Introduction

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[HCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
[ICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
[IKOM	United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observer Mission
ITA	União para a Independência Total de Angola
[OMIL	United Nations Observation Mission in Liberia
[OSOM	United Nations Operation in Somalia
ISAS	United Nations Stand-By Arrangement System
ITAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
(A)	United States (of America)
AID	United States Agency for International Development
ARN	Western Africa Research Network
EISS	World Event/Interaction Survey
IO	World Health Organization
NU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front

1   Introduction

Conflict Studies, Conflict Prevention and Early Warning

During the Cold War era the two superpowers regularly intervened in conflicts across the globe, especially those taking place in regions of the Third World, such as South-East Asia and Africa. Since these conflicts erupted at a safe distance from the core areas of superpower competition (Europe, the Middle East) the superpowers could intervene without risking uncontrollable nuclear confrontation.

By intervening in those regions they could pursue their own strategic interests, and, because of this, such regional or localized conflicts were interpreted almost exclusively within the framework of East-West competition. The superpowers would intervene with the sole or principal purpose of countering the (perceived) influence of their rival and would try and find a 'solution' to the conflict that would be in conformity with their own interests. Such solutions would invariably involve the support, by military or other means, of one particular side to the conflict, rather than the conscious pursuit of a peaceful solution to the conflict as such. In other words, these conflicts were not the object of altruistic and (relatively) impartial efforts at mediating an end to violence, but they constituted – at least for the superpowers – wars by proxy serving one of their specific strategic objectives. As a result, their actions did not usually amount to containment or resolution, let alone prevention, of violent conflicts, but often had a contrary, intensifying effect on the level of hostilities.

The fall of the Berlin Wall signalled the end of this rivalry and, consequently, the withdrawal of the superpowers from the distant theatres of conflict in the Southern hemisphere. It was no longer necessary to intervene in those conflicts for the sake of defending Western or Soviet interests. While this had the benefit of putting an end to the intensifying effects of superpower meddling, it also meant that there were no longer any external agencies around – at least not of comparable stature – to mediate, contain or resolve conflicts. This amounted to a process of strategic marginalization which, at least in Africa, coincided with a process of steady economic decline.

In a way one could say that this did not matter much, at least not initially, for in the Western world the end of the Cold War was accompanied by a naive optimism that one had reached the end of major ideological confrontations – indeed, the end of history

itself.[1] Yet, any illusions that nothing dramatic was going to disturb the serenity of the post-Cold War era were quickly shattered by the eruption of conflicts at the fringes of the Western world, namely the Balkans, Africa and the southern regions of the former Soviet Union. Many of these conflicts, moreover, involved very complex, *intra*-state struggles, were often very violent and in several cases concerned the very ideological issue of communal groups and their conflicting identities. Rwanda and Bosnia are typical examples.

In fact, it seemed that post-Cold War conflicts, and especially complex domestic conflicts in Third World countries, were on the increase, although this was probably more due to the fact that political observers now turned their attention to regions they had formerly ignored in the context of East-West confrontation, than to an actual increase in those conflicts. Nevertheless, it does appear that the life cycle of conflicts began to grow longer.[2] Whether or not this was related to the subsidence of Cold War rivalry, superpower withdrawal meant that the task for intervention in violent conflicts was bequeathed to other international actors, i.e. international organizations such as the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) or the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

However, the nature of post-Cold War intervention in conflicts by inter-governmental institutions differed greatly from the competitive character of interference by the nuclear powers. First of all, it appeared that intervention was now dictated, not by the narrow interests of some dominant states, but by a humanitarian or enlightened purpose: the alleviation of human suffering. Secondly, the task of intervention in conflicts had now been entrusted to actors without much rational consideration as to their capabilities and the requirements posed by crisis situations. The shortcomings of international organizations became clear rather quickly, among others because their intervention in certain conflicts followed upon tardy and belated decision-making and, consequently, faced situations that had already spiralled out of control, sometimes well beyond the stage of state collapse. Liberia and Somalia are the cases in point. In several of these conflicts the international community failed dismally to affect a meaningful change. Somalia, Rwanda, but for a long time Bosnia and Liberia as well, underlined the inability of the United Nations to put an end to some of the worst carnage since the end of the Second World War.

