IMPROVING THE USE OF LESSONS LEARNED AND OTHER EVIDENCE FOR ATROCITY PREVENTION IN THE US DEPARTMENT OF STATE

SPECIAL REPORT SEPTEMBER 2023

UNITED STATES
HOLOCAUST
MEMORIAL
MUSEUM

SIMON-SKJODT CENTER
FOR THE PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE

THE UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
teaches that the Holocaust was preventable and that by
heeding warning signs and taking early action, individuals
and governments can save lives. With this knowledge,
the **Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide**
works to do for the victims of genocide today what the
world failed to do for the Jews of Europe in the 1930s
and 1940s. The mandate of the Simon-Skjodt Center is
to alert the United States' national conscience, influence
policy makers, and stimulate worldwide action to prevent
and work to halt acts of genocide or related crimes against
humanity, and advance justice and accountability. Learn
more at **ushmm.org/genocide-prevention.**

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FOREWORD

The 1979 Report of the President's Commission on the Holocaust, which laid out the vision for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and its Committee on Conscience that oversees genocide prevention efforts, stated, "Only a conscious, concerted attempt to learn from past errors can prevent recurrence to any racial, religious, ethnic, or national group." As the Museum's Founding Chairman Elie Wiesel said when addressing the importance of preventing genocide today, "A memorial unresponsive to the future would violate the memory of the past."

The Museum's Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide was established to fulfill that vision by transmitting the lessons and legacy of the Holocaust and "to alert the national conscience, influence policy makers, and stimulate worldwide action to confront and prevent genocide."

The Simon-Skjodt Center's "Lessons Learned in Preventing and Responding to Mass Atrocities" project is one way the Museum seeks to carry out this charge. The project aims to identify lessons from history that can potentially contribute to saving lives by preventing future genocides and related crimes against humanity.

The main goal of the project is to understand better how policy makers, across all levels of government, can take effective action to prevent mass atrocity crimes and protect civilian populations in situations where they face serious threats of group-targeted, systematic violence.

One of the major goals of the project has been to summarize what has been learned from research and practice about when and how atrocity tools can be used most effectively. We conducted a systematic review of 30 years of research on 12 atrocity prevention tools. We built the Tools for Atrocity Prevention web resource to allow users to explore the results together with other information—including brief case illustrations, findings from practitioner interviews, and relevant US laws—that could help policy makers assess the potential utility of specific tools.

We have no illusions, however, that even a robust and accessible body of lessons and research evidence about how to prevent atrocities would automatically lead to better policy in practice. Translating documented lessons into learning—meaning that the lessons lead to changes in future behavior—is challenging for all organizations.

Therefore, as part of our "lessons learned" project, this paper seeks to understand how lessons and other evidence can be *used* more effectively to help prevent mass atrocities. Julia Fromholz, a former State Department official, began the project during her time as a Leonard and Sophie Davis Genocide Prevention Fellow. Along with Simon-Skjodt Center staff, she interviewed current and former State Department officials to understand the obstacles they faced in the use of lessons learned. Their findings affirm that moving from lessons identified to lessons applied is indeed challenging for a host of reasons. Yet, they also describe a strong foundation for progress in law, policy, existing capabilities, and ongoing efforts of officials focused on atrocity

prevention. Seizing on these opportunities represents one path toward more effective atrocity prevention decision making.

Preventing genocide is, of course, difficult. In deciding how to respond, policy makers face an array of constraints and competing concerns. We know from the Holocaust what can happen when early warning signs go unheeded and responses fall short. We aim for this paper to support policy makers and others interested in prevention. If it helps them think through how lessons learned and other evidence can be used to make better decisions, it will be a small contribution toward the ultimate goal of saving lives.

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September 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

There are no simple solutions to the prevention of mass atrocities. Decisions about what actions to take to address atrocity risks are invariably difficult judgment calls. Given the stakes, policy makers should make every effort to increase their chances—even if just marginally—of making wise decisions. One way to improve policy choices is to use all available information and insights that are relevant to the decision, including lessons or evidence drawn from analysis of experience or data.

Virtually every report on US government efforts to prevent mass atrocities has called for greater investment in lessons learned efforts. At the same time, recent legislation and policy initiatives demonstrate that the US government is increasingly committed to using evidence in policy making across the board, including in atrocity prevention. Yet, no study has analyzed the obstacles to using lessons learned and other evidence for atrocity prevention and how they might be addressed. This report seeks to help fill the gap.

This report focuses specifically on the use of lessons learned and other evidence within the US Department of State as a whole, given its lead role in developing and carrying out US foreign policy, including actions to help prevent and respond to mass atrocities. The State Department is a large and diverse institution, making it difficult to characterize the degree to which it exhibits the attributes associated with effective use of lessons learned and other evidence. Nevertheless, we identified a number of common themes across interviews with 25 former and current officials, which paint a picture of the difficulty of encouraging use of lessons learned and other evidence for atrocity prevention in the State Department and help identify potential areas for improvement. This report intends to draw attention to areas of atrocity prevention policy making that could be strengthened; it should not be read as an assessment of any particular entity within the Department.

Defining effective use of lessons learned and other evidence

We frame this report around "lessons learned and other evidence," which generally refers to information or knowledge drawn from systematic analysis of data or review of experience that can help officials make and carry out effective policy decisions.

Use of lessons learned and other evidence does not imply that policy prescriptions could or should be derived solely from research evidence or analysis of experience. As applied to atrocity prevention, effective use of lessons learned and other evidence should promote earlier recognition of and action aimed at mitigating risks; consideration of a wide range of potential responses; systematic identification of comparable cases; efforts to match responses to unique contexts; and consideration of policy design choices drawing on experience.

Obstacles to the State Department's use of lessons learned and other evidence for atrocity prevention

Current and former officials discussed several challenges to the use of lessons learned and other evidence in atrocity prevention policy-making processes, which we summarize into the following themes:

- The **absence of a strong learning culture** provides the common thread and partial explanation for each other obstacle identified. Several interviewees commented on ways in which the prevailing culture in the Department does not match the reflective, mistake-accepting culture of a model learning organization, including perceptions that failure is unacceptable; that foreign service rotations impede

knowledge sharing; that information sharing is limited; and that planning for potential future crises is lacking.

- **Skepticism that evidence could influence atrocity prevention policy decisions**. While most of the points related to learning culture apply broadly, our interviews suggested that additional obstacles impede the effective use of lessons learned and other evidence for atrocity prevention specifically. This skepticism appears to be related to the ambiguity or contested status of evidence on atrocity prevention and to perceptions that atrocity prevention decisions are heavily shaped by politics and arguments about what is morally right, leaving little space for use of evidence.

- Several former officials cited **capacity constraints** as an obstacle and emphasized that most personnel perceive that locating or drawing on lessons learned or other evidence requires more time from working-level officials than is often feasible.

- While some bureau-level initiatives exist, interviewees described the Department as having **inefficient and disorganized learning management systems**. Currently, the Department does not seem to have a systematic way to identify, collect, or disseminate lessons learned and other evidence on atrocity prevention or other topics.

- **Inconsistent senior leadership support and questions about "ownership"** mean officials throughout the Department may not perceive that use of lessons learned or other evidence is a priority, and previous efforts have foundered when there was no clearly designated "owner" to lead such efforts.

Recommendations

We expect that improving decision making in response to atrocity risks will require State Department leaders and frontline staff to identify specific ways to change processes and culture in order to advance the use of lessons learned and other evidence for atrocity prevention.

We organize specific recommendations around five priority goals. While we focus on recommendations that would have the greatest benefit for atrocity prevention specifically, in many instances these actions are about strengthening the foundations for lessons learned and other evidence more generally. Where our recommendations pertain to activities that are already ongoing at some level, we aim to reinforce their importance, raise their profile, and encourage sustained or increased investment.

1. **Promote a stronger culture of learning by demonstrating that use of lessons learned and other evidence is valued**: Senior leaders, including the Secretary of State, should lead this change by publicly encouraging evidence use across the Department; by fostering engagement with different types of knowledge; by welcoming memos that present multiple, competing arguments (i.e., "split memos"); and by using performance appraisals and awards to recognize and reward effective use.

2. **Strengthen internal knowledge generation and sharing**: Multiple entities in the State Department help make lessons learned and other evidence more accessible and useful for decision makers. Senior leaders should support these activities with adequate resources, help make these efforts more widely known and accessible across bureaus, and better coordinate learning activities.

3. **Improve systems that support sharing and use of lessons learned and other evidence**: Consolidating the current patchwork of knowledge-sharing platforms, ensuring that a standard set of questions related to lessons learned is used for all country-specific atrocity prevention discussions,

and mandating that lessons are captured by key officials before they leave posts should lead to more effective evidence use.

4. **Enhance the use of lessons learned and other evidence in training:** Rollout of existing atrocity prevention training should be accelerated, expanded, and complemented by a special seminar for senior diplomats, and other training courses should integrate guidance on evidence use.

5. **Increase accountability for using lessons learned and other evidence in atrocity prevention decision making:** The Secretary of State should direct the Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights and the Under Secretary for Political Affairs to jointly ensure that atrocity prevention decisions are informed by lessons learned and other evidence. Learning efforts should also be included in the annual report to Congress, in accordance with the Elie Wiesel Act.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Simon-Skjodt Center's "Lessons Learned in Preventing and Responding to Mass Atrocities" project aims to understand better how policy makers across all levels of government can take effective action to prevent mass atrocity crimes and protect civilian populations in situations in which they face serious threats of group-targeted, systematic violence.

This component of the project focuses on how the US Department of State can improve its use of lessons learned and other evidence in policy decision-making processes related to atrocity prevention.

Virtually every report on US government efforts to prevent mass atrocities has called for greater investment in lessons learned efforts. In 2008, the Genocide Prevention Task Force, convened by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the American Academy of Diplomacy, and the US Institute of Peace, recommended that the National Security Council oversee "the commissioning of 'after action' reports to generate lessons learned," which were meant to inform action in future crises across multiple administrations.[1] Eight years later, the Experts Committee on Preventing Mass Violence, convened by the Friends Committee on National Legislation, found that "efforts to coordinate planning and lessons learned processes have lagged both within and across agencies."[2] Four prominent reports on the US government's atrocity prevention policy—the Experts Committee 2016 report, a 2017 report from the Global Public Policy Institute,[3] former State and NSC official Stephen Pomper's 2018 report for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum,[4] and former State official[5] Beth Van Schaack's 2021 report for the American Bar Association[6]—all recommended establishing processes for reviewing mass atrocity prevention efforts and drawing lessons, including some kind of process for independent review of past situations to avoid bias and bureaucratic conflict between departments and agencies.

