THE "RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT" AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Connecting the Atrocity-Prevention and Fragile-States Agendas

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At the United Nations World Summit in September 2005, global leaders took a historic stand against mass atrocities by adopting the doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). One of the principal commitments that UN members made in endorsing the R2P doctrine was to assist states in developing the capacity to protect their populations from mass atrocities.[1] In endorsing these "pillar two" actions, the international community recognized that development assistance is the most practical tool for preventing atrocities over the long term. The development community has slowly begun to heed this call, taking steps to integrate atrocity prevention into its policies and programs over the past decade.

In 2011, the US government took a major step to carry out its commitment to prevent mass atrocities. President Barack Obama issued the first-ever presidential directive on mass atrocities and created the Atrocities Prevention Board (APB) to coordinate US policy and programs. From the start, development assistance was an integral part of this vision: the presidential directive made the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) a full member of the APB, referred to the key role of development professionals, and emphasized the importance of engaging in "the full spectrum of smart prevention activities."

During the same period, development agencies, partner governments, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) began to address the separate but related challenge of "fragile states." The origins of the international fragile-states movement[2] lie in the debate during the 1990s about the proliferation of civil wars and failed states in the wake of the Cold War. The concept of fra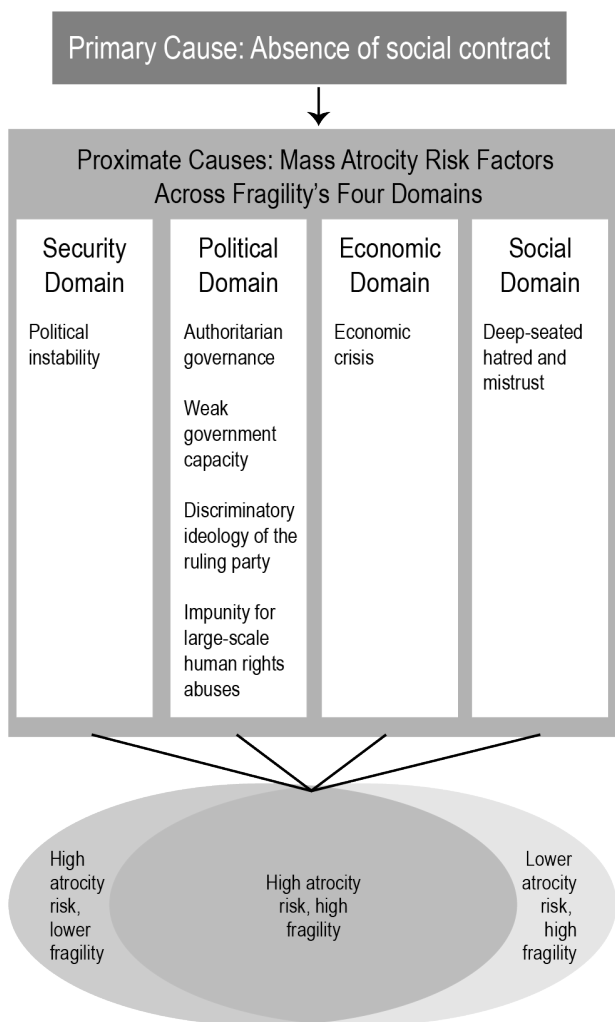gility was created to capture not just egregiously failed states such as Afghanistan but also states that foster transnational problems like terrorism, disease, environmental degradation, and illicit economies.[3] The overarching goal of this development initiative has been to promote resilience in fragile states.

USAID has been at the forefront of efforts to support both the atrocity-prevention and the fragile-states agendas. Under the George W. Bush and Obama administrations, USAID adopted a number of important initiatives to weave atrocity-prevention and counter-fragility policies into the fabric of its development work.[4] Yet the effort to integrate a concern for mass atrocities into the development agenda is still very new—and in fact still very peripheral. Moreover, the two communities remain mostly siloed within USAID despite their common origins and related areas of emphasis.