Among both scholars and policy-makers – in and outside international organizations – this state of affairs gave impetus to the argument that it would probably be easier, and in any case cheaper, to intervene in conflicts before they had escalated to higher levels of intensity. Indeed, it was argued that it would be better if one would try and prevent the eruption of violent conflicts in the first place. In this case one could

1   F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York, 1992).
2   J.G. Siccama and A. Oostindiër, *Veranderingen in het conflictpatroon na de Koude Oorlog. misverstanden en feiten* (Clingendael *Notitie*: The Hague, 1995), p. 23.

better influence the standpoints of the parties, which at this stage would not yet have committed their resources to realize a military breakthrough. 'Entrapment' or over-commitment[3] of their resources makes parties less amenable to mediation, also because, in long drawn out conflicts, they can become so bogged down that they cannot observe or formulate peaceful alternatives as a result of cognitive rigidity.[4]

Any action to prevent the eruption of violence would, of course, require clear forewarning of impending trouble. Together with the increase (in the observation) of conflicts, this stimulated interest among scholars and policy-makers, firstly, in the origins, causation and nature of human conflicts as such. Conflict studies therefore received a new lease of life. Numerous countries, universities and research institutes began to develop new research programmes, often involving international cooperative efforts and active government support and finance, in order to gain a better understanding of the intricacies of conflict processes.

Secondly, an aspect of these conflict studies that began to receive special attention was the issue of 'early warning'. With its origins in the sphere of military relations – especially the nuclear balance of power – and the prediction and management of natural disasters such as drought, famine and refugee flows, scholars extended the concept's application to the area of violent conflicts in general. Early warning in this context was formulated as a special tool in strategies of conflict prevention or, to use an older term, preventive diplomacy. If put into practice, it would involve the collection of data on the basis of uniform, systematized procedures; their analysis according to a proper scientific methodology; and, if it would be concluded that those data pointed to a high probability of impending violent conflict, the transmission of a warning to political decision-makers. Those decision-makers could then take the requisite steps – so-called 'early action' – to prevent the conflict from reaching a violent phase or, alternatively, from escalating to higher levels of violence. This, in a nutshell, is the idea behind early warning and its role in the prevention of conflicts. Both the concept of early warning and that of conflict prevention also constitute the more policy-oriented dimension of conflict studies.

Conflict Research at the Clingendael Institute

Since 1994-1995 both the study of conflicts as such and the study of the issues of early warning and conflict prevention have been part of the research programme of the

3   See for this I.W Zartman, 'Conflict Reduction: Prevention, Management, and Resolution', in F M Deng and I.W. Zartman (eds), *Conflict Resolution in Africa* (Washington, 1991), ch. 11
4   M. Deutsch, 'Subjective Features of Conflict Resolution: Psychological, Social and Cultural Influences', in R. Väyrynen (ed.), *New Directions in Conflict Theory: Conflict Resolution and Conflict Transformation* (London and New Delhi, 1991), pp. 37-50; and M. Deutsch, *The Resolution of Conflict* (New Haven and London, 1973), p. 351.

Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'. This research was commissioned by, and is being executed at the behest of, the Directorate-General for International Cooperation of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

THE CAUSES OF CONFLICT IN THE THIRD WORLD

In 1995 the Clingendael Institute commenced a research project entitled 'causes of conflict in the Third World'. The first phase of the project began with a Clingendael *Occasional Paper*,[5] followed by an international conference on the subject and the publication of a book called *Between Development and Destruction: An Enquiry into the Causes of Conflict in Post-Colonial States*.[6]

The project amounts to a comparative analysis of the causes of conflict in three regions of the Third World, namely South Asia, West Africa and Central America. In collaboration with research institutes in those regions case-studies were written on fourteen countries, i.e. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Ghana, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador. The project's objectives were dual: first, to contribute to the formulation or elaboration of theories on causes of conflict and, second, to make the results of the project available for recommendations on development cooperation policy to the Dutch government, as well as to encourage the debate within the regions concerned on the formulation of policy with regard to conflict resolution and prevention.

The concept of conflict was approached in such a way as to signify only violent conflict and thus exclude those disputes that do not have a violent character. Levels of violence may naturally oscillate between low-intensity conflict, such as guerrilla warfare, and completely escalated civil wars and genocides. However, conflict was essentially defined in terms of a process involving, among others, a dispute or pre-hostilities phase, a violent phase and a post-hostilities phase. Conflicts thus involve a life cycle in which certain variables may bring a dispute into a violent phase or a violent conflict back to the stage of non-violent interaction.

Confronted with the lack of comprehensive theories about the causes of violent conflict, the project assumed that human conflicts are multi-causal phenomena in which different combinations of independent variables can lead to different outcomes – namely the eruption or absence of violence. Although this multi-causality makes it hard to include all relevant data in a model, it was assumed that one can, in fact, identify certain key factors with regard to violent conflict that can be broadly categorized as political, military and socio-economic. In order to find out which factors are responsible for violent conflicts, the research was executed in the framework of a uniform, analyti-

cal cadre. For this, recourse was taken to Alexander George's method of 'structured, focused comparison'.[7] This, put simply, comes down to a systematized procedure for the collection and processing of data with the help of a checklist which includes all factors that may potentially be relevant in the eruption of violence. In addition, the research project aimed to test nine specific hypotheses in order to give the project more focus.[8]

