atrocity prevention has been internalized as a core objective of US foreign policy at the highest levels of the current administration. As threats evolve, an APB should be designed to ensure that atrocity prevention remains on the agenda of critical (and potentially competing) interests that receive high-level and, when necessary, presidential attention.

Participants suggested that the APB could provide particular value in defining where atrocity prevention falls along the spectrum of competing interests that must be balanced in specific contexts, thereby concentrating attention on cases in which atrocity prevention is both a necessary and feasible policy priority. Tightening this scope of interest and assessing potential approaches in terms of feasibility—i.e. weighing risks against case difficulty and policy impact potential—were raised as important contributions to be made by the board.

Time, attention, and all other resources that enable US government engagement are limited commodities already stretched across a vast array of policy priorities that rarely receive deserved focus. Narrowing the list of threats to engage to those with the greatest potential to benefit from focused attention was thus suggested an important role for the APB.

Noting that serious human rights violations occur daily across the globe, but that mass atrocities risk

is much less pervasive, participants agreed that the APB would need to resist the temptation to pursue compliance with the full human rights agenda and maintain a strict focus on ongoing or potential atrocity crimes. The APB could maintain this focus by enhancing existing early warning “watch list” assessments with a more nuanced understanding of atrocity risks in the broader context of competing interests and more realistic evaluations of potential policy impact.

Devoting an “atrocity focus” to these early assessments would also create a role for the APB in laying the groundwork for future engagement and narrowing information and logistics gaps that often frustrate prevention and response missions. One participant pointed to chronic difficulties in satisfying the basic preconditions for policy implementation—or even information gathering—in a mission’s early stages. Policy response can be delayed by factors as simple as the inability to immediately identify a ground agent with the necessary language skills.

Having provided more consistent, upstream evaluation of which cases should demand more focused attention, the APB could then initiate the early groundwork of policy engagement by identifying resources (human and financial), arranging for logistical needs (such as providing for security clearances), and building necessary contact networks.

Broadly speaking, the APB should have the capacity to narrow its own focus, gather intelligence, tap into expertise across the interagency structure, and initiate the groundwork for policy engagement within a swifter timeframe than has thus far been possible.

The APB and Crisis Response

Participants repeatedly echoed that the board would likely face a specific dichotomy of cases: situations of high, imminent or ongoing risk that have already mobilized internal focus and high-level attention vs. slow burn or “over the horizon” crises that have yet to trigger high-level concern and a cohesive policy approach. Participants reiterated that policies must be nuanced for particular crises, and suggested that bureaucratic dynamics within the US government must be designed to accommodate this need for flexibility.

The APB should thus be designed to adapt its role to the needs of a given case. Rather than imposing

a thematic mandate and assuming leadership over policy development in response to atrocity risk, the APB should complement existing structures and determine how it best fits within each scenario.

In terms of direct crisis-response, participants indicated that discussions within the ongoing interagency review have thus settled on the following roles for the APB:

- When high-level attention already rests with an existing standing committee devoted to a particular crisis, the role of the APB will be to feed analysis, perspectives, and recommendations nuanced to atrocity risk into this standing process.
- For cases that lack the attention of an existing structure, the APB will lead on high-level focus, intelligence, analysis, policy development, and mobilization.

Given this duality of roles, participants suggested that defining the APB’s relationship to existing mechanisms and determining how to build on what works well are key to the ongoing review. When an effective interagency structure is already leading the charge on a particular crisis, the APB would add value in funneling atrocity-specific analysis into the policy development process. As a repository of expertise on mass atrocities, the APB would provide deeper perspective on atrocity risks and forward preventive strategies evaluated in terms of past atrocity experience.

Participants noted that the second category of cases—“slow burn” and “over the horizon” crises—typically allow for a greater spectrum of policy options with lower execution costs, but chronically attract minimal attention. They suggested that filling this gap would be the primary added value of the APB. High-level attention over a longer time horizon would both prevent and prepare for escalation, bringing focus and guidance to upstream, structural prevention and laying early groundwork to address barriers to policy response, such as the intelligence deficit that often defines the first phases of an emerging crisis.

As noted above, however, attention and resources should be prioritized in terms of threat severity, competing interests, and the potential to impact risk levels with a feasible policy response. Should the APB focus primarily on broad-based flag-raising, what

one participant termed “focus fatigue” will likely undermine its efforts and ultimate sustainability.

