

R2P IDEAS in brief



Asia Pacific Centre for the
Responsibility to Protect

The Responsibility to Prevent – Applying a Causal Framework to the 3 Pillars

Year of Prevention

Since its unanimous support at the 2005 World Summit, much of the focus of R2P has been on Pillar 3 concerns, either in the face of imminent atrocities, or after such violence has already been committed. However, two recent events have seen a broadening of this emphasis to encourage a greater commitment to prevention: Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's declaration that 2012 be known as the 'year of prevention', and US President Barack Obama's announcement of the establishment of an Atrocities Prevention Board.

While all 3 Pillars of R2P prioritise prevention, many challenges remain. Most significantly, operationalising a broad 3 Pillar approach to the prevention of mass atrocities needs to be informed by an understanding of both root causes and escalating factors of such violence.

Sound preventive strategies need to be premised on an understanding of the range of factors that contribute to the commission of widespread or systematic violence. Effective prevention requires careful analysis of the complex, interweaving factors that lead to risk of atrocities over the long term, as well as an understanding of pathways by which risk escalates into the commission of atrocities.

This briefing paper outlines a framework to account for the causes, and in turn onset, of mass atrocities. By highlighting the complex interaction between long term preconditions and crisis events, the framework demonstrates that effective prevention needs to incorporate a combination of long term measures aimed at reducing the risk of future atrocities, as well as measures designed to prevent their imminent commission. This suggests that preventive policies need to utilise all 3 Pillars of the Secretary-General's approach to implementing R2P.

While causal frameworks for genocide specifically, and conflict in general are both in abundance, the same cannot be said for the four mass atrocity crimes. This research has been part of a three-year (2009-2012) AusAID-funded Prevention Program at the Asia-Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. The Program has been dedicated to furthering the understanding of the causes of mass atrocities and discovering measures to advance the preventive component of the responsibility to protect principle.

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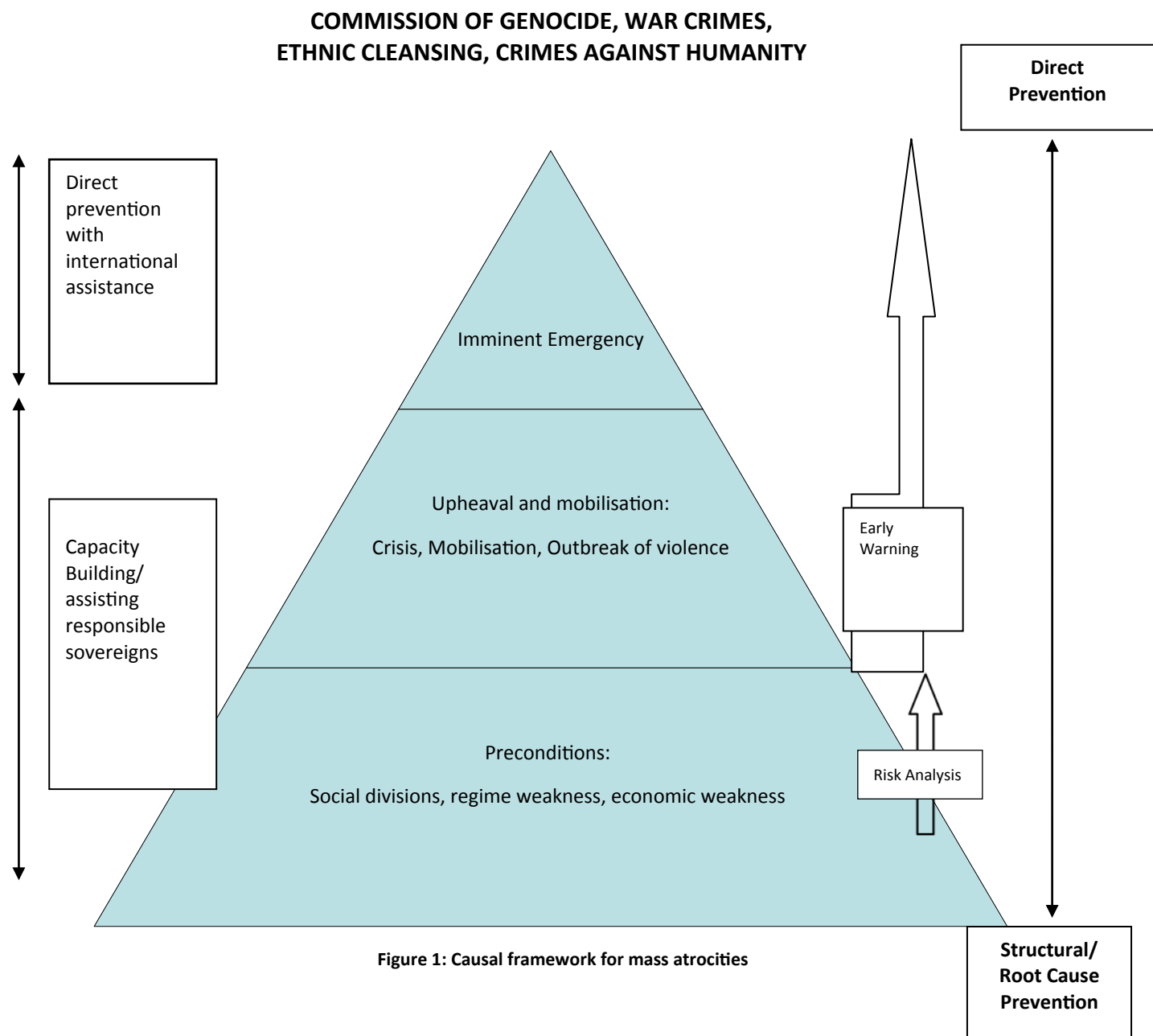


