

Strengthening Australia's Conflict Prevention Programming through a Strategic Approach to Atrocity Prevention

Benjamin E. Goldsmith, Professor & Research Director, School of Politics and International Relations, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University

Cecilia Jacob, Associate Professor in the Department of International Relations, and Associate Dean (Research, Engagement and Impact) in the College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University.

Dr Tibi Gallis, Executive Director, Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities.

Frank Osei, Technical Assistance Officer, Executive Office Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities

Dr Sascha Nanlohy, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Economics and Peace; Honorary Research Associate, The University of Sydney.

Introduction

Global geostrategic trends directly impact Australian foreign and defence policy in a variety of ways. For a nation such as Australia, which prioritises defence of the rules-based international order, there are few violations more egregious to confront than genocide and mass atrocities. Nevertheless, genocide has killed at least 84 million civilians worldwide since 1900.¹ Genocide and mass atrocities are not just catastrophic events; they reflect deep ethical and moral failings in society and the international community; they also increase the prevalence of terrorism, civil war, mass displacement, economic destruction and long-term failure to democratise. Recent large-scale atrocity events have had major consequences in the Indo-Pacific region including increasing the flows of refugees, such as the mass killing of Tamils at the end of the Sri Lankan civil war (2009) and of Rohingya during the ongoing civil war in Myanmar.²

Genocide and mass atrocities are among the most catastrophic forms of violence that afflict the world today. As a middle power that seeks to uphold the rules-based international order, Australia recognises the importance of atrocity prevention as core to that order. This submission outlines the importance of atrocity prevention as a distinct but related imperative to conflict prevention for Australian development policy. It illustrates the relationship between a number of major strategic trends and mass atrocities, where Australia sits in the global atrocity prevention landscape and a series of concrete measures Australia could take to strengthen atrocity prevention and conflict prevention capacity within government.

¹ Charles Anderton, 'Killing Civilians as an Inferior Input in a Rational Choice Model of Genocide and Mass Killing', *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy* 20 (2014): 327–346.

² The Targeted Mass Killing dataset categorizes both of these events as genocides. See: Charles Butcher, Benjamin E. Goldsmith, Sascha Nanlohy, Arcot Sowmya, and David Muchlinski. "Introducing the Targeted Mass Killing Dataset for the Study and Forecasting of Mass Atrocities," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 64, 7-8 (2020): 1524-1547. Data can be accessed here: <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/79DSXR>

The strategic conditions facing Australia in the next decade augur poorly for mass atrocity risk in the region and beyond. The international system is facing some of its most severe challenges to previously agreed upon norms including territorial integrity and aggression. Normative frameworks like the Responsibility to Protect are also significantly challenged following repeated failures to actively prevent atrocity crimes. Great power competition has always been a feature of the international system but continues to increase as great and middle powers seek to expand their influence beyond their own borders and traditional zones of influence. External influence has been critical to genocides and politicides during the 20th and 21st centuries. Great or regional power competition has incentivised permissiveness or active support for catastrophic atrocities from great power patrons based on ideological alignments or strategic interests.³

According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Programme the world experienced more conflicts concurrently in 2023 than at any time since World War Two.⁴ Many of these do not amount to the level of war and will not result in atrocity crimes but an increasing number of conflicts escalate into extremely violent warfare with either no regard for civilian protection or indeed deliberate targeting of civilian populations at the core of war fighting strategy. The increase in conflict has implications for arms proliferation and influence competition which can both exacerbate the other leading to increasingly unstable regions, risking conflict contagion, transnational crime and the breakdown of order in previously functional societies.

Climate change is another threat multiplier which is shown to increase conflict and atrocity risk, via indirect causal pathways. Heightened resource scarcity, competition for resources and uncertainty over weather patterns or the effects of natural disaster events creates the conditions for amplified conflict between groups, often where existing conflicts exist. Climate change is also bringing about the conditions for mass movement of people, potentially creating tensions between existing and new populations. The relationship between climate and conflict is not isolated to the effects of climate change but also its solution. Decarbonisation, while a vital economic and environmental interest, also will bring about significant geopolitical change with the decline of competition for oil and its changing geopolitical salience cooccurring with increased salience and competition for critical minerals.

Technological change also has profound implications for atrocity risk. Cyberspace is already a critical platform for the coordination, promotion, and monitoring of mass atrocities. It may also be an avenue for low cost, high impact interventions.⁵ Artificial intelligence is further changing the shape of war and may have profound implications for atrocity risk and response including in the automation of autonomous weapon systems.

Greater understanding of these issues, and planning for their prevention, is critical for Australian strategic interests in the 21st century.

