



2022

# United States Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Respond to Atrocities



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**Figure 1 Caption: Yerevan, Armenia** – At the Armenian Genocide Memorial complex, an eternal flame is dedicated to all those who were killed during the Ottoman-era Armenian genocide. Freepik photo by Saiko 3P

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

President Biden has affirmed that atrocity prevention and the promotion of respect for human rights are central to U.S. national security, stating, “I recommit to the simple truth that preventing future genocides remains both our moral duty and a matter of national and global importance.... When hatred goes unchecked, and when the checks and balances in government and society that protect fundamental freedoms are lost, violence and mass atrocities can result.” Atrocities inflict long-term trauma and destroy lives and communities. Atrocities may violate international human rights law, contribute to widespread displacement, regional and international instability, and economic disruption, and threaten U.S. and partner nations’ security and interests. As set forth in Executive Order 13729, A Comprehensive Approach to Atrocity Prevention and Response, which remains in effect, “preventing mass atrocities and genocide is a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the United States.”

The Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-441) (the Elie Wiesel Act) states that atrocity prevention is in the U.S. national interest, and calls for the United States to pursue a “government-wide strategy to identify, prevent, and respond to the risk of atrocities.” The three goals laid out in this strategy support the following envisioned end state:

**The U.S. Government takes timely and effective action to anticipate, prevent, and respond to atrocities, in coordination with partner governments, and international, civil society, and local partners. The White House-led Atrocity Prevention Task Force (Task Force) coordinates these efforts.**

## I. STRATEGIC CHALLENGE

For decades, the United States has worked at home and abroad to strengthen governmental capacity to respect, promote, and safeguard human rights and promote peace – including through efforts to prevent atrocities. Yet more action is needed. Despite international pledges of “Never Again” following the Holocaust, genocide, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, and war crimes continue to occur globally. The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum reported 20 ongoing mass killings as of September 2020, perpetrated by 10 states and 10 non-state groups, in 15 countries. The costs associated with atrocity response far outweigh investments in early prevention. Atrocity prevention saves lives and – given the high cost of response and recovery efforts – U.S. resources. Therefore, it is in the United States’ strategic interest to prioritize resources for prevention activities, while necessarily responding to and assisting in recovery from atrocities.

## II. STRATEGIC APPROACH AND GOALS FOR CONCRETE ACTION

This Strategy outlines how the Task Force, an Interagency Policy Committee (IPC), will coordinate concrete action through a whole-of-government approach to prevent, respond to, and recover from atrocities. The Task Force will support country-specific and regional policy processes and feed into a higher-level Prevention and Stabilization Steering Committee, which will coordinate the implementation of the Elie Wiesel Act. The Task Force will seek bilateral, multilateral, and civil society partnerships to advance atrocity prevention, response, and recovery.

The Task Force prioritizes early identification and prevention of atrocities in countries most at risk for atrocities, as determined by the Task Force on at least an annual basis. In cases of ongoing atrocities, the Task Force supports regional policy processes in developing and monitoring targeted response options and adjusting course as needed. In the aftermath of atrocities, the Task Force supports regional policy processes by recommending and monitoring recovery efforts to address the legacies of human rights abuses, pursue accountability, justice, and redress and help prevent recurrence.

### Goals & Objectives of the Strategy

The following goals and objectives align atrocity efforts with the prevention architecture articulated in the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability, released in December 2020 pursuant to the Global Fragility Act (GFA).

#### A. Goal 1: Atrocity Prevention, Response, and Recovery – Pursue Early Action and Locally Driven Solutions in Priority Countries

The Task Force aims to achieve impact through concerted action in countries at risk of atrocities. To do this, the Task Force will use quantitative and qualitative assessments, drawing upon input from civil society, to identify priority countries for atrocity prevention efforts, including addressing conflict-related sexual violence.

