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Atrocity Prevention through Persuasion and Deterrence
Political Missions and Preventive Deployments

Summary

- Political missions can be described as multilateral teams of primarily civilian experts that rely largely on political persuasion to find a nonviolent way out of crises. Preventive deployments are defensive military missions primarily aimed at deterring state or non-state actors from initiating undesired actions. Both political missions and preventive deployments are traditionally seen as conflict management tools used by international or regional organizations.

- In certain circumstances, political missions and preventive deployments could contribute to the prevention of mass atrocities by keeping potential perpetrators from implementing a mass atrocity policy and protecting vulnerable populations, through persuasion and deterrence.

- The success of both tools depends in large part on the rare consent of a host government, manifestly failing to protect its population from a threat posed by non-state actors inside its territory, or hostile actors operating from neighboring countries. The utility of these missions is limited when the host regime is responsible for the atrocities in the target area.

> " [T]o be an effective deterrent, the force has to maintain a credible threat of offensive action. If military forces have to resort to offensive activities and compellence, its deterrence has failed by definition. "

Introduction

About 25 leading policymakers, scholars and nongovernmental organization (NGO) leaders participated in an input session organized by the U.S. Institute of Peace on April 5, 2012. The participants analyzed the utility of political missions and preventive deployments for atrocity prevention. This brief describes the key findings and conclusions from the working session, and serves as input for the U.N. secretary-general's report in advance of the U.N. General Assembly's interactive dialogue this summer on timely and decisive responses to prevent and halt genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity in accordance with the Responsibility to Protect principle.

Political missions and preventive deployments are traditionally seen as conflict management tools. Both instruments have received insufficient attention in assessments of the international toolbox available for atrocity prevention. However, both types of missions have operated amid actual and imminent atrocity situations, and have arguably mitigated the risk or impact of atrocities.

This brief analyzes the utility of preventive deployments and political missions for the prevention of mass atrocities or R2P crimes, specifically their role as an R2P Pillar III tool, in a context where atrocity crimes are imminent or ongoing, both in times of peace or violent conflict. In his January 2009 report on the "Implementation of the Responsibility to Protect," U.N. Secretary-

General Ban Ki-moon posited that this responsibility contains three pillars: 1) the protection responsibilities of the state, 2) international assistance and capacity building; and 3) timely and decisive response to prevent and halt genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity. R2P's third pillar includes pacific and coercive tools for collective action in the face of atrocities, and after local efforts or international capacity-building failed to prevent a crisis situation. Since tools are rarely applied in isolation, a separate study should analyze the complementarity of these instruments with alternative measures.

As mass atrocities often occur in the context of violent conflict, traditional conflict management tools indirectly contribute to the prevention of atrocity crimes. In certain circumstances, political missions and preventive deployments can directly prevent atrocities or mitigate their effect as a complement to other diplomatic, economic or military measures. Through persuasion and deterrence, political missions and preventive deployments could keep potential perpetrators from implementing a "mass atrocity policy" and protect vulnerable populations. As preventive deployments succeed, they may transform into a political mission, or both instruments may operate simultaneously in a complementary manner.

Atrocity Prevention through Persuasion: Political Missions

Political missions can be described as multilateral teams of primarily civilian experts deployed by international or regional organizations. Political missions rely largely on political persuasion to find a nonviolent way out of crises through engagement with the conflicting parties. The existing missions vary widely in terms of activities, size and scope, and include standing regional offices, special envoys, or transformed peacebuilding missions. As a conflict management tool, the existing missions are rarely deployed with a preventive mandate and have a mixed track record. So far no political mission was explicitly mandated to prevent atrocities, even though some operated in areas where atrocities occurred, like the U.N. Regional Office for Central Asia (in Kyrgyzstan) or the U.N. Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS).

Given the constraints posed by atrocity situations, political missions are primarily useful as 'Pillar II instruments,' addressing structural drivers of conflict or state fragility and providing assistance in effective governance when the risk of atrocities is remote. Political missions can contribute to the operational prevention of atrocities as a mechanism for mediation, persuading potential perpetrators to refrain from atrocity planning and embrace nonviolent options to achieve strategic objectives. Political mediation, however, is only useful when the political objectives of the conflicting parties are reconcilable. Missions can develop anticipatory relationships with political and military leaders, including potential perpetrators, exercise diplomatic pressure, or warn about the risks of radical strategies. Political missions could also coordinate the diplomatic efforts of other international actors involved in crisis diplomacy. The missions have been involved in observing, monitoring and reporting human rights abuses. Their role could go beyond mapping the capabilities, interests and strategies of powerful players, to include the condemnation of observed abuses, protective accompaniment, and rumor control. The ability of political missions to protect potential victims in a 'Pillar III context' is limited. However, when properly resourced, a protective civilian presence can provide early warning to the international community or locals at risk, inform the planning process of other Pillar III responses, and obstruct the efforts required to plan, authorize and execute atrocities.

Political missions are less controversial than more coercive tools, particularly when they carry a region-wide mandate, like the U.N. Regional Office for West Africa. Their generally discreet, non-military, and consensual nature limits the perceived intrusiveness. They are also relatively inexpensive, and benefit from their adaptability to evolving circumstances. As the situation moves from a

Pillar II to an imminent or active atrocity situation, however, the political mission's core objectives need to be reconciled with and, if necessary, subordinated to, the goal of mitigating the risk or impact of atrocities. Efforts to foster sustainable political settlements may obstruct time-sensitive initiatives to restore stability or protect civilians.

