**From Reaction to Resilience in Mass Atrocity Prevention: An Analysis of the 2013 UN Report, “Responsibility to Protect: State Responsibility and Prevention”**

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**Abstract**

This paper analyses the 2013 UN Secretary-General’s report, *The Responsibility to Protect: State Responsibility and Prevention.* By presenting a framework for prevention that incorporates both risk factors and sources of resilience, the report advocates an understanding of why it is that some states *do not* experience mass atrocities. By doing so, it is the first policy document to explore in detail the notion that local and national actors are the primary agents of long-term (structural) prevention. In this paper, I demonstrate how the report is conceptually distinct from previous framings of structural prevention. I then provide a brief evaluation of the report, using illustrations from Botswana and Zanzibar to highlight its strengths and limitations.

**Introduction**

United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s 2013 report, *The Responsibility to Protect: State Responsibility and Prevention,* advocates a fresh approach to the long-term prevention of mass atrocities. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how this report represents an innovation in the conceptualisation of structural prevention, by charting recent progress in the understanding and approach used in both mass atrocity and conflict prevention. Most significantly, the report represents a departure from previous documents through its focus on the relationship between risk factors and sources of resilience. The report points out that these sources of resilience are processes that are developed and carried out principally by local and national actors.

Acknowledging the responsibility of domestic actors in the prevention of mass atrocities is not new – numerous reports on the preventive dimension of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) assume domestic actors as central. For instance, the 2001 International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) stressed that while prevention was not exclusively “a local affair”, prevention was, “first and foremost the responsibility of sovereign states, and the communities and institutions within them.”[[1]](#endnote-1) The same responsibility was apportioned to domestic actors in the World Summit Outcome Document: “Each individual state has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. This responsibility entails the prevention of such crimes, including their incitement, through appropriate and necessary means.”[[2]](#endnote-2)

The relationship between state responsibility and prevention was further elaborated in the Secretary-General’s framing report, *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect.* This dimension of R2P was identified as Pillar One.[[3]](#endnote-3) He identified Pillar One – the state’s responsibility to protect its populations – as “the bedrock of the responsibility to protect.”[[4]](#endnote-4) Yet the report also acknowledged that researchers had at best a limited understanding how states effectively managed diversity over the long term: “more research and analysis are needed on why one society plunges into mass violence while its neighbours remain relatively stable…”[[5]](#endnote-5) Much is known about the causes of genocide and other mass atrocities – scholars of comparative genocide studies have been theorizing about the common antecedents of mass violence since the 1970s, during which time an impressive body of work has amassed.[[6]](#endnote-6) But very little research has been devoted to why it is that states containing at least a moderate risk of future mass atrocities manage to avoid such violence. This question goes to the heart of R2P’s first pillar, yet very little is known about it – much is known about the failure of responsibility, but much less about how this responsibility is carried out, particularly in states that contain risk factors associated with such violence. Indeed, amongst scholars of comparative genocide studies, the same lacuna exists – much has been written about the antecedents of genocide and other forms of mass killing, but very few scholars have investigated why it is that such violence *does not* occur, despite the presence of risk factors.

The 2013 report shifts this focus by unpacking the principle’s preventive dimension – the role of the state in carrying out its responsibility to protect.[[7]](#endnote-7) It challenges the root cause approach to prevention, evident in previous UN reports. Its characterization of mass atrocity risk as not signifying an inevitable path towards atrocities aligns with the scholarship on the causes of such violence. Yet, it goes one step further than much of this scholarship, by offering a framework for understanding why mass atrocities do not occur in places where risk exists. It is addressing this question that the report develops insights for prevention.

This paper unfolds in four sections. First I highlight why the report’s emphasis on risk and resilience is important. Second, I utilize the report’s risk/resilience framework to analyse ways that local and national actors mitigated risk in two cases – one with moderate risk (Botswana), and one with high risk (Zanzibar) – in order to illustrate ways that understanding risk mitigation can provide insights for prevention. Finally, I outline some policy implications for the report, as well as one key limitation.