RESEARCH ON EARLY WARNING AND CONFLICT PREVENTION: THE FIRST PHASE

In order to enhance and speed up the more policy-oriented aspects of conflict research at the Clingendael Institute, the Directorate-General for International Cooperation of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs commissioned a project that would focus specifically on the issues of early warning and the prevention of conflicts. This project commenced with an overview of the political practice of international governmental organizations in this field. This overview dealt with various international institutions: the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe; the United Nations; the Organization of American States (OAS); the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN); and, finally, several organizations on the African continent, namely the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Economic Community of West African States, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in the Horn of Africa and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). This overview was published as a Clingendael *Occasional Paper* in February 1996.[9] The main findings of this report, which are presented in outline in the next chapter, were the subject of lengthy discussions at an international symposium, which was held at the Clingendael Institute in November 1996 and gathered together several scholars and representatives of national governments, inter-governmental organizations and NGOs. Chapters 3 to 7 of the present volume form the off-shoot of the papers presented at this conference, while the appendix summarizes the main trends of the debates triggered by these contributions.

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5   Entitled 'Conflict and Development: The Causes of Conflict in Developing Countries', written by Luc van de Goor.

6   Edited by L. van de Goor, K. Rupesinghe and P. Sciarone (London, 1996).

7   See A.L. George, 'Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison', in P.G. Lauren (ed.), *Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory and Diplomacy* (New York, 1979) and *ibid.*, 'Case Studies and Theory Development', paper presented to the Second Annual Symposium on Information Processing in Organisation, Carnegie-Mellon University, 15-16 October 1982.

8   The results of the project will be published in the course of 1998 in the form of three regional reports and one synthesis report.

9   Entitled 'Conflict Prevention and Early Warning in the Political Practice of International Organizations' (The Hague, 1996).

THE SECOND PHASE OF RESEARCH ON CONFLICT PREVENTION: THE WEST AFRICAN REGION UNDER SCRUTINY

Before introducing the structure and contents of this book it is necessary to give a cursory outline of the on-going research on conflict prevention at the Clingendael Institute, in order to put the present volume in the context of its general research programme.

With the completion of the present volume, the Clingendael research on conflict prevention has begun to focus specifically on the West African region. This second phase was developed at the request of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is related to the Clingendael project on the Causes of Conflict in the Third World and is executed in joint collaboration with researchers in West Africa, Central America and the United Kingdom. The objective of the research on conflict prevention in West Africa is to investigate the needs and requirements felt in that region with regard to the containment and prevention of (inter- and intra-state) conflicts and to integrate the lessons learnt by other regions in this issue-area. To this purpose, this second phase aims to analyse the strengths, deficiencies and weaknesses of the various ways and means of conflict containment and prevention, as employed and experienced by different political actors and institutions in West Africa. Some of these aspects have been touched upon in the *Occasional Paper* mentioned above, as well as in the second chapter of this volume, and will be elaborated more fully in the course of this second stage.

Research will thus concentrate especially on the practices and activities of conflict prevention and containment at the sub-state level and by non-governmental actors and institutions,[10] while also providing a policy-oriented analysis of the conflict preventive activities of the Economic Community of West African States.[11] Comparisons are then made with the experiences gained in this area by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the various actors that were involved, in the late 1980s, in ending the civil wars in the Central American region. The insights that will be generated at this second stage will, by their policy-oriented focus, make relevant knowledge available to appropriate levels of decision-making[12] and provide a new stimulus to the debate in this field.

The Volume in Outline: Structure and Contents

This book, however, has a scholarly perspective. Its objective is therefore to provide a contribution to the on-going debate in the academic community on the possibilities and requirements for, as well as the limitations of, policies of early warning and conflict prevention.

As mentioned above, the book starts with a concise overview of the practices of conflict prevention and early warning as developed by international governmental organizations since the end of the Cold War. For this purpose the next chapter uses a deliberately narrow definition of the concept of conflict prevention, which is not followed in the other contributions to the volume: in this overview conflict prevention will denote any kind of (political, economic, military) action with the aim of preventing the eruption of violence as such. In other words, activities can only be deemed conflict preventive if they take place before a conflict has reached the phase of armed violence (the so-called dispute phase). If those activities take place after violence has already erupted, they should be considered under the headings of the older and familiar concepts of conflict mediation, conflict containment, conflict management or conflict reduction.

