

BUILDING AN ANTI-GENOCIDE INFRASTRUCTURE

**An Update on the Record of U.S. Implementation of
the Genocide Prevention Task Force Recommendations**

Presented by

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Good morning. It is a pleasure to see all of you here today.

I want first to thank my fellow panelists, Jacques Semelin, Antoine Garapon, and Dr. Francis Deng. I would like to recognize Dr. Deng [U.N. Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide] for his remarks but, more important, for his contribution to our field over a remarkable career. His ideas about the responsibilities of state sovereignty and about internally displaced persons have influenced us all. And now his office's framework for analyzing risks of genocide is proving a valuable tool in promoting atrocities prevention. It is a privilege to share the stage with you.

I would also like to acknowledge the French Shoah Memorial, the hardworking staff at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, our partners at the American Bar Association, and colleagues from other organizations who worked on the Genocide Prevention Task Force. Some of them are in this room, including Paul Stares, Lawrence Woocher, and Tod Lindberg. They have been a source of great support and friendship.

I also want to seize this opportunity to say a few words about the unusual program I have had the privilege to direct for the past two years. The Committee on Conscience has a unique perch—nothing else exists like it in the human rights world. We are an initiative launched by the major Holocaust memorial in the United States to use our assets, platform, and stature to raise awareness, influence policymakers, and otherwise do what we can to ensure that the crimes of the Holocaust are not repeated. As I look about the room, I see potential partners and I would encourage all of you to be in touch if you have ideas about how we can advance our shared agenda.

My remarks today will focus on what is happening in the United States, in both our national government and civil society. We understand that the abolition of genocide and other mass atrocity crimes will only come about through concerted international action, but the U.S. must play a leading role.

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I would like to focus on a piece of the puzzle that sometimes receives insufficient attention: what governments can do to strengthen their own capacities to prevent genocide and other forms of mass violence.

Much important work has been done over the past two decades, by some in this very room, to try to build a new international architecture to prevent and respond to the worst of the worst crimes. This includes strengthening the system of accountability through the establishment of a new International Criminal Court and other mechanisms; creating a dedicated office of genocide prevention at the United Nations; articulating and strengthening the Responsibility to Protect norm; and the more recent efforts to create regional networks on genocide prevention. A new movement in civil society has emerged to press governments politically to take more vigorous action to prevent or halt mass atrocity crimes in places like Burma, Congo, and Sudan.

But what gets lost is the need to put in place—in every government in the world—policies, practices, and structures that could help prevent the unfolding of such events in the future. Building the right governmental infrastructure and tools is a crucial step for enabling a will to protect. Unless leaders have the tools ready at their disposal—the best intelligence and early warning, effective preventive diplomacy, the right military training and doctrine, and a decision-making process that prioritizes protection of endangered peoples—their chances of success are diminished.

The Genocide Prevention Task Force offers some helpful guideposts. I am not just talking about the recommendations themselves but the way in which they have been taken up both by the U.S. government and civil society. They suggest a possible model for how Europe might develop new ideas for strengthening its capacities to prevent genocide.

Three years ago, the Museum and its partners—the U.S. Institute of Peace and The American Academy of Diplomacy—established a task force to create a blueprint for an effective genocide prevention infrastructure for the U.S. government. Such an infrastructure, we believed, would contribute both to identifying conflicts at their earliest stages and to triggering a response—before violence starts or escalates, when all the tools of preventive, non-military diplomacy have the best chance of success.

We asked two former U.S. cabinet officials, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and former Secretary of Defense William Cohen, to lead a task force of experts. We sought members who were diverse and bipartisan and had served in government during periods when the United States had failed to avert genocide or respond effectively once violence had begun.

The resulting report—of three dozen recommendations—provides a detailed plan of action.

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As a first matter, the Task Force acknowledged that the U.S. record on genocide has been mixed, at best, and that genocide prevention had been dealt with as a foreign policy afterthought. Responsibility for such crises was fragmented among various agencies and prone to bureaucratic lethargy and ad hoc decision-making.

The Task Force argued, as its central recommendation, that genocide prevention needed to be elevated to a foreign policy priority for the United States and rooted its case for such attention in core national security interests. To make genocide prevention a priority, the report outlined concrete recommendations—including robust presidential leadership in the form of a clear public statement that preventing genocide is in our national security interests, a “whole of government approach,” and a high-level point-person in the executive branch responsible for ensuring specific changes in doctrine and practice for the intelligence, diplomatic, and military communities. The Task Force also made recommendations about setting up effective early warning mechanisms, training for foreign policy officials, and strengthening and transforming civil society in places ripe for or experiencing conflict.

Less than two years since the report’s release, the Task Force’s impact has been significant, not only in a specific, if incomplete, set of reforms but, perhaps more important, in something I think of as atmospheric—a palpable change of mind-set about the primacy of prevention.