Impacts of Conflict and Mass Atrocities on Australian National Interests

³ Sascha Nanlohy. "Geopolitics and genocide: patron interests, client crises, and realpolitik." *Journal of Global Security Studies* 9, no. 1 (2024): ogad023.

⁴ Shawn Davies, Garoun Engström, Therese Pettersson, and Magnus Öberg. "Organized violence 1989–2023, and the prevalence of organized crime groups." *Journal of Peace Research* 61, no. 4 (2024): 673-693.

⁵ Rhiannon Neilsen. "Coding protection: 'cyber humanitarian interventions' for preventing mass atrocities." *International Affairs* 99, no. 1 (2023): 299-319.

Regional Instability in the Indo-Pacific

Weak governance or civil strife in neighbouring states can spill across borders, create power vacuums, and necessitate costly interventions. For example, the early 2000s intercommunal violence in the Solomon Islands pushed that state toward collapse, prompting Australia to lead the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) to restore order. Similarly, subnational conflicts in Southeast Asia, such as Myanmar's ethnic crises and insurgency in the southern Philippines were identified by Australia's Foreign Policy White Paper as key sources of regional instability. Left unchecked, such turmoil can foster transnational threats and invite external interference, jeopardizing the "secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific" that Australia seeks to uphold.

Refugee Flows and Irregular Migration Pressures

Conflict and mass atrocities often drive large-scale displacement, leading to refugee flows and irregular migration that pose humanitarian and security challenges for Australia. Analysis of the impacts directly from genocide or politicide show that on average these atrocity crimes lead to the displacement of around 2.6 million people per year between 1975-2010.⁶ As noted, in the Indo-Pacific, this dynamic was most recently evident during the 2015 Rohingya refugee crisis: when Myanmar's crackdown on the Rohingya forced hundreds of thousands to flee, waves of asylum seekers took to boats across Southeast Asia. Australia faced regional pressure to respond, and has currently budgeted \$370 million in humanitarian aid for Myanmar and the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh over the next three years.⁷ Globally, conflicts like the Syrian civil war have triggered mass migrations that strain international refugee systems. Unregulated flows of desperate people can fuel smuggling networks, test Australia's border security, and create diplomatic friction in the region. Proactively addressing root causes of displacement and supporting frontline states is therefore seen as essential to Australia's strategic interest in orderly migration and regional stability.

Economic and Trade Disruption

Major conflicts and atrocities can disrupt trade, investment and economic stability, directly harming Australia's economic interests. In an interconnected global economy, wars in one region can cause worldwide ripple effects, for example, Russia's 2022 war in Ukraine was a major contributor to inflationary pressures even in Australia. Closer to home, any conflict that interrupts key Indo-Pacific shipping lanes would be devastating for a trade-dependent nation like Australia.

Damage to Australia's Global Reputation and Influence

Australia's international standing and influence are shaped by how it responds to conflicts and human rights crises. As a liberal democracy that often advocates for a "rules-based order" and humanitarian norms, Australia is expected, by its own public and by partners, to contribute constructively to alleviating mass atrocities. Failure to do so can tarnish Australia's reputation. In an Indo-Pacific strategic environment where influence is often garnered through diplomacy and values, Australia's stance on mass atrocities, whether vocal

⁶ Gary Uzonyi. "Unpacking the effects of genocide and politicide on forced migration." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 31, no. 3 (2014): 225-243.

⁷ <https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/corporate/portfolio-budget-statements/australias-official-development-assistance-budget-summary-2025-26>

advocacy, sanctions, peacekeeping or refugee support plays a key role in either bolstering or diminishing our soft power.

Increased Demand on Defence, Aid, and Diplomatic Resources

Finally, overseas conflicts and humanitarian disasters resulting from mass atrocities place significant demands on Australia's defence forces, foreign aid budget, and diplomatic efforts. Australia frequently contributes to international crisis responses, which can stretch national resources. Militarily, Australia must be prepared for evacuations, peacekeeping, or even combat operations as part of coalitions. The Defence Strategic Review 2023 notes that Australia's defence posture and budget are under growing strain in an era of "cascading" security crises. This reflects a broader trend: whether it is contributing to stabilisation in Afghanistan, disaster relief in the Pacific, or diplomatic mediation through forums like the UN and ASEAN, Australia must divert considerable funding and personnel to address the downstream impacts of conflicts. Such commitments are driven by both moral imperatives and clear national interest: by investing in conflict prevention and crisis response, Australia ultimately seeks to reduce the need for costlier interventions later. Nonetheless, every dollar and deployment toward an overseas crisis is a resource not spent elsewhere. Thus, preventing mass atrocities and containing conflicts early aligns with Australia's interest in minimizing heavy burdens on the Australian Defence Force, aid programs and diplomatic corps. In the long run, a more peaceful world is decidedly in Australia's strategic and budgetary interest.