#### Priority Actions:

1. On an annual basis, at minimum, identify up to the top 30 Task Force priority countries most at risk for atrocities, which may include countries in any phase of atrocities – prevention, response, recovery, or combination thereof.
2. From those up to top 30 priority countries, develop a short list for Task Force intensive focus in coordination with regional counterparts. Utilizing relevant quantitative and qualitative civil society and intelligence reporting as well as the 2021 U.S. Government Atrocity Assessment Framework, the Task Force will conduct assessments of risk factors and pathways to atrocities in these priority countries.



**Figure 2 Caption: Kigali, Rwanda** — A visitor stands at a display showing photographs of genocide victims at the Kigali Genocide Memorial. Since 2001, more than 250,000 of the estimated one million victims of genocide against the Tutsi have been buried at the memorial. Every year, more people are brought to the memorial for a dignified burial as unmarked graves continue to be uncovered around the country. U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Shawn Nickel

3. Assess current efforts, including gaps inhibiting sufficient action, and available tools to mitigate atrocity risks.
4. In coordination with country-specific or regional policy processes, develop targeted response plans for priority countries.
5. As new atrocity crises emerge or are anticipated, coordinate a whole-of-government response co-led with NSC regional directorates.
6. Support and ensure U.S. Government entities, including U.S. missions abroad, adjust and update Integrated Country Strategies, Country Development Cooperation Strategies, defense cooperation programs and agreements; program design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation; and/or relevant country or regional strategy documents and processes to reflect atrocity risk assessments analysis and recommendations.
7. Assess progress on implementation of atrocity prevention and response actions, and work with regional policy processes to adjust course, as needed.
8. 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.

## **B. Goal 2: Partnerships – Promote International Cooperation, Civil Society Engagement, and Strategic Public Messaging**

The Task Force will strive for consultative, coordinated, and transparent activities to prevent, respond to, and foster recovery from atrocities – including strategic public messaging. The U.S. Government will invite collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders including UN agencies, regional organizations, partner governments, local populations, and civil society and related consortia.

### **Priority Actions:**

1. Promote data collection and information sharing on early warning, escalating risk, human rights violations and abuses, perpetrators, and ongoing atrocities; Task Force efforts; and lessons learned and best practices, including on atrocity prevention tools and training approaches with like-minded partners, international and civil society organizations, and Congress.
2. Consult with civil society organizations and partner governments on the development of atrocity assessments and response plans.
3. Explore coordinated joint actions to prevent and respond to atrocities with like-minded international partners such as through the International Atrocity Prevention Working Group (IAPWG).
4. Identify and monitor indicators of risk to evaluate interventions on an ongoing basis, and where possible in priority countries.
5. Establish country coordination groups with donors or other in-country partners.
6. Pursue a strategic communications plan to amplify messages about countries of concern, atrocity perpetrators or facilitators, and Task Force efforts through social media, public remarks, and events.

## **C. Goal 3: Management – Enable an Effective, Integrated U.S. Government Prevention Architecture**

For the U.S. Government to identify, prevent, and respond to atrocities effectively, U.S. Government personnel must be trained to recognize and report on early warning indicators and escalatory risk, as well as potential U.S. interventions. Each U.S. department and agency is responsible for developing and providing relevant atrocity prevention training and guidance to its personnel, as appropriate. In addition to training, early and consistent coordination across regional and functional offices is necessary to ensure integrated U.S. Government action on atrocity prevention.

### **Priority Actions:**

1. Ensure that key U.S. Government implementing agencies have dedicated personnel and resources to execute the mandate and functions of this strategy.
2. Train relevant U.S. Government personnel – including but not limited to Foreign Service Officers assigned to Task Force countries – to track and identify warning signs, report this information to decision-makers, and develop action plans to prevent or respond to atrocities.
3. Integrate atrocity prevention in applicable functional and regional policy processes and strategies.
4. Develop department and agency-specific processes for coordination on atrocity prevention and related Task Force activities.