Substantial benefits would be gained from strengthening cooperation between the atrocity-prevention and fragile-states policy communities. For the atrocity-prevention community, cooperation on fragile states would place R2P at the core of development discourse. For the fragile-states community, cooperation on atrocity prevention would provide much-needed focus to the hitherto impractically long lists of "priority actions" for the promotion of resilience. To encourage such a partnership, this paper discusses the conceptual and programmatic similarities between the two agendas and makes recommendations for initiating political and technical cooperation.[5]

Conceptual Overlap

The international atrocity-prevention community defines *mass atrocities* as "large-scale, systematic violence against civilians," including genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes.[6] In his primer on atrocity prevention, Scott Straus identifies several causes, or "macro-level risk factors," of mass atrocities.[7] These risk factors include conflict dynamics, such as political instability; governance issues like authoritarianism, weak government capacity, a ruling party's discriminatory ideology, and impunity for large-scale human rights abuses; and socioeconomic problems, such as economic

Figure 1: Conceptual Overlap Between Fragility and Atrocity Risk Factors

to the failure of political institutions and processes to respond to the needs of citizens, and illegitimacy stems from citizens' views that the institutions and processes are unacceptable. Regarding the economic domain, economic and financial institutions and infrastructure are ineffective when they cannot generate employment and economic growth, and they are illegitimate when they operate without transparency and are inaccessible to much of the population. And in the social domain, ineffectiveness arises from the failure of the state to provide basic services that meet popular demand, and illegitimacy stems from the state's intolerance toward vulnerable or minority groups.[11]

As Figure 1 shows, the overlap between the main risk factors for mass atrocities and the main hallmarks of fragility is extensive. For the two communities, the deepest root of each problem is arguably the absence of a social contract between state and society. Atrocity-prevention experts cite authoritarian governance and state-led discrimination as atrocity-risk factors, whereas the fragile-states community cites the absence of a "political settlement" as a root of fragility.[12] For both policy communities, the cause of their respective problem is a fundamental dysfunction in state–society relations.

Other major risk factors of mass atrocities also align neatly with the four major domains of fragility. Widespread instability is a reflection of fragility in the security and political domains. An exclusionary ideology, as well as discrimination and unpunished violence, is a symptom of political fragility. Economic crisis is a mark of fragility in the economic domain. Deep-seated hatred and mistrust among social groups are characteristics of social fragility. And weak government capacity is emblematic of fragility across all four domains.

A preliminary survey of countries at greatest risk of mass atrocities and that rank highest in measures of fragility further confirms the conceptual overlap between the two policy agendas. Figure 2 portrays this overlap by comparing the Early Warning Project's list of countries at risk for state-led mass killing with the Fragile States Index's list of countries beset by fragility.[13] Of the top 25 countries on the EWP's atrocity risk list, more than three-fifths (16 countries) are also on the FSI's list of the top 25 fragile states. Of the 9 EWP countries not on the FSI's top 25 list, 6 are ranked 26–50 by the FSI, 2 are ranked 51–75 by the FSI, and 1 is ranked 76–100 by the FSI.

Thus, most of the countries deemed at the greatest risk for mass atrocities are also judged to be severely to moderately fragile. Conversely, of the 9 countries that appear on the FSI's top 25 list but not on the EWP's top 25 list, 7 are ranked 25–50 by the EWP, 1 is ranked 51–75 by the EWP, and 1 is ranked 76–100 by the EWP. In other words, most of the severely fragile states are also at high risk for mass atrocities. The dissimilarities between the two watch lists, however, serve as important reminders that the risk factors for mass atrocities and fragile states are not identical. In particular, the threat of mass atrocities can exist even where fragility is not acute.

crisis and distrust among different social groups. As with all complex political phenomena, mass atrocities have no single cause. Together, these factors provide a comprehensive list of priorities for long-term prevention.[8]

The international fragile-states community defines *fragility* as referring to "those states unable or unwilling to adequately assure the provision of security and basic services to significant portions of their populations and where the legitimacy of the government is in question."[9] Accordingly, USAID's Fragile States Strategy notes that a *fragile state* is one "where both effectiveness and legitimacy are weak."[10]

For USAID, state ineffectiveness and illegitimacy are assessed across four separate domains: security, political, economic, and social. In the security domain, ineffectiveness concerns the failure of the military and police to secure borders and limit crime, and illegitimacy derives from military and police services that are performed inequitably and with human rights violations. Within the political domain, ineffectiveness is due

Figure 2: Overlap between Countries on 2016 Early Warning Project Statistical Risk Assessment and Fragile States Index

High mass atrocity risk, lower fragility score	High mass atrocity risk, high fragility score	Lower mass atrocity risk, high fragility score
Mali (8,31)	Sudan (1,5)	Uganda (26, 24)
Turkey (13, 64)	Yemen (2, 4)	Chad (28, 8)
Bangladesh (16, 39)	Myanmar (3, 25)	Haiti (34, 11)
Egypt (17, 36)	Nigeria (4, 13)	Zimbabwe (35, 4)
Sri Lanka (18, 47)	Afghanistan (5, 9)	Libya (37, 23)
Tanzania (20, 65)	Burundi (6, 17)	Guinea-Bissau (42, 16)
Ukraine (21, 90)	Central African Republic (7, 3)	Niger (50, 20)
Rwanda (22, 34)	Pakistan (9, 17)	Eritrea (57, 19)
Cameroon (23, 26)	Democratic Republic of the Congo (10, 7)	Kenya (78, 22)
	Iraq (11, 10)	
	Somalia (12, 2)	
	South Sudan (14, 1)	
	Ethiopia (15, 15)	
	Guinea (19, 12)	
	Ivory Coast (24, 21)	
	Syria (25, 6)	