Although it is readily conceded that the distinction between prevention and containment of conflict is not sharp and that third-party intervention in conflicts must be analysed as part of a continuum of activities along the life cycle of a conflict, it is also crucial to realize that the practice and vocabulary of international politics and diplomacy can be rather slick. The result is that, in political practice, the concepts of early warning and conflict prevention are so far being used, not only in an inarticulate way and as synonyms for other concepts, but also with a frequency that may at times create the impression that conflict preventive activities have already become a structural feature of the post-Cold War era. Thus, a strict definition of conflict prevention must be employed in order to distinguish between mere lip-service to, and concrete policies of, conflict prevention. The following chapters will, however, employ a broader

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10   One could think of provincial and local authorities, (neo-)traditional leaders like clan elders and chieftaincies, former political leaders active in mediating in conflicts, African-based human rights groups and other pressure groups of civil society. This component of the project will be drafted in the form of a selective inventory of West African actors and institutions involved in the field of conflict prevention.

11   This part of the project concerns a study of the ECOWAS-sponsored intervention in the Liberian civil war.

12   One could think here not only of West African governments, but also of ECOWAS itself, other intergovernmental organizations in and outside Africa, NGOs and the donor community generally. Enhancing institution building and strengthening the research capacity of the West African region is another objective of this phase, which was included in line with development cooperation policy of the Netherlands government. It is also the intention of the Clingendael Institute to undertake a third, policy-oriented phase in its conflict research programme, which will merge the project on the causes of conflict in the Third World with the research on early warning and conflict prevention.

definition that relates early warning and conflict prevention also to activities to prevent the *escalation* of hostilities.

The central argument of the second chapter is that international organizations are almost solely preoccupied with tackling *existing* conflicts, rather than potential or impending conflicts in the future. Almost all organizations are only activated to produce a response to conflicts once violence has already occurred. This is especially true for inter-governmental organizations in Africa, whose response capacity has always been very low, although the recent record of the Southern African Development Community may be evaluated in a more positive way.

Moreover, properly designed early warning systems, in Africa and elsewhere, are very rare. Only the United Nations and some of its Specialized Agencies can boast early warning systems or procedures that to some extent resemble the requirements of scholarly models of systematic collection, analysis and processing of indicators of potential violence. The UN's fact-finding capacity is in this respect relevant for some of the world's smaller, regional organizations. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe stands out for its unconventional early warning capability in the form of a High Commissioner on National Minorities, whose activities are usually considered as highly relevant to the prevention of conflicts in former Eastern bloc countries. The Organization of American States and the Association of South-East Asian Nations do not possess any structures that provide for early warning of violent political troubles ahead. Contrary to the African institutions, these organizations do not even pay (regular) lip-service to the concepts of prevention and early warning.

More generally, inter-governmental organizations can so far boast very little activity, let alone success, with respect to developing and implementing conflict preventive strategies. Only the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe comes closer, with its system of consultation procedures, to providing a strategy with which to prevent the eruption of armed conflicts. However, the post-Cold War record of both the OSCE and other organizations, such as the UN, is also marked by spectacular failures to thwart the eruption or escalation of, especially, civil wars. Much of their activity can be criticized as being too little, too late.

The second chapter also analyses what kind of events or developments the various inter-governmental organizations consider to be signals of impending armed conflict – quite apart from the question of whether, from a scientific point of view, such interpretations are correct. Related to this, the chapter investigates what concept of security inter-governmental institutions adhere to. Their perceptions of – what are supposed to be – signals of impending trouble, as well as their security concepts, have a direct bearing on their decisions of whether or not to respond to developments, while they also influence the way in which they will respond.

The chapter shows that international organizations have developed divergent views on signals of potential violent conflict and that the related security concepts vary considerably. There are, however, also similarities between some of the organizations discussed. Both the OSCE and the United Nations employ rather broad concepts of

security and consider a large array of events or developments as signs of potential violent conflict. While the OAS focuses on *coups d'état*, as threats to hemispheric stability rather than signs of impending intra-state violence, evidence for Africa's international organizations is still rather thin. The OAU does not emphasize particular developments or events as signals of potential conflict, but in practice has devoted considerable time in trying to de-escalate the conflicts in the Great Lakes region. While ECOWAS is almost solely concerned with the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone, evidence on SADC and IGAD is still inconclusive. In all cases, however, security concepts have steadily broadened since the end of the Cold War, which in practice means that humanitarian considerations have gained in importance when it comes to deciding on, and legitimizing, intervention in conflicts.

The way in which these organizations tend to process and respond to (perceived) signals of conflict varies as well. In the OSCE this takes place through the High Commissioner on National Minorities, as well as the complex system of consultation procedures that aim to reduce tensions between member states. While ASEAN's processing of, and response to, conflicts are dependent on bilateral forms of cooperation, in the UN, OAS and OAU the secretariat and its Secretary-General have in this respect been given upgraded roles. However, parallels in institutional and procedural responses to conflicts are rather limited. On the whole, each organization seems to have its own peculiar solutions to very specific institutional experiences.