**Figure 3 Caption: Near the Syrian border, Jordan** – Refugees displaced by the violence in Syria wait at a transit center in Jordan for trucks that will take them to the Za’atari refugee camp in February 2014. U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum photo by Lucian Perkins

### III. ADVANCING THE STRATEGY

#### A. Interagency Roles and Responsibilities

The United States will enhance its efforts to anticipate, prevent, and respond to atrocities by improving how agencies and departments work together. The Executive Branch has established clear roles and responsibilities for advancing this Strategy, specifically:

- The White House National Security Council (NSC) staff leads the IPC-level Atrocity Prevention Task Force, for which the State Department’s Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations serves as Secretariat. The Task Force includes representatives from the Departments of State (State), Defense (DoD), Homeland Security (DHS), and Justice (DoJ); Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); the Treasury (Treasury); United States Agency for International Development (USAID); and Intelligence Community (IC). Additional departments and agencies, such as the Commerce Department or U.S. Trade Representative, may engage with the Task Force on an as-needed basis.
- State oversees and implements U.S. foreign policy and strategy related to atrocity prevention, response, and recovery, including diplomatic and multilateral engagement. State produces quarterly early warning assessments on atrocity risks. State implements or coordinates security assistance and cooperation programming such as institutional capacity building and human rights training. State ensures that atrocity assessments inform the development of relevant Integrated Country Strategies (ICS), in line with section 1210D(b) of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (FY 2021 NDAA).