What are atrocity crimes, and how are they related to armed conflict?

Atrocity crimes are episodes of conscience-shocking abuse that violate the fundamental human rights of a group of individuals. Mass atrocities are crimes that occur on a large scale and include systematic targeting of population groups based on identity or the indiscriminate targeting of civilians, to further political and/or military aims. Generally, mass atrocities include the international crimes of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity defined in the Rome Statute (1998). Mass atrocities violate International Human Rights Law, and in the context of war crimes, International Humanitarian Law. In exceptional cases, these include violations of the Genocide Convention. These crimes constitute the most serious violations or abuses of human rights that occur on a large scale.

Atrocity violence is distinct from conflict violence; however, they are interrelated. Armed conflicts are defined as combat between two or more belligerent groups in an international or non-international armed conflict. Mass atrocities are one-sided, intentional violations of human rights of the most serious nature and can be committed in either peacetime or wartime. However, most mass atrocities are committed during armed conflicts.

Atrocity prevention refers to strategies and interventions to prevent or halt episodes of widespread and systematic violations of human rights. These strategies correspond to specific risk factors that increase the likelihood of atrocities being committed. Such risks include:⁸

- Political instability, including weak state institutions, coups, mass popular demonstrations, assassinations, etc.;

⁸ See [United Nations Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes: A tool for prevention](#) (2014), Scott Straus, *Fundamentals of Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention*, Washington D.C.: US Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2016.

- Armed conflict, that includes mobilization of armed forces and militia with capacity and resources to commit largescale violence;
- Extreme ideology that includes motive or intent to target a population group;
- Intergroup tensions and patterns of discrimination against a population group.

These risk factors overlap with conflict risk. Therefore, strategies aimed at preventing conflict and atrocities are often complementary. Many of the risks and drivers of both conflict and atrocities are embedded in development-related concerns and can be integrated into development policy.⁹ Strengthening state institutions and democratic process, supporting economic reforms, community resilience, peacebuilding and transitional justice are examples of development-related interventions that can reduce risk of both conflict and atrocities.

However, at times, conflict prevention strategies may exacerbate specific atrocity risks. For example, conflict resolution processes may shift the balance of power in favour of a dominant group and belligerent parties to the conflict. Power-sharing arrangements between former belligerent parties or political inclusion of former-militia in election processes, for example, can exclude population groups that were non-party to conflict and may increase likelihood of discriminatory policy and targeting. This was the case with the Western-backed peace process in Myanmar during its semi-democratic transition (2011-2020). Inattention to the risks of atrocities by the international donor community was evident in the failure to prevent the genocidal targeting of the Rohingya population group in 2017, despite the presence of clear atrocity risk factors.¹⁰

Any action taken to support long-term peace and strengthen the prevention of armed conflict must consider the potential for the commission of atrocity crimes, and the extent to which development actions may alleviate or exacerbate these risks.¹¹ A particular challenge for conflict and atrocity prevention in the Indo-Pacific is that reliable data on risk factors are not available for many countries, especially in the Pacific region. But such data are crucial for understanding and early warning in order to prevent major outbreaks of violence.¹² Australia has an interest in improving systematic early warning capabilities in the region.

Should the Australian Government seek to strengthen its conflict prevention capacity through its development program, we urge the government to develop a wider atrocity prevention strategy to ensure an accurate assessment of the impact of its programs. A strategy should ensure that Australia does not inadvertently contribute to conditions that may exacerbate the

⁹ United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General: Development and the responsibility to protect: recognizing and addressing embedded risks and drivers of atrocity crimes, [A/77/910-S/2023/409](#). 6 June 2023.

¹⁰ Gert Rosenthal, *A Brief and Independent Inquiry into the Involvement of the United Nations in Myanmar from 2010 to 2018*, 29 May 2019; Martin Mennecke and Ellen E. Stensrud, (2021). The Failure of the International Community to Apply R2P and Atrocity Prevention in Myanmar. *Global Responsibility to Protect*, 13(2-3), 111-130. On Australia's actions specifically, see Cecilia Jacob, (2021). Navigating between Pragmatism and Principle: Australia's Foreign Policy Response to the 2017 Rohingya Crisis. *Global Responsibility to Protect*, 13(2-3), 186-217.

¹¹ For more detailed case studies and recommendations for foreign policy and development policy, see Cecilia Jacob (2022) *Foreign Policy and Diplomatic Promotion of Human Rights for Atrocity Prevention*, Oxford Institute for Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict, Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford.