At the same time, recent legislation and policy initiatives demonstrate increasing US government commitment to using evidence in policy making across the board, including in atrocity prevention. The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (the Evidence Act) requires departments and agencies to develop evidence to support policy making, including by articulating "learning agendas" and annual evaluation plans.[7] Following on the Evidence Act, in April 2022, the White House announced a "Year of Evidence for Action," which included commitments to "strengthen and develop new strategies and structures to promote consistent evidence-based decision-making inside the Federal Government" and to "increase connection and collaboration among researchers, knowledge producers and decision makers inside and outside of the Federal Government."[8] Most recently, the July 2022 *United States Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities*, which followed the passage of the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2018, commits the interagency Atrocity Prevention Task Force to "incorporate lessons learned and best practices and … continuously adapt its approach and recommendations when new information and lessons become known."[9]

Despite the apparent consensus that the US government should document lessons more systematically and use evidence to inform mass atrocity prevention policy decisions, and the associated legislative and policy mandates, no study has analyzed existing obstacles to the use of lessons learned and other evidence for atrocity prevention and how they might be addressed. This report seeks to help fill the gap. Specifically, we focus on the *use or application* of lessons learned or other evidence, not the identification of lessons or production of evidence.

This report does not contend that deficits in the use of lessons learned and other evidence are the most important reason for suboptimal atrocity prevention policy decisions. Competing interests, potential tradeoffs, and uncertainty about what actions would be effective are all arguably more consequential. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to expect that if US government officials were to use lessons learned and other evidence more effectively, it would increase the likelihood of effective actions being taken. Thus, we

focus on identifying potential areas of improvement in the use of lessons learned and other evidence that could yield significant benefits for atrocity prevention policy making.

This report focuses specifically on the State Department, due to its lead role "in formulating and executing the foreign policy and relations of the United States of America,"[10] including taking action to help prevent and respond to mass atrocities. This is not to discount the important roles of other departments and agencies—including, but not limited to, the Departments of Defense, Justice, Treasury, and the US Agency for International Development—in formulating and executing US policy with respect to mass atrocities. Nor does it discount the National Security Council (NSC)-led interagency process as a critical venue for using lessons learned and other evidence. Focusing on a single department allowed us to explore specific aspects of institutional culture and bureaucratic process, which may differ across departments and agencies.[11] In addition, the formal NSC-led interagency process normally focuses on a relatively small set of countries or situations—very rarely taking up a case without the ascent of the State Department or chief of mission—whereas the State Department plays a lead role in US foreign policy on all countries. Furthermore, even when the NSC coordinates interagency policy on a country, deliberations internal to the State Department have a large influence over the scope and nature of the interagency discussion, including which policy options are considered. Together, these factors make the use of lessons learned and other evidence within the State Department particularly important to atrocity prevention.

The following questions guided our research:

- How has the State Department used lessons learned and other evidence in policy-making processes related to mass atrocities?

- What obstacles has the State Department faced in the use of lessons learned and other evidence in these policy-making processes?

- How could the State Department improve its use of lessons learned and other evidence in atrocity prevention policy-making processes?

We sought to examine how the State Department, *as a whole*, uses lessons learned and other evidence for atrocity prevention. As will be discussed below, many bureaus and offices play roles in this process. *This report is not an assessment of the performance of any particular entity within the Department*.

This report is based on a review of relevant literature and semi-structured interviews with 25 former and current officials who have substantial experience working in the US government on atrocity prevention, policy for countries at risk of mass atrocities, learning and knowledge management, or related fields. These interviews were conducted between January 2022 and March 2023.[12] The report summarizes the results of this effort in five sections: (1) What is effective use of lessons learned and other evidence? (2) What promotes use of lessons learned and other evidence? (3) Foundations for progress: law, policy, and existing capabilities; (4) Perspectives of current and former officials on use of lessons learned and other evidence for atrocity prevention; and (5) Recommendations.

II. WHAT IS EFFECTIVE USE OF LESSONS LEARNED AND OTHER EVIDENCE?

Various terms—including "policy-relevant knowledge," "lessons learned," "evidence-based policy," "evidence-informed policy," and "learning organizations"—are used in scholarly literature and policy reports to describe closely related concepts. We frame this report around "use of lessons learned and other evidence." In this section, we define these terms and discuss what effective use of lessons learned and other evidence on atrocity prevention would entail in practice.

Defining use of lessons learned and other evidence

By lessons learned, we refer to "knowledge acquired from the review of past experience (good or bad) with the intention of reusing said knowledge to improve future performance (either by re-creating positive or avoiding negative past experience)."[13] For example, lessons learned can take the form of after-action reviews or case study reports that distill insights drawn from experience.

By evidence, we refer mainly to "high-quality information constructed by systematically collecting data, analyzing data with rigorous research methods, then developing conclusions that are valid and reliable."[14] For example, evidence can take the form of historical or social scientific studies and intelligence analyses. Some definitions of evidence also include "the tacit knowledge and experience acquired over time by policy-makers and practitioners."[15] Most policy decisions appear to draw heavily on tacit knowledge,[16] so we focus on the use of evidence generated by systematic analysis.

The lines between "lessons learned" and "evidence" can be blurry. Moreover, since our interest is in how lessons or other evidence, from whatever source, are used or applied in subsequent decision making, we define our scope as "use of lessons learned and other evidence." This formulation encompasses information or knowledge drawn from systematic analysis of data or review of experience that can help officials make and carry out effective policy decisions.

Our conception of *effective use* of lessons learned and other evidence is very similar to the idea of "evidence-informed decision making," defined simply as the use of the best available information and evidence in making choices.[17] Compared to the idea of "evidence-based policy," evidence-informed decision making is more sensitive to the many factors that can and should affect decisions in specific situations. These factors might include "context, public opinion, equity, feasibility of implementation, affordability, sustainability, and acceptability to stakeholders," among others.[18]

When considering a topic as complex as preventing mass atrocities, it bears emphasizing that use of lessons learned and other evidence does not imply that precise policy prescriptions could or should be derived solely from research or analysis of experience. Writing about evidence-informed policy, Rosemary Rushmer and colleagues explain that the evidence shared with decision makers:

> may not be a definite product or a clear recipe for action, but rather a *set of ideas* about trends and patterns … or about what has worked to address these issues in other places. When these ideas are shared, they provide possibilities and options for consideration in the new setting. They raise awareness and get people thinking in new ways. Here the priority is not to get practice and policy standardised around a proven evidence base but rather to prompt consideration and debate.[19]

BOX 1 – Definitions of key concepts and terms

According to Executive Order 13729 (2016), **mass atrocities** or **atrocities**, neither of which is defined under international law, refer to large-scale and deliberate attacks on civilians and include acts falling within the definition of genocide as defined under international law and by US domestic statute. The Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act defines atrocities as synonymous with war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.[20]

Atrocity prevention, as defined by Scott Straus (2016), is "the effort to prevent, contain, and/or mitigate violence against non-combatants either in or out of conflict."[21] Atrocity prevention can draw on a wide range of strategies and tools available to the US government, including diplomacy, development assistance, and military action. When we discuss atrocity prevention policy making, we refer to deliberations, decisions, and implementation actions in response to perceived risks of atrocities in a particular context.

Lessons learned has become a ubiquitous term in public and private sector organizations over the past few decades. According to McIntyre et al., "lessons learned consist of knowledge acquired from the review of past experience (good or bad) with the intention of reusing said knowledge to improve future performance (either by re-creating positive or avoiding negative past experience)."[22] The term assumes that lessons are both identified and acted upon, although the latter may be rarer than the former.

Evidence refers to "high-quality information constructed by systematically collecting data, analyzing data with rigorous research methods, then developing conclusions that are valid and reliable."[23]

Lessons learned and other evidence combines these two definitions to encompass information or knowledge drawn from systematic analysis of data or review of experience that can help officials make and carry out effective policy decisions.

A **learning organization** "is an organization skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights."[24]

What does effective use of lessons learned and other evidence for atrocity prevention look like?

Effective use of lessons learned and other evidence will take different forms depending on the specific context and questions being considered. Moreover, the effectiveness with which policy processes use lessons learned and other evidence varies in degrees; some forms may be used more commonly, but not always to their fullest benefit.

Interviewees cited the following examples as representing relatively effective use of lessons learned:

- Multiple people cited the US government's assessment and response to mass atrocity risks in Burundi in 2015. The assessment took place in part because influential officials sought to apply general lessons that had been gleaned from many cases of mass atrocities over decades—namely, the lesson that early engagement provides the best opportunities for prevention and that preventive actions should be tailored to address particular drivers.[25] Had these lessons not been used, officials might well have relied on the common "wait-and-see" approach, missing opportunities for prevention.[26]

- One former State Department official cited a case in which decision makers effectively used lessons learned from experience regarding accountability for atrocities in the Democratic Republic of the

Congo. By this account, officials recognized that recent experience in the same country constituted strong evidence that setting aside accountability in peace negotiations would increase the chance that atrocities would recur. Had these lessons been ignored, diplomats might have neglected accountability again and missed a chance to reduce the risk of future atrocities.

- Some current officials pointed to recent work to assess and address atrocity risks in multiple "early warning" countries, working with and through the interagency Atrocity Prevention Task Force. The countries were chosen, following a similar model from Burundi in 2015, because they exhibited significant risks but were not yet full-fledged crises. The work on these countries reportedly was designed to address shortcomings of past engagements—for example, by addressing gender issues more fully and coordinating closely with regional policy processes. In this way, the effort drew on the general lesson about the value of early action and more specific lessons about how to pursue this type of work effectively.