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A Causal Framework of Mass Atrocities

The causal framework presented in this briefing paper¹ identifies three major stages in the path to mass atrocities:

1. The existence of preconditions
2. Processes of crisis, upheaval and mobilisation
3. Imminent emergency



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Stage One – Preconditions

The *preconditions* that are conducive to genocide or other mass atrocities can be grouped into three main categories: (1) the existence of established ethnic, religious or political divisions, (2) regime weakness and (3) economic weakness. The factors in this stage establish the potential for genocide or other mass atrocities. In themselves they do not represent a linear path to the inevitable outcome of such violence.² In this way they are regarded as necessary but not sufficient factors for the commission of such atrocities.

Most genocide scholars have identified the existence of long-term social cleavages as a precondition for mass violence. The risk becomes more acute when a victim group suffers systematic discrimination. Such divisions are often further exacerbated by past atrocities. A weak regime can compound this division by seeking to consolidate its power through acts of aggression against groups or individuals it regards as a threat. Such violations tend to be more pronounced when democracy or the rule of law is fragile or non-existent. Economic weakness can increase the risk of future atrocities in three ways: relative isolation in world trade, economic crisis leading to scapegoating, and economic inequality based on social difference.

Stage Two – Upheaval and Mobilisation

The risk of mass atrocities increases substantially if a state with many preconditions experiences crisis and *upheaval*. Crises can come in the form of economic decline, a weakening of political institutions, or a natural disaster. When upheaval brings about a change in the domestic balance of power, elite groups may seek to assert or re-assert their authority by espousing an ideology that elevates a dominant group and dehumanizes other groups. When a high number of preconditions already exist, the opportunities for elites to harness such divisions becomes much greater.

The factors in stage two can be organised sequentially:

1. A political, economic or natural crisis heightens pre-existing divisions.
2. This prompts mobilisation.
3. This mobilisation can lead to the outbreak of organised violence.

In the second stage, low-level atrocities may have already been committed, making the risk of genocide and mass atrocities considerably higher, as the opportunity to exterminate or uproot a rival group is increased.