NOTE: "High" rankings refer to countries listed in the top 25 of the respective index. "Lower" rankings refer to countries listed below the top 25 of the respective index. Countries' risk rankings are listed in paranatheses according to the following format: (Early Warning Project ranking, Fragile States Index ranking).

Programmatic Similarity

How does the extensive conceptual overlap translate into programmatic efforts to address these common risks?

As Straus observes, the goal of international atrocity-prevention programs is "to take action that eliminates or reduces the intensity of the causes of genocide and other forms of mass atrocity."[14] For example, Straus and other atrocity-prevention scholars propose a range of strategies that might reduce the risk of instability and armed conflict, including programs for conflict prevention, security sector reform, and democratic governance. The risks of discrimination and deep-seated hatred and distrust could be addressed by reducing discrimination through constitutional and legal provisions against discrimination, equal access to public services such as education and health care, and celebration of minority cultures. And the risk of economic crisis could be prevented by decreasing economic inequality and increasing economic growth, especially in relation to marginalized populations.

The international fragile-states community has proposed a parallel agenda to address the sources of fragility. According to USAID's Fragile States Strategy, a combination of efforts to strengthen the accountability of security forces, to expand and reform the rule of law and key social services, to broaden democratic representation, and to foster economic growth may reduce fragility risks. In addition, the major forum on fragility, the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (IDPS), achieved a landmark programmatic agreement in

2011. This New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States included the following five Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals (PSGs).[15] The PSGs are a useful synthesis of the overall fragile-states program.

- **Promoting legitimate politics** would encompass the atrocity-prevention measures of preventing conflict, fostering the legitimacy of state institutions, promoting democratic governance (including legitimate elections), and cultivating tolerance and pluralism.
- **Strengthening citizen security** would include the atrocity-prevention program on reforming the police and military.
- **Promoting justice** would be addressed through the atrocity-prevention initiatives of reducing discrimination, ending impunity, and creating constitutional and legal frameworks for human rights.
- **Improving economic livelihoods** would be covered by the atrocity-prevention measures on supporting inclusive economic growth.
- **Expanding state revenues and public services** would intersect with the atrocity-prevention programs on providing public services in education and health care and establishing various mechanisms of accountability and oversight in government and civil society.

The similarity between atrocity-prevention programs and the fragile-states programs is equally extensive. As Figure 3 demonstrates, atrocity-prevention measures often line up well with the priorities of the PSGs.

Toward Political and Technical Cooperation

The conceptual overlap and programmatic similarity between the atrocity-prevention and fragile-states agendas demonstrate that the two international communities would mutually benefit from greater engagement.[16] In essence, the amelioration of fragility would contribute directly to the prevention of mass atrocities, and vice versa. Yet the two movements have yet to intersect either conceptually or programmatically.[17]

Because the proposed programs of both the atrocity-prevention community and the fragile-states community are so comprehensive, the largest challenge with regard to implementation facing each community separately is to identify and support the aspects of its respective program that are most relevant to a country's current situation. Both Straus's expansive program addressing his seven macro-level atrocity risk factors and the New Deal's five very broad Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals are at once breathtaking in their imagination and daunting in their implementation.

To create a manageable joint program, cooperation between the two communities should focus on a shared core principle: Both the atrocity-prevention and fragile-states communities highlight the exclusion of sizable portions of a population

Figure 3: Programmatic Overlap Between Counter-Fragility Measures and Atrocity Prevention

Peacebuilding and statebuilding goal	Promoting legitimate politics	Strengthening citizen security	Promoting justice	Improving economic livelihoods	Expanding revenues and public services
Atrocity prevention measure	Conflict prevention Fostering the legitimacy of state institutions Promoting democratic governance Cultivating tolerance and pluralism	Reforming the police and military	Reducing discrimination Ending impunity Creating constitutional and legal frameworks for human rights	Supporting inclusive economic growth	Providing public services in education and health care Establishing mechanisms of accountability and oversight

from a country's social contract. Mass atrocities often occur when a government targets a marginalized social group, when such a group rebels against its intolerable status, or when both phenomena take place together. Similarly, state fragility is seen to occur when a government and important social groups cannot achieve a viable political settlement. Therefore, political and technical cooperation should center on the common interest of addressing the marginalization of social groups in concrete programmatic ways.