**The 2013 report, State Responsibility and Prevention**

In this section, I outline the key contents of the 2013 report, before elaborating on why these contents are innovative. Since 2009, the UN Secretary-General has released six reports on the Responsibility to Protect, with the aim of unpacking the World Summit agreement, and providing guidance as to how the principle can be materialised. The 2009 report, *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect,* outlined a “three-pillar strategy” for advancing the principle: ‘the protection responsibilities of the state (pillar one); “international assistance and capacity building” (pillar two); and “timely and decisive response” (pillar three).[[8]](#endnote-8) Since then, much of the debate around R2P has centred on the third pillar. The 2013 report explores prevention options under the category of pillar one, exploring the role that domestic actors play in carrying out their responsibility to protect, particularly in environment where risk is salient.

The report’s framework for understanding state-based prevention is premised on the interaction of two broad dynamics – the long-term risk associated with mass atrocities, and sources of resilience that states adopt to manage such risk.

The report has three main parts – an identification of the key risk factors associated with mass atrocities; the identification of ‘national sources of resilience’, which interact with risk in a way that potentially inhibits escalation; and an exploration of ‘targeted measures’ – policy options that state actors can (and in some cases, have already) adopt to strengthen their capacity to prevent mass atrocities.

The risk factors identified in the report range from structural factors, to escalators and triggers. Structural factors include ‘patterns of discrimination’, such as political exclusion, a limitation of right, economic inequality (between groups), and gender discrimination;[[9]](#endnote-9) and the ‘underlying motivation for targeting a community’, through the adoption of an exclusionary ideology that posits a community as a threat, or inferior.[[10]](#endnote-10) Escalating factors include the changing of circumstances, which might facilitate the perpetration of atrocities, such as strengthening the capacity of armed groups, or further reducing the rights of certain communities through changes in legislation. If a government lacks the ability to halt prevent such violence in the face of escalating tensions, this too signals risk. Finally, triggers such as regime overthrow, violent conflict, uprisings or unrest, or contested elections can compound and escalate risk.[[11]](#endnote-11)

The 2013 report offers a way of understanding why mass atrocities do not occur by identifying “national sources of resilience.” It identifies a broad set of domestic processes that build resilience, and mitigate the risk of mass atrocities. Included are constitutional protections that recognise and preserve the rights of different identity groups; democratic systems of governance and accountability; state obligations – through international law – to criminalise genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity; transitional justice processes where such mechanisms are called for; security sector reform – where appropriate; and measures that address real or actual economic inequalities, particularly when such inequalities are based on identity.[[12]](#endnote-12) These identified sources of resilience are then accompanied by examples from various countries. For instance, three examples of constitutional protections are provided – the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; Croatia’s Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities; and South Africa’s system of rights for “cultural, linguistic, religious and traditional communities.”[[13]](#endnote-13) What these examples illustrate is the unique and contextually specific nature of strategies adopted in various countries, which, viewed through the prism of this report have a protective dimension in relation to mass atrocities. For the other sources of resilience, a similar structure is followed – illustrations from a wide range of countries, providing detail on how resilience is manifested in a range of unique contexts. This varied examples provides a clue to the importance of local and national actors tailoring strategies and policies that build resilience.

The 2013 report’s emphasis on the relationship between risk and resilience is important for three reasons. First, it challenges the root-cause approach to prevention. Second, it aligns more closely with research into the causes of genocide and other mass atrocities by stressing that risk itself does not signify an inevitable path to violence. Third, it goes beyond much of the research into the causes of mass atrocities, by developing a lens to better understand why atrocities do not occur when risk exists, premising preventive strategies on processes that have an inhibitory effect on risk.

By representing the prevention of mass atrocities through the relationship between risk and resilience, this report challenges the root cause-based approach to structural prevention. To underscore this point of departure, some backgrounding from earlier reports is needed. Structural prevention has been commonly framed as the identification and amelioration of the root causes of potential deadly violence, as evidenced in a number of UN reports produced since the end of the Cold War. In 1992’s *An Agenda for Peace,* Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali highlighting the need for the “United Nations to deal with the underlying economic, social, cultural and humanitarian causes and effects of conflict.”[[14]](#endnote-14) The Carnegie Commission further developed these threads by distinguishing between strategies which addressed escalating tensions (operational prevention), and those which addressed the root causes (structural prevention).[[15]](#endnote-15) It is this notion of structural prevention that surfaced in the UN’s series of four reports on conflict prevention, between 2001 and 2008.[[16]](#endnote-16)