¹² Håvard Hegre, Håvard Mokleiv Nygård, Peder Landsverk. "Can We Predict Armed Conflict? How the First 9 Years of Published Forecasts Stand Up to Reality," *International Studies Quarterly* 65, 3 (2021): 660–668. Sascha Nanlohy, Charles Butcher and Benjamin E. Goldsmith. "The Policy Value of Quantitative Atrocity Forecasting Models," *RUSI Journal* 162, 2 (2017): 24-32.

risk of future atrocities. Instead, development policy and conflict prevention strategies need to be sensitized to atrocity risk.

Atrocity prevention as a foreign and development policy objective

The recommendation for Australia to develop a national atrocity prevention strategy, and to coordinate this with its approach to conflict prevention would bring Australia in line with its peers. These include the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union that have developed institutional capacity to integrate atrocity prevention across its wider development cooperation and foreign policy.

The United States has recognised atrocity prevention as ‘a ‘core national security interest and core moral responsibility of the United States’.¹³ It has created an interagency atrocity prevention taskforce, passed the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act (2018), and implemented the United States Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent and Respond to Atrocities (2022). This strategy includes foreign assistance/programming to:

... 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.¹⁴

To the extent that the US capacity for and interest in conflict and atrocity prevention in the Indo-Pacific is waning under the present administration, it may fall largely to Australia to assume leadership in regional early warning and prevention efforts.

The UK Houses of Parliament have launched an independent [standing group on atrocity crimes](#), while developing early warning and analysis tools to detect atrocity crimes, including the Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability strategic assessment tool. The UK Parliament's International Development Committee has also started a dialogue to urge the adoption of a national atrocity prevention strategy, to be integrated across the UK's foreign and security policy.¹⁵

The European Union External Action unit has developed an [atrocity prevention toolkit](#) to assist EU Staff to assess early warning and response to atrocities in partner countries. European states such as Denmark have developed atrocity prevention programming into their development cooperation programs, leveraging their foreign assistance to mitigate atrocity risk factors and support peace.¹⁶

¹³ Barack Obama, ‘Presidential Study Directive 10: Directive on Creation of an Interagency Atrocities Prevention Board and Corresponding Interagency Review’, 4 August 2011.

¹⁴ [United States Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent and Respond to Atrocities](#) (2022), page 9.

¹⁵ House of Commons International Development Committee, ‘[From Srebrenica to a safer tomorrow: Preventing future mass atrocities around the world: Government's response to the Committee's Third Report](#)’, 19 January 2023. See also, the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, ‘[UK approach to preventing mass atrocities](#)’, 2019.

¹⁶ Martin Mennecke. (2020). Denmark and the implementation of R2P. In C. Jacob, & M. Mennecke (Eds.), *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect: A Future Agenda* (1. ed., pp. 37-60). Routledge.

Currently, Australia's strategy to preventing armed conflict through its conflict and fragility programming is disconnected from its work on atrocity prevention. Atrocity prevention is supported by the multilateral unit in DFAT with limited resources. Australia's approach is aimed primarily at UN diplomatic initiatives on the Responsibility to Protect and has yet to be integrated within our wider foreign assistance and development programming.

To do so would require the development of a national atrocity prevention strategy and the development of robust early warning and monitoring capacity. We propose the creation of an Australian Network for Atrocity Prevention, see appendix 1. Development cooperation can be used to support peacebuilding and reduce the likelihood of conflict and atrocity crimes in partner states. However, strategic planning across government departments is needed for any future coordinated response to atrocity situations during different phases of escalation.

Strengthening DFAT's Internal Capacities for Conflict and Atrocity Prevention (TOR 1 and 4)

Australia's international development program represents a significant investment in regional stability and human security. Almost all of Australia's \$5 billion ODA budget goes to Indo-Pacific countries.¹⁷ However, the effectiveness of conflict prevention programming depends critically on the institutional capacities within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to design, implement, monitor, and evaluate prevention-focused initiatives. This brief discusses how strengthening internal DFAT capacities can enhance Australia's contribution to building resilience in fragile states and improving early identification and mitigation of conflicts and atrocities.

Effective conflict and atrocity prevention requires specialized knowledge, analytical frameworks, and operational capabilities that differ substantially from traditional development programming. Foreign service officers and development practitioners require dedicated training to:

- Recognize structural risk factors and early warning indicators of potential conflict and mass atrocities;
- Integrate conflict-sensitive approaches across sectoral programming (governance, education, infrastructure, humanitarian assistance);
- Engage effectively with at-risk communities and local civil society actors;
- Coordinate prevention efforts across government agencies and with international partners; and
- Monitor and evaluate the impact of prevention-focused interventions.

