

# WIN WITHOUT WAR



## Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

*Intel for Advocacy*

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SL: Preventing violence through... war?

### **The Takeaway:**

- From Bosnia to Burma, Syria to Rwanda, when there's a risk of a mass atrocity abroad, we're often told we have two options: do nothing or go to war. It's a false choice.
- In a new report from the Win Without War Education Fund, co-authors former Herbert J. Scoville Peace Fellow, Caroline Smith and policy director Kate Kizer show that U.S. atrocity prevention policy is broken, and call for a new, peace-first approach.
- The lesson of atrocity prevention is a lesson for all of U.S. foreign policy: there are no military solutions to non-military problems.

## **From Building Bombs to Building Futures: A new U.S. approach to mass atrocity prevention**

What should the United States do about mass atrocities abroad? It's a question that has occupied foreign policymakers since the revelations of the horrors of the Holocaust, gaining renewed attention following mass killings in Rwanda and Bosnia in the 1990s. But in all this time, the debate in the United States has all too often returned to the same question: should we take military action, or should we do nothing? It's a false choice.

In a new report, Win Without War Education Fund calls for a third way: the United States has an obligation and a national security interest in helping to prevent mass atrocities abroad. But it can only do so by putting peace first.

### **The Failed Status Quo**

U.S. atrocity prevention policy is broken. Using three case studies of past U.S. responses to countries at risk of atrocity — Burma, Kenya, and Syria — the report finds that the current approach is:

- *Reactive* — The United States typically only responds to atrocities when there is immense political pressure to do so; in other words, when the violence is already visible, and it's too late to take preventative action.

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- *Militarist* — When there's a risk of mass atrocity abroad, the dominant thinking presents a false binary: take military action (either our own or through the support of “partners”) or do nothing.
- *Lacking Accountability* — The United States consistently fails to hold itself and its purported military “partners” accountable for their actions, undermining international incentive not to commit violence and U.S. credibility in seeking justice for others.

## A New Approach

The reactive, militarist, unaccountable approach has failed — with deadly results. Confronting the risk of atrocities abroad and preventing the repetition of some of histories' worst tragedies will require a complete transformation of how we respond to the threat of mass violence. Here are just a few of the key steps on the new path to mass atrocity prevention:

- Act to prevent atrocities well before violence has broken out, using established and proven predictive tools;
- Stop relying on war, including both our own interventions and assistance to security “partners” to resolve or mitigate violence and insecurity;
- Invest for the long term in economic empowerment and locally-designed and -led peacebuilding, with a focus on building local capacity to prevent conflict;
- Hold *all* perpetrators of violence accountable, even our erstwhile security partners and *ourselves*; and
- Address the root drivers of violence by centering U.S. foreign policy around resolving and mitigating the truly existential transnational threats to human security, like mass global inequality to climate change.

## Applying the New Approach: The Case of the Sahel

Early predictors indicate that the Sahel — a region stretching from Mauritania to Sudan — is one of the highest risk areas in the world for an outbreak of mass violence, made especially vulnerable by the potential for climate shocks. For years, the United States' approach to the region, in coalition with France and other NATO partners, has relied on ineffective security assistance to corrupt governments and militaries that often commit human rights abuses alongside those committed by the non-state armed groups.

We must heed these warning signs and take immediate, long-term action before it's too late. That means rejecting military “solutions” and instead: centering the [demands](#) of local civil society like the People's Coalition for the Sahel; funding local climate resiliency, and seeking comprehensive global solutions to the climate crisis; addressing youth disenfranchisement by redirecting resources away from security assistance and towards flexible programming that can provide sustainable, local economic empowerment; creating a timetable for complete military withdrawal; suspending military support; clarifying U.S. law to prevent obstacles to humanitarian and peacebuilding assistance; and working with civil society to support conflict resolution and

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accountability for abuses. Only if we act now, and redirect our efforts to truly addressing the root causes of violence, can we hope to prevent further tragedy in the Sahel.