UN approaches to the prevention of genocide and other mass atrocities have also adopted this notion of structural prevention. In 2004, Kofi Annan established the Office of the Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide. The Office stressed, “To prevent genocide and genocidal conflicts, it is critically important to understand their root causes,”[[17]](#endnote-17) which “revolve around inequalities between identity groups.”[[18]](#endnote-18) The Special Adviser’s mandate included both operational and structural preventive strategies. Ban Ki-moon’s 2009 report, *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect,* highlighted the need to address the “underlying fissures in the social and political fabric particularly in states and regions where ethnic tensions run high and deep inequalities among groups persist.”[[19]](#endnote-19) The Office linked the risk of genocide to a wide array of tensions and inequalities inherent in most societies, and argued that long-term prevention needed to include the promotion of equitable economic development, inclusive political representation, and the fostering of tolerance within diverse societies.

There are two limitations to this approach to prevention. The first is that it tends to prioritise external actors in identifying root causes, and devising preventive strategies.[[20]](#endnote-20) Even when UN reports acknowledge the primacy of state responsibility in the prevention of both conflict and mass atrocities,[[21]](#endnote-21) there remained a profound lack of clarity on how such responsibility is carried out, or what responsible statehood looks like, particularly in countries that display long-term risk factors.

The second limitation is in the assumption that root causes inevitably lead an inevitable path to a violent outcome. This in turn implies that the existence of root causes, or risk factors, necessitates their removal, and such action then constitutes effective prevention. This is apparent in Ban Ki-moon’s 2008 report on conflict prevention: “if we do not deal with the root causes of conflict – and offer sustainable solutions – we will be left with humanitarian emergencies and peacekeeping operations without end.”[[22]](#endnote-22) In academic sources on prevention, the assumption of a violent outcome is indicated through the representation of conflict as a linear progression of stages,[[23]](#endnote-23) positioning structural prevention within a linear trajectory continuum.[[24]](#endnote-24) This invites a particular policy logic – that it is better to confront such problems at an early stage in order to avoid more complex challenges at a later stage.

By contrast, the 2013 report considers prevention based on the assumption that the primary actors are local and national actors. Instead of framing prevention as strategies (instigated and carried out by external actors) aimed at fixing the ‘problem’ of root causes, it considers what governments and communities are already doing to address challenges associated with mass atrocity risk. This shift in focus is premised on two assumptions – that no country is entirely immune to risk, and that the presence of risk “does not directly or inevitably cause atrocity crimes.”[[25]](#endnote-25)

This characterization of risk in the 2013 report aligns more closely with the academic research into the causes of genocide and other mass atrocities. The report’s claim that “societies can exhibit multiple sources of risk but not experience atrocity crimes,”[[26]](#endnote-26) reflects a general consensus within the field of comparative genocide studies. There is broad agreement among such scholars that the existence of root causes (or preconditions, or risk factors, as they are often referred to) do not inevitably lead to violent outcomes. At best there is a weak causal link between such factors and mass atrocities – the most substantive claim is that the presence of root causes may make a territory or state more conducive to atrocities, but such risk factors are not sufficient to lead to mass violence.[[27]](#endnote-27) Overall, the perpetration of mass atrocities is a rare phenomenon that does not happen in most places most of the time, even in the presence of risk. For example, according to a survey compiled by Genocide Watch, of all countries that experienced a very high risk of genocide between 1945 and 2008, the number that *did not* result in genocide was double the number that did. When risk is more moderate, the proportion of countries that do not experience genocide becomes far greater.[[28]](#endnote-28) As Welsh and Sharma point out, mass atrocities are “high impact, yet low probability events.”[[29]](#endnote-29) It makes sense then, to tailor approaches to prevention on the basis of this understanding of risk, rather than as the first stage of a linear trajectory towards a violent outcome.

But how does this understanding of risk alter how we think about prevention? For the report, it means developing an understanding of why mass atrocities *do not* occur. The report’s identified national sources of resilience seeks to unpack, and offer a lens into domestic dynamics which give clarity to the question of why it is that risk often does not escalate and lead to mass atrocities. These national sources of resilience offers a synthesis of a range of policies, strategies and processes which have been effective in mitigating risk in a range of challenging environments. Here, the report explores a lacuna in the scholarship on mass atrocities.