By contrast, one foreign service officer cited the response to a 2022 massacre in Chad as a case of ineffective use of lessons learned because of a lack of institutional memory about past responses to atrocity crises. According to the interviewee, some officials working on Chad appeared to have been unaware of relevant precedents, including the US response to the 2009 stadium massacre in Guinea, which included US support for a UN commission of inquiry, travel restrictions, and public condemnation by senior officials. Notwithstanding differences between the two cases, basic knowledge about responses to past atrocity crises is necessary to assess how lessons from experience should be applied to current situations. The interviewee suggested that the lack of awareness about past precedents contributed to the lack of a more robust response to the violence in Chad in 2022.

Policy makers can derive significant benefits from lessons learned and other evidence about atrocity prevention, but their use is not automatic.

Another example of ineffective use of lessons learned came from an interview with a current regional bureau official working on policy toward a country at relatively high risk of mass atrocities. The interviewee wondered aloud whether general mass atrocity risk factors or warning signs had been identified through the study of historical cases. The ability to identify risk factors and warning signs is a core tenet of atrocity prevention practice and multiple resources exist in and outside of the Department on this topic. That an official working on a relatively high-risk country was unaware of this suggests that, despite the availability of resources on this topic, not all key officials are prepared to use lessons learned.

These examples illustrate that policy makers can derive significant benefits from lessons learned and other evidence about mass atrocities and their prevention, but that their use is not automatic. Table 1 describes some recurring questions on which US government officials could benefit from consistent use of lessons learned and other evidence. Neither the questions nor the sources of potentially relevant information are meant to be comprehensive, but rather to help illustrate the practical value of incorporating lessons learned and other evidence into atrocity prevention decision making. In Box 2, we provide another way of thinking about the utility of using lessons learned and other evidence.

TABLE 1 – Use of lessons learned and other evidence in atrocity prevention: recurring questions, sources, and illustrative implications

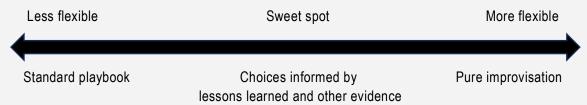| QUESTIONS AND SPECIFIC SUB-QUESTIONS	ILLUSTRATIVE SOURCES OF LESSONS LEARNED AND OTHER EVIDENCE	ILLUSTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS	
		EFFECTIVE USE	INEFFECTIVE USE
What is known about the potential future trajectories of a situation based on understanding of comparable cases? a. What are mass atrocity warning signs? b. How do mass atrocities affect US interests?	- State's Atrocity Risk Assessment Framework and other extant US government resources on atrocity prevention - Intelligence analysis - Academic studies	- Earlier, more widespread recognition of atrocity risks - More early preventive action	- Neglect of atrocity warning signs - Default to a "wait-and-see" posture
What is known about the strategies and tools that could be used to help prevent or respond to atrocities? a. What are the most salient strategies and tools to help prevent mass atrocities? b. Which strategies and tools are most effective in different types of circumstances? c. What did the US government do in similar cases and to what effect?	- External resources, such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Tools for Atrocity Prevention website[27] - Intelligence analysis - Internal "after-action" and lessons learned reports - Diplomatic cables about specific atrocity crises and responses	- Consideration of a broad range of strategies and tools - Attempt to match tools to context - Systematic identification of comparable cases	- Consideration of only a small number of tools/actions - Influential arguments based on ostensibly analogous cases, despite important differences - Bureaucratic factors dominate choices about strategies and tools
What is known about how specific strategies and tools can be designed and implemented to be most effective? a. What variations exist in the way strategies and tools can be used?	- External resources, such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Tools for Atrocity Prevention website - Internal "after-action" and lessons learned reports - Diplomatic cables about specific atrocity crises and responses - Experienced practitioners	- Discussion about how to design and implement options with reference to past experiences	- Repetition of previous actions without analysis of effectiveness - Bureaucratic factors dominate choices about design and implementation - Policy choices based on superficial or incomplete understanding

BOX 2 – Using lessons learned and other evidence: A "sweet spot" between two common pitfalls

One way to help clarify what we mean by effective use of lessons learned and other evidence is to describe two opposing pitfalls that flow from a failure to use lessons learned and other evidence and that have been common in policy making in response to threats of mass atrocities.

The first pitfall can be described as complete reliance on a "standard playbook," in which the policy response to a new situation is dictated entirely by a predetermined script, without tailoring the action to the specific dynamics of the situation or the characteristics of the key actors involved. Whereas the standard playbook approach can be relatively easy to operationalize, given existing capabilities, organizational standard operating procedures, and psychological comfort that comes with following past practice, it suffers from rigidity and lack of responsiveness to dynamics of particular cases.[28]

The second pitfall, the polar opposite of the "standard playbook" approach, can be described as pure improvisation, approaching each situation as if it were entirely sui generis. While improvisation can potentially enable policy responses to be carefully matched to specific characteristics, it is typically chaotic and slow, and neglects useful insights derived from comparable cases. These insights can relate to the effectiveness of alternative strategies or tools, the likely responses of key actors to policy action, and the operationalization of strategies into specific actions by various parts of the foreign policy bureaucracy.

Spectrum of flexibility in policy responses to potential or ongoing mass atrocities

Less flexible	Sweet spot	More flexible

Standard playbook	Choices informed by lessons learned and other evidence	Pure improvisation

As this spectrum suggests, there should be a "sweet spot" between the standard playbook and pure improvisation in which policy makers balance the need to tailor responses to unique contexts with the need to think ahead and learn from the past. Finding the sweet spot requires drawing on multiple types of knowledge to inform policy choices. The idea is to balance the virtues of flexibility and case-specific tailoring with benefits that come from general strategies, frameworks, and knowledge gained by analyzing many cases.

III. WHAT PROMOTES EFFECTIVE USE OF LESSONS LEARNED AND OTHER EVIDENCE?

Experience from multiple domains indicates that individuals and organizations frequently fail to take full advantage of lessons learned and other evidence that could potentially improve their decision making. Decision makers often do not take account of pertinent evidence, even when evidence is strong and reasonably unambiguous, such as for certain medical and social service interventions.[29] The basic challenges are compounded in some contexts by political and organizational factors. Obstacles to the effective use of lessons learned and other evidence are commonplace and can present themselves at varying levels, degrees, and points within a policy-making process.

Below we summarize key attributes associated with effective use of lessons learned and other evidence across institutional contexts, drawing heavily on a 2017 RAND Corporation report that sought to provide best practice recommendations for strengthening the State Department's lessons learned processes.[30] The extent to which decision makers use lessons learned and other evidence will vary across specific individuals, offices, and cases for a variety of reasons beyond these five attributes.[31] These attributes describe the characteristics of institutions that support more effective use of lessons learned and other evidence, other things equal.

Although the five key attributes are presented discretely, they are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. These characteristics serve as reference points for the analysis of interviews with current and former officials presented in Section V. Where these attributes are absent or weakly present, it does not mean that lessons learned and other evidence are not used at all, but that individuals and offices that seek to promote their use will face longer odds.

Five key attributes that promote effective use of lessons learned and other evidence[32]

1. **CULTURE OF LEARNING:** Across the institution, there is widespread support for the use of lessons learned and other evidence; sustained learning systems; incentives for knowledge use; a mistake-accepting environment; collaborative relationships; and trust between decision makers and knowledge brokers.[33]

2. **SENIOR LEADERSHIP SUPPORT AND DEFINED ROLES:** Senior leaders support the institution's use of lessons learned and other evidence and clearly define who manages related learning activities to keep people and processes accountable.

3. **ADEQUATE RESOURCES AND CAPACITY:** The institution's use of lessons learned and other evidence is supported by adequate funding, staffing, time, and sustained investment. It also includes training on tasks such as knowledge management, lesson identification, and research interpretation and application.

4. **ACCESSIBLE KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS:** A clearly defined knowledge management system is widely used by the institution, including systems to transfer and share lessons learned and other evidence between stakeholders.

5. **CLEAR STRATEGY:** The institution's use of lessons learned and other evidence is based on well-defined objectives and processes.

IV. FOUNDATIONS FOR PROGRESS: LAW, POLICY, AND EXISTING CAPABILITIES

A strong foundation exists for improved use of lessons learned and other evidence at the State Department. The legal and policy mandates now in place make improving lessons learned and other evidence use a requirement, not simply a lofty aspiration. Moreover, several existing structures and capabilities have the potential to facilitate more effective use of lessons learned and other evidence in atrocity prevention policy making.

Legislative and policy mandates

The Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act, the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act, and the Global Fragility Act enshrined in law the US government's commitment to work on preventing mass atrocities around the world and to use evidence in making policy (see Box 3 for details on each act).[34]

At the State Department, Secretary Blinken has linked the generation and use of evidence to the "modernization" agenda. In an October 2021 speech at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), he acknowledged that the Department has not "always done a good job capturing lessons" and described the need to modernize the Department, including its "tech," "comms," and "analytical capabilities."[35]

The legal and policy mandates now in place make improving lessons learned and other evidence use a requirement, not simply a lofty aspiration.

In July 2022, Deputy Secretary Wendy Sherman announced the release of the *US Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities*.[36] The strategy emphasizes the importance of evaluation, learning, and adaptation. Several of the strategy's "priority actions" relate to this theme, including commitments to:

- "Utilize reflective learning and conduct evaluations of atrocity prevention initiatives to build the atrocity prevention body of knowledge, identify effective tactics, and adapt interventions, as needed."

- "Promote data collection and information sharing on … lessons learned and best practices, including on atrocity prevention tools."

- "Incorporate lessons learned and best practices and … continuously adapt its approach and recommendations when new information and lessons become known."

Existing structures and capabilities

Numerous entities within the Department are either actively working to promote the use of lessons learned and other evidence for atrocity prevention or have relevant capabilities that could be deployed for this purpose.