For example, consider the international community's work on fragility and atrocity prevention in South Sudan in advance of the country's current civil war. A member of the g7+ grouping of fragile-states governments, South Sudan issued its New Deal fragility assessment in December 2012.[18] The document took stock of the progress in advancing each PSG and identified the challenges to further advancement.

That fragility assessment recommended 62 priority actions. In theory, all of those actions could contribute to the promotion of resilience and, by association, to a decreased risk of mass atrocities. Yet in practice, to narrow those New Deal programmatic priorities, an alliance between the atrocity-prevention and fragile-states communities might have focused on the implementation of the 20 specific actions with greatest relevance to the central challenge of inclusion. That roughly one-third of the New Deal agenda for South Sudan could have brought greater attention to the shared atrocity-prevention and fragile-states principle: the inclusion of marginalized populations in the social contract. In so doing, that alliance may have contributed to a prevention of new violence—including mass atrocities—in December 2013 and beyond.

The South Sudan illustration, while necessarily speculative, underscores the practical benefits of cooperation across the two agendas. For atrocity-prevention advocates, cooperation with the fragile-states agenda offers linkage with a more mainstream and better-endowed development initiative. For fragile-states specialists, adopting an atrocity prevention lens helps focus the sprawling resilience agenda on a more manageable set of program areas within each PSG.[19]

RECOMMENDATIONS

WITHIN USAID

Given the leading analytic and programmatic role that USAID has played in both policy communities over the past decade, USAID is best placed to catalyze cooperation between the atrocity-prevention and fragile-states agendas.

1. **Initiate collaboration between the agency's atrocity-prevention and fragile-states teams.** To date, collaboration between the small group of officers at the Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance working on atrocity prevention and their counterparts in the Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation and Office of Policy working on fragility has been minimal. The teams should discuss how USAID's policy and programs on fragile states could develop a special focus on atrocity prevention.

2. **Incorporate atrocity prevention into the agency's fragile-states strategy and other key technical documents.** As the work of updating USAID's Fragile States Strategy proceeds under a revitalized USAID working group on fragility, the group could integrate atrocity prevention into the revised strategy. To improve the agency's joint analysis of atrocity and fragility risks, the Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation should ensure that USAID's supplementary atrocity-assessment framework is integrated into the new fragility assessment tool.[20]

3. **Include atrocity prevention in the conflict/fragility sections of the country strategies and programs of field missions.** By joining the field support work of the atrocity-prevention and fragile-states teams, mission-level activity on atrocity prevention within the context of addressing conflict and fragility could increase considerably.

4. **Support the National Security Council in building parallel bridges between the two policy communities across the US government.** Since USAID career officers retain considerable analytic and programmatic capacity on both atrocity prevention and fragile states, they could support the National Security Council to bridge US national security efforts on atrocity prevention and fragility, particularly with regard to crisis countries of great strategic interest to the United States. The strong relationship between USAID and the State Department's Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations could anchor increased interagency cooperation.

BEYOND USAID

1. **Urge the senior councils of the IDPS to initiate a similar integration of atrocity prevention into the fragile-states agenda.** Mark Green, USAID's administrator, should deliver remarks at relevant multilateral forums—including the next ministerial meeting of the IDPS—on the importance of integrating atrocity prevention across the fragile-states work streams. Given the record of strong US leadership at the IDPS, such a message would carry great weight.

2. **Encourage the integration of atrocity prevention into the technical work of the IDPS and its three constituent groupings.** As cochair of the New Deal's Implementation Working Group, USAID is well positioned to initiate an IDPS technical-level discussion on integrating atrocity prevention. Similarly, USAID's experts on atrocity prevention and fragile states should together participate in technical meetings of the g7+, the International Network on Conflict and Fragility, and the Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding in order to catalyze related discussions and activities.

3. **Urge UN leadership to carry out a parallel initiative.** USAID's administrator should work with the US ambassador to the United Nations to engage the UN secretary-general, the administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the UN special advisor for the prevention of genocide on replicating USAID's joint emphasis on atrocity prevention and fragile states within the UN Secretariat, the UNDP, and the entire UN Development Group, especially with regard to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals—which in the form of the historic Goal 16 have embraced peace and human rights.[21]

Notes

[1] UN General Assembly, "2005 World Summit Outcome," New York, October 24, 2005, para. 138–40.

[2] In this paper, I use the terms *fragile-states community* and *fragile-states movement* to refer not only to the 20 self-identified fragile-states governments that compose the g7+ grouping but also to the development agencies and civil society organizations that are involved in this international policy area.