Investigating why risk does not lead to violence is a question that is largely overlooked in the field of comparative genocide studies. Such research has overwhelmingly been concerned with ‘what goes wrong’. In methodological terms, the tendency has been be select a number of past cases of genocide (or genocide-like violence) and to examine what factors contributed to the perpetration of such violence. Factors that are common across cases then form the basis of theoretical claims by scholars of comparative genocide studies.[[30]](#endnote-30) However, while this has developed our understanding of the causes of such violence, this scholarship has overwhelmingly neglected the question of what *other* outcomes are possible when risk is present. The consequence of this is that we know a lot more about the causes of mass atrocities, and very little about how such violence is avoided, even though these causes are far more common than the outcomes of violence with which they are associated. This prompted one scholar, Scott Straus to label this imbalance as a “frequency mismatch”.[[31]](#endnote-31)

The 2013 report’s framework of risk and resilience offers a suite of ‘other outcomes’ by exploring ways that risk has been managed or addressed by various member states. From constitutional protections and democratic systems, to security sector reform and measures to reduce horizontal inequalities, the report provides examples of measures adopted by range of countries, each who have their own contextually specific calibration of risk. A small but emerging agenda within the field of comparative offers a very similar approach, utilizing negative cases (cases where the violent outcome did not occur) to gain insights for prevention.[[32]](#endnote-32)

In this way, the report’s principal strength is as a frame of analysis for understanding local and national processes of risk mitigation. By acknowledging the “low probability” nature of risk, the implicit assumption then is that something is already going right within states to prevent risk escalation. Understanding precisely what is going right in terms of risk mitigation means understanding prevention with the assumption that local and national actors are key. What role international actors may play in terms of prevention, needs to be premised on an understanding of national processes of risk mitigation, in order to reinforces processes that are having positive effect, while assisting in processes of greater need. In this, way, the 2013 turns prevention on its head – premising action not on addressing what goes wrong, but understanding what goes right, in the face of risk.

**Risk Mitigation in Practice – Botswana and Zanzibar**

What do countries already do to manage risk, and how can the 2013 report further our understanding of risk mitigation? In this section, I will use the report’s risk/resilience framework to provide insights into ways that Botswana and the semi-autonomous province of Zanzibar have managed different levels of risk. Botswana provides insights into how a moderate level of risk has been managed over time. Zanzibar provides insights into how a case with a high level of risk has avoided atrocities. Both moderate and high-risk cases are important in terms of prevention. Cases of moderate risk are instructive, particularly in terms of how they have been able to avoid escalation and upheaval; they also provide insights into the processes that marginalised groups have adopted to address inequality and discrimination. Cases containing a high level of risk have the potential to provide a greater understanding of how domestic actors respond to situations where risk is escalating and tensions are dangerously high. The challenge in such cases is to not only address long-term structural challenges, but to diffuse tensions and manage highly volatile situations. The report itself not only acknowledges the universal nature of risk, but also draws examples from countries right along the risk spectrum, from relatively low (citing Canada’s constitution, and Australia’s ‘Close the Gap’ program),[[33]](#endnote-33) to more recent post-atrocity environments (such as Timor-Leste and Guatemala).[[34]](#endnote-34)

While Botswana is not a country that is typically associated with the risk of atrocities, its entrenched discrimination of certain San Bushmen groups put the country on the radar of Genocide Watch, whose 2008 risk list identified it as having a “moderate” risk of future genocide. Minorities at Risk have also identified it as having a moderate risk of rebellion.[[35]](#endnote-35) Countries that contain a moderate level of risk are particularly useful to analyse, as they are more likely to contain effective processes of risk mitigation.