**To learn more about how to apply this new approach to atrocity prevention to the Sahel, watch our report release webinar [here](#).**

## **Addressing U.S. Complicity**

While this report focuses primarily on the U.S. failure to prevent third parties from committing atrocities, there are also many instances in which U.S. foreign policy has had a more direct role in mass violence: imposing broad-based sanctions, [backing](#) ongoing genocides, and launching illegal wars, to name just a few. Any reform of the U.S. approach to atrocity prevention must therefore be linked to a wider [transformation](#) of U.S. foreign policy strategy: both to end ongoing U.S.-fueled violence and to ensure accountability for past actions. In order to credibly prevent others from doing harm, we must do no harm ourselves.

## **No Military Solutions**

This report takes a detailed and thorough look at the complex failures of, and potential for improvements to, U.S. atrocity prevention policy. But the main lesson can be boiled down to a single point: **there are no military solutions to non-military problems**. It's a lesson that applies not only to atrocity prevention, but all of U.S. foreign policy. Multiple decades of attempting to bomb our way to peace, funneling limitless funds into the Pentagon and police while gutting funding for human needs, applying deadly sanctions on entire populations in the hopes that we can strong arm countries into doing our bidding — these are all part and parcel of the same failed military mindset. It's time for a new approach. It's time to stop building bombs and start building futures.

“From Building Bombs to Building Futures” was co-authored by Fall 2019 Win Without War Education Fund Scoville Peace Fellow Caroline Smith and Win Without War Education Fund Policy Director Kate Kizer.

**The full report is available [here](#). A two-page summary can be found [here](#). Help amplify the new approach to atrocity prevention on Twitter [here](#).**

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## **Bad Faith Attacks**

This week, news broke of a coordinated [campaign](#) of [attacks](#) on the Iran nuclear deal. Let's be clear: the Iran deal was entirely successful until the Trump administration unilaterally withdrew from and violated it by reimposing crushing sanctions on Iran. Now, there's a small window for Biden to fulfill his promise to reenter. Claims that we must somehow force Iran to accept an entirely new slate of demands before doing so are simply bad faith attacks by those who want

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the deal to fall through entirely. The choice is simple: diplomacy or war. Rejoin the deal first. Everything else comes after.

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## **BURIED LEDES**

**Global freedom and democracy [are in decline](#), and some countries have used the pandemic as an excuse to consolidate control.** From rising authoritarianism to global health, it's clear there are no military solutions to the greatest security challenges we'll face this century.

The border should be a place of refuge, not militarization. **22 Members of Congress, led by [Rep. Grijalva](#), urged Biden to [end the military deployment](#) at the southern border and instead invest in border communities.**

130 countries have yet to receive a single dose of Covid-19 vaccine. That's due in part to World Trade Organization rules that privilege big pharma profits over human lives. **This week, people across the world joined in a [day of action](#) to waive those rules and #FreeTheVaccine.**

**The Biden administration has [granted Temporary Protected Status](#) (TPS) to undocumented Venezuelans who fled their country's crisis.** It's a great step — now it's time we stop fueling that crisis ourselves with deadly blanket sanctions.

People fleeing unsafe conditions in other countries should not be sent back, either. **Win Without War joined 313 organizations urging Biden to [designate 18 countries](#) for TPS status** — a move that would protect 2.3 million people from deportation.

**[\\$60 billion](#) — that's what the biggest U.S. weapons manufacturers spent in 2020 [lobbying the government](#) to continue our endless wars** (and funnel millions of federal dollars into their own pockets).

**Biden has proposed multiple options for an [interim power-sharing government](#) between Afghan leaders and the Taliban**, and announced regional diplomatic efforts to move the peace process forward. Good. Now, it's crucial that the U.S. follow through on its commitment to [withdraw U.S. troops](#) from Afghanistan by May 1.

**The “security assistance” that the U.S. provides to 147 countries often means we [outsource war](#).** Instead of building up foreign militaries, we should build up state and local civil society institutions that actually foster long-term stability and wellbeing.

And finally, dreaming of getting lost on some faraway travels? **How about getting [this lost](#)?**