The Department's Atrocity Prevention Working Group, an informal coordination mechanism, has advanced efforts to identify and share atrocity prevention lessons learned and other evidence. According to participating officials, the group conducts after-action reviews for atrocity prevention assessments and records lessons from former atrocity prevention practitioners. The Working Group also regularly engages with civil society groups to further expand its body of evidence-based resources and reports, and it conducts training, as mandated by the Elie Wiesel Act, on atrocity prevention resources within and outside the Department.[37]

Bureaus and offices with evaluation and learning functions

Several bureaus engage systematically in evaluation and learning activities. For example:

- CSO includes offices specializing in research and lessons learned production and sharing. The Office of Advanced Analytics (CSO/AA) produces and disseminates analyses and develops data resources to inform decision making.[38] The Office of Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation (CSO/DME) "Collects, synthesizes, and disseminates lessons learned from CSO and other evaluations to inform ongoing and future work," among other functions geared at producing research on conflict issues and disseminating programmatic best practices.[39] Additionally, CSO's Office of Communications, Policy, and Partnerships (CSO/CPP) "develops and maintains strategic relationships with academic institutions, NGOs, think tanks, and the private sector to increase access to data and research," among other functions.[40]

- The Office of Knowledge Management within the Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL/KM) "is responsible for all knowledge management efforts including program design, training, and technical advisory" within the bureau.[41] The office also participates in the interagency Atrocity Prevention Task Force and officials reported that it conducts lessons learned efforts.

- The Office of Policy, Planning and Resources for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs (R/PPR) aims to "provide realistic measurement of public diplomacy's and public affairs' effectiveness."[42] According to an interviewee, its functions involve collecting lessons of public diplomacy and seeking to ensure that such knowledge is used across the Department.

Bureau of Intelligence and Research

As a member of the Intelligence Community, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) leads the State Department's research and analysis.[43] The bureau also houses the Humanitarian Information Unit within the Office of the Geographer and Global Issues (INR/GGI), which seeks to "identify, collect, analyze, and disseminate all-source information … in preparation for and response to humanitarian emergencies worldwide, and to promote innovative technologies and best practices for humanitarian information management."[44] Further, through its Analytic Exchange Program, INR leads the Department and the Intelligence Community in gathering and disseminating research from external experts on a wide range of topics.[45]

Because the Intelligence Community does not advocate for or assess US policy decisions, INR's role may be limited when it comes to drawing analytical conclusions from past US government atrocity prevention efforts.

Center for the Study of the Conduct of Diplomacy

The FSI's Center for the Study of the Conduct of Diplomacy (CSCD), established in 2014, presents an opportunity for strengthening resources to train State Department personnel on the use of lessons learned.[46] The 2015 Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review highlights CSCD as one way the Department and USAID will promote innovation, stating that it will "disseminate case studies, include them in training exercises, and integrate them into interagency and community-wide planning."[47]

At CSCD's official launch in 2016, then-Deputy Secretary Antony Blinken stated that it would "ensur[e] that we apply the lessons of the past to our conduct and actions in the future."[48] According to the Foreign Affairs Manual, CSCD's mandate is to "strengthen the Department of State's institutional culture of learning, by analyzing previous actions and programs and preparing case studies."[49]

To carry out this mandate, CSCD conducts Policy Implementation Reviews "to capture lessons learned and best practices about diplomatic tradecraft."[50] CSCD reviews only the tradecraft of diplomacy—that is, the implementation of policy—it "does not analyze the merits of policy decisions."[51]

The RAND Corporation's 2017 report, *Enhancing Next Generation Diplomacy Through Best Practices in Lessons Learned*, states that "CSCD is on a journey to drive cultural changes."[52] However, this apparent opportunity is hampered by CSCD's severely limited capacity, with only a handful of full-time employee positions and the responsibility to carry out in-depth, comprehensive reviews. Additionally, our research suggests that many people in the Department are unfamiliar with CSCD's work.

Office of the Inspector General

The State Department's Office of the Inspector General (OIG) conducts inspections of embassies and other Department units "to determine whether policy goals are being achieved and whether the interests of the United States are being represented and advanced effectively."[53] During inspections, the OIG compares posts' policy work to official planning documents such as Integrated Country Strategies, since those provide clear standards. According to some interviewees, the focus on adherence to official plans hinders the usefulness of OIG reports for collecting lessons learned since they may focus more on whether a post pursued a promised policy than on whether a specific result in the country was achieved.

The OIG's review of the withdrawal from Afghanistan suggests that the office could potentially play an expanded role in distilling lessons from State Department action.[54] In his October 2021 speech at FSI, Secretary Blinken stated that the Department would "capture all that we learned, to study it, to apply it, to preserve it in a way that it enhances our future planning and helps us prepare better for future contingencies."[55]

Online knowledge-sharing platforms

The State Department uses multiple applications that contain learning-management features, such as Diplopedia and Microsoft SharePoint. While these systems have potential to better assist learning processes, policy makers described current efforts to use them as insufficient and siloed at the bureau level.

Cable archives

Cables serve as the official means of communication between or among posts and Washington. They are often used to report on policy implementation or to disseminate information or requests. They could also be used to more routinely disseminate lessons learned reporting; however, multiple interviewees noted that the cable archive system's current search capabilities do not consistently allow officers to locate all specific cases or thematic areas of concern, assuming useful cables were written on them.

BOX 3 – Relevant legislative mandates

Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2018 recognizes atrocity prevention as a national interest of the US government.[56] It requires officials to monitor, identify gaps, facilitate policies, and allocate resources pursuant to an atrocity prevention strategy.[57] The enhancement of processes that support the effective use of lessons learned and other evidence would be supported within the mandates of this legislation.

Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 "requires [US federal] agency data to be accessible and requires agencies to plan to develop statistical evidence to support policymaking."[58] The Act also requires "agency coordination for the strategic use of data" and the creation of specific positions "to support and implement Federal evidence-building activities."[59] The Act's mandates apply to departments and agencies responsible for domestic and foreign policy, including those represented on the Atrocity Prevention Task Force. The Office of Management and Budget has played a leadership role in overseeing implementation of the Evidence Act and spearheading other evidence- and evaluation-related initiatives, anchoring this agenda firmly in the White House.[60] In accordance with the Act, in June 2022 the State Department issued its 2022–26 Learning Agenda, which emphasizes the advancements needed to improve the Department's learning processes.[61] It outlines priority questions for the Department to address and report on over the next four years with overlapping atrocity prevention concerns that indicate greater potential for progress.[62]

Global Fragility Act of 2019 seeks to stabilize and prevent global fragility and violence by mandating the implementation of a Global Fragility Strategy.[63] The Act requires the US government to identify priority countries and mandates "[a]ssessment, monitoring, and evaluation frameworks for diplomatic, development, and security assistance and activities … with clear metrics for each such country or region, as well as interagency plans for using such frameworks to adapt such activities on a regular basis."[64] The Act's requirements indicate potential for expanded development of lessons learned and other evidence applicable to policy making regarding atrocities or closely related scenarios.

V. PERSPECTIVES OF CURRENT AND FORMER OFFICIALS ON USE OF LESSONS LEARNED AND OTHER EVIDENCE FOR ATROCITY PREVENTION

This section summarizes key themes from interviews with 25 current and former US government officials that were conducted from January 2022 to March 2023. The State Department is a large and diverse institution, making it difficult to characterize the degree to which it exhibits the attributes associated with effective use of lessons learned and other evidence described above. For example, Department officials include Foreign Service and Civil Service Officers, working in embassies abroad and in Washington, organized in bureaus with regional and functional mandates. Some officials and offices have specific mandates to encourage use of lessons learned and other evidence and/or to develop strategies to prevent mass atrocities, while others have more general mandates to develop and carry out US foreign relations with particular countries or regions. We chose interviewees to reflect this diversity, but they are not necessarily a representative sample. In addition, the Department is not static, so former officials' perspectives might not fully reflect the latest evolution.

Notwithstanding these cautions, we identified a number of common themes across the interviews. To be clear, the themes from the interviews are *not* assessments of the performance of any particular bureau or office. Rather, they paint a picture of the difficulty of encouraging use of lessons learned and other evidence for atrocity prevention in the State Department and help identify potential areas for improvement.

Overall, most of our interviews suggested that the attributes that support effective use of lessons learned and other evidence discussed in Section III are weakly present in the State Department. In sum, several interviewees indicated that the State Department is not a model "learning organization" as it does not foster a culture that encourages systematic use of lessons learned or other evidence and does not have well-defined and widely used knowledge-management systems.[65] Interviewees mentioned several challenges to the use of lessons learned and other evidence in atrocity prevention policy-making processes, including perceived skepticism that evidence could influence atrocity-prevention policy decisions; capacity constraints; inefficient and disorganized learning management systems; and inconsistent support from senior leadership and questions about "ownership."

Themes from the interviews paint a picture of the difficulty of encouraging use of lessons learned and other evidence for atrocity prevention in the State Department.

Absence of a strong learning culture

The absence of a strong learning culture provides the common thread and partial explanation for each obstacle described in this section. As noted above, a learning culture encourages reflection, acceptance of mistakes (as learning opportunities), and a commitment throughout an organization to continuous improvement by adapting based on learning. Several interviewees commented on ways in which the prevailing culture in the Department does not reflect these attributes.

One former official who had tried to pursue a lessons learned activity on atrocity prevention policy stated, "I saw the usual set of State Department barriers: Everyone I wanted to talk to about it was moving on to another position, or people didn't want to talk about errors or if something bad happened, or no one would admit the bad thing could have been prevented."

Multiple interviewees mentioned a perception that failure is unacceptable at the Department, whereas learning requires people to admit mistakes and explore their causes and consequences. One current foreign service officer said that senior leaders had recently begun to encourage more controlled risk taking and had voiced acceptance for failure, though other interviewees did not speak to this possible trend.

Multiple interviewees said that key aspects of the State Department's structure—such as the cyclical rotation of Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) to new posts[66] and organization into regional and functional bureaus—contribute to the absence of a strong learning culture.

Related to the Foreign Service, our interviews indicated that transfer of lessons learned and other evidence is typically not prioritized in FSO rotations: FSOs are not given incentives to create extensive transition files or reviews of past policies for their successors or relevant bureaus and offices in Washington. Before an officer starts at a new post, they might study the language or take a training course about the country at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI). Some interviewees remarked, however, that they had been deployed to new posts without receiving a thorough brief on the history of US policy with regard to that country.

"No one goes in with requisite job experience to understand what was done in these situations."
Current foreign service officer

In addition, notwithstanding recent progress in providing training on atrocity prevention as mandated by the Elie Wiesel Act, several interviewees said that FSOs do not receive sufficient training to identify and integrate atrocity prevention lessons learned and other evidence on a consistent basis.[67] As one current foreign service officer said, when it comes to starting at a post for a country at risk of experiencing atrocities, "No one goes in with requisite job experience to understand what was done in these situations."