At present, there is no systematic approach to building these capacities within DFAT. While a Conflict Prevention and Strategy Branch exists within the Defence and National Security Policy Division, Australia lacks the dedicated bureau-level infrastructure that comparable nations maintain for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The absence of permanently offered dedicated conflict and atrocity prevention training for foreign service staff limits Australia's ability to translate development investments into meaningful prevention outcomes. This gap is particularly consequential given Australia's significant presence in the

¹⁷ <https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/corporate/portfolio-budget-statements/australias-official-development-assistance-budget-summary-2025-26>

Indo-Pacific, a region facing diverse conflict risks including political instability, climate-induced displacement, resource competition, and identity-based tensions.

The Case for Dedicated Prevention Infrastructure

The 2013-2014 integration of AusAID into DFAT resulted in a significant loss of specialized development expertise relevant to conflict prevention programming. Independent reviews have documented that up to 2,000 years of cumulative expertise was lost when leading global experts, advisers, senior locally-engaged staff, and principal specialists departed¹⁸. The aid program continues to recover from this exodus of senior-level expertise years later.

A 2024 peacebuilding roundtable convened by the Asia, Australia and Pacific Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Network concluded that a dedicated peacebuilding unit within DFAT is necessary to strengthen Australia's conflict prevention capabilities.¹⁹ This need has become more pressing given the significant reduction in United States engagement in conflict prevention and atrocity prevention work, which creates both a gap and an opportunity for Australia to assume greater leadership in the Indo-Pacific alongside regional partners. This submission endorses that recommendation and proposes specific measures to strengthen DFAT's internal conflict and atrocity prevention capabilities.

Establishing a dedicated Conflict and Atrocity Prevention Unit, whether as a bureau, division, or centre of excellence, would provide:

- A focal point for conflict prevention expertise within DFAT;
- Coordination capacity for whole-of-government prevention efforts;
- Institutional memory and lesson-learning from past programming;
- A platform for partnership with international prevention actors and research institutions;
- Dedicated resources for training and capacity development across the foreign service.

International partners, including the United Kingdom and European Union, maintain dedicated atrocity prevention and conflict stabilization units within their foreign ministries. Australia's leadership in the Indo-Pacific would be strengthened by comparable institutional infrastructure. A recent Australian defence analysis has recommended that government adopt an 'atrocity prevention lens' that injects prevention considerations into existing policies, programs, and capabilities²⁰. This approach helps identify otherwise unforeseen risks and generates options for prevention. The Australian Government should consider interdepartmental coordination models such as the US Atrocity Prevention Board, which integrates Defence, Foreign Affairs, intelligence, and law enforcement perspectives into a unified prevention framework.

¹⁸ Richard Moore. (2019). *Strategic choice: A future-focused review of the DFAT-AusAID integration*. Development Policy Centre, Australian National University. <https://devpolicy.org/publications/reports/DFAT-AusAIDIntegrationReview-FullVersion.pdf>

¹⁹ Asia, Australia and Pacific Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Network. (2024). *Peacebuilding in Australian foreign policy: A summary of views and conclusions from the Australia Peacebuilding Network Roundtable* [Summary]. Initiative for Peacebuilding, University of Melbourne. https://arts.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/4874913/Peacebuilding-Roundtable-Summary-Notes.pdf

²⁰ Sascha Nanlohy and Gorana Grgić. (2024). *Geostrategic trends and atrocity risk: Understanding the risk of mass atrocities in a changing global and regional context* (Australian Army Occasional Paper No. 19). Australian Army Research Centre. https://researchcentre.army.gov.au/sites/default/files/op_19_nanlohy_grgic_geostrategic_trends_and_atrocity_risk.pdf

Developing an Evidence Base for Conflict Prevention in the Pacific (TOR 2, 3, and 4)

This section discusses how Australia can strengthen the effectiveness of its international development program by building a robust evidence base on conflict prevention. Without systematic knowledge of what works, Australia's prevention investments risk operating on assumption rather than demonstrated effectiveness. We propose that Australia invest in generating this evidence through strategic partnership with the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), an approach that would simultaneously strengthen regional prevention architecture and produce lessons applicable across the Indo-Pacific.