In chapter 3 Howard Adelman sketches the historical background to the idea of early warning. The concept's origins are dual: early warning came into use in the world of military intelligence – where it was meant to help prevent hostile acts by perceived enemies – as well as in the context of humanitarian assistance to victims of natural disasters like hurricanes, drought and famine. The post-Cold War conception of early warning is, however, mainly rooted in this second, humanitarian usage of the term. Adelman describes the attempts to establish an early warning capability and structure in the UN, among others by way of the Office for Research and the Collection of Information (ORCI), in the work of which he participated. Following ORCI's demise, the three principal departments of the UN secretariat – the Departments of Political Affairs, Peace-keeping Operations and Humanitarian Affairs – developed another early warning procedure to ensure the collection, exchange and analysis of information between them. Adelman also provides an overview of the research that is being undertaken in the NGO sector and the academic community.

In his second contribution to the volume Adelman discusses at length the interaction between early warning and the management of conflicts. In particular, he analyses process and structural problems in the necessary networking between organizations, institutions and individuals involved in the monitoring of (potentially) violent conflicts and the issuing of warnings about impending or escalating violence to the relevant contexts of decision-makers. Adelman focuses specifically on the problem of comr·

cation and the role of perception (that is, of conflicts) among external observers and decision-makers in such a networking process. His central contention is that the problem of sharing data on potentially escalating conflicts between the various agencies involved in early warning, as well as the way in which relevant early warnings of those conflicts are phrased, presented and perceived, are as important as the attempt to establish a system or model of reliable indicators of conflict as such. Moreover, the sharing and transmission of information, the way in which early warnings are phrased and presented, the development of models of indicators and the formulation of a response strategy to conflicts are all interrelated.

For example, if a conflict is viewed as an age-old struggle between ethnic groups that are at war with each for the simple reason of having different cultural identities, one is likely to conclude ('warn') that the conflict is insoluble – something that will negatively affect the nature of the response of those who are supposed to intervene and stop the conflict. Even if a process of conflict management is started up, subsequent escalation signals run the risk of being ignored. Policy-makers with a vested interest in a negotiating process may exhibit a built-in disposition to focus on those actors who are prepared to talk, and neglect the more extreme forces favouring violence. As argued by Adelman, the very process of conflict management may itself inhibit and distort the ability to read and interpret signals because of the efforts already invested in that process. Thus, early warning and conflict management have a complicated relationship that is not always mutually reinforcing.

Problems of perception are therefore not limited to actors who are parties to the conflict, but extend to those who are monitoring the conflict and formulate early warnings, as well as those responsible for policy- and decision-making. Different institutional cultures may come into play here and, in the course of the networking process necessary for the observation of conflict signals and the formulation of early warnings, seriously complicate the conflict issues and the production of response strategies. Adelman discusses the barriers to the proper reception of conflict signals, such as the drowning of signals of impending conflict by contradictory indicators or by signals of other potential conflicts, as well as the possibilities of misinterpretation and rejection by decision-makers.

The initial stages of the early warning process are impaired by the fact that, in the academic community, no one model of indicators has been accepted. Different categorizations, as well as different terminology and labelling of conflicts, are being used. This contributes to confusion, may jeopardize the proper processing and interpretation of data and, in fact, may become a part of the conflict itself. Adelman illustrates this by a case-study describing reactions to the events in Rwanda during the early 1990s, which certain organizations for some time refused to label genocide for reasons of

expediency.[13] Agencies involved in monitoring conflicts or human rights may not wish to antagonize the regime of the country concerned by using a particular label, while actors and institutions that are provided with early warnings of conflicts may, for ideological or power political reasons, refuse to listen and act upon those warnings. Furthermore, even within one single organization the networking necessary for producing and transmitting early warning messages may be a problem because of internal bureaucratic rivalries.

In chapter 5 Peter Wallensteen takes up the issue of how to improve our reading of potential conflict signals. He contends that there are at least four aspects in the process of early warning that require our attention. First, one must, of course, come up with the indicators of impending trouble, in other words, issue the warning as such. The second element is that of receptivity, namely how to phrase warnings in such a way that decision-makers will take note. His third point is that, since the relationship between warnings, their reception and subsequent preventive actions is not a straightforward one, the conditions under which states and international organizations will take action must be studied, including the types of action that are needed to prevent (further) escalation. Finally, early action will have to be followed up by subsequent preventive activities if it does not immediately remove the escalatory pressures in the conflict, thus raising the question of long-term commitment of the intervening parties.

If conflicts intensify, this may take two different forms – protracted or rapid intensification – both of which affect the four above-mentioned aspects of the early warning process in different ways. In case of sudden, rapid intensification, the party initiating the use of violence will probably try to gain a tactical advantage by surprising its opponent. Since, in Wallensteen's words, 'surprise is the game', the violent stage of these conflicts (whether inter-state or domestic) is preceded by a relative dearth of indicators of impending trouble. Official statements and open threats will be few and far between, although troop movements, military manoeuvres and arms purchases may signal the intensification of the conflict. Other signals are shifts in the use of military resources and austerity measures in the civilian sectors, but also new forms of propaganda, media coverage and the actions of extremist groups. While the collection of information on such signals used to be the exclusive preserve of national intelligence agencies, the end of the Cold War and the concomitant rise in humanitarian concerns may have increased the opportunities for inter-governmental organizations and other actors to gather such data.