I’ll address the concrete reforms first.

As we heard from Samantha Power, the Obama administration is adopting one of the report’s priority structural recommendations: the creation of a highest-level interagency committee on mass atrocities prevention. This committee comprises decision-makers from all areas of government who are tasked with identifying, on a regular basis, where violence is likely and recommending specific action for dealing with it.

In addition, earlier this year, President Obama appointed an individual to take the lead on genocide and mass atrocity prevention issues for his administration. David Pressman, who is with us today, is the Director for War Crimes and Atrocities Prevention. He is based at the National Security Council, and he is the identified focal point within the U.S. government for policies on these issues.

A genocide and mass atrocities prevention working group at the State Department is looking at what the U.S. government will do, in real time, when the signals foretell impending mass atrocity crimes. We have also seen changes at the Pentagon, where Secretary Gates has established a new Office of Rule of Law and International Humanitarian Policy, charged with, among other things, adopting policies for the prevention of mass atrocities. In August, the U.S. Army issued a new doctrine that called on future forces to be prepared to conduct what they called “mass atrocity response operations” as part of full-spectrum military operations.

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While these are still just words on paper, the shift is clear: The U.S. military establishment is beginning to codify preventing genocide as a matter of strategy and policy.

The U.S. intelligence community has joined the effort, embracing the report's recommendation that there be regular assessments of threats of mass violence. Before he resigned this year, Admiral Dennis Blair, then the Director of National Intelligence, testified before Congress about the risks of mass atrocities—pointedly declaring that southern Sudan is at risk of mass killing or genocide in the next three to five years.

The U.S. Congress has also taken up the charge. Eleven U.S. senators recently introduced a bipartisan resolution that calls for the administration to develop and communicate its approach for anticipating, preventing, and mitigating acts of genocide and other mass atrocities.

NGOs, activists, and policy advocates have also embraced the Task Force agenda—and multiplied its reach and impact while broadening their efforts beyond individual cases like Darfur. Many organizations have individually taken up the Task Force recommendations as a program priority. Last year, the Genocide Intervention Network held a two-day conference on genocide prevention attended by more than 800 grassroots advocates.

One of our co-sponsors today, the American Bar Association, brought the Task Force report to its annual meeting for endorsement and has become a major partner in efforts like this meeting to create an international network that can respond to mass atrocity crimes.

A group of roughly a dozen leading U.S. and international NGOs formed a coalition—the Prevention and Protection Working Group—that has taken up the Task Force's recommendations in earnest as its advocacy agenda. The combined constituencies of these organizations number in the millions—and each has been educating and galvanizing its members.

U.S. civil society, in fact, has been the engine behind the congressional legislation I mentioned and has used its collective resources to call on the Obama administration to take forward-going steps.

The effect, over the past two years, has been an evolution in the genocide prevention movement: NGOs have broadened their work on mass atrocity crimes beyond specific crises like Darfur or Congo and established an entirely new area of work—for organizing, raising awareness, and advocating for prevention.

All of this work amplifies the message of genocide prevention and creates a feedback loop that will help make progress on the full range of recommendations in the report.

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Clearly we have a way to go, especially in implementation. Setting policies doesn't ensure they will be implemented. We do not have a fully functioning and global early warning system, or a rapid deployment force with the capability of protecting civilians in situations of mass conflict, or a network of officials within governments who are tasked with making this issue their number-one priority every day. We badly need a massive public education campaign aimed at building the kind of political support leaders rely on to make difficult decisions—with domestic political repercussions—that are often required to halt mass atrocities. This might be a role, for instance, that museums like mine or others might consider playing in this sphere.

We need all of these tools because there will always be doubt and nuance and complexity in democracies when it comes to dealing with a specific crisis, when, of course, results matter most of all. If you don't head off a tragedy, you have failed.

No country can go at this alone. Thankfully, around the world, new organizations and networks are forming with genocide prevention or the responsibility to protect as their stated mission. What's needed now is for more states to develop their own institutions and structures for elevating the prevention of genocide as a policy priority. There ought to be officials like David Pressman in each and every government, charged with organizing prevention efforts in each society and serving as a focal point for cooperating with other countries.

The Genocide Prevention Task Force offers some helpful suggestions, but it is certainly not the last word. There is no cookie-cutter approach to genocide prevention; each government or international institution needs to find structures and staffing approaches that fit its own bureaucracy and culture. Perhaps the model of a high-level panel might be applicable to Europe or other countries as a way of stimulating reforms appropriate to their own systems.

What is essential is that each government act urgently to adopt genocide prevention as a mission. We don't want to wait for another avoidable catastrophe to take place before we adopt the necessary reforms to give true meaning to the words "Never Again."

For more information or to read the full transcript of the symposium, including the keynote address by Samantha Power, visit ushmm.org/paris_symposium.