

Atrocity Prevention at the Crossroads: Assessing the President's Atrocity Prevention Board after Two Years James Finkel United States Holocaust Memorial Museum 15 September 2014

President Obama's decision in August 2011 to launch Presidential Study Number 10 (PSD 10) and to stand up the Atrocities Prevention Board (APB) the following April significantly advanced the US Government's efforts and capacity to prevent mass atrocities and mitigate their effects. But after two years of operation, the APB has reached a crossroads, and fulfilling its potential will continue to be a steep climb.

To fulfill its potential, the APB will need additional resources, closer coordination within key Departments and Agencies as well as with key Allies and civil society, and a work force better prepared to wrestle with this toughest of 21st century challenges.

If the President continues to believe strongly in atrocity prevention and the APB process that he has set in motion, it will be important for him to reiterate that support publicly and to make his views clear personally to his most senior foreign policy subordinates.

Most past and current members of the Board would concede that its track record is mixed. While it has contributed significantly to policy discussions and decisions regarding such places as Burma and Kenya, among others, it has been less successful, so far, with respect to Syria, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan.

The Board continues to be viewed skeptically – and occasionally even hostilely – from some quarters within the national security establishment. The APB's first challenge has been to find the sweet spot where it can bring its special expertise to bear in existing interagency policy forums without slowing those discussions down or disrupting them. I believe the APB enhances those discussions in two important ways:

- By bringing to the table a structured, functional process for identifying emerging risks for mass atrocities at a much earlier stage and by helping to plan and execute steps to prevent them;

- By providing expertise, tools, and perspectives that have often been overlooked or ignored.

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