In cases of protracted intensification, acts of violence, as well as the parties and issues involved, have been around for some time and are known to the outside world.

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13 Adelman was the co-author of an excellent analysis of the Rwanda genocide. See H. Adelman and A. Suhrke, *Early Warning and Conflict Management* (Steering Committee of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda: Odense, 1996).

Still, although external actors could have taken action at earlier stages, they are still regularly taken by surprise when the conflict enters a phase of intensification. Early warning indicators should thus focus on unsolved problems, refugee populations that originated during earlier periods and the flow of small arms.

However, since even conflicts that experience rapid intensification are usually known beforehand to the outside world, it may be better to focus on what to do rather than how to predict. Since decision-makers hate to be taken by surprise, their receptivity to early warning of conflicts with rapid intensification may be higher than to those with protracted intensification, although, paradoxically, there will be less opportunity for preventive action. Wallensteen argues that the reverse is true for cases of protracted intensification. Such conflicts may offer several moments of effective intervention, yet external actors are likely to consider these conflicts as continuous, insoluble issues and thus be reluctant to act. Again, the dimension of perception of conflicts comes into play here.

Wallensteen also discusses the types of action to be taken by decision-makers, such as direct or containment action, as well as their impact on the parties to the conflict. He also analyses the need for sustained action, that is, beyond the initial period of intervention, and various problems that may have a negative impact on the determination of the intervening actors to continue with their preventive activities.

In noting that the permanent members of the UN Security Council are likely to evaluate the need for preventive action from the perspective of their own strategic interests, Wallensteen ties the analysis of early warning firmly to the 'realist' approach to international politics. Thus, in chapter 6 Ruddy Doom reintroduces the analysis of the structures of international relations to the debate on early warning and conflict prevention which, for logical reasons, has been somewhat overshadowed by humanitarian arguments.

In discussing the political prerequisites of conflict prevention by external actors, Doom emphasizes very strongly that good intentions are not enough if one wishes to formulate and implement conflict preventive strategies. Early warning and conflict prevention have become almost magical formulas that have to be handled with great care if one wants to avoid disappointment. Practical guidelines for concrete objectives are needed, as well as a willingness to work on the basis of mere probabilities rather than inflated expectations. In Doom's words, peace is not only morality, but also a matter of politics.

Having set the tone for his contribution, he notes that foreign affairs were, and to a considerable extent still are, the monopoly of political elites – both in parliamentary and authoritarian systems. Moreover, public opinion is generally less concerned with distant, international issues than with domestic problems: since solidarity evolves along concentric circles, its strength and effectiveness usually diminish with geographical distance.

Perhaps more importantly, Doom analyses the concept of international community – a term that is widely used and abused in policy-making and activist circles. Although one may state the obvious, such a community does not exist. Rather, we face a structural contradiction between a globalized economic system and political structures that are by and large still rooted in, and oriented towards, the nation-state. International organizations do not really compensate for this, as these are generally inter-state institutions. Thus, states have a tendency to define peace as the mere absence of open violence between states rather than in terms of sustainable peace, for fear of turning their own countries into targets of external interference. Intervention in conflicts will take place on the basis of an interest calculus which makes it improbable that conflict prevention, instead of non-intervention in internal affairs, will become the guiding principle of international politics.

Doom continues with a fundamental discussion about the (im)possibilities of predicting our political future or, more specifically, the eruption or escalation of conflicts. For this he borrows from so-called chaos theory, which was first formulated in the natural sciences: since societies constitute open and dynamic systems that contain a multitude of interactions, there is a continuous tendency towards change and instability – notwithstanding the presence of some degree of order or 'structures' (i.e. fundamental patterns of interaction) in social relations. All systems – physical and social – possess preservation laws that enable them to absorb small disturbances in those patterns. Yet this is only true to some degree, since when the system is already considerably off-balance, even minor events may lead to enormous shifts in such patterns. One can therefore only make predictions in terms of probabilities. Moreover, the more a system is off-balance, the more potential situations will present themselves and, thus, the smaller the chance of success for a particular action or strategy directed to solve or contain a conflict. Cost/efficiency ratios of intervention activities decline sharply when this so-called 'bifurcation threshold' is passed. This confirms the contention noted in the introduction of this chapter that it is easier to avert conflict in its earlier stages – a conclusion that is at odds with the observation that, due to power political reasons, conflict prevention will never become a dominant strategy in international relations. A case-study on the events in eastern Zaire in 1996 illustrates Doom's arguments on chaos theory, conflict prevention and power politics.