Despite significant investment in conflict prevention and peacebuilding globally, the evidence base on what works remains underdeveloped. While few assessments have examined the effectiveness of specific tools, for instance on the contributions of truth commissions and memorialization initiatives to prevention outcomes or the US Holocaust Memorial Museum's tools for atrocity prevention project, no comprehensive assessment has been conducted on the broader impact of development aid on conflict and atrocity prevention, either globally or within the Pacific region.²¹ This evidence gap constrains effective programming in several ways:

- Policymakers lack reliable data on which interventions produce measurable prevention outcomes;
- Resource allocation decisions are made without clear evidence of comparative effectiveness;
- Lessons from past programming are not systematically captured or applied; and
- The field cannot demonstrate impact to maintain political and financial support for prevention investments.

The difficulty of measuring prevention impact is well recognized within the international community and the fields of peacebuilding and development; it is inherently challenging to prove that an event did not occur because of a specific intervention²². However, this challenge makes investment in evidence development more important, not less. Australia has a strategic interest in closing this evidence gap. Effective deployment of development resources in fragile and conflict-affected contexts requires understanding which approaches produce results. Building this evidence base would enable Australia to allocate prevention investments more effectively, demonstrate value to stakeholders, and position itself as a leader in evidence-informed prevention practice.

The Melanesian Spearhead Group as a Strategic Partner

The MSG, comprising Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and the FLNKS of New Caledonia, represents a strategic opportunity for Australia to generate evidence on prevention effectiveness in its immediate region. The MSG's 2038 Prosperity for All Plan reflects member states' commitment to regional solidarity, sustainable development, and human rights protection. However, structural risk factors persist across the region, including historical grievances, inequality, political instability, and climate-related displacement. As

²¹ See Kerry Whigham, K. *Truth commissions and their contributions to atrocity prevention*. Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities; Whigham, K. (2023). *Beyond remembering: An atrocity prevention toolkit for memory spaces*. Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities. <https://www.auschwitzinstitute.org/news/publications>; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Lessons Learned in Preventing and Responding to Mass Atrocities: <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/simon-skjodt-center/work/lessons-learned>

²² United Nations Department of Political Affairs. (2018). *United Nations conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy in action: An overview of the role, approach and tools of the United Nations and its partners in preventing violent conflict*. United Nations. https://dppa.un.org/sites/default/files/booklet_200618_fin_scrn.pdf

recent analysis has noted, threat multipliers including extreme climate events heighten the risk of mass atrocities in the Indo-Pacific, underscoring the need for evidence-informed prevention strategies in Australia's immediate neighbourhood²³.

Supporting or partnering with the MSG to generate prevention evidence serves multiple Australian interests:

- Produces regionally-specific knowledge to inform Australia's prevention programming in the Pacific;
- Strengthens regional architecture for peace and security in Australia's immediate neighbourhood;
- Builds prevention capacity among key Pacific partners as a byproduct of evidence generation;
- Generates lessons applicable across the broader Indo-Pacific; and
- Positions both Australia and the MSG as leaders in evidence-based prevention practice globally.

A Proposed Evidence Development Initiative

Australia should invest in a collaborative evidence-generation initiative with the MSG and international prevention research partners. This initiative would pursue four interconnected objectives. First, the initiative would undertake collaborative research on priority prevention topics relevant to Australia's Pacific programming. An immediate priority could examine climate-induced displacement and atrocity risk, a topic of direct relevance to Pacific island nations and to Australia's regional interests. This research would generate evidence to inform Australian programming while contributing to global understanding of climate-conflict linkages. Second, the initiative would develop monitoring and evaluation frameworks and tracking tools that enable measurement of prevention intervention impacts over time. This could include the enhanced collection of systematic quantitative and qualitative data for conflict and atrocity early warning models. Building this capacity addresses the fundamental challenge of demonstrating prevention effectiveness and creates infrastructure for ongoing evidence generation that can inform future Australian investments. Third, the initiative would support, document and share prevention approaches across MSG member states, identifying innovations, challenges, and lessons learned. This peer learning mechanism would generate comparative evidence on what works in Pacific contexts, directly informing Australia's programming decisions. Fourth, the initiative would support translation of research findings into practical policy guidance, ensuring that evidence informs both Australian programming and regional prevention strategies.

This evidence development initiative would complement broader efforts to strengthen MSG's prevention architecture, including training for government officials and secretariat staff, strategy development support, and policy integration assistance. By grounding these capacity-building efforts in rigorous evidence generation, Australia would ensure that its regional investments are informed by systematic learning about what works.

Recommendations

1. Develop a national atrocity prevention strategy that details the respective responsibilities of relevant government departments, and create an institutional mechanism for implementation and coordination of this strategy.

²³ Nanlohy and Grgić, 2024.