[3] For background on the fragile-states concept and movement, see Derick W. Brinkerhoff, "State Fragility, International Development Policy, and Global Responses," International Development Working Paper no. 2016-03, RTI International, Research Triangle Park, NC, October 2016.

[4] For example, USAID was an active member of the APB; included atrocity prevention in its renovated Strategy on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance; created a manual on atrocity prevention for field officers; conducted oral histories of officers who had served in countries when atrocities had been committed; partnered with other development agencies to train development professionals on atrocity prevention; and initiated targeted atrocity-prevention programs in countries deemed by the APB to be at high risk.

[5] The paper focuses on the "prevention" of mass atrocities, rather than on the "response" to mass atrocities or the "recovery" from mass atrocities.

[6] Scott Straus, *Fundamentals of Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention* (Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2016), 40. The Obama administration used a slightly different definition of *mass atrocities*: "large scale and deliberate attacks on civilians." White House, "Executive Order—Comprehensive Approach to Atrocity Prevention and Response," May 18, 2016, sec. 2.

[7] Straus, *Fundamentals of Genocide*, chap. 2.

[8] Although this paper—given its specific comparison—focuses on long-term prevention, Straus also identifies short-term risks factors. Development assistance may not be best placed to address immediate "triggers" of violence, such as the formation of armed militias or an explosion of hate speech. Yet both short- and long-term risk factors must be included in a comprehensive approach to the prevention of mass atrocities. For an analysis of short-term risk factors, see ibid., chap. 3 and 4.

[9] "Fragile States Strategy," USAID, Washington, DC, January 2005, 1.

[10] Ibid., 3.

[11] Ibid., 4. The International Conflict and Fragility Network of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development issues an annual States of Fragility report. In the 2016 volume, the OECD adds a fifth dimension of fragility to these original four: environmental. See OECD, *States of Fragility 2016: Understanding Violence* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2016), chap. 1.

[12] International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, "A New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States," November 20, 2011, 2.

[13] The Early Warning Project is sponsored by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (https://www.earlywarningproject.org/risk_assessments). The Fragile States Index is sponsored by the Fund for Peace (http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/data/). In the case of fragile states, I used the Fragile States Index rather than USAID's Alert List because the latter is not a public document. The methodologies of the Fragile States Index and Alert List are similar.

[14] Straus, *Fundamentals of Genocide*, 133.

[15] IDPS, "A New Deal," 2.

[16] For a discussion of the overlap between atrocity prevention and the fields of conflict resolution, human rights, and humanitarian law, see Straus, *Fundamentals of Genocide*, 115–18.

[17] The only exception is a passing reference to fragility in USAID's field guide on atrocity prevention. In a section on options for prevention programs, the guide stresses the strategic importance of "build[ing] the effectiveness and legitimacy of weak state institutions." The guide notes, "Fragile states are more likely to experience political crises and conflicts that are virtually always precursors of mass atrocities." Therefore, the guide asserts that an atrocity-prevention program must address simultaneously the twin sources of fragility: ineffectiveness and illegitimacy. See "Field Guide: Helping Prevent Mass Atrocities," USAID, Washington, DC, April 2015, 20–21. The three other USAID strategic priorities for atrocity prevention overlap with Straus's list of programmatic priorities: conflict prevention, promotion of human rights and democratic governance, and strengthening of civil society.

[18] "Fragility Assessment," Aid Coordination Directorate, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, Government of the Republic of South Sudan, Juba, December 2012.

[19] For a comprehensive assessment of the New Deal, see Sarah Hearn, "Independent Review of the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States," New York University Center on International Cooperation, April 2016.

[20] "Conflict Assessment Framework, Version 2.0," USAID, Washington, DC, June 2012.

[21] For a discussion of the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals in fragile states, see OECD/DAC, *States of Fragility 2015: Meeting Post-2015 Ambitions* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2015); and UNDP, *SDG-Ready: UNDP Offer on SDG Implementation in Fragile Situations* (New York: UNDP, 2016).

The Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum works to prevent genocide and related crimes against humanity. The Simon-Skjodt Center is dedicated to stimulating timely global action to prevent genocide and to catalyze an international response when it occurs. Our goal is to make the prevention of genocide a core foreign policy priority for leaders around the world through a multi-pronged program of research, education, and public outreach. We work to equip decision makers, starting with officials in the United States but also extending to other governments, with the knowledge, tools, and institutional support required to prevent—or, if necessary, halt—genocide and related crimes against humanity.

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The assertions, opinions, and conclusions in this policy brief are those of the author. They do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.