Botswana is a multi-ethnic country that is dominated by various Tswana tribes, who make up roughly between 60 and 80% of the country. Other groups include the San Bushmen (a wide collection of different indigenous groups), the Bakgalagadi, the Wayeyi and the Kalanga.[[36]](#endnote-36) The modern state of Botswana was established for the most part by wealthy Tswana landowners, and they developed a form of government that favoured the old ruling elite.[[37]](#endnote-37)

One of the negative consequences of this domination is what the 2013 report refers to as “patterns of discrimination against a particular community…”[[38]](#endnote-38) For Botswana, the target of discrimination has been the San, the Bakgalagadi and the Wayeyi. They are not represented in the upper house, the House of Chiefs. They were also removed from their traditional lands and denied ownership during the privatisation of tribal grazing land that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s – most of which went to wealthy members of Tswana tribes.[[39]](#endnote-39) As a result, they were profoundly disadvantaged. Such discrimination was taken further in some cases, particularly against the San, who faced forced evictions from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, widespread arrests, and even cases of torture.[[40]](#endnote-40)

These policies exacerbated, to use the 2013 report’s words, “unequal access to economic opportunities.”[[41]](#endnote-41) Despite being one of the richest countries in Africa, more than a third of its population live in extreme poverty. It has the fourth highest gap between rich and poor in the world.[[42]](#endnote-42) As a result, a small minority of Botswana’s population experience marginalization, discrimination, profound inequality, and at times human rights violations. But this risk has never escalated to dangerous levels. To better understand this, some insight needs to be gained from mitigating factors.

One source of resilience that has had an inhibitory effect on this risk is Botswana’s robust national accountability mechanisms. The country’s independent judiciary have, on numerous occasions, provided a legal safety net for these marginalized groups, even in the face of discriminatory government policies. Three court rulings that overturned discriminatory government policies stand out. In 2006 the High Court issued a ruling in the case of the First Peoples of the Kalahari against the Government of Botswana, declaring illegal the government’s policy of forcibly removing groups of San Bushmen from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR).[[43]](#endnote-43) The government accepted the ruling, allowing these groups to return. The First Peoples won another case in 2011 when the Court of Appeal determined that the San had the right to re-open a borehole on the CKGR (previously closed by authorities) for the provision of drinking water.[[44]](#endnote-44)

The third ruling relates to the composition of the House of Chiefs. In 2002, a civil society organization (named Kamanakao) advocating for the rights of the Wayeyi minority, mounted a High Court challenge in relation to the House’s membership (as articulated in the constitution and the Chieftaincy Act), on the grounds that it had failed to represent minorities beyond the eight dominant tribal groups. The High Court ruled that both the constitution and the Chieftaincy Act were “discriminatory and unconstitutional”, and that they prevented the Wayeyi and other groups “equal treatment and protection.”[[45]](#endnote-45) The House’s composition has since expanded, increasing its membership from eight to fifteen.[[46]](#endnote-46)

These examples demonstrate how Botswana’s independent judiciary have provided a legal safety net in the face of discriminatory government policies. The significance of these rulings is that they offer avenues for the grievances of the country’s most marginalized groups to be expressed and responded to, using non-violent means. They highlight a high level of trust in due process – that there is merit in challenging these inequalities through legal means, rather than resorting to violent struggle.

During the 1990s and early 2000s, the semi-autonomous Tanzanian province of Zanzibar also contained “patterns of discrimination against a particular community” – namely, against populations of Arab and Indian descent, who mostly inhabited the island of Pemba. Between 1964 and 1992, these residents on Pemba were allowed no political representation;[[47]](#endnote-47) and much of the revenue from the island’s clove industry was diverted to Zanzibar Island.[[48]](#endnote-48) The “underlying motivation” for targeting these populations can be traced back to the revolution in late 1963, which overthrew the Arab-led, British supported government that had gained power at independence. The revolutionary government sought to weaken all who were perceived to support the former government through persistent discrimination.[[49]](#endnote-49) Tensions between the two islands escalated following a move to reinstate multi-party democracy in 1992. Grievances on Pemba were articulated through the formation of a new political party, the Civic United Front (CUF).[[50]](#endnote-50) Tensions escalated over the next decade as CUF supporters were regularly intimidated, and two elections (1995 and 2000) delivered results in favour of the incumbent Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), amid widespread claims of fraud.[[51]](#endnote-51) They reached flashpoint after the 2000 elections when protesting CUF supporters were confronted by police, killing more than thirty-five, and injuring 600.[[52]](#endnote-52) The “absence of structures or institutions designed to protect the population” was evident through the use of the police to target the opposition supporters with impunity. At the same time, elections became a “driver” for escalating tensions. Compounding these tensions were prior atrocities, committed during the 1964 revolution, which saw non-Africans targeted and massacred – up to 12,000 were killed.[[53]](#endnote-53) This escalation of risk reached its peak after the 2000 elections. While it simmered for a number of years, it has not since escalated to the same dangerous levels.[[54]](#endnote-54)