2. Build early warning, monitoring and assessment tools for the prevention of armed conflict and mass atrocities, especially including better data coverage for the Pacific region of crucial interest to Australia.
3. Establish a dedicated Conflict and Atrocity Prevention Unit within DFAT to serve as a centre of expertise, coordination, and training for prevention-focused programming.
4. Develop and implement a mandatory conflict prevention training curriculum for foreign service officers, with particular emphasis on staff posted to fragile and conflict-affected contexts.
5. Create a specialized training program for DFAT staff on atrocity prevention, drawing on established international curricula such as the Global Raphael Lemkin Seminar model, adapted to Indo-Pacific contexts.
6. Integrate conflict and atrocity risk analysis into standard country strategy development processes, ensuring that prevention considerations inform programming decisions from the outset.
7. Establish mechanisms for ongoing professional development and knowledge exchange on conflict prevention, including secondments to international prevention organizations and participation in regional prevention networks.
8. Fund a collaborative atrocity prevention and research program between Australia, the MSG Secretariat, and international prevention partners to generate evidence on conflict prevention effectiveness in Pacific contexts.
9. Support development of impact measurement frameworks and tracking tools, building capacity to monitor and evaluate prevention programming and generate ongoing evidence to inform Australian investments.
10. Establish or support the establishment of a Pacific Prevention Evidence Hub to consolidate research findings, facilitate knowledge exchange, and ensure lessons are systematically captured and applied to Australian programming across the Indo-Pacific.
11. Commission an impact assessment of Australia's existing conflict prevention and stabilization programming in the Pacific, with findings used to inform future programming decisions and contribute to the broader evidence base.
12. Integrate evidence generation requirements into all new conflict prevention programming, ensuring that Australian investments systematically contribute to building the evidence base on prevention effectiveness.

Contributor Biographies:

Dr Sascha Nanlohy is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Economics and Peace and conflict and security expert. He earned his PhD in Government and International Relations from the University of Sydney (2021), following a Master's in Peace and Conflict Studies and a Bachelor of Arts. Dr Nanlohy's research centres on the external influences on genocide, atrocity forecasting, and the geopolitics of mass violence. He is a Research Associate with the Australian National University's Atrocity Forecasting Project, and has worked as a consultant and instructor for the Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities and the US Holocaust Memorial Museum's Simon-Skjoldt Center for the Prevention of Genocide, he previously served on the board of the International Association of Genocide Scholars. His peer-reviewed publications appear in leading journals including the *Journal of Global Security Studies*, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Global Responsibility to Protect*, and *RUSI Journal* as well as developing research for the Australian Department of Defence. Dr Nanlohy's first book *The Geopolitics of Genocide* is forthcoming with Cornell University Press.

Cecilia Jacob is Associate Professor in the Department of International Relations, and Associate Dean (Research, Engagement, and Impact) in the College of Asia and the Pacific at The Australian National University. Her work focuses on civilian protection, mass atrocity prevention, and international human protection norms. She has advised numerous governments on atrocity prevention and conflict-related policy and has consulted for several UN agencies and humanitarian organisations, including the UN Joint Office on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect. Cecilia has authored widely; her latest book *Accountability and Human Protection: The Challenges of a New Global Order* is forthcoming with Oxford University Press.

Benjamin E. Goldsmith is a Professor in the School of Politics and International Relations at the Australian National University. He is the Chief Investigator of the Atrocity Forecasting Project based at ANU. His research in the areas of international relations, global public opinion, and atrocity forecasting has appeared in leading journals including *American Political Science Review*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *PNAS Nexus*, *Political Psychology*, and *World Politics*, and has been featured in popular media including *The Economist*, *The New York Times*, *Scientific American*, and *The Washington Post*. He has received several major research grants including an Australian Research Council Future Fellowship. He was the inaugural President of the Australian Society for Quantitative Political Science, and serves on the editorial boards of *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* and the *Journal of East Asian Studies*.

Dr. Tibi Galis has been the Executive Director of the Auschwitz Institute since 2006. Before joining AIPG, Dr. Galis worked as an Associate Researcher for the Parliament of the United Kingdom, helping develop the country's position on the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide. He also served as rapporteur for the Swedish government at the 2004 Stockholm International Forum on the Prevention of Genocide. Dr. Galis earned a Ph.D. from the Strassler Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Clark University, with a focus on transitional justice. He also holds an M.A. in International Politics and Political Development from the University of Manchester and a B.A. in Political Science from Babes-Bolyai University in Romania, his native country.