One key factor that discerns 'ordinary' violent conflict from those likely to be characterised by mass atrocities is the mobilising of people around exclusionary ideologies.

At this stage of crisis and upheaval, if violence committed goes unpunished, or receives the active support of government, a culture of impunity that paves the way for genocide or other mass atrocities is established. Moreover, the further such tensions and violence escalates, the more difficult it is for preventive strategies to stop the momentum towards mass atroc-

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Stage Three – Imminent Emergency

Once violence takes on a more systematic character in its targeting of victim groups, the risk of genocide or other mass atrocities becomes much greater. In the weeks and months immediately prior to the commission of such atrocities, a number of warning signs become apparent and their presence highlight the *imminence* of an emergency. These can be categorised into four main types:

- The increase of life integrity violations.
- The organised preparation of mass murder.
- Greater opposition from the victim group.
- Warnings from the international community, not supported by action. If external actors issue threats or warnings that are not supported by action, this may actually encourage a culture of immunity based on the perception that further atrocities will not elicit a negative response.³

An Illustrative Case: Côte d'Ivoire

The causal framework is useful in accounting for the escalation of violence in Côte d'Ivoire, following the political crisis triggered by the 2010 elections. The country was characterised by a number of preconditions underscoring the risk of future atrocities – ethnic and religious cleavages, state-led discrimination, human rights violations were all evident. In addition, years of troubled democratic transition and economic decline had precipitated a military coup in 1999 and a civil war in 2002-2003.⁴ With frequent brutal crackdowns of political opponents, and political competition commonly aggravating the already volatile social cleavages, the November 2010 election in Côte d'Ivoire was conducted in an environment marked by acute risk for mass atrocities.

Indeed, when the incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo refused to accept the results and concede defeat, the country was pushed into another crisis. This provoked a mobilization of troops and an escalation of violence defined by territory and ethnicity. When supporters of the declared winner, Alassane Ouattara took to the streets in early December to protest, security forces killed many of the unarmed demonstrators. They also attacked the offices of opposition officials and civil society groups. Throughout the country, pro-Gbagbo forces especially targeted northern Ivoirians and West African immigrants, and committed widespread sexual violence against these groups.⁵ By January 2011, this violence had escalated considerably. Gbagbo's supporters were using state-run television to broadcast incitements to violence against both Ouattara supporters and UN personnel, and their attacks against civilians intensified. Reciprocal attacks by pro-Ouattara militias in villages that supported Gbagbo were also escalating.⁶ By March 2011, the country was in the grasp of a full-scale armed conflict, characterised by the deliberate targeting of civilians. Massacres, targeted killings and sexual violence were committed by forces on both sides.⁷

This violence was eventually halted in April 2011 when Gbagbo was arrested after French Special Forces and pro-Ouattara forces stormed the presidential palace – a move authorised by UN Security Council Resolution 1975. The Security Council stressed its support for the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) to use 'all necessary means to carry out its mandate to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence.'⁸ However, while this latest crisis ended swiftly after an effective international response, the risk of future atrocities has not diminished. This recent episode of violence and upheaval further aggravated the long-term social cleavages in the country, and as long as political competition continues to be defined by such division, the possibility of ongoing violence and further atrocities remains high.

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An understanding of the unfolding violence in Côte d'Ivoire both prior to and since 2010 through the causal framework highlights the need to foster preventive strategies which address not only immediate escalatory factors, but also the complex interaction of long term preconditions related to governance and social diversity. In other words, an understanding of causes of mass atrocities in Côte d'Ivoire emphasises the need for a 3 Pillar approach to prevention.

The role of prevention

Effective prevention needs to focus on measures that address both the rising tensions that lead to genocide or other mass atrocities, and the long term preconditions of these crimes. It can only be effective when it is premised on a sound understanding of the causes of mass atrocities. This framework offers a broad and holistic starting point.