By the nature of their positions, functional bureau staff, who are often members of the civil service, bring more specialized knowledge of thematic issues across regional lines compared with many, primarily FSO, personnel in regional bureaus. In principle, combining thematic and country-specific knowledge should yield more effective decision making. However, bureaucratic divisions and perceptions of competing policy interests have historically hindered lessons learned and evidence use and collaborative policy making broadly.

Some current officials reported that it has recently become more routine to bring regional and functional entities together, within the Department and in interagency discussions, to develop strategies to prevent or respond to atrocities, and that this practice supports more effective use of lessons learned and other evidence. Yet, multiple foreign service officers said that regional perspectives still tend to dominate and that functional bureaus are rarely able to ensure that lessons learned and other evidence are considered by their regional counterparts.

Interviewees mentioned two other issues related to learning culture: limits on information sharing and lack of planning.

Some interviewees said the Department's culture related to information sharing did not support the use of lessons learned and evidence. One interviewee said a pervasive attitude exists across the Department that information should not be shared unless there is a "need to know."[68] Multiple interviewees suggested that the hierarchical structure of the Department limits less-senior officials from sharing lessons learned and other evidence, except when it is expressly requested or approved by more senior officials. Additionally, one foreign service officer said bureaus are often perceived as information silos, not conducive to Department-wide information sharing and coordination. We heard from others that information sharing itself is not a problem and is in fact a core function of officials working on atrocity prevention. One interviewee said the more serious challenge is identifying practically useful insights from an abundance of information.

Two foreign service officers described the Department's culture as being reactive, especially at posts, including a lack of planning for potential mass atrocity scenarios. These officers described their experiences at high-risk posts where no worst-case planning took place that might have supported critical reflection on lessons learned or other evidence. One foreign service officer noted that senior officials often perceive atrocity scenario planning as accepting the premise that their policies might fail, which they are often reluctant to do.

Relatedly, some former and current State Department officials described the culture broadly as one that rewards consensus over disagreement. Taken together, these cultural attributes contribute to an environment that often limits opportunities to make more innovative use of lessons learned and other evidence within decision-making processes.[69] Instead, some interviewees described a tendency to repeat previous policies because they are considered less risky bureaucratically.

Skepticism that evidence could influence atrocity prevention policy decisions

While most of the points related to institutional culture apply broadly, our interviews suggested that additional obstacles impede the effective use of lessons learned and other evidence for atrocity prevention specifically. Current officials working on atrocity prevention reported, "As external analysis becomes available providing in-depth analysis on the effectiveness of policy response options, State has incorporated this analysis into its development of country-specific atrocity prevention recommendations." Yet, several current and former officials we interviewed described Department officials as being skeptical about the role of evidence in decisions related to mass atrocities. There are multiple potential explanations for these perceptions.

First, evidence on atrocity prevention tends to be ambiguous and contested due to a combination of features that makes research and learning on this topic especially challenging. For example, there are numerous atrocity prevention tools, many potentially relevant factors, and a relatively small number of historical cases of mass atrocities, which vary tremendously. One interviewee suggested that applying research findings to urgent and highly complex situations is difficult due to the perception that cases are not always similar enough to draw a comparison. Furthermore, the way atrocity prevention tools work may change over time as both perpetrators and atrocity prevention actors learn and adapt. As multiple interviewees described, compared with other policy issues on which evidence is clearer and less contested, it is often more difficult to persuade non-specialists of the utility of incorporating lessons learned and other evidence into atrocity prevention decision-making processes.

Second, mass atrocity situations can give rise to some of the most politically sensitive and controversial decisions that government leaders make. Interviewees indicated that several political interests are often in tension in atrocity contexts, especially when a strategically important government threatens a civilian population. As one current foreign service officer put it, "Even if we were aware of the precedents or lessons learned that could be applied, which sadly we are not, there is significant bureaucratic and policy pressure not to do so and those who advocate strongly inside the Department for an alternate approach risk marginalization or worse."

Political considerations, especially in a period of extreme polarization in the United States, can work against efforts to promote a culture of learning.[70] One interviewee noted that admitting that a policy failed to work as intended—a prerequisite for learning—is political in and of itself. Another interviewee also articulated concerns about data misuse to achieve political goals. When decisions are highly political, it can lead to selective or biased use of information to support a decision that has already been made—sometimes called "policy-based evidence"—rather than even-handed use of the best available information to support a decision-making process.

Third, debates about how to respond to atrocities are heavily influenced by assertions about what is morally right, not just what would be effective at achieving certain outcomes. For example, one interviewee described the pressure for the Department "to be seen as doing something," due to the moral aspect of atrocity crises. Yet, as the literature suggests, when the "logic of appropriateness" overrides the "logic of consequences,"[71] decision makers will find little space for the use of evidence.

Capacity constraints

As the literature indicates, adequate capacity—especially staff time—is associated with better use of lessons learned and other evidence. Yet, time is often in short supply at the State Department, especially when responding to fast-moving crises. Several current and former officials said that locating or drawing on lessons learned and other evidence requires more time from working-level officials than is often feasible. One foreign service officer suggested that officers do not receive adequate training to draw on past lessons, analyze early warning signs, or prepare responses to atrocities based on these lessons and other evidence. They said that once a crisis is unfolding, key staff are completely consumed by urgent tasks (e.g., staffing an Emergency Action Committee), so it is too late for them to find and consider this information.

One former official noted that an effort to identify and implement lessons specific to recent State Department atrocity responses failed because there were not enough staff dedicated to the effort to make it systematic or comprehensive.[72] By contrast, the Department's recent work on selected "early warning" countries, in coordination with the Atrocity Prevention Task Force, suggests that having dedicated staff opens opportunities to make effective use of lessons learned.

The lack of funding for atrocity prevention initiatives also makes knowledge acquisition more difficult.[73] Congressional appropriations in the Global Fragility Act help support a robust fragility-related learning agenda. By contrast, the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act does not contain funding provisions,[74] making organizing additional programming and training focusing on atrocity prevention more difficult. One interviewee judged that the small congressional appropriations earmarked for atrocity prevention were insufficient to foster major learning activities.

Respondents cited functional bureaus, including several reporting to the Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights (J-family), and the standing interagency committee dedicated to atrocity prevention (now the Atrocity Prevention Task Force; previously the Atrocity Early Warning Task Force and the Atrocities Prevention Board) as sources of additional staff capacity for learning-related activities. A few interviewees noted that functional bureaus can carry out short-term postings at missions to provide additional focus on and attention to atrocity-related issues. As discussed above, however, FSOs at post may be reluctant to trust advice from officials they may view as having less expertise of the country in question. Two foreign service officers noted that embassy and regional personnel are likely to be more receptive to atrocity prevention advice from officials who have relevant field experience.

Inefficient and disorganized learning management systems

Clearly defined knowledge management systems are associated with more effective use of lessons learned and other evidence, according to multiple studies. Currently, the State Department does not seem to have a systematic way to identify, collect, and disseminate lessons learned and other evidence.

Given the absence of a widely used knowledge-sharing platform, interviewees described lessons learned and other evidence as often being limited to the people who were closely involved in or aware of relevant learning efforts, such as individual cables capturing lessons from a particular case study, or to the people who could draw on personal experience in that policy area. Using lessons learned, then, often requires that an officer either know officials involved in a specific case or be aware of a particular learning initiative. The frequent turnover in positions, especially among FSOs, appears to heighten these challenges. As one foreign service officer put it, at least in terms of atrocity prevention, the Department "has no institutional memory."

Current officials involved in the Department's Atrocity Prevention Working Group said that they have improved systems for identifying and sharing atrocity prevention lessons learned and other evidence. They cited dissemination of the Atrocity Risk Assessment Framework, sharing cables reporting on atrocity assessments, and the Department-wide clearance on its major atrocity prevention work. These officials

suggested these systems could be expanded to support frontline officials in identifying and using lessons learned and other evidence.

Inconsistent support from senior leadership and questions about "ownership"

Consistent with the literature on learning organizations, interviewees noted the importance of having high-level support and clear roles and responsibilities to enable effective generation and use of lessons learned and other evidence. One interviewee who had worked on previous lessons learned initiatives said the efforts were largely unsuccessful because no official or office was clearly made responsible for leading and managing the effort. As another interviewee said, "If it isn't owned, then it's not carried out."

Several interviewees attributed what they saw as the absence of ownership to a lack of support from senior leaders for the broad project of generating and using lessons. Effective lessons learned projects require not only that senior leaders appreciate the utility of lessons learned and other evidence, but also that they designate mid-level officials to play leading roles and that they allocate requisite resources to relevant offices for these efforts.

Interviewees emphasized that sustained support from senior leaders, especially within the regional bureaus that normally lead the policy-making process, is critical for effective use of lessons learned and other evidence. According to multiple interviewees, support from chiefs of mission is essential for learning-related efforts at diplomatic posts. For example, different ambassadors have varied in their engagement with entities like the standing interagency committee dedicated to atrocity prevention and willingness to support assessment missions staffed by experts. Another interviewee said that when functional bureaus, such as DRL, do not have confirmed assistant secretaries, it translates into less effective use of lessons and other evidence in atrocity prevention decision making.

The 2022 *US Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities* outlined the roles of different agencies, including the State Department, in carrying out the US government's atrocity prevention policies. Additionally, the Foreign Affairs Manual describes certain bureaus as having knowledge acquisition and support roles. Nevertheless, comments about ownership were frequent enough in our interviews to suggest that official articulations may not have fully addressed questions across the Department about roles and responsibilities related to use of atrocity prevention lessons learned.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations offer preliminary guidance for how the State Department can improve its use of lessons learned and other evidence in atrocity prevention policy making. Whether or not any of the specific recommendations are implemented, *we expect that improving decision making in response to atrocity risks will require State Department leaders and frontline staff to identify specific ways to change processes and strengthen its culture in order to advance the use of lessons learned and other evidence*. This long-term effort will require continued focus, review, and adjustment based on experience.

We organize specific recommendations around five priority goals that are meant to reduce the gap between the attributes known to support use of lessons learned and other evidence and what we heard from current and former officials about evidence use at the State Department. While we focus on recommendations that would have the greatest benefit for atrocity prevention specifically, in many instances these actions are about strengthening the foundations for use of lessons learned and other evidence at the Department more generally.