Atrocity Prevention and Related Agendas: Rationalizing Complex Relationships for Coherent Policy

Confronted by a consistent challenge for policy development, participants focused heavily on the relationship between atrocity prevention and closely related agendas such as conflict prevention, human rights promotion, peacebuilding, and sustainable development. More specifically, participants considered the tendency both to conflate and artificially disaggregate atrocity prevention and conflict prevention/resolution as policy objectives. While acknowledging undeniable links, participants pointed also to important conceptual distinctions. Many were reminded of past cases (e.g., Rwanda and the Balkans) in which US government policy was so determined either to end (or avert) an armed confrontation that it largely ignored what seemed like peripheral atrocity threats faced by civilians.

Participants thus asked to what degree preventing (or resolving) conflict is the same enterprise as preventing systematic, large scale civilian-targeting, or mass atrocity crimes. Perhaps more importantly, what does this relationship imply for how the US government should pursue these objectives and how it should structure its internal capacities to do so most coherently and effectively?

In the words of one participant, if the two policy objectives are distinct but equally important, does an APB require a counterpart Conflict Prevention Board? How will the State Department’s Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO), proposed as part of the QDDR, approach genocide and mass atrocity prevention? Will it consider atrocity prevention a simple subset of conflict prevention activities, perhaps ignoring areas or moments in which the two objectives are in tension?

Others noted that conflict prevention and resolution strive toward a neutral, stabilized outcome among (potential) combatants. Pursuing this goal, however, can clash with key objectives to prevent atrocities and protect civilians—namely, accountability, deterrence, and the prevention of further civilian-targeting. Some questioned whether preventing imminent atrocity will ever trump the goal of ending an armed conflict if “atrocity preven-

tion” is implicitly subsumed within a broader conflict prevention rubric.

At the same time, many participants cautioned against artificially compartmentalizing these objectives—particularly in terms of bureaucratic structures and mandates. Given the tendency of bureaucratic institutions to create silos that isolate fundamentally interconnected policy areas and processes, participants urged the APB to find a way to address issues of competing interest while still allowing for a properly cohesive approach to conflict and atrocity prevention, as well as extended agendas such as human rights and peacebuilding.

The APB might play an important role in rationalizing the relationships between these agendas and what they can or should mean for US government policy development. Participants encouraged the APB process to work against artificial bifurcation of related issues and agendas, while also providing deep thematic expertise on atrocity dynamics and their unique implications for objective clarification and policy development.

The APB and the QDDR: Maximizing Links and Leverage Points

While the APB and QDDR implementation have been discussed largely in isolation, participants noted key points of intersection that, if fully harnessed, could prove highly useful to the APB process.

The State Department and USAID’s Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review, issued in late 2010, forwarded a series of reforms intended to better direct the resources and expertise of State and USAID toward the most pressing challenges faced by US foreign policy. Its fourth chapter identifies conflict prevention as a core policy priority and outlines shifts intended to ensure an improved, whole-of-government approach to crisis and instability.

Participants were quick to claim that the PSD-10 and QDDR implementation are concurrent but distinct processes. Limited to State and USAID, yet more thematically expansive than the PSD-10, QDDR implementation was considered tangential to a discussion focused primarily on the APB.

In spite of these challenges, participants identified several aspects of QDDR implementation with potential to reinforce APB efforts. At the broadest level, the QDDR’s reorientation of focus and

resources toward conflict expands relevant mission space and ensures targeted policy attention within the US government's diplomatic and development structures. More specifically, the QDDR redefines the working relationships of a large subset of atrocity prevention "implementers," and thus facilitates the objective of PSD-10 to create a system that enables relevant actors to better perform existing functions.

The new "G" family outlined in the QDDR's restructuring proposal for the State Department, for example, brings together a mutually reinforcing cluster of bureaus and offices and creates a more intuitive access point for APB engagement. At the operational level, realigning particular offices that contribute to different elements of an overarching process (such as justice sector reform) holds promise for improved policy and program development.

Participants also pointed to parallels in APB and QDDR objectives to elevate the role of country teams and regional bureaus. One participant noted that the QDDR process has already encouraged more internal information sharing between headquarters and the field. As both the QDDR and the APB promote integrated communication between regional and functional actors, shared objectives are more effectively reinforced.