Frank Osei joined the Auschwitz Institute in October 2025 as the Executive Office's Technical Assistance Officer. In this role, he supports the planning and implementation of the Executive Office's technical assistance programs, working closely with partners to strengthen atrocity prevention capacities in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Frank is a researcher, trainer, and peacebuilding practitioner specializing in atrocity prevention. He is currently pursuing doctoral studies at Binghamton University (State University of New York), where his research explores the localization of global prevention norms. He has published widely on atrocity prevention and local peace infrastructures and has served as a consultant for regional and international organizations on atrocity risk assessment and mitigation strategies. Frank holds a Master's degree in International Studies and Diplomacy from SOAS, University of London, and a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from the University of Ghana.

About AIPG: The Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities is building a world that prevents genocide and mass atrocities. Through education, training, and technical assistance, we support governments and other actors to develop and strengthen prevention policies and practices. We also encourage cooperation among governments through regional and international networks to advance this work. We help government officials develop policies that remove risk factors and make institutions more inclusive, build institutions that reinforce these goals, and provide redress to victims of past violence. By training officials to put preventative measures in place, we help build more resilient societies around the world. We are a small NGO working in over 90 countries to make prevention a reality.

About the Atrocity Forecasting Project: The Atrocity Forecasting Project at the Australian National University enhances global and Asia-Pacific capacity to anticipate mass atrocities and genocide by developing advanced quantitative forecasting models and deepening understanding of the political instability and conflict processes that precede such events. Using cutting-edge machine-learning alongside traditional social science methods, the project produces forecasts and reports designed as early-warning tools to help protect vulnerable populations and inform prevention efforts. Outputs build on academic literature and are intended to complement qualitative analysis and expert judgment for policymakers and practitioners working on atrocity prevention.

Appendix 1:

Australian Network on Atrocity Prevention Concept Paper DRAFT

Contact

Cecilia Jacob, Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, The Australian National University. [REDACTED]

Rationale

Australia is committed to the principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) on the international community's responsibility to prevent mass atrocity crimes, and protect populations in situations of widespread and systematic human rights abuses. Australia has been a key player in advocating and developing international policy frameworks to improve the prevention and protection of populations from atrocities and genocide over the past two decades.

In light of growing geopolitical tensions and persistence of mass atrocities around the world, there is a need for Australia to develop atrocity prevention capability. Such a capability would align with Australia's broader interest in human rights and the international rule of law. This capability requires coordinated strategies across key government departments, regional and international organisations, to mobilise a wider range of preventive strategies, including early warning, and response mechanisms to address the complex dimensions of human rights emergencies.

Objective

The objective of the Australian Network on Atrocity Prevention (ANAP) is to develop a network of practitioners and experts on atrocity prevention to exchange knowledge and understanding of the field of atrocity prevention, and best practices as these apply to the whole of government policy context. Working group sessions will aim to increase shared understanding of atrocity prevention as a complex policy and operational field, and to build a deeper understanding of the roles and experiences of counterparts within this broader field. Potential outcomes of the working group include identifying areas of complementarity for building a coordinated and effective atrocity prevention capability, and deepening ties between counterparts in the Australian policy context.

Structure and format

Members of the working group will be invited to join Chatham-House roundtable discussions on a bi-monthly basis. Each discussion will focus on a theme that relates to key areas of atrocity prevention policy and practice. Discussion will be led by several of the invited practitioners or invited guests, and allow for open exchange on key developments, experiences and challenges in this field. Participants will be encouraged to exchange openly on potential strategies for addressing these challenges.

Format: Online, and as restrictions permit, hybrid format with online and in-person in Canberra

Length of sessions – 1.5 hours, includes short presentation by lead discussants on the relevant topic, followed by open roundtable discussion. Rapporteur to document key discussion points

Timing – a late afternoon/evening session would accommodate participants in the region plus north American/UK/EU participants {TBD}

Frequency – bi-monthly, with possibility of ad hoc meetings in response to specific cases.

12 Month Schedule – PROPOSED

Session	Topic
1	Atrocity prevention as a cross-cutting policy field and the Australian policy context
2	Can atrocities be prevented? Early warning and atrocity forecasting
3	Timely and effective assistance and regional context
4	Response and international context
5	United State Experiences: the Atrocity Prevention Board
6	EU and UK experiences: EU Atrocity Prevention Toolkit, the UK Integrated Review
7	Accountability for Prevention
8	Revisiting the Australian policy context: what would a national AP strategy look like?

Invitation List

Includes Government sections whose work is related to atrocity prevention, even if it is not defined as such – (eg conflict prevention and fragility, human rights, humanitarian response), country and regional desks and diplomatic posts in in states with atrocity risk, and those responsibility for R2P at UN in NY/GVA, ICC.

Other Departments: Defence, Civil-Military Centre, Attorney-General's Department, PMC
With Australian-based and international academics/experts