Several State Department officials we interviewed are actively working to advance the use of lessons learned and other evidence for atrocity prevention, including around these priority goals. Where our recommendations pertain to activities that are already ongoing at some level, we aim to reinforce their importance, raise their profile, and encourage sustained or increased investment.

PRIORITY GOAL I. Promote a stronger culture of learning by demonstrating that use of lessons learned and other evidence is valued

- **The Secretary of State should follow up his "Modernization of American Diplomacy"[75] speech with a speech specifically devoted to promoting a culture of learning across the Department**. Senior officials clearly articulating and modeling the importance of using lessons learned and other evidence, including knowledge drawn from mistakes, across the Department would help expand knowledge generation and use. For example, the Secretary could discuss how a recent lessons learned effort informed subsequent decisions in an atrocity prevention case.

- **Senior leaders should communicate that "split memos"[76] are an acceptable way to reflect differing views**. Split memos provide a potential avenue to include two sides of an argument, such as when broad historical patterns and deep country analysis lead to divergent expectations about a foreign leader, or when officials disagree about which historical case is most analogous to a current crisis. Avoiding forced or premature consensus would create more space for collaboration as well as engagement with different types of lessons learned and evidence at all levels.

- **The Bureau of Global Talent Management should encourage supervisors to incorporate appraisals of lessons learned and other evidence use into performance reviews**, including Foreign Service Employee Evaluation Reports.[77] Few steps are as powerful in shaping institutional culture as adding an expectation to the formal evaluation process that leads to career promotion.

- **The Enterprise Data Council should use the new Data for Diplomacy Awards to publicly recognize State Department officials who have used lessons learned and other evidence to improve the Department's work in preventing mass atrocities.[78]** First awarded in 2022, the new program was "created to support and accelerate the Department's first-ever Enterprise Data Strategy which positions data as a critical instrument of diplomacy."[79] The award provides an incentive that could be leveraged for improving atrocity prevention.[80]

PRIORITY GOAL II. Strengthen internal knowledge sharing and use

- **Congress should appropriate funds to expand the State Department's atrocity prevention learning efforts.** Additional appropriations should support hiring more staff to serve as "knowledge brokers," facilitating processes to promote the use of lessons learned and other evidence for atrocity prevention.

- **The Bureau of Budget and Planning and the Office of Foreign Assistance should work with the Office of Management and Budget to ensure adequate funds are allocated to advancing the use of lessons learned and other evidence for atrocity prevention, as mandated by law and policy**. This would likely mean larger budgets for evaluation and learning activities across multiple bureaus (including Atrocity Prevention Working Group members CSO, DRL, GCJ, GWI, and INL, plus CSCD, given its mandate for evaluating the conduct of diplomacy), for training in the use of lessons learned and other evidence, and for ongoing knowledge management.

- **The Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights (J) should request that CSCD study at least one atrocity prevention engagement annually and share the results widely—including with regional bureaus and posts—as well as through convening an annual seminar.** In line with recommendations from other atrocity prevention reports, independent reviews of past atrocity responses can improve future US government atrocity responses and prevention efforts. As discussed in Section IV, expanding CSCD's work and reach would require increasing its funding and staff allocation.

- **The Atrocity Prevention Working Group should expand efforts to ensure all policy staff are aware of the internal resources on lessons learned and other evidence pertinent to atrocity prevention**. To help advance these ongoing efforts, it may be valuable for the working group to solicit feedback from key officials within regional bureaus and at posts about how to improve the utility of its work. Since a dearth of time is often given as a reason for policy makers' limited attention to lessons learned and other evidence, senior leadership in the Department could require deputy assistant secretaries, for example, to attend briefings about existing resources on atrocity prevention lessons learned and other evidence to become more familiar with them—and then to impart that knowledge to their colleagues.

- **CSO—with the other members of the Department's Atrocity Prevention Working Group—should ensure learning activities mandated by the Global Fragility Act (GFA) are coordinated with atrocity prevention learning activities.** The GFA requires that the ten-year plans for priority countries and regions include "assessment, monitoring, and evaluation frameworks for diplomatic, development, and security assistance and activities … as well as interagency plans for using such frameworks to adapt such activities on a regular basis."[81] Since "fragility" and "atrocity risk" overlap, especially in prevention or "upstream" contexts, learning activities under the GFA should not be perceived as completely distinct from those described in the *US Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities*. Close coordination and broad distribution of findings will be important to maximize the value of the GFA learning activities.

PRIORITY GOAL III. Improve systems that support sharing and use of lessons learned and other evidence

- **The Center for Analytics in the Office of Management Strategy and Solutions should develop and implement a plan to improve the Department's use of knowledge management systems.** Critical attributes of an effective plan include choosing a knowledge management system that is well suited to a variety of decision types and substantive issues; clear guidance on why, how, and when to use the system; and communications to ensure that staff are aware of the system's purpose and functionality. This plan should involve the development of an accessible interface for policy makers to more easily search for and locate cables. Successful implementation will require consistent support from Department leadership, in both words and resources, to ensure its wide use.

- **As the secretariat for the interagency Atrocity Prevention Task Force, CSO should ensure that a standard set of questions related to lessons learned and other evidence is used for all country-specific atrocity prevention discussions.** These could include, for example, questions about which historical situations are most similar to the current case, what was done in those cases to what effect, and what lessons were drawn from the experience. These questions would complement the Atrocity Risk Assessment Framework, which does not discuss how lessons learned or other evidence can help in identifying and prioritizing prevention or response options.

- **The Director General of the Foreign Service should mandate and create systems for FSOs leaving high-risk posts to distill lessons learned and other relevant information for their successors and relevant bureaus in Washington**—including members of the Atrocity Prevention Working Group and relevant regional bureaus. CSO or another bureau should be designated to stockpile these reports and circulate this information to ensure atrocity prevention knowledge is not lost in transitions.

PRIORITY GOAL IV. Enhance the use of lessons learned and other evidence in training

- **The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) should accelerate the rollout of its atrocity prevention training to FSOs assigned to posts in countries experiencing or at risk of mass atrocities, which is required by the Elie Wiesel Act.** The training should provide clear guidance on how to locate and use lessons learned and other evidence specific to atrocity prevention.

- **The Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights should convene a special (virtual) seminar for ambassadors and deputy chiefs of mission assigned to posts in countries with a high risk of experiencing mass atrocities**. The seminar should distill key points from broader atrocity prevention trainings and foster sharing among ambassadors and DCMs about lessons they have learned from mass atrocity crises and how others can use them.

- **DRL should seek to expand the reach of its atrocity prevention training to include all desk officers for countries experiencing or at risk of mass atrocities and relevant locally employed staff at posts in high-risk countries.**

- **DRL should condense its atrocity prevention training into a virtual module for onboarding new personnel assigned to work on countries experiencing or at risk of mass atrocities and new locally employed staff at posts in high-risk countries.**

- As part of the Department's "modernization" commitment to expand professional training for personnel across the Department,[82] FSI should provide training on how to use lessons learned and other evidence, including in the entry to Foreign Service (A100) training and more in-depth courses.

PRIORITY GOAL V. Increase accountability for using lessons learned and other evidence in atrocity prevention decision making

- The Secretary of State should direct the Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights and the Under Secretary for Political Affairs to jointly ensure that decisions about how the United States should work to prevent and mitigate atrocities are informed by lessons learned and other evidence. The Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights (J) should be primarily responsible for ensuring that lessons learned and other evidence resources are provided to regional bureaus, whereas the Under Secretary for Political Affairs (P) should be primarily responsible for ensuring that regional bureaus review lessons learned and other evidence resources in their decision-making processes.

- CSO and other Atrocity Prevention Working Group members should report on learning efforts in the annual Elie Wiesel Act report submitted to Congress. The 2024 report to Congress should specifically discuss how the commitments to evaluation, learning, and adaptation articulated in the *US Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities* are being put into practice.[83] Additionally, the report should document lessons from actions taken to help prevent or respond to atrocities during the reporting period, rather than only summarizing its efforts in particular cases.

ENDNOTES

[1] Madeleine K. Albright and William S. Cohen, *Preventing Genocide: A Blueprint for U.S. Policymakers* (Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, American Academy of Diplomacy, and US Institute of Peace, 2008), 65, https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/20081124-genocide-prevention-report.pdf.

[2] Charles J. Brown et al., *"A Necessary Good: U.S. Leadership On Preventing Mass Atrocities Final Report of the Experts Committee on Preventing Mass Violence,"* The Experts Committee on Preventing Mass Violence, 2016, 41, https://www.fcnl.org/sites/default/files/documents/a_necessary_good_-_us_leadership_on_preventing_mass_atrocities.pdf.

[3] Tessa Alleblas et al., "In the Shadow of Syria: Assessing the Obama Administration's Efforts on Mass Atrocity Prevention," The Hague Institute for Global Justice, GPPi, and Mount Holyoke College, 2017, 6, https://www.gppi.net/media/Alleblas_Aloyo_Brockmeier_Rotmann_Western__2017__In_the_Shadow_of_Syria.pdf.

[4] Stephen Pomper, "Atrocity Prevention Under the Obama Administration What We Learned and the Path Ahead," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2018, 39, https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/Stephen_Pomper_Report_02-2018.pdf.

[5] In March 2022, Beth Van Schaack was sworn in as the US Ambassador-at-Large for Global Criminal Justice. From 2012 to 2013, Van Schaack was the Deputy to the US Ambassador-at-Large for Global Criminal Justice.

[6] Beth Van Schaack, "Atrocities Prevention & Response: A Good Governance Blueprint," American Bar Association, 2021, 17, https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/human_rights/atrocity-crimes-initiative/van-schaack-atrocities-prevention-blueprint-white-paper-2021.pdf.

[7] *Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018, H.R.4174*, 115th Cong., Public Law No: 115-435, https://www.congress.gov/115/plaws/publ435/PLAW-115publ435.pdf.

[8] "FACT SHEET: Biden-Harris Administration Launches Year of Evidence for Action to Fortify and Expand Evidence-Based Policymaking," The White House, April 7, 2022, https://www.whitehouse.gov/ostp/news-updates/2022/04/07/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-launches-year-of-evidence-for-action-to-fortify-and-expand-evidence-based-policymaking/.

