



DEFINING THE CHALLENGE

Some we see; others remain invisible to us. Some have names and faces; others we do not know. We speak of the victims of genocide and mass atrocities, their numbers too staggering to count.

Individual lives—disrupted, damaged, and lost forever—are never far from our minds as we write this report. By its nature, a blueprint for U.S. policymakers must be concrete to be credible. Inevitably, it must confront the challenges of bureaucracies and budgets, policies and political will. But we must never lose sight of the evil inherent in the subject matter and the human beings who suffer as a result of that evil.

In the last century, tens of millions of people lost their lives in episodes of mass killings. Shortly after the turn of this century, the international community stood by as murders, rapes, destruction, and dislocation began to unfold in Darfur.

The Genocide Prevention Task Force and its experts posed some vexing questions. Why—sixty years after the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and twenty years after its ratification by the United States—are we still lacking the institutions, policies, and strategies to reliably prevent genocide and mass atrocities? Why is our national security bureaucracy too often unable to marshal what is needed to prevent the human suffering and loss of life that accompanies mass violence? How is it that many Americans are rallying against genocide, but our nation seems unable to prevent the large-scale and deliberate attacks that shake our national conscience and threaten our national security?

How is it that after the Holocaust—despite the international community vowing that the “odious scourge” of genocide must never be permitted and that international leaders would “undertake to prevent and to punish” this crime—we could not fully meet that challenge?

Making the Case: A Threat to Values and Interests

Genocide and mass atrocities are a direct assault on universal human values, including most fundamentally the right to life. These crimes also threaten core U.S. national interests in several ways:

First, genocide fuels instability, usually in weak, undemocratic, and corrupt states. It is in these same types of states that we find terrorist recruitment and training, human trafficking, and civil strife, all of which have damaging spillover effects for the entire world.

Second, genocide and mass atrocities have long-lasting consequences far beyond the states in which they occur. Refugee flows start in bordering countries but often spread. Humanitarian needs grow, often exceeding the capacities and resources of a generous world. The international community, including the United States, is called on to absorb and assist displaced people, provide relief efforts, and bear high economic costs. And the longer we wait to act, the more exorbitant the price tag. For example, in Bosnia, the United States has invested nearly \$15 billion to support peacekeeping forces in the years since we belatedly intervened to stop mass atrocities.

Third, America’s standing in the world—and our ability to lead—is eroded when we are perceived as bystanders to genocide. We cannot be viewed as a global leader and respected as an international partner if we cannot take steps to avoid one of the greatest scourges of humankind.

No matter how one calculates U.S. interests, the reality of our world today is that national borders provide little sanctuary from international problems. Left unchecked, genocide will undermine American security.

A core challenge for American leaders is to persuade others—in the U.S. government, across the United States, and around the world—that preventing genocide is more than just a humanitarian aspiration; it is a national and global imperative.

Political Will and Sovereignty

At the beginning of the report, we acknowledge that the United States' record in responding to threats of genocide has been mixed. Over the span of time, our top officials have been unable to summon the political will to act in a sustained and consistent manner or take the timely steps needed to prevent genocide and mass atrocities from occurring. The road to genocide prevention may be paved with the best intentions, but our leaders have not always been bold enough in confronting congressional skeptics or reluctant policymakers. Moreover, a lack of dedicated resources for prevention and the absence of bureaucratic mechanisms designed for rapid analysis and response have become a rationale for inaction.

Summoning political will requires leadership, not only after a crisis strikes, but also before one emerges. It means taking on inertia within the government, investing political capital, doing the heavy lifting of persuasion. Political will involves fending off critics and cynics. It means bucking the tides of caution. It means risking failure.

Traditional views of sovereignty have also been major obstacles to effective international action. It has often been argued that external action in response to threats of genocide constitutes unacceptable interference in a country's domestic affairs. There is a growing understanding, however, that sovereignty implies rights and obligations, and that states have a basic responsibility to protect their citizens from genocide and mass atrocities. No government has the right to use national sovereignty as a shield behind which it can murder its own people. The challenge for the world community is not only to state this principle, but to implement it.

Avoiding Definitional Traps

Finally, there is the definitional challenge of invoking the word *genocide*, which has unmatched rhetorical power. The dilemma is how to harness the power of the word to motivate and mobilize while not allowing debates about its definition or application to constrain or distract policymakers from addressing the core problems it describes.