Using the 2013 report’s risk/resilience framework, after 2000 resilience was strengthened in two key areas – policies that addressed economic deprivation on Pembe island, and democratic reform, which saw the introduction of a government of national unity in 2010. Economic reforms were introduced discreetly by Zanzibar’s president, Amani Abeid Karume, who came to power in 2000, following the retirement of Salmin Amour. Such reforms included an increase in health and education spending, with the building of numerous new schools and medical centres.[[55]](#endnote-55) Karume also connected Pembe to the national electricity grid – a forty-year lag behind Zanzibar Island.[[56]](#endnote-56)

Most significant was the political reform agreed to by Karume, and opposition leader Hamad, in 2010, to establish a ‘government of national unity’ – a power-sharing arrangement which would replace the existing ‘winner-take-all’ system.[[57]](#endnote-57) This would see the two major parties share ministerial portfolios according to proportion of seats won. The winning party would take the office of the president, while the running up would be ‘first vice-president.’[[58]](#endnote-58)

This rapprochement between the two main parties, and the ensuing power-sharing arrangement that followed, precipitated further reform. For Pemba, it heralded a change to the terms of trade for the island’s key revenue earner, cloves. Previously, prices had been strictly controlled, and significantly less than the world market price – as low as 7 per cent.[[59]](#endnote-59) Through the new government, vice-president Hamad spearheaded a policy that determined that farmers would receive 80 per cent of the market price, significantly increasing revenue for the agricultural sector on the island.[[60]](#endnote-60)

These reforms preceded an election in 2010 that was almost entirely absent of tension. External observers noted that “irregularities” that marred earlier elections were notably absent during this one; campaigning prior to the election was also characterized by greater calm. While the election was not conducted flawlessly,[[61]](#endnote-61) the 2010 election did not trigger tension and violence like previous elections.

The case of Zanzibar is an illustration of how communal tensions can decrease dramatically after political and economic reforms redress long-standing discrimination. The relative absence of tension during the 2010 election is a measure of just how swift this change can be. Measures to improve Pembe’s infrastructure, political reform that heralded more equitable political representation, and the ensuing economic reform that brought in greater revenue for Pembe’s clove industry strengthened the territory’s resilience, and significantly reduced election-related tensions. The 2013 report has identified the “diffusion and sharing of power” as having a strong impact on the promotion of “the peaceful coexistence of different interests.”[[62]](#endnote-62) The sharing of power in Zanzibar transformed the territory’s political environment from one marked by seemingly intractable differences, to one of accommodation and mutual benefit. This became a catalyst for economic reform, which had the effect of increasing revenue on Pembe Island. Zanzibar’s recent transformation is an illustration of how a place that endured decades of high risk can, in a relatively short time, introduce measures that can significantly reduce such risk.

**Policy Implications and Limitations**

How does the 2013 report impact the way the UN engages in prevention? There are two major implications for the way that prevention is approached by the UN system. First is better analysis of countries that contain risk. The risk/resilience framework contained in the report allows for a more accurate understanding of the complex forces that manage risk over time, offering a more nuanced approach to early warning. Structural risk factors like discrimination, economic inequality and limited democracy form the basis upon which early warning and risk assessment is conducted.[[63]](#endnote-63) However, the tendency to conduct early warning analysis on the basis of risk factors alone can be problematic. As Witold Mucha points out, this approach to early warning neglects the question of why violence does not always escalate, despite the presence of risk. Such an oversight then de-values the role that local and national actors play in mediating conflicts and reducing tension, and can deny them ownership in the process of prevention.[[64]](#endnote-64) There is also a tendency to view structural risk factors as “static properties”, rather than as part of more broader, more fluid process.[[65]](#endnote-65) The consequence is a tendency to understand risk as part of a linear progression towards the outbreak of violence or atrocities.[[66]](#endnote-66) The UN Secretariat conducts early warning analysis primarily within the Secretariat’s Department of Political Affairs. A recently published framework of analysis for mass atrocities has acknowledged the possibility that risk does not always lead to violent outcomes, and that local sources of resilience can have an impact on the absence of atrocity crimes.[[67]](#endnote-67)

