

The Stanley Foundation, Courier Preventing the next mass atrocity - The US and UN strive to build better systems to prevent human tragedy Rachel Gerber, Program Officer

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Nimble is a descriptor rarely earned by large bureaucracies. Their advantage lies more in political and institutional heft than agility. Yet agility is often the precise quality demanded of effective solutions to the most severe, complex, and intractable of global problems. □□

Growing political commitment to protect civilian populations from mass atrocity crimes such as genocide, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, and war crimes faces a challenge shared by broader efforts to address contemporary global realities—how to redirect the inertia that drives our political institutions toward systematically nuanced preventive engagement, rather than ad hoc crisis response.

Discussion of atrocity prevention and US national security at the Stanley Foundation's 51st annual Strategy for Peace Conference echoed this broad challenge as the United States seeks to fully implement its responsibility to protect through a "whole-of-government" approach to mass atrocity crimes. The dialogue convened key US and UN officials, diplomats, and mass atrocity specialists to discuss ongoing efforts to elaborate the US government's strategic approach to genocide and mass atrocities, explore next steps for effective institutional development, and encourage strategic dialogue between US institutions and their multilateral partners at the United Nations.

Action and Aspiration

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) has built on numerous institutional developments that recognize the threat of mass atrocities to US national security and seek 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 (...)

(...) Roundtable participants, however, questioned to what degree strategic language at the

national and multilateral levels provides clear directives for concrete action. While a normative and rhetorical victory, they suggested that the genocide and mass atrocity language in the NSS remains aspirational and has failed to establish the priority of these issues among the myriad goals identified in the document. Many looked to the State Department's upcoming Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review and an expected Presidential Policy Directive to address these gaps. □□

At the multilateral level, the overarching policy framework provided by the Responsibility to Protect was considered set for implementation, clearly identifying commitments and mechanisms through which they could be advanced. Barriers to concrete action at the United Nations were thought to be more political, institutional, and operational than strategic (...)

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