To avoid the legalistic arguments that have repeatedly impeded timely and effective action, *the task force has defined its scope in this report as the*

prevention of “genocide and mass atrocities,” meaning large-scale and deliberate attacks on civilians. The victims of genocide and mass atrocities are typically targeted because of their identification as members of a group. In defining its scope, the task force has not attempted to circumscribe which kinds of groups deserve special protection or to articulate how these groups should be defined. The colloquial description of large-scale and deliberate attacks on civilians is buttressed by a framework in international law that has been accepted by the United States and other governments and that defines serious crimes meriting special international concern.* We use the term *genocide* in this report as a shorthand expression for this wider category of crimes. Moreover, the central purpose of our effort being prevention, we are advocating the adoption of measures before acts of massive violence have been committed or labeled.

This task force is not a historical commission; its focus is on the future and on prevention. At the same time, we recognize the importance of learning from the past and the dangers of denying past crimes. In seeking to understand the key challenges and identify potential recommendations, we drew on a wide range of past experiences that can inform future action. There are many references to specific countries and historical events in this report, not all of which necessarily fall into the category of genocide, but all of which have relevant lessons for our objective: to help the U.S. government prevent future cases.

Strategic Approach

There is no consensus as to the causes of genocide and mass atrocities, nor is there one commonly agreed-upon theory that sufficiently explains the key catalysts, motivations, or mechanisms that lead to them. History has shown that genocide and mass atrocities can manifest themselves in highly variable ways, and we should not assume that future perpetrators will follow old patterns.

* Those crimes are: (1) *genocide* as defined in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948) and (2) *crimes against humanity* as described in the Nuremberg Charter (1945) and most recently defined in the Rome Statute creating the International Criminal Court (1998). Many of the specific acts constituting these crimes are also proscribed by the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and in customary international law; war crimes can include individual criminal acts, but generally become a matter of international concern if they are committed as part of a plan or policy or as part of a large-scale commission of such crimes.

At the same time, we know that genocide has deep roots and that its execution requires planning and organization. Seizing on opportunities to prevent mass atrocities requires a comprehensive approach, breaking through bureaucratic silos to draw on a wide array of analytical, diplomatic, economic, legal, and military instruments and engaging with a variety of partners. It also requires a combination of high-level attention and standing institutional mechanisms.

In organizing our work, we considered how the U.S. government could develop and deploy more effective strategies to identify and pursue opportunities for prevention. This led us to study five distinct but interrelated domains:

- *Early warning: assessing risks and triggering action.* Early warning based on risk analysis highlights for policymakers threats of genocide and opportunities for prevention. It is critical for prioritizing our efforts, informing the design of effective strategies, and spurring action. By improving the accuracy of warnings and ensuring that they are channeled effectively to decision makers, we will find greater opportunities for preventive action.
- *Early prevention: engaging before the crisis.* The greatest opportunities for prevention appear long before violence begins. Many countries are vulnerable to extreme violence. By engaging leaders, institutions, and civil society at an early stage, the United States can help countries steer clear of these dangers.
- *Preventive diplomacy: halting and reversing escalation.* Even when signs of preparation for genocide are apparent, there are opportunities to alter leaders' decisions and interrupt their plans. By improving our crisis response system, we will be better prepared to mount coherent, carefully calibrated, and timely preventive diplomacy strategies.
- *Employing military options.* When opportunities for prevention have been lost and the best that can be achieved is to forcefully stop ongoing atrocities, military means are crucial. U.S. military assets can also play an important role in supporting and providing credibility to options short of the use of force. By being prepared to employ military options as part of comprehensive genocide prevention strategies, we will strengthen our capacity and our effectiveness.

- *International action: strengthening norms and institutions.* The United States has an interest in promoting a system of international norms and institutions that averts potential genocide and mass atrocities before they occur, stops them quickly and effectively when they occur, helps societies rebuild in their wake, and holds perpetrators accountable. By working in partnership with others in the global community, the United States will multiply its positive impact.

This report includes a chapter corresponding to each of these areas, in which we review recurring challenges, assess current readiness of the U.S. government, and make recommendations that address both strategy and institutional structures. There are a number of themes that cut across chapters, and each of our five expert groups' research and deliberations informed and contributed to all pieces of the report. In our opening chapter, we take up the question of leadership, which we found to be at the heart of our endeavor.