

TRANSCRIPT OF GENOCIDE PREVENTION TASK FORCE PRESS CONFERENCE

December 8, 2008

AMBASSADOR BRANDON GROVE:

For centuries the world has been plagued by episodes of mass violence. Sixty years ago tomorrow, governments around the world came together to adopt the convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide.

During these six decades, however, we have continued to witness mass atrocities around the world. Even today Americans are increasingly confronted with information about genocide and mass atrocities taking place virtually anywhere in the world.

Preventing genocide still remains one of the most enduring and frustrating challenges of our time, even while genocide threatens core American values and our national interest.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the American Academy of Diplomacy, and the genocide -- and the U.S. Institute of Peace have looked specifically -- have jointly convened the Genocide Prevention Task Force specifically to examine the role of our own government in these difficult issues.

What more could and should the U.S. government do to prevent and respond to genocide and mass atrocities? How does one develop a road map, a blueprint that takes into account concrete measures and the need to generate leadership and political will from the president on down?

Over the past year we have worked to develop an integrated, specific, and comprehensive plan of action for the next administration and beyond. One that can readily be implemented. Today we are submitting our report.

We have been privileged to have as co-chairs of the Task Force two of the nation's most distinguished public servants, Former Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, and former Secretary of Defense, William Cohen, from whom you will hear in just a moment.

The co-chairs worked with a task force of talented men and women who have dedicated their lives to public service. I'm delighted that some members of the Task Force are with us today, Mr. Vin Weber, General Tony Zinni. The three heads of the convening organizations are here as well, Sara Bloomfield, who is director of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Ambassador Ron Neumann, who is president of the American Academy of Diplomacy, and Ambassador Dick Solomon who heads the U.S. Institute of Peace.

Also present in front of me are the expert group leaders who so ably drove the intellectual process that culminated in this report. Our warm thanks go to our primary funder, Humanity United, for supporting this effort.

SECRETARY MADELEINE ALBRIGHT:

Our report honors the memory of Julia Taft, a beloved member of our Task Force, who passed away earlier this year, and who is a true leader in the area of humanitarian assistance and emergency response.

The report is dedicated to the millions of people who have died as a result of mass atrocities and genocide. Their stories served as our inspiration.

The central premise of our report is that genocide is unacceptable, and that we can and should do more to prevent it.

The United States does not bear this burden alone, but we have both a duty and a profound interest in helping to show the way. As an international leader, we are affected by events on every continent. Our citizens will be safer and do better in a world governed by law, in which human rights are respected, and atrocities avoided where possible, mitigated when necessary, and punished if they occur.

As our report emphasizes, the choice we face in trying to prevent genocide is rarely a case of all or nothing. There is a broad range of foreign policy options between standing aside and ordering in the Marines. The more diligent we are in detecting and addressing potential problems, the more favorable our options will be.

In its report, the Task Force proposes a number of steps to strengthen early warning, facilitate preventive action, enhance our diplomacy, and widen the range of alternatives our leaders will have when emergencies do arise.

It also stresses the vital goal of working with allies and friends to strengthen international institutions and norms. In so doing, the report highlights three key areas.

The first is leadership. We believe that the United States should treat the prevention of genocide as a top foreign policy priority, and that this spirit should pervade both our national security agencies and the multilateral bodies of which we are a part.

The second key area is organization. We recommend that our government create a high level, interagency mechanism that is specifically focused on stopping genocide before it happens.

The third area is funding. We propose an appropriation of \$250 million annually to finance specially tailored projects in countries at risk. This modest fund would give our diplomats a potential -- a potentially pivotal tool with which to avert catastrophe. The amount is in addition to America's ongoing efforts in such important arenas as countering terrorism, building peace, fighting poverty, empowering women, aiding refugees, and supporting the growth of democratic institutions.

Overall the Task Force hopes that its report will attract further attention to what remains one of the great security and moral challenges civilizations has faced. Preventing genocide is an obligation we owe to past victims, to those now in dangers, and to those who may find themselves in jeopardy in years to come.

It is also a responsibility we have to ourselves and to our own future. We may lack the power to create a perfect world, but we can choose to build a better one. The means are there, and it's up to us to supply the will.

SECRETARY WILLIAM COHEN:

The prevention of genocide is not simply a moral issue -- although it is a compelling moral issue -- it's a national security one. One cannot read some of the remarks made by Secretary Robert Gates recently, talking about the need to build new institutions, to look at the institutions we have and how they were designed to defeat the adversary in the Cold War. But we're living in a different world today. It's not a new world order, but it's a new world disorder.

And when I think about it, what's going on on a day-to-day basis, you think of Yeats. And I can paraphrase about things falling apart, the center no longer holding, and that the passionate are full of the -- the worst are full of passionate intensity, while the best are lacking in all conviction.

And what this report is trying to do is saying, the best aren't lacking in all conviction. We can't sit on the sidelines while this is taking place. We have to develop, as Madeleine said -- Secretary Albright said, the leadership from the president on down through the Congress, we have to develop institutions so that we can say, we don't have a means of executing a policy, if we had a policy. So we've got to have the leadership, we've got to have the mechanism, and we've got to have the money in order to prevent -- do our best to prevent the kind of mass atrocities, and slayings, and genocide that have taken place, and continue to take place today.

So, this is a report. It's a blueprint, as Secretary Albright has said. We lay out some very specific things that need to be done. We're hoping that the next administration will embrace

them. Based upon statements that I've read, I would think that they would be very supportive of what we're seeking to do.

But I just want to thank all who have been part of this effort to say, this is something important. We cannot just find ourselves sitting on the sidelines saying, well, I wish we could do something. We don't have the manpower, the money, or the will in order to stop the slaying, and the raping, and the pillaging, and destruction of tens of thousands -- hundreds of thousands of people. That is not just a moral issue. As I've said, it affects our national security. It's what Secretary Gates talks about, failed states becoming the breeding ground of terrorist activities and solicitations.

So, I'd like to keep it simply as a moral issue, but it's a -- it affects us directly. It affects our security. And that's why I think we've had such broad support, Republicans and Democrats coming together, people who have held leadership positions in the Congress and in our military saying, this has got to stop. We have a means of helping to make it stop, and we're all going to join hands and try to make it a reality. Thank you, very much.