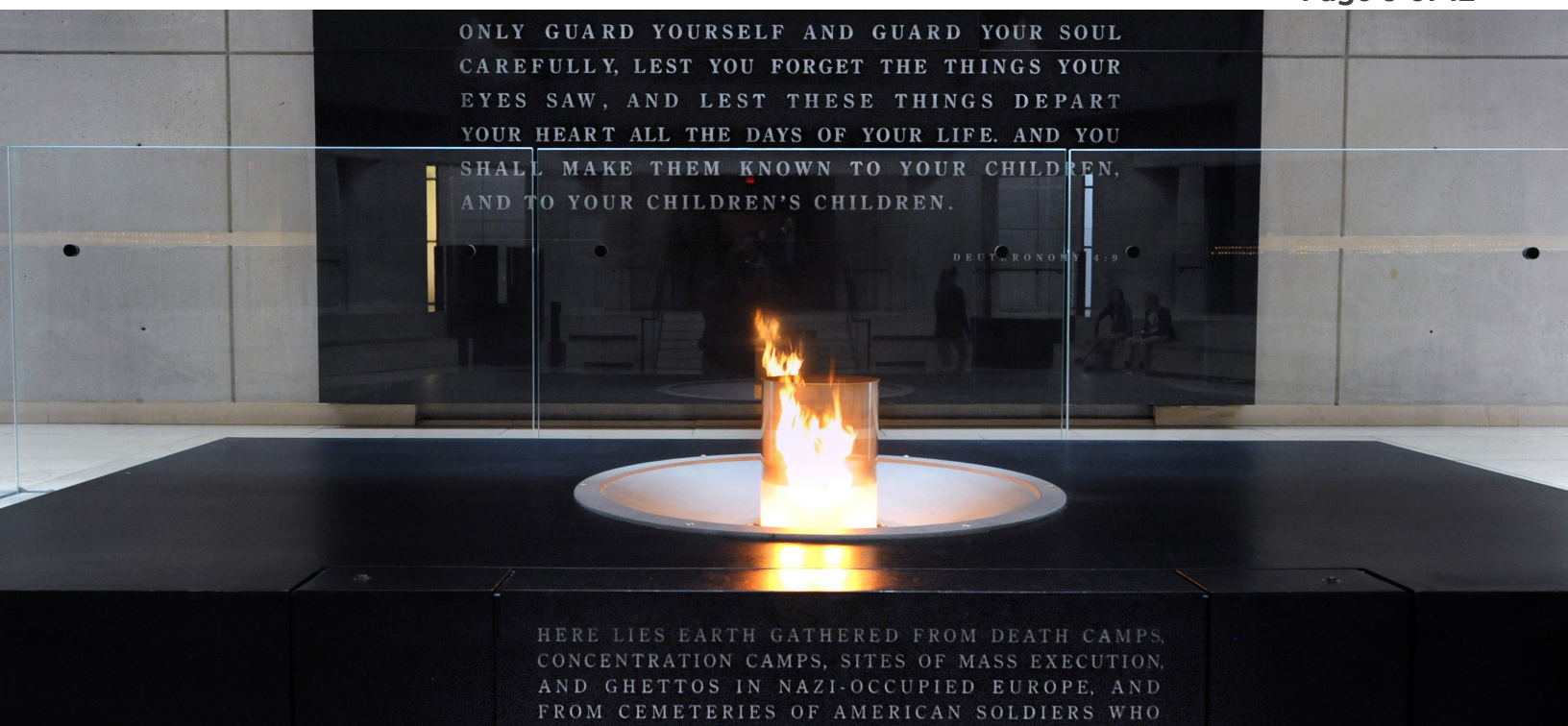
- USAID implements non-security U.S. assistance, including development and humanitarian aid, across the atrocity prevention cycle in support of U.S. policy objectives, and monitors and reports on in-country developments. USAID ensures atrocity assessments inform the development of priority missions' Country Development and Cooperation Strategies (CDCS) in line with section 1210D(b) of the FY 2021 NDAA.
- DoD supports efforts to prevent and respond to atrocities, and to address atrocity prevention through civil affairs and security cooperation programming such as institutional capacity building and human rights training. DoD also provides requisite security and reinforces civilian efforts, where appropriate and consistent with available authorities.
- The IC produces assessments to identify atrocity risks and ongoing atrocities on a regular basis. To support the Task Force's country prioritization process, and development of assessment and response plans, the IC provides additional in-depth analysis as requested.
- DHS, DOJ, FBI, and other interagency partners support justice and accountability mechanisms through coordinated law enforcement action and intelligence sharing to investigate and support prosecution of individuals and entities for relevant federal crimes, including genocide, torture, and war crimes.
- Other Federal departments and agencies, including Treasury through the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) support U.S. efforts to prevent and respond to atrocities globally, through tools such as sanctions, as appropriate and authorized, based on their unique mandates, capabilities, and relationships.