Sustaining Structures and Policy Priority

Given that policy priority is always prey to shifts in leadership, participants noted the importance of planning for the sustainability of the APB and the broader policy focus it is meant to encourage. In order to ensure that atrocity prevention remains a priority in future administrations, participants suggested that the APB proactively (1) foster stakeholder buy-in and mainstream atrocity prevention across the interagency structure, (2) secure the APB's institutional grounding, (3) generate external momentum that reinforces internal policy priority, and (4) encourage bi-partisan support in Congress.

Mainstreaming for Sustainability

Echoing the idea that the APB should be a process or system rather than an isolated structure, participants highlighted broad mainstreaming as key to long-term sustainability, as well as impact and effectiveness.

Participants underscored that the PSD-10's ongoing review process has been driven by a spectrum of

interagency actors and involved consultation with regional players. However, buy-in has been uneven and skepticism remains. Across the US government and within key agencies such as the Departments of State and Defense, many continue to question how atrocity prevention or response differs from the mandates and operations they execute every day.

The APB must be designed to expand a sense of doctrinal "ownership" outward from its functional core to direct implementers of operational policy, diversifying the range of stakeholders vested in atrocity prevention as a policy priority. In the words of one participant, the ultimate objective of the APB should be to make atrocity prevention so integral to the day-to-day work of policy and operational actors that a devoted institution is no longer necessary to trigger focus and priority. In effect, the board should seek to "put itself out of a job."

Securing this level of broad-based ownership, however, requires facing the power dynamics and skepticism that often characterize the relationship between functional and regional players. The review process and the APB should move engagement with regional bureaus beyond consultations on existing approaches and capacities and promote self-identification by regional leadership of (1) the relevance of an atrocity focus for their work and (2) the assets an APB could bring to their ongoing efforts. Participants reinforced the role of an APB in facilitating existing processes and ongoing work, rather than superimposing itself as a new layer of bureaucratic authority over the regional actors and country teams that develop policy on the ground.

Participants highlighted that resources often drive buy-in. Thus the APB should pair its input with drawdown authorities that empower implementers to better pursue concrete activities and generate more effective policy outputs. As one participant put it, if you bring an opinion with resources, it becomes a more interesting idea.

At the same time, the current climate has placed rather rigid demands on the APB's efforts to remain "budget neutral." One participant suggested that the APB should seek to extract greater value from existing procedures through broad-based mainstreaming. Regional bureaus allocate significant resources to conflict prevention, but constantly find themselves "reinventing the wheel" in terms of policy development. Existing assets might be more effi-

ciently applied in light of the policy guidance provided by an APB. Ongoing human rights reporting could also be refocused to address new questions that better inform policy priorities, reducing the waste that often comes from “churning out reports” without a precise objective.

By supporting existing processes in which stakeholders already understand their role and feel invested, the APB can spread costs across the interagency structure, ensure that relevant agencies are engaged and committed to atrocity prevention, and increase the likelihood that its efforts will outlast the current administration.

Institutional Grounding

While participants reaffirmed that the APB’s true value will be determined by its ability to better enable policy development as a dynamic and evolving process, they also noted that some functions proposed for the APB require a standing structure and bureaucratic grounding. If the APB is intended to function as a repository of best practices or a “toolbox” of preventive strategies, for example, some level of institutionalization is required. Thus far, administration efforts to improve atrocity prevention and response capacities have been personality driven. APB potential as a reliable trigger for high-level attention demands a degree of institutional permanence and memory, particularly as founding members transition out of current roles.

Participants agreed that the NSC was the proper focal position for the APB as a high-level, interagency process, but noted that NSC structure is personality-dependent, appointee-based, and consistent fodder for administration restructuring. Some suggested that long-term institutionalization would require identifying a vanguard office, tethered to the NSC, but rooted in the bureaucracy, perhaps within the State Department. Others noted, however, that allocating an office and permanent staff to the board would present a challenge to “budget neutrality,” and suggested the APB remain a coordinating tool rather than a physical entity. While consensus was not reached on these institutionalization questions, participants agreed that they merit deeper consideration by the ongoing interagency review process.