One could envision the rapid deployment of a political mission as the only accepted tool in a non-permissive environment. But authorizing, funding and equipping new missions in the face of atrocities remains a burdensome process unlikely to produce the timely relief crisis situations require. Moreover, there is a risk that political missions may be accepted by repressive regimes to stave off international criticism or buy time to execute a planned atrocity campaign. In addition, they strongly depend on explicit international support and credible commitments, and may by themselves lack the enforcement capability to affect the calculations of potential perpetrators.

Atrocity Prevention through Deterrence: Preventive Deployments

Preventive deployments can be described as defensive military missions deployed by international or regional organizations. These missions could alternatively be labeled as preventive contingency operations or military flexible deterrent options. Preventive deployments are inherently defensive and could contribute to the prevention of atrocity crimes through deterrence. However, to be an effective deterrent, the force has to maintain a credible threat of offensive action. If military forces have to resort to offensive activities and compellence, its deterrence has failed by definition. Both in theory and practice, preventive deployments have primarily been identified as conflict management tools, but they rarely have been put to practice. The UNPREDEP Mission deployed in Macedonia in the 1990s—the only U.N. preventive deployment mission—was established at the request of the Macedonian government and effectively prevented the outbreak of violent conflict at a time when the risk of atrocities was remote. An example of a preventive deployment directly engaged in atrocity prevention is EUFOR RD Congo (2006). Mandated to assist MONUC during the elections in Kinshasa, this mission was spatially and temporally very limited.

The armed force could operate preventively within the area at risk, directly protecting civilians through a visible presence, or act as an 'over-the-horizon force,' serving as a credible contingency unit deployable when identifiable tripwires are crossed. In the absence of violent conflict, preventive deployments could establish a military presence to dissuade potential perpetrators expected to plan, instigate or commit atrocity crimes, and build up capacity for offensive action in case the failure of deterrence triggers a need for compellence. If undesired actions continue the mission can issue explicit military threats. In case of ongoing atrocities, preventive deployments could effectively contain the intensity of the crimes or reduce the risk of spill-over into more stable areas or neighboring countries. The mission would protect potential victims in case of a power imbalance through the facilitation of evacuations, the establishment of humanitarian corridors, air drops of humanitarian supplies, police monitoring, and the protection of villages or IDP/refugee camps. The presence of a military force with surveillance assets to monitor and report atrocity crimes can influence potential perpetrators through the 'power of witness.' The mission could conduct information operations to monitor perpetrator behavior, collect intelligence and condemn widespread abuses.

The success of a preventive military mission relies on solid commitments to back the mission militarily in case compellence is required. The authorization of military deployments requires a significant level of international support, and ultimately depends on the level of media attention, the nature of strategic links between power patrons and the potential perpetrator, regional support for

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international engagement, the resource availability and the assessment of the mission's likely effectiveness. When these come together successfully, the presence of a robust multilateral military force demonstrates an intimidating level of international resolve by increasing the perceived cost of atrocity campaigns as a final resort strategy, and strengthens the credibility of complementary economic, political and diplomatic efforts. Preventive deployments can complement the work of non-combatant evacuation operations, and encourage national forces to protect local civilians as they extract their nationals at risk.

Preventive deployments are not without risks, however. The threat or slow deployment of this intrusive tool may create moral hazards or cause an unintended escalation as the perceived window of opportunity closes in the eyes of the perpetrator. Intended victims may feel themselves protected by the force, and empowered to undertake their own retribution. The authorization of military options may trigger domestic political opposition or concerns within the general public opinion. The operational risks are multiple, including the high potential for anti-coalition sentiments, casualties, or equipment loss. The deployment may pause the security dilemma, but does not address potentially underlying causes of atrocity situations by itself.

Conclusions

Political missions and preventive deployments could serve as useful tools for atrocity prevention in a limited number of scenarios, and carry the largest utility when an international mission is already established on the ground for alternative purposes prior to the eruption of atrocities. When confronted with imminent or ongoing atrocities, these 'pillar II missions' require a rapid adjustment and expansion of their mandate and capacity. The early inclusion of atrocity prevention in the mission's mandate would facilitate this transformation. Unless a ground presence exists prior to the escalation, the success of both mission types depends on the rare consent of a host government manifestly failing to protect its population from a threat posed by non-state actors inside its territory, or hostile actors operating from neighboring countries. Since political missions and preventive deployments are generally consensual, their utility remains limited in cases where the regime is primarily responsible for the atrocities in the target area.

The current institutional preparedness to conduct political missions or preventive deployments mandated to prevent atrocities is minimal. A central challenge remains the lack of training, doctrine and planning for the prevention of atrocities through civilian or military means, both at the national and international level. Most of the existing doctrine is woven into national and intergovernmental doctrine for peacekeeping operations, COIN, and non-combatant evacuations. Doctrine development should focus on the risk posed by non-state actors as potential perpetrators. The guiding principles should also recognize that in the face of imminent atrocities, these missions may need to relinquish their impartiality, a significant departure from multilateral missions primarily aimed at political engagement or the prevention of violent conflict. Despite their political role, neither civilian nor military missions can remain passive in the face of atrocities, and have a responsibility to take appropriate action within their means in the face of atrocity crimes.

In addition to training and doctrine, these missions require the necessary surveillance capabilities and skills to understand and interpret early indicators, and take appropriate action. Both types of missions should consider the use of new technologies to acquire intelligence on civilian insecurity. Internal coordination among U.N. actors in the field is key, as well as coordination with the other international and local actors present in the targeted area. Too often bureaucratic politics will hamper the execution of integrated missions whether aimed at political engagement, conflict management or the prevention of mass atrocity crimes.