## B. Interagency Decision-Making and Coordination

The Task Force is responsible for monitoring and alerting decision-makers to early warning signs and escalatory risks, and countries of concern. In addition to its work to catalyze prevention, the Task Force participates in and provides support to existing regional policy processes involving response and recovery activities. To ensure complementarity among atrocity prevention efforts and related policy initiatives, the Task Force coordinates closely with relevant NSC Directorates and feeds into the high-level Prevention and Stabilization Steering Committee.

## C. Measuring Success

1. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** The Task Force will produce an internal annual work plan to guide its work and include corresponding monitoring, evaluation, and learning plans defining agreed-upon indicators of impact and targets for quantifying progress. These indicators, where appropriate and practicable, will be reported via the annual congressional reports required by the Elie Wiesel Act.  
At least annually, the Task Force will formally evaluate the impact of its efforts in priority countries.
2. **Consultation, Learning, and Adaptation:** The Task Force will consult regularly with relevant civil society stakeholders, congressional members, and local populations. The Task Force will incorporate lessons learned and best practices and will continuously adapt its approach and recommendations when new information and lessons become known.



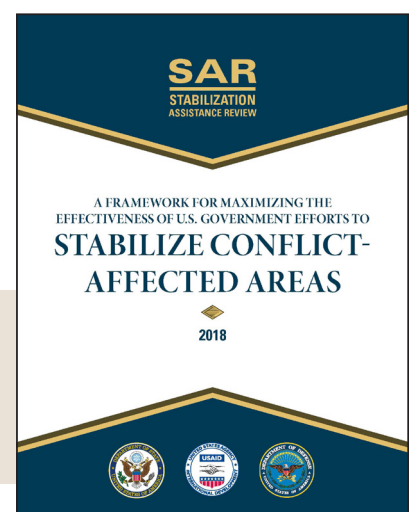
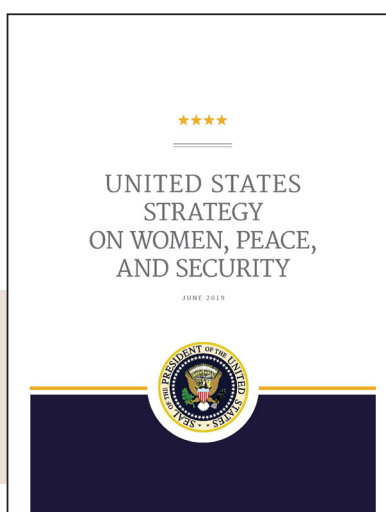
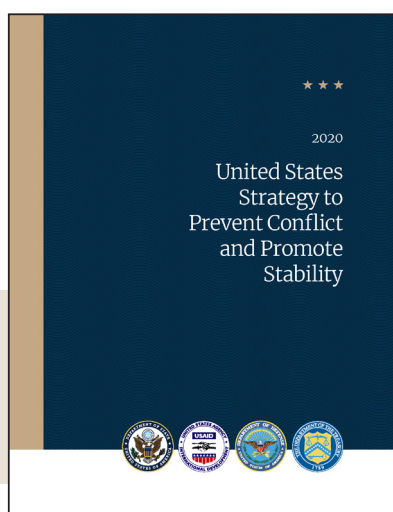
**Figure 4 Caption: Washington, D.C. –** An eternal flame burns inside the Hall of Remembrance at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. A plaque in front of the flame reads, “Here lies earth gathered from death camps, concentration camps, sites of mass execution, and ghettos in Nazi-occupied Europe, and from cemeteries of American soldiers who fought and died to defeat Nazi Germany.” Department of Defense photo by Marvin Lynchard

## IV. INTEGRATION OF U.S. GOVERNMENT TOOLS AND POLICY INITIATIVES

### A. Non-Exhaustive List of Illustrative Tools

1. **Diplomacy:** U.S. diplomatic advocacy can influence the motivation and means of atrocity perpetrators by increasing the visibility and costs of atrocities. The U.S. Government will pursue preventative diplomacy in multilateral fora and via effective coordination between D.C.-based policymakers and in-country personnel. Diplomatic interventions may be conducted jointly with like-minded partners where appropriate.
2. **Foreign Assistance/Programming:** U.S. foreign assistance can work with partners to strengthen institutional and societal resilience, help address underlying grievances, provide emergency and humanitarian relief and response, and advance reconciliation and transitional justice. The U.S. Government will target its foreign assistance in the atrocity risk priority countries to address atrocity prevention, response, and recovery – and will ensure accurate and evaluative reporting on programmatic activities.
3. **Defense Support and Security Cooperation:** Defense support and security cooperation can bolster weak institutions and promote democracy, transparency, and respect for human rights. Security cooperation agreements and programs will be adjusted as needed to address emerging atrocities, adherence to international humanitarian law and human rights norms, and civilian control of the military and other security forces in countries of concern.
4. **Trade, Investment, Commercial Diplomacy, and International and Bilateral Engagement on Financial Transparency:** The U.S. Government will promote financial transparency and enhance anti-corruption initiatives to address weak governance and illicit financing that can contribute to atrocity risk. Where appropriate, strengthening trade relations and conditioning economic investments in countries at risk, will be employed to prevent and recover from atrocities.