Second, the importance of this kind of analysis is evident in the Secretary-General’s subsequent report on Pillar II of R2P. Providing international assistance to countries for the prevention of mass atrocities represents the second pillar of R2P. As Welsh and Sharma point out, the targeted provision of international assistance works best when it aims to “mitigate risk and build resilience.”[[68]](#endnote-68) Premising such assistance on an understanding of local sources of resilience, allows for external prevention actors to facilitate and strengthen processes of risk mitigation that already exist. The Secretary-General states that international assistance works best when it can “reinforce the efforts that states are already making to protect their populations from atrocity crimes…”[[69]](#endnote-69) The Secretary-General goes on to argue that international assistance has a greater impact when it is in sync with national priorities, reinforcing the value of a framework that casts a lens over such efforts.

While the report does not purport to present an exhaustive account of state-based atrocities prevention, the framework it advocates contains one major weakness – its emphasis on structural factors. What it overlooks is the central role that individual leaders often play, both in aggravating risk in some cases, and mitigating risk in others. The crucial roles leaders play is beginning to gain scholarly attention. In Byman’s study of the drivers and prohibitors of ethnic conflict, he stresses that leaders can take advantage of and deepen existing tensions, or work to dampen them: “the views of elites – wherein for or against conflict – and their freedom to express their views can potentially cause a peaceful situation to turn violent or defuse an otherwise tense situation.”[[70]](#endnote-70)

Two more recent studies investigating why some countries experience mass atrocities – or the specific crime of genocide – while others do not, stress the importance of leaders as pivotal in both violent and nonviolent outcomes. In his investigation into why Côte d’Ivoire pulled back from the brink of genocide in 2011 – in contrast to Rwanda in 1994 – Straus highlights the contrasting approaches that each country’s inaugural leaders took. In Rwanda, numerous speeches by Kayibanda (and his successor, Habyarimana) “shows a consistent emphasis on the threat that Tutsis represented.”[[71]](#endnote-71) By contrast, Côte d’Ivoire’s founding leader, Houphouët-Boigny “preached the values of inter-ethnic cooperation, dialogue and tolerance.”[[72]](#endnote-72) This, claims Straus, created a strong counter-balance to the divisive politics that became prevalent following Houphouët-Boigny’s death in 1993.[[73]](#endnote-73) Indeed, as the case of Zanzibar in this paper demonstrates, the political and economic reform that strengthened resilience there followed the political rapprochement between the territory’s president, Amane Abeid Karume, and the opposition leader Saif Sherif Hamad. The key role that leadership can play in risk aggravation, and risk mitigation is largely under-researched, but clearly an important dimension to long-term prevention.[[74]](#endnote-74)

**Conclusion**

Investigating why atrocity crimes do not occur has only recently emerged as a research agenda within the field of comparative genocide studies. As many scholars have pointed out, the presence of risk rarely materializes into mass atrocities, but there has been virtually no interest in investigating why it is that risk does not escalate. Yet such an investigation is central to prevention – what processes have an inhibitory effect on risk? What actors are responsible? What insights could be gained for other places experiencing comparable challenges? In providing some clarity to these questions, the 2013 report argues that there are many things that domestic actors already do, which have as one of their consequences the prevention of mass atrocities. Indeed, when it comes to prevention, domestic actors often have a greater chance of success.[[75]](#endnote-75) As Bellamy and Lupel point out, “the so-called ‘structural’ or ‘root causes’ of genocide are not easily influenced by external actors.”[[76]](#endnote-76)

The report’s promotion of focal points affirms this approach. The establishment of atrocity prevention or R2P focal points fosters the “integration of an atrocity prevention perspective in national policies and strategies.”[[77]](#endnote-77) They provide an opportunity to apply a preventive lens over existing policies and strategies to demonstrate how they might (or already do) contribute to the ongoing prevention of mass atrocities. Such an approach offsets the need for a distinct set of resources and strategies, making a strong case for ways that states can engage in prevention without burdening already over-stretched budgets. Structural prevention is not a process that is applied prescriptively by external actors, like a doctor’s treatment of a sprained ankle.[[78]](#endnote-78) By contrast, the report makes a case for understanding already existing domestic sources of resilience through an atrocity-prevention lens.