Fostering External Momentum

Participants highlighted the importance of multilateral engagement and noted that, thus far, APB plan-

ning has acknowledged this importance primarily in terms of political mobilization and policy impact. They agreed that working with international partners is the best way to ensure broad-based diplomatic support for policy initiatives, as well as to fully maximize limited resources and sources of leverage held throughout the international system. Rooting the APB within multilateral processes thus contributes to burden sharing and permits more nuanced engagement in which the US government can lead or support as necessary for a given effort.

At the same time, participants noted that proactive multilateral engagement may hold promise as a means to reinforce internal momentum to address atrocity issues and better ensure the sustainability of the APB and its broader policy focus.

Embedding APB processes within multilateral counterparts—including UN and regional mechanisms as well as growing global networks like the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) “focal points” initiative—would link the APB to external sources of momentum that can reinforce the forward-focused inertia of internal processes. Promoting and participating in such networks—particularly while political priority is assured—would position future administrations to engage by default in an ongoing process and, in the words of one participant, to respond to expectations set by others. Some argued that active engagement at the multilateral level would establish precedent for US leadership and thus create incentives to maintain an ongoing leadership role in global efforts, even if a future US administration is less innately committed to atrocity prevention as a policy priority.

Like their US government counterparts, however, multilateral partners face both political and capacity challenges that limit their ability to respond to early warning signals and engage early enough to prevent atrocities. In addition to finding ways to support and/or complement multilateral processes, participants suggested that the review process should consider how the APB might encourage other states to identify a focal point/coordinating mechanism for atrocity prevention, review internal capacities, and develop an atrocity-focused plan for internal and foreign policy. Participants particularly encouraged the APB to consider partnering with governments of the Global South that share US government objectives to internalize atrocity prevention as a priority for national-level policy devel-

opment. They also suggested that partnerships be pursued at both the macro level of national decision making, and the micro level of field implementation and operational policy.

To contribute further to external sources of momentum that might productively feed back into internal process, participants also recommended that the APB encourage the creation of an external network of civil society supporters, or a non-governmental coalition of “friends” of the APB. Such a coalition might contribute to internal processes not only through analysis and information sharing on thematic issues and individual crises, but also by serving as an external “watch group” to ensure continued accountability to the APB’s objectives.

Beyond this brief mention, little attention was paid in the discussion to the role of civil society and/or public engagement in APB efforts and process. One participant noted that increasing public awareness of atrocity prevention and its relevance to US national security would be important to the long-term sustainability of the APB process. More thought should be given to this assertion and how such needs might be addressed in the course of the interagency review as the APB begins to function as an established body.

Securing Congressional Support

Presidential administrations possess great scope for independent policy development in the realm of foreign policy. Given that the APB process seeks to be “budget neutral,” participants noted that much can be done to advance the process without congressional approval. That said, some participants pointed to past policy efforts to counter atrocities that required congressional buy-in (e.g., opening space for policy maneuver within the Sudan sanctions of 2003–2005). Others suggested that when Congress feels marginalized, it can become obstructionist.

Even in the current climate of congressional stalemate, preventing atrocities remains a largely non-partisan issue—one that saw movement in Congress in 2010 through the nonbinding Senate Concurrent Resolution 71. This resolution not only recognized genocide prevention as a core US interest, but also encouraged the administration to consider steps (much like those outlined in the PSD-10 and QDDR) to enhance internal capacities to better respond to atrocity risk.

Participants suggested that the administration should leverage this piece of legislation as a framework for congressional consultations on both the APB and the QDDR, clearly identifying how proposed reforms respond to the recommendations forwarded in the resolution.

Conclusion

Participants shared a broad sense of optimism that the PSD-10 process and the APB will not only bring much needed high-level attention to the issue of atrocity risk, but also close many of the gaps that have frustrated past US government efforts to prevent and respond to mass atrocity crimes. This optimism was tempered, however, by recognition of the work ahead, particularly in generating shared investment across the US government such that atrocity prevention becomes a systemic rather than personality-driven commitment of US policy.

In the words of one participant, it is time for the PSD process to move into its next phase of implementation, shifting from the intellectual exercise of capacity assessment to a focus on practical needs for policy development. Ensuring that all stakeholders across the US government internalize the importance of atrocity prevention and their role in advancing it as a core US policy objective is critical to the successful functioning of an interagency APB, the sustainability of its doctrine and processes, and thus a lasting focus on atrocity prevention as a core moral responsibility of the United States.

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