[9] "2022 United States Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities," State Department, July 15, 2022, https://www.state.gov/2022-united-states-strategy-to-anticipate-prevent-and-respond-to-atrocities/.

[10] "1 FAM 011.2 Role of Department of State," Foreign Affairs Manual, State Department, accessed July 2022, https://fam.state.gov/FAM/01FAM/01FAM0010.html.

[11] For an example of a similar analysis focused on a different agency, see Janeen Madan Keller et al., "Mainstreaming Evidence Use through Locally Led Development: Recommendations for USAID," Center for Global Development, 2022, https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/mainstreaming-evidence-use-through-locally-led-development.pdf.

[12] Most respondents spoke off the record without attribution.

[13] Susan McIntyre et al., *Utilizing Evidence-Based Lessons Learned for Enhanced Organizational Innovation and Change*, Advances in Human Resources Management and Organizational Development (AHRMOD) Book Series (Hershey: IGI Global, 2015), 3-4. https://www.igi-global.com/book/utilizing-evidence-based-lessons-learned/108292.

[14] Nick Hart and Meron Yohannes (eds.), *Evidence Works: Cases Where Evidence Meaningfully Informed Policy* (Washington, DC.: Bipartisan Policy Center, 2019), 9. https://bipartisanpolicy.org/download/?file=/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Evidence-Works-Cases-Where-Evidence-Meaningfully-Informed-Policy.pdf.

[15] David J. Hunter, "Evidence-Informed Policy: In Praise of Politics and Political Science," *Public Health Panorama* 2, no. 3 (2016): 269. https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/325358.

[16] Tacit knowledge refers to "personal knowledge resident within the mind, behavior and perceptions of individuals. Tacit knowledge includes skills, experiences, insight, intuition and judgment. Tacit knowledge is typically shared through discussion, stories, analogies and person-to-person interaction and is, therefore, difficult to capture or represent in explicit form. Because individuals continually add personal knowledge, which changes behavior and perceptions, tacit knowledge is, by definition, uncaptured" ("Gartner Glossary," Gartner, accessed March 2023, https://www.gartner.com/en/information-technology/glossary/tacit-knowledge).

[17] This definition is consistent with some uses of the term "evidence-based policy," but it is meant to emphasize that "evidence" should be conceived broadly and to communicate "a more nuanced view of the relationship between evidence and policy" (Hunter, "Evidence-Informed Policy," 268). The State Department's 2022-2026 Learning Agenda, pursuant to the Evidence-Based Policy Making Act of 2018, defines evidence-based learning as the use of "evidence that can inform and improve the Department's learning," which "includes data, metrics, program evaluations, and internal documentation of U.S. foreign policy efforts—from diplomatic cables to press statements," and notes "learning activities should take a holistic view of what constitutes evidence" ("Learning Agenda 2022-2026," State Department, June 17, 2022, 4, https://www.state.gov/plans-performance-budget/department-of-state-learning-agenda-2022-2026-2/).

[18] World Health Organization, "Evidence, policy, impact. WHO guide for evidence-informed decision-making," 2021, ix, https://apps.who.int/iris/rest/bitstreams/1405176/retrieve.

[19] Rosemary Rushmer et al., "Knowledge Translation: Key Concepts, Terms and Activities," in *Population Health Monitoring,* eds. M. Verschuuren, M. and H. van Oers (Springer, Cham, 2019), 131, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-76562-4_7.

[20] *Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2018*, S.1158, 115th Cong., Public Law No: 115–441, https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/COMPS-15362/pdf/COMPS-15362.pdf.

[21] Scott Straus, *Fundamentals of Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention* (Washington, DC: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2016), 115, https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/reports-and-resources/fundamentals-of-genocide-and-mass-atrocity-prevention.

[22] McIntyre et al., *Utilizing Evidence-Based Lessons*, 3–4.

[23] Hart and Yohannes, *Evidence Works*, 9.

[24] David A. Garvin, "Building a Learning Organization," *Harvard Business Review*, 1993, https://hbr.org/1993/07/building-a-learning-organization.

[25] Reflecting on the Burundi case in 2015, then-Undersecretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights Sarah Sewall stated the interagency APB-led effort led to targeted programming and "the deployment of a prevention adviser to support the embassy in the lead up to the 2015 national elections ... [who] enhanced the U.S. government's monitoring early warning signals of violence to complement the execution of a set of de-escalation programs that were specifically targeted against potential perpetrators and messengers of violence" (Sarah Sewall, "Charting the U.S. Atrocities Prevention Board's Progress," Council on Foreign Relations, March 30, 2015, https://www.cfr.org/event/charting-us-atrocities-prevention-boards-progress).

[26] United States attention to Burundi in the late 1990s has also been cited by policy makers as a case in which failures in neighboring Rwanda were instrumental to prompting more effective preventive action.

[27] "Tools for Atrocity Prevention," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed January 2023, http://preventiontools.ushmm.org.

[28] Problems associated with standard playbook approaches are well established across a range of international agendas (e.g., see Bruce W. Jentleson, "Preventive Diplomacy: A Conceptual and Analytic Framework," in *Opportunity Missed, Opportunity Seized Preventive Diplomacy in the Post-Cold War World*, ed. Bruce W. Jentleson [Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999], 13–14, https://media.carnegie.org/filer_public/9e/43/9e435fc8-f8fd-4764-aabd-2c8eba103b38/ccny_book_1999_opportunities.pdf). We could expect them to be especially problematic for an objective like atrocity prevention, which entails action across an extremely wide range of circumstances—armed conflict vs. "peacetime"; state vs. non-state perpetrators; groups targeted by ascriptive characteristics vs. political affiliation; and atrocities motivated by extremist ideology vs. desire to retain political power.

[29] See, e.g., David Epstein and ProPublica, "When Evidence Says No, But Doctors Say Yes," *The Atlantic*, February 22, 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2017/02/when-evidence-says-no-but-doctors-say-yes/517368/.

[30] The RAND report includes a comprehensive review of the literature on organizational theory, supplemented with findings from interviews with organizations across the private and public sectors (see Dwayne M. Butler et al., *Enhancing Next-Generation Diplomacy Through Best Practices in Lessons Learned* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2017), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1930.html).

[31] The "Context Matters Framework" may help decision makers assess broader policy contexts and identify "the best entry points to improve the use of knowledge in a public agency." For more information, see "Context Matters: A Framework to support knowledge into policy," INASP and Purpose & Ideas, July 7, 2021, https://www.inasp.info/contextmatters.

[32] This discussion is based primarily on the thematic best practices in Butler et al., *Enhancing Next-Generation Diplomacy*, 2017, and supplemented with the findings of Kathryn Oliver et al., "A systematic review of barriers to and facilitators of the use of evidence by policymakers," *BMC Health Services Research* 14, no. 2 (2014), https://bmchealthservres.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1472-6963-14-2https://bmchealthservres.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1472-6963-14-2; Garvin, "Building a Learning Organization," 1993; Hart and Yohannes, *Evidence Works*, 2019; Christina Boswell, *The Political Uses of Expert Knowledge: Immigration Policy and Social Research* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/political-uses-of-expert-knowledge/CFAD0049F51CE721112F1DA1CB6B6D1A; Brian Head, "Toward More 'Evidence-Informed'

Policy Making?" *Public Administration Review* 76, no. 3 (2015), https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/puar.12475; David A. Garvin et al., "Is Yours a Learning Organization?" *Harvard Business Review*, 2008, https://libraries.unl.edu/images/StaffDev/Is_Yours_a_Learning_Organization.pdf; and Nick Milton, *The Lessons Learned Handbook: Practical Approaches to Learning from Experience* (Chandos Publishing, 2010), https://www.sciencedirect.com/book/9781843345879/the-lessons-learned-handbook.

[33] Knowledge brokers refers to individuals or entities who serve as "the links between different entities or individuals that otherwise would not have a relationship such as policy makers and researchers. Their core function is connecting people to share and exchange knowledge" (E. Jackson-Bowers et al., "Towards better policy and practice in Primary Health Care," Primary Health Care Research and Information Service, 2006, 1, https://rpp.wtgrantfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Knowledge-Brokering.pdf).

[34] Other legislative mandates may also help strengthen the use of lessons learned and other evidence for atrocity prevention. For example, the Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act of 2016 requires that federal departments and agencies that allocate foreign assistance "develop a clearinghouse capacity for the collection and dissemination of knowledge and lessons learned that serve as benchmarks for future programs" and that they "undertake collaborative partnerships and coordinate efforts with academic, national and international institutions," among other obligations (see *H.R.3766 - Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act of 2016*, 114th Congress, Public Law No: 114-191, https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/3766). Additionally, the 2019 United States Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security states the US government, "where necessary," will "apply lessons learned from the past, analytic rigor, and evidence-based research to inform targeted and effective policies and programming going forward" as it relates to women's role in and preventing and resolving conflict ("United States Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security," State Department, June 2019, 15, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/WPS_Strategy_10_October2019.pdf).

[35] Antony J. Blinken, "Secretary Antony J. Blinken on the Modernization of American Diplomacy," State Department, October 27, 2021, https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-on-the-modernization-of-american-diplomacy/.

[36] Sherman et al., "On the 2022 Elie Wiesel Act Report to Congress and New U.S. Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities," State Department, July 15, 2022, https://www.state.gov/on-the-2022-elie-wiesel-act-report-to-congress-and-new-u-s-strategy-to-anticipate-prevent-and-respond-to-atrocities/.

[37] As the State Department reported in 2022, it "provided two courses on atrocity prevention; a total of 272 participants enrolled between January 1, 2021 and May 1, 2022. Course participants came from 164 overseas posts and 56 bureaus, offices, and interagency partner organizations. USAID updated its atrocity prevention training to shift from early warning to early action. In 2021, 65 USAID staff, including 50 Foreign Service Officers, participated in Atrocity Prevention training, including a dedicated training course conducted for USAID and Department of State staff in Ethiopia" ("2022 Report to Congress Pursuant to Section 5 of the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2018 [P.L. 115-441]," State Department, July 15, 2022, https://www.state.gov/2022-report-to-congress-pursuant-to-section-5-of-the-elie-wiesel-genocide-and-atrocities-prevention-act-of-2018/).