How does an atrocity prevention lens work? The cases of Botswana and Zanzibar demonstrate how it can highlight processes of risk mitigation in two very different contexts, involving different levels of risk. For Botswana, the greatest insight is found in observing the successes that marginalized and excluded groups have had in using legal mechanisms to challenge discriminatory government policies. While Botswana is not normally associated with mass atrocities – indeed the risk is relatively moderate – often it is in areas of moderate risk where the greatest insights for prevention can be found. It is not helpful in terms of prevention, to wait until there is no ambiguity about the imminence of mass atrocities. The genocides in Rwanda and Srebrenica illustrate that at the point of imminence, the options that domestic actors have to prevent violence are profoundly limited; the kind of outside interventions needed are expensive and invasive; and tragically, often the requisite political will to intervene does not exist. Yet even in cases of high risk – like Zanzibar in the early part of this century, there are still measures that domestic actors can introduce to defuse purportedly irreconcilable differences. Insights from cases like Zanzibar and Botswana can be instructive for other countries with risk – civil society organizations in other places where discrimination exists could learn from the approaches of organizations like the First Peoples of the Kalahari, and Kamanakao. Zanzibar could be instructive for polities who may also be considering power-sharing arrangements in order to combat election-related tensions. Indeed, annual focal point meetings currently create forums for such discussions. For instance, in 2014, Botswana was the host of the Fourth Global Network of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) Focal Points. The meeting had as its focus, capacity building in relation to the rule of law – an area of strength for Botswana.

Thus, the 2013 report’s biggest strength is its readiness to consider approaches to prevention that are premised on understanding what state-instigated processes already mitigate risk. What makes the report original is not its claim that state responsibility is central – virtually every UN report on conflict prevention has stressed this. Rather, its point of departure is the presentation of a framework that helps us to understand why it is that many states that contain long-term risk factors do not end up committing atrocities against their own populations.

**Notes**

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2. United Nations, “2005 World Summit Outcome”, A/60/L.UN 2005, 20 September 2005, pars. 138-139. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The Secretary-General identified a three-Pillar approach to R2P, based on paragraphs 137 and 138 of the World Summit Outcome Document. Pillar One is the state’s own responsibility to protect their populations from atrocity crimes; Pillar Two is the provision of international assistance where needed; Pillar Three recommends Security Council-authorised responses in cases (on a case by case basis) when a member state “manifestly fails” to protect its populations from atrocity crimes. See Ban Ki-moon, “Implementing the Responsibility to Protect”, A/63/677, 12 January 2009, p. 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid, p. 8. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid, pp. 10-11. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
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7. Ban Ki-moon, “Responsibility to Protect: State Responsibility and Prevention,” A/67/929-S/2013/399, 9 July 2013. Throughout this article I refer to this report as “the 2013 report”. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Ban Ki-moon, “Implementing the Responsibility to Protect,” p. 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Ban Ki-moon, “State Responsibility and Prevention,” pp. 4-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid., p. 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
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12. Ibid., pp. 8-11. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
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15. The Carnegie Commission, *Preventing Deadly Conflict,* p xix. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Kofi Annan, “Prevention of Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General,” A/55/985-S/2001/574, 7 June, 2001, p. 1, 36; Kofi Annan, “Progress Report on the Prevention of Armed Conflict,” 8/60/891, 18 July 2006, p. 30; Ban Ki-moon, “Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1625 (2005) on Conflict Prevention, Particularly in Africa,” S/2008/18, 14 January 2008, p. 14. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Office for the Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide, “Preventing Genocide,” <http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/adviser/genocide_prevention.shtml>, accessed 14 July 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Office for the Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide, “Preventing Genocide, Crimes Against Humanity, Ethnic Cleansing and War Crimes,” <http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/adviser/un_role.shtml>, Accessed 14 July 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
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26. Ban Ki-moon, “State Responsibility and Prevention,” p. 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
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32. See Stephen McLoughlin, *The Structural Prevention of Mass Atrocities: Understanding Risk and Resilience* (Oxon: Routledge, 2014); Scott Straus, *Making and Unmaking Nations: War, Leadership and Genocide in Modern Africa* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015). [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Ban Ki-moon, “State Responsibility and Prevention”, pp. 8, 11. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid., p. 10 [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
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