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# Policy Memo

**DATE:** October 20, 2010

**SUBJECT:** Atrocity Prevention and US National Security—  
Implementing the Responsibility to Protect

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The Obama administration's inclusion of genocide prevention and explicit reference to the responsibility to protect framework within its recently issued National Security Strategy (NSS) builds on numerous institutional developments within the US government (USG) that recognizes the threat of mass atrocities to US national security and seeks to enhance US capacities for both prevention and response. These strategic elaborations and structural adjustments have been made in parallel with similar developments at the United Nations.

As part of its 51st annual Strategy for Peace Conference, the Stanley Foundation convened some 25 governmental and nongovernmental officials near Washington, DC, on October 14–16, 2010, to discuss ongoing efforts to elaborate the USG's strategic approach to genocide and mass atrocities, explore next steps for effective institutional development, and encourage strategic dialogue between key USG institutions and its multilateral partners at the United Nations. Participants included USG and UN officials, diplomats, civil society representatives, and mass atrocity specialists.

Participants identified the following action points to further the atrocity prevention agenda:

- Enhance USG communication and coordination with the UN system and increase support for UN institutional developments such as the anticipated joint office on genocide prevention and R2P.
- Broaden the range of options available to address potential and unfolding mass atrocities.
- Continue and accelerate internal USG efforts to develop appropriate institutional processes that ensure tailored policy options and crisp, accountable decision making.
- Establish priorities and secure an actionable mandate within the USG with a Presidential Policy Directive (PPD).
- Strengthen analytical tools and better integrate the intelligence and development communities into mass atrocity prevention and planning.

- Communicate with Congress and protect bipartisan space on mass atrocity issues.
- Create stronger links between the government, NGO, and corporate communities in order to maximize the contributions of each.

Additional highlights and key observations from the discussion follow:

## **National and Multilateral Strategic Frameworks**

- Reference to atrocity prevention and the responsibility to protect in the US National Security Strategy was widely considered to be a rhetorical and strategic victory, promoting norm diffusion and providing a fundamental foundation for ultimate policy development and implementation.
- In spite of its significance, participants suggested that the language inserted in key US strategic documents such as the NSS and the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) remains largely aspirational and falls short of setting a policy framework for concrete implementation. Broad principles must be matched with explicit prioritization to translate existing strategy into operational doctrine. Participants encouraged the administration in its intention to produce a PPD on mass atrocities to address remaining gaps.
- At the multilateral level, the policy framework provided by the Responsibility to Protect doctrine, drawn within the broader parameters of preexisting international law, was considered largely sufficient, clearly identifying commitments and the mechanisms through which they can be advanced. Some specific conceptual and strategic gaps remain, particularly in terms of capacity-building and targeted development assistance. However, participants suggested that the overarching policy framework was conducive to implementation and challenges at the multilateral level were primarily political, institutional, and operational.

## **USG Institutional Needs**

- While institutional adjustments are in process, there are remaining deficiencies that frustrate efforts to prevent and respond to mass atrocities, such as structural tendencies toward crisis response rather than prevention; insufficient links between agencies, bureaus, and offices; disincentives for early attention and reporting, etc. There is a need to establish sustainable and consistent mechanisms that make inaction more difficult.
- Many referenced a remaining disconnect between information assessment and the policy process. There is currently no structure within the USG tasked with integrating information, providing a common assessment framework, and producing operational policy options.
- Encouraging efforts are under way to address many of these institutional deficiencies, including the establishment of a National Security Council (NSC) focal point, as well as

both an NSC-directed Interagency Planning Committee (IPC) and working group on mass atrocity issues.

- Early IPC efforts should be credited with spearheading an additional DOS-centered interagency working group and inspiring intra-agency efforts at DoD. The DOS group is immediately focused on identifying points of contact, existing tools, and remaining institutional gaps. It coordinates closely with the NSC-directed process.
- Congress is a neglected but central actor in securing sustainable approaches. The administration and broader bureaucracy should communicate more with Congress on internal dynamics, creating political space for appropriate legislation to reinforce the interagency process. Participants also emphasized the need to keep mass atrocity prevention a bipartisan issue.
- While participants felt that it was too early to express satisfaction with institutional developments, the process was seen to be progressing and operating within a window conducive to permanent change. More needs to be done to develop calibrated triggers that elevate policy consideration and ensure accountable decision making. Participants agreed political will is the fundamental prerequisite for decisive action.