Pleading for a modest approach to conflict prevention he also argues that, first of all, conflicts inhere in social and political life and should therefore not always become the target of preventive action. They should not be stopped for the mere sake of stability, but be tackled along the lines of sustainable development. Conflict prevention should have the modest goal of trying to contain violent conflicts, i.e. to prevent the worst case scenario of total escalation, rather than the utopian objective of resolving the contentious issues.

In this respect chapter 7 concentrates on the question of how the United Nations can improve upon its record. To this purpose James Sutterlin, who has worked inside the

UN Secretariat for more than a decade, outlines the early warning process in terms of three phases: information gathering, analysis of data and communication of warnings. All three must be effective if the process is to function satisfactorily.

For its information the UN depends on both primary and secondary sources. Among the first one might mention public media, member states and UN field posts, while secondary sources are NGOs, the academic community, UN functional offices and other inter-governmental organizations. In collecting data the world body is hindered by resistance of member states, which usually disapprove of UN offices and representatives reporting on their actions and policies. Thus, the absence of a proper intelligence capability hampers UN efforts to prevent conflicts. While the UN Specialized Agencies and functional offices possess considerable information that could be of use in this regard, this source of data is as yet untapped because these organizations do not wish to antagonize the member states in question and thereby put at risk their representatives in the field. Moreover, there is no system or procedure through which such information can be reported to a central office within the main United Nations structure.

The analysis of early warning data is focused mainly in the Department of Political Affairs and carried out by regional divisions that employ qualitative methodologies on a country-specific basis. Policy analysis teams then review the submissions of the regional division teams. Although the Department of Political Affairs has, in the words of Sutterlin, 'the responsibility to identify potential and actual conflicts' and recommend on these issues to the Secretary-General, it also has to coordinate and plan its actions with the other two departments – Peace-keeping Operations and Humanitarian Affairs – with which it shares responsibility as far as this phase of the early warning process is concerned. Sutterlin describes the weaknesses in this system, such as the lack of social and economic indicators, the absence of contact with the academic community and the operational tasks of the three above-mentioned departments which leave little time for thorough analysis of relevant data.

Apart from noting the necessity that reports with important data penetrate the circles of decision-makers around the Secretary-General, he discusses the need for systematic provision of data to the UN Secretariat by functional organizations such as the FAO, UNHCR and UNEP, as well as regional organizations like the OSCE and the OAU. Sutterlin opines that the regional institutions should, theoretically, be well equipped to engage in preventive activities in their region as they are more familiar with the causes of, and issues surrounding, local conflicts. However, judging from their performance with regard to conflict resolution and containment – rather than prevention as such – he considers that their record is at best doubtful, with the exception of the OSCE.

These remarks take the analysis to the possibilities, as well as the limitations, of a so-called global division of labour between the UN and other (regional) organizations. The difficulties inherent in such a division of labour were put in sharp relief by the famous policy document *An Agenda for Peace* by former UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali and the 1993 constitutive document that introduced the OAU's 'Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution'. While in the former document the hope was expressed that the world's regional institutions could develop a more significant role in the field of conflict prevention,[14] the latter document orders the OAU to take recourse to the UN for financial, logistical and military assistance if conflicts deteriorate to such an extent that more wide-ranging intervention is considered necessary.[15] While this underlines the fact that both the world body and regional organizations experience serious problems in realizing an effective strategy of conflict prevention, it is nevertheless clear that not all activities necessary for the prevention of the world's conflicts can be undertaken by the UN.

Thus chapters 8 and 9 investigate what role regional organizations – whether inter-governmental, state or non-state (NGO) institutions – can play in this regard. Since many of the conflicts of the post-Cold War era have erupted in Africa, both chapters discuss, albeit from different perspectives, the issue of a division of labour between external and African institutions. While the concept of 'regional' organization can be used to refer to both continental institutions such as the OAU and organizations whose membership is confined to a particular region within the continent, in chapter 8 the focus is mainly on the latter type. In this chapter Gilbert Khadiagala first describes the mechanism for the prevention and containment of conflicts as established by the OAU in 1993. He notes that in the five years since then the Secretary-General has been active in the mediation of various conflicts, as well as the observation of elections, but that the OAU's record in peace-keeping is still rather mixed, with member states being less than enthusiastic about efforts to enhance the organization's capacity in this area. Rather, it is the continent's various regions that, in Khadiagala's words, are becoming the 'laboratories for conflict prevention, peace-keeping, and the forging of common values'.

Yet such roles depend on the presence of certain strong and viable states that can assume leadership in their region with regard to the containment or prevention of conflicts. In discussing the intervention of ECOWAS in the Liberian civil war, Khadiagala notes the staying power of ECOMOG or 'ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group'. He argues that this points to the importance of leadership in collective security, which in this case depended on Nigeria contributing disproportionately to ECOMOG's military capabilities.