5. **Sanctions and Visa Restrictions:** Sanctions, the threat of sanctions, visa or travel restrictions, or other financial or travel-related pressure tools can be employed, as appropriate and when in support of broader U.S. policies and interests, to influence and apply pressure to people, organizations, and governments in connection with atrocities.
6. **Law Enforcement:** The U.S. Government will continue efforts to identify, prevent the entry of, investigate, arrest, prosecute, and remove known or suspected human rights violators over whom the U.S. has jurisdiction, including those responsible for committing or facilitating atrocities; and strengthen law enforcement and justice capacities of our international partners.
7. **Intelligence and Analysis:** The United States will focus attention and resources on developing, improving, and utilizing intelligence and analysis tools that incorporate evidence-based atrocity risk factors and inform the development of response plans.
8. **Justice and Accountability:** To advance justice and aid in the prevention of recurring atrocities, the United States will promote accountability for atrocities, both in the United States if perpetrators are present in U.S. territory and subject to U.S. jurisdiction, and abroad through supporting a broad range of transitional justice mechanisms, including domestic, international, and hybrid tribunals; international investigations and inquiries; truth-telling, memorialization, institutional reform, and otherwise strengthening criminal justice systems.
9. **Strategic Communications:** In certain priority countries, and as appropriate, the U.S. Government will develop and implement Strategic Communication Plans that can be employed to apply pressure to mitigate atrocity risks. Public communications will also be used to inform American and global audiences of U.S. Government efforts on atrocity prevention, response, and recovery.



## B. Related Policy Initiatives

1. **U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability (2020):** The U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability seeks to break the costly cycle of fragility and promote peaceful, self-reliant nations. The GFA references the importance of civilian protection and transitional justice efforts to conflict prevention and stabilization activities. Atrocity prevention and response efforts complement and align with the goals of the GFA to address fragility and the underlying causes of violence and conflict. Integrating atrocity prevention considerations across the development and implementation of 10-year country plans in GFA priority countries and regions, including corresponding Integrated Country Strategies and Country Development Cooperation Strategies, is critical.
2. **U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security (2019):** The U.S. Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Strategy, released in June 2019 pursuant to the WPS Act of 2017, aims to support the safety of women and girls in conflict and crisis, and increase the meaningful participation of women in efforts to prevent conflict, counter terrorism, and build peace. The 2016 U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally (2016, update forthcoming) notes that women and girls are often deliberately targeted with conflict-related sexual violence, which can be both an early warning sign for future atrocities and an atrocity crime in and of itself. Through the 2021 U.S. National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality, the Biden Administration emphasizes the need for a gender perspective across our foreign and national security policies, including in our humanitarian response and prevention efforts. Recognition of the disproportionate impact of gender-based violence, and the political, economic, and social exclusion of women, girls, and LGBTQI+ persons in certain contexts can help improve early warning frameworks to forecast mass atrocities.
3. **Stabilization Assistance Review (2018):** The Stabilization Assistance Review (SAR) is a framework that provides lessons learned and principles for how to best leverage U.S. diplomatic engagement, defense professionalization and capacity building, and foreign assistance to stabilize conflict-affected areas. Atrocity prevention and response efforts will align with and incorporate SAR principles.
4. **Interagency Counterterrorism Resources and Policy Review (2021):** The Biden Administration is leading an ongoing interagency review of counterterrorism resources, policy, posture, and prioritization to determine how best to shape the future CT enterprise in light of evolving threats and its alignment with other national security priorities such as Strategic Competition. Where the threat of terrorism accompanies the risk of atrocities, atrocity prevention and response actions will align with and complement CT efforts.
5. **U.S. Democracy and Human Rights Agenda (2021):** The Biden Administration has articulated that supporting democracy, protecting human rights, and fighting corruption are central to U.S. national security, and emphasized that human rights must be at the center of U.S. foreign policy. Democracy and human rights activities will support atrocity prevention by promoting legitimate, transparent, and inclusive political, economic, and social systems that reduce fragility; increase resiliency; mitigate risks of violent conflict and instability; and advance equity, inclusion, dignity, and freedom for all.



**Figure 5 Caption (front and back cover): Phnom Penh, Cambodia** – A view from the S-21 Interrogation and Detention Center of the Khmer Rouge regime. As part of the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, the S-21 preserves evidence of a tragic period in Cambodian history with the aim of encouraging visitors to be messengers of peace. Freepik photo by Kostya