[38] "1 FAM 473.5 Office of Advanced Analytics (CSO/AA)," Foreign Affairs Manual, State Department, accessed March 2023, https://fam.state.gov/fam/01fam/01fam0470.html#:~:text=1%20FAM%20473.5-,Office%20of%20Advanced%20Analytics,-(CSO/AA).

[39] "1 FAM 473.8 Office of Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation (CSO/DME)," Foreign Affairs Manual, State Department, accessed March 2023,

https://fam.state.gov/fam/01fam/01fam0470.html#:~:text=1%20FAM%20473.5-
,Office%20of%20Advanced%20Analytics,-(CSO/AA).

[40] "1 FAM 473.1 Office of Communications, Policy, and Partnerships (CSO/CPP)," Foreign Affairs Manual, State Department, accessed March 2023, https://fam.state.gov/fam/01fam/01fam0470.html#:~:text=1%20FAM%20473.5-
,Office%20of%20Advanced%20Analytics,-(CSO/AA).

[41] "1 FAM 532.2 Office of Knowledge Management (INL/KM)," Foreign Affairs Manual, State Department, accessed March 2023, https://fam.state.gov/fam/01fam/01fam0530.html.

[42] "Office of Policy, Planning, and Resources," State Department, accessed March 2023, https://www.state.gov/bureaus-offices/under-secretary-for-public-diplomacy-and-public-affairs/office-of-policy-planning-and-resources-r-ppr/.

[43] "1 FAM 430 Bureau of Intelligence And Research (INR)," Foreign Affairs Manual, State Department, accessed March 2023, https://fam.state.gov/fam/01fam/01fam0430.html.

[44] "Key Topics—Bureau of Intelligence and Research," State Department, February 1, 2019, https://www.state.gov/key-topics-bureau-of-intelligence-and-research/.

[45] "About Us—Bureau of Intelligence and Research," State Department, accessed March 2023, https://www.state.gov/about-us-bureau-of-intelligence-and-research/.

[46] Butler et al., *Enhancing Next-Generation Diplomacy,* 2; "1 FAM 294.10 Center for the Study of the Conduct of Diplomacy (FSI/SPAS/CSCD)," Foreign Affairs Manual, State Department, accessed March 2023, https://fam.state.gov/search/viewer?format=html&query=12%20FAM%20294.10&links=FAM,29410&url=/FAM/01FAM/01FAM0290.html#M294_10.

[47] *"*Enduring Leadership in a Dynamic World: Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review 2015," State Department and USAID, 2015, 58, https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/241429.pdf.

[48] Antony J. Blinken, "Reception on 'American Diplomacy: Preparing for the Challenges of Tomorrow,'" State Department, February 2, 2016, https://2009-2017.state.gov/s/d/2016d/252108.htm.

[49] Foreign Affairs Manual, "1 FAM 294.10(a)."

[50] Foreign Affairs Manual, "1 FAM 294.10(b)."

[51] Ibid.

[52] Butler et al., *Enhancing Next-Generation Diplomacy,* 72, 74.

[53] "Senate Appropriations Committee, State OIG Testimony 04 27 2022," OIG State Department, April 27, 2022, 2, https://www.stateoig.gov/uploads/testimony_news/testimony_pdf_file/2022-04-27-sappc-fy2023-state-budget-hearing-state-oig-testimony.pdf.

54 "Review of Emergency Action Planning Guiding the Evacuation and Suspension of Operations at U.S. Embassy Kabul, Afghanistan," State Department Office of Inspector General, May 2023, https://www.stateoig.gov/report/aud-mero-23-15.

55 Blinken, "Secretary Antony J. Blinken on the Modernization of American Diplomacy."

56 *Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act.*

57 Ibid.

58 *Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act.*

59 "Enterprise Data Council," State Department, accessed March 2023, https://www.state.gov/enterprise-data-council/.

60 Expanding the growing focus on evidence-informed policy, in April 2022, the White House announced a "Year of Evidence for Action," which includes commitments to "strengthen and develop new strategies and structures to promote consistent evidence-based decision-making inside the Federal Government;" and "increase connection and collaboration among researchers, knowledge producers, and decision makers inside and outside of the Federal Government" (Ciocca Eller et al., "Year of Evidence for Action Kicks Off!" Evaluation.gov, April 8, 2022, https://www.evaluation.gov/2022-4-7-year-of-evidence-for-action/).

61 State Department, "Learning Agenda 2022–2026."

62 Relevant priority questions include: "How can the State Department improve the effectiveness of its diplomatic interventions to better advance foreign policy objectives?" and "How can the Department better respond to unpredictable international events and emergencies such as global pandemics?" (Ibid., 3).

63 *Global Fragility Act of 2019*, H.R.2116, 116th Cong., https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5db70e83fc0a966cf4cc42ea/t/5f6208ed4c84b42901596f35/16002603339 57/BILLS-116HR1865SA-RCP116-44+%28GFA+ONLY%29.pdf.

64 Ibid.

65 The 2017 RAND report on the Department's lessons learned process reached a similar conclusion: "To achieve … full learning organization status, the department as a whole will need to have adopted and embraced a learning culture and a mindset of continuous improvement" (Butler et al., *Enhancing Next-Generation Diplomacy*, 72).

66 The 2017 RAND report notes a similar finding: "Department of State interviewees cited several barriers to creating a learning culture, including … a high frequency of rotation across all levels of the organization" (Butler et al., *Enhancing Next-Generation Diplomacy,* 4).

67 One interviewee suggested the State Department structure encourages bureaucratic expertise (i.e., managing interagency and political processes) rather than emphasizing training focused on developing analytic expertise among personnel.

68 The 2017 RAND report details a similar finding: "Department of State interviewees cited several

barriers to creating a learning culture, including a need-to-know mentality with respect to knowledge sharing … and an individualist mentality within the department" (Butler et al., *Enhancing Next-Generation Diplomacy,* 4).

[69] The Department maintains a Dissent Channel that allows employees "to express dissenting or alternative views on substantive issues of policy, in a manner which ensures serious, high-level review and response." However, it is only to be used if the "regular operating channels" do not provide adequate space for differing opinions (See "2 FAM 070 Dissent Channel," Foreign Affairs Manual, State Department, accessed March 2023, https://fam.state.gov/fam/02fam/02fam0070.html).

[70] Kenneth A. Schultz, "Perils of polarization for US foreign policy," *The Washington Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (2017): 7–28, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0163660X.2017.1406705.

[71] James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, "The logic of appropriateness," ARENA Working Papers (2004): 478–498, https://www.sv.uio.no/arena/english/research/publications/arena-working-papers/2001-2010/2004/wp04_9.pdf.

[72] See Box 3 in section IV for more detail.

[73] As the 2017 RAND report finds, "One of the biggest challenges for lessons-learned programs is obtaining a secure source of funding. If an organization does not see lessons learned as a priority, it will not emphasize or resource lessons-learned activities" (Butler et al., *Enhancing Next-Generation Diplomacy,* 60).

[74] Ibid.

[75] Blinken, "Secretary Antony J. Blinken on the Modernization of American Diplomacy."

[76] Provided to senior officials during decision-making processes, a split memo "contains reasons why the different offices support a given policy" when "some set of offices favors a particular policy choice and another set favors a different one." (Ashley S. Deeks, "Secret Reason-Giving," *Yale Law Journal* 129, no. 3 [2020]: 655, https://www.yalelawjournal.org/pdf/DeeksArticle_amfcwrd2.pdf.)

[77] This recommendation is consistent with the State Department's 2022–25 core precepts for the tenure and promotion of Foreign Service employees, which include an expanded focus on data literacy. It specifies expectations for Foreign Service members seeking promotion at various levels to incorporate data-driven analysis into their work. For example, mid-level officers seeking promotions, should "[base] recommendations and decisions on data-driven analysis, as appropriate," and officers seeking Senior Foreign Service advancement, should "[use] data-driven analysis as appropriate to influence and steer policy and processes and guides others to do the same." See "Decision Criteria for Tenure and Promotion in the Foreign Service 2022–2025," State Department, u.d., 7–8, https://pathtoforeignservice.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/2022-2025-Core-Precepts.pdf.

[78] "On the Recognition of the State Department's Inaugural Data for Diplomacy Award Winners," State Department, May 5, 2022, https://www.state.gov/on-the-recognition-of-the-state-departments-inaugural-data-for-diplomacy-award-winners/.

[79] Ibid.

80 As the 2017 RAND report notes, "Providing rewards is also another successful incentive for lessons learned. Organizations can reward employees with bonuses or promotion for participating in lessons learned activities. This is achieved by including lessons learned in the performance review process. Additionally, awarding prizes or giving recognition for innovative initiatives can improve buy-in." (Butler et al., *Enhancing Next-Generation Diplomacy,* 64.)

81 *Global Fragility Act of 2019.*

82 As Secretary Blinken said in an October 2021 speech at FSI: "Secretary Powell had a vision for what the military calls a training float—a set number of employees who are getting professional training at any given time, without sacrificing our readiness. Now, we will make that happen. We're working to add more positions to the training float in the current budget, and we'll push to increase those numbers even more in the coming years. We want both the Foreign and Civil Service to have more opportunities for professional development throughout your careers, including exchanges and rotations in other government agencies, the private sector, Congress. Your chances to learn and grow as State Department professionals should and will be ongoing." (Blinken, "Secretary Antony J. Blinken on the Modernization of American Diplomacy.")

83 The 2022 Elie Wiesel Act report to Congress recommends the Atrocity Prevention Task Force "Monitor progress of the implementation of the U.S. Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities and further refine monitoring, evaluation, and learning across the atrocity prevention architecture." ("2022 Report to Congress Pursuant to Section 5.") The 2023 Elie Wiesel Act report to Congress mentions some learning activities, such as exchanges of best practices between like-minded partners. However, it does not detail after-action reports conducted, lessons learned from particular atrocity crises, or other significant learning efforts. ("2023 Report to Congress on Section 5 of the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-441)," State Department, August 2, 2023, https://www.state.gov/2023-report-to-congress-on-section-5-of-the-elie-wiesel-genocide-and-atrocities-prevention-act-of-2018-p-l-115-441-as-amended/.)

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　　1 FAM 473.5 Office of Advanced Analytics (CSO/AA)
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