## **Identifying and Developing Tools**

- The range of known policy options remains limited, and it is still difficult to determine what ground actions are appropriate when confronted with potential or unfolding atrocities. Training officials with the skills to diffuse dangerous and complex situations has attracted substantial attention but remains a challenge.
- Bureaucracies, both UN and USG, are structured to repeat and reinforce existing processes rather than develop nuanced policy options. Bureaucratic inertia challenges efforts to foster creative approaches to unique ground dynamics. While the toolbox may not yet be fully identified and articulated, one participant cautioned against accepting a failure of imagination in response to current crises.
- There is potential added value from civil society in developing and mobilizing tools for atrocity prevention. NGOs are considered well placed to document conditions, provide comparative case analysis and best practice assessment, as well as to network with local populations and civil society to develop innovative upstream early warning mechanisms. Several government officials acknowledged they were largely unaware of ongoing NGO efforts, suggesting that information sharing should be increased and links explored with government processes.

## **Leveraging Multilateral Partnership**

- Effective communication between UN and USG processes is critical. While terminology differs in each setting, the UN and USG face related challenges that would benefit from increased awareness and dialogue.

- Though applauding USG efforts to address institutional gaps and develop an actionable policy framework, some participants emphasized the need to maintain a multilateral focus to avoid damage that would result from unilateral action. They suggested the US should do more to directly support institutional developments at the United Nations, such as the merger of the Office of the Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide with the Special Advisor on the Responsibility to Protect into a single joint office.
- Participants underscored the importance of constructive collaboration and suggested there should be a mutually reinforcing division of labor between different protection-focused actors. Central actors are not currently operating coherently as a community and leveraging varied approaches and comparative advantages.
- UN progress on R2P is an example of its central role in norm setting, and the United Nations is best placed to leverage legitimacy and constructively elevate the visibility of crises.
- One participant suggested that the USG and NATO were crucial to implementation of R2P's "third pillar" capacity as they are two of few existing structures capable of coordinating a multilateral use of military assets, whether for coercive or noncoercive measures.
- Awareness gaps and misperceptions regarding UN internal processes are pervasive among its potential implementation partners, including the USG. The UN's elaborate architecture makes it challenging for outside actors to infer internal process and interpret outcomes. Better understanding of UN structures and processes would facilitate more effective engagement with UN counterparts.

## **Shared Challenges**

- Distinguishing between mass atrocity prevention and the broader conflict prevention agenda provides a significant challenge. For the USG, the problem was described as primarily conceptual. Effective approaches rely on a nuanced and as yet insufficient understanding of the relationship between related but distinct agendas such as conflict prevention, peacebuilding, civilian protection, and mass atrocity prevention.
- In the UN context, the atrocity/conflict prevention challenge was recognized to be both conceptual and operational, making appropriate distinctions even more significant. Applying a particular label to a specific crisis and defining UN engagement as either conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping, or peacebuilding defines fundamental parameters for efforts undertaken, ranging from the actors involved to the resources available.
- There is a potential tension at both the national and multilateral levels between long-range planning and immediate crisis response. While there is a need for balanced and simultaneous focus, it should be recognized that current crisis response is unlikely to mobilize the same range of options that might be available once conceptual gaps are

addressed and new institutional processes in place. While options may not be as extensive in imminent situations such as Sudanese referendum, participants underscored the urgency for creative and credible, if imperfect, response.

- The UN and the USG both face the challenge of developing appropriate upward streams of information that ensure top-level attention and encourage accountability for timely decision making. It was generally acknowledged that various networks provide large amounts of information, but some participants suggested that weaknesses lie in the ad hoc nature of the reporting chain. Ad hoc mechanisms, however prevalent and useful, are not dependable enough to ensure necessary information flow required in mass atrocity situations.
- Nuanced focus on protection issues by national and global development actors was noted as a missing tool in global prevention and response efforts. There has been too little attention paid to how development programs and international assistance could be tailored to encourage dynamics and build institutions that reduce profitability and incentives for civilian-targeted violence.

## **Full Report to Follow**

A more comprehensive report about this conference and its major recommendations will follow in a few weeks.

The analysis and recommendations included in this Policy Memo do not necessarily reflect the view of the Stanley Foundation or any of the roundtable participants, but rather draw upon the major strands of discussion put forward at the event. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this document. Therefore, it should not be assumed that every participant subscribes to all of its recommendations, observations, and conclusions.

*For further information, please contact Keith Porter at the Stanley Foundation, 563-264-1500.*

### **About The Stanley Foundation**

The Stanley Foundation seeks a secure peace with freedom and justice, built on world citizenship and effective global governance. It brings fresh voices, original ideas, and lasting solutions to debates on global and regional problems. The foundation is a nonpartisan, private operating foundation, located in Muscatine, Iowa, that focuses on peace and security issues and advocates principled multilateralism. The foundation frequently collaborates with other organizations. It does not make grants. Online at [www.stanleyfoundation.org](http://www.stanleyfoundation.org).