It also highlights a paradox in the prevention of mass atrocities – that is, the deeper one goes in examining the structural causes of these crimes, the more difficult it is to prove direct causal links between any single factor and the eventual commission of the four crimes associated with R2P. Yet, the longer these preconditions are left to fester (stage 1), without proactive, targeted measures to increase state and community resilience to crisis and upheaval (stage 2) the more difficult prevention becomes in imminent emergencies (stage 3). In other words, both the range of preventive tools and the probability of their success significantly decrease as the situation escalates from long-term risk to upheaval, to imminent atrocities. Nevertheless, preventive strategies that address the long-term preconditions have a range of benefits, such as strengthening democracies and the rule of law, decreasing inequities in economic opportunity, and building social resilience.

A 3 Pillar Approach to the Prevention of Mass Atrocities

The following table illustrates the range of preventive strategies can address the long-term preconditions of mass atrocities as well as escalating tensions prior to the imminent commission of such violence.

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	Pillar 1	Pillar 2	Pillar 3
Preconditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fostering strong civil society • Free and independent press • Mechanisms for managing social divisions and tensions • Incorporating international humanitarian standards into domestic law • Monitoring tensions between and within communities • Challenging gender-based discrimination • Fostering individual responsibility • Becoming a signatory to the Rome Statute, strengthening the rule of law • Developing national human rights institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing assistance to foster the existing capacity for indigenous mediation and dispute resolution • Improving development assistance to poor and marginalised minority groups • Targeted assistance programs to build capacity that mitigates the risk of mass atrocities • Assisting with electoral reform and incorporating contingency planning on peaceful power transitions • Public and private diplomatic efforts to persuade states to meet their protection obligations • Assistance in incorporating legal provisions to curb gender-based violence and to strengthen the rule of law • Helping to develop 'civilian capacity' in regional/sub-regional organisations to prevent mass atrocity crimes, including training for local, state and regional institutions to recognise causes of mass atrocities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Pillar 3 activities are relevant in post-conflict environments, characterised by atrocities, where states are rebuilding in the face of weakness and vulnerability) • Caretaker governments (Kosovo, Bosnia, Cambodia) • Peace operations as primary upholders of law and order • Protection of property/assets • Peace-building initiatives • Development of capacity sharing arrangements
Upheaval/ Mobilisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking assistance from the UN or other organisations • Civil society pressure on elites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mediation • Preventive Diplomacy • Statements of concern • Developing capacity for early warning of escalating tensions and violence • Partnerships between intergovernmental organisations and civil society to develop early warning • Preventive deployment • High level dialogue for child protection • Advocacy on human rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blocking the flow of arms • Statements of concern • Fact finding missions by the UN or regional organisations • Using existing peace operations to initiate counter-broadcasts in the face of hate speech • Establishing safe havens for displaced populations

Figure 2: Strategies to prevent mass atrocities

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	Pillar 1	Pillar 2	Pillar 3
Imminent Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual and community resourcefulness in protecting potential victims • Conveying information through social media about potential violence and danger spots to avoid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadening the mandates of preventive deployments • Assisting weakened states 'to deal with armed, non-state actors' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted sanctions, embargoes • Preventive diplomacy • Good offices • Mediation • Peace enforcement • ICC indictments • Blocking access to incendiary/hate speech media broadcasts (radio, internet, cell network jamming) • Public calls by diplomats against hate speech/escalating violence • Advocating against the use of veto in the Security Council on situations characterised by mass atrocities

Figure 2: Strategies to prevent mass atrocities

The 3 pillars of R2P can be understood and operationalised through the lens of the causal framework for mass atrocities. This approach incorporates local, national and international actors, and suggests a range of strategies to address both structural indications of risk as well as escalatory factors. In doing so, the following observations can be made:

- Prevention does not need to wait for certain 'threshold moments' to be actualised. While some specific preventive strategies are contingent on responding to certain turning points in the escalation of tension and violence, there are a variety of strategies available to mitigate the risk of atrocities before tensions reach a crisis point.
- Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 strategies that address the preconditions of mass atrocities are broad, varied and almost universally favoured. Providing international assistance for development, capacity-building for good governance, and electoral reform are practices which receive widespread support.
- All forms of assistance – related to governance, development as well as humanitarian aid – should plan their strategies and projects with an atrocity prevention lens. Such planning demonstrates an awareness of the context-sensitive nature of risk – the specific nature of preconditions that exist, as well as the occurrence or likelihood of crisis and upheaval, and the impact that long term assistance may have, both positive and negative.⁹
- The multi-Pillar approach to prevention can be complementary in a variety of ways. Often Pillar 2 can be complemented by Pillar 1. For example, understanding how states and communities mitigate risk and foster resilience can inform pillar two strategies in order to facilitate processes that are already proven to work.
- In extreme cases where states manifestly fail to carry out their responsibility to protect, the burden of protection can fall on local actors. Their resourcefulness and determination in the face of danger is often the only form of protection, particularly in cases where the international community is unable to initiate a timely and effective response. In this way Pillar 1 approaches to prevention have significance at every stage of the causal framework.

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- In cases where atrocities are imminent, it is extremely difficult to reach consensus on Pillar 3 responses - such measures are highly controversial.¹⁰ Moreover, the later preventive action is operationalized, the more expensive it becomes, and the less likely it is to succeed. Given this, it makes sense to fully utilize the broadest range of strategies available, with the aim of avoiding impasses on international responses to escalating crises like Syria.

Conclusion

This framework underscores the need to develop greater cognisance of the causes and paths of escalation to mass atrocities, in relation to the full range of corresponding preventive strategies that exist. This demands a holistic approach to prevention – one that utilises all 3 Pillars of the Responsibility to Protect. Increased commitment to a broad range of strategies that address the risk of mass atrocities raises the possibility that the number of cases where such violence breaks out will decrease.¹¹ Fewer instances of mass violence means a greater amount of resources and attention can be devoted to those that occur, and the harder they are to ignore.

¹ For a more detailed explanation of this framework, see McLoughlin, Stephen. 2009. 'Preventing Genocide and Mass Atrocities: Causes and Paths of Escalation' Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect.

² See, for example, Kuper, Leo. 1981. *Genocide*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 55; Fein, Helen. 1979. *Accounting for Genocide*. New York: The Free Press, pp. 7-9.

³ Harff, Barbara. 1998. 'Early Warning for Humanitarian Crises: Sequential Models and the Role of Accelerators'. In *Preventive Measures: Building Risk Assessment and Crisis Early Warning Systems*, ed. John L. Davies and Ted Robert Gurr. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, p. 76.

⁴ Human Rights Watch. 2011. "'They Killed Them Like It Was Nothing' The Need for Justice in Côte d'Ivoire's Post-Election Crimes'. Available at http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/cdi1011webwcover_0.pdf, p. 16.

⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 26-27.

⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 26-37, 41-51.

⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 59-87.

⁸ United Nations Security Council. 2011. S/RES/1975 (2011).

⁹ See Bellamy, Alex. 2011. 'Mass Atrocities and Armed Conflict: Links, Distinctions and Implications for the Responsibility to Protect'. Policy Analysis Brief, The Stanley Foundation, pp. 8-9.

¹⁰ See, for example, Jennifer M. Welsh. 2010. 'Turning Words into Deeds? The Implementation of the 'Responsibility to Protect''. *Global Responsibility to Protect*. 2 (1-2), p. 153.

¹¹ See Bellamy, Alex. 2010. 'The Responsibility to Protect – Five Years On'. *Ethics and International Affairs*. 24(2), p. 167.

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Further Reading for Genocide/Mass Atrocities Prevention

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