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14   See B Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-keeping* Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to the statement adopted by the Summit Meeting of the Security Council on 31 January 1992 (United Nations New York, 1992), ch VII

15   See AHG/Decl.3 (XXIX)/Rev 1 Declaration of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government on the Establishment within the OAU of a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, and Resolution (June, 1993) paragraphs 15-16 and 25

Similarly in Southern Africa, South Africa has been able to provide leadership in the region after the demise of apartheid. Thus Pretoria's intervention in Lesotho (1994) helped restore constitutional legality to that country and, more generally, South Africa's new profile has allowed SADC to develop a new role with regard to the containment of conflict. Khadiagala discusses in this respect the mandate of the newly established SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security, as well as SADC joint peace-keeping exercises – which many observers consider to be the model for enhanced African peace-keeping – and, perhaps more importantly, SADC's new role in developing a regional consensus around shared norms and values of state behaviour in domestic and regional politics.

In his discussion of the East African region and the Horn of Africa Khadiagala observes that they differ from Southern and West Africa, primarily in the absence of a clearly defined leader state with sufficient resources to provide direction with regard to regional security issues. This problem is compounded even further by overlapping membership of various inter-state organizations and the presence of several civil wars and competitive inter-state relations in these two regions. To illustrate these points Khadiagala describes the ups and downs of IGAD(D) and the structures of East African cooperation. Similarly, the Great Lakes region has lacked both a 'sturdy regional institutional framework' for security cooperation and a clear leading state to provide it with a sense of direction. Zaire under Mobutu was unable to assume the leadership of the Great Lakes area, while in the wake of Mobutu's demise and declining Western interest it was Uganda that stepped into the emergent power vacuum. So far, however, these changes have not reduced the conflict potential of the region. In this respect both the East African Cooperation agreement (EAC) of 1996 and the moribund Communauté Economique des Pays des Grands Lacs (CEPGL) are analysed for their potential role in regional security, as is the informal alliance of Eastern African leaders (Museveni, Kabila, Kagame, Afeworki and Zenawi) which many observers have dubbed 'Africa's emerging new leadership'.

Although Khadiagala's analysis is mainly concerned with the mediation, containment and resolution of existing violent conflicts, his arguments are highly relevant to any potential strategies and instruments of conflict prevention as such. While contending that leadership by a particular actor is a *sine qua non* for successful policies by African institutions in these areas, he also discusses the dilemma created by the fact that, while necessary for effective third-party intervention in conflicts, forceful leadership by a particular member state may also generate obstacles preventing regional institutions from assuming the role of effective and impartial broker in African conflicts. Central to his discussion is that this dilemma can only be resolved by the development of democratic, legitimate political systems – which he analyses under the heading of 'transparency'.

In the penultimate chapter Timothy Shaw, Sandra MacLean and Katie Orr take up this point by discussing what they call the 'agency' of peace-keeping roles, as well as the importance of non-governmental organizations in the mediation, containment and prevention of African conflicts. With 'agency' they refer to the question of who is mainly in control of initiatives to undertake and implement humanitarian interventions – that is, African or external powers? Like Doom they analyse third-party intervention in the context of interest calculations by the individual actors involved. Moreover, like Doom they relate the issue of peace-keeping and conflict prevention firmly to the question of sustainable development, the effects of structural adjustment programmes and economic liberalization and, more generally, to the changing patterns and features of Africa's political economies. In this respect they lament the tendency of intervening powers to search for short-term palliatives rather than long-term structural solutions to conflicts. Rather than interpreting the post-Cold War concern with humanitarian intervention and conflict prevention as aspects of an enlightened era, their radical perspective views these issues in terms of *realpolitik*, including the roles and activities of NGOs therein. Furthermore, they discuss the question of the 'division of labour' between the various state, inter-state and non-governmental actors involved in peace-keeping or peace-building on the African continent. This division of labour obviously varies between conflict cases and the different stages of these conflicts.

In discussing – what they too see as – important new developments in the area of conflict containment and prevention inside Africa's inter-governmental institutions, they note the interesting attempts in the OAU and the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) to link these institutions to the various actors from African civil society. However, they do not contend that the roles played by African NGOs (or, for that matter, external, international NGOs) in the area of conflicts is by definition always positive or constructive. Rather, they note with concern the proliferation of African groupings that are ethnically, regionally or religiously based, as these may also help to exacerbate, instead of reduce, the conflict potential on the continent.

In their analysis the authors discuss the growing importance of international (usually Western) NGOs or INGOs in what they term the 'peace-building nexus', i.e. their increased activities in providing basic needs like health and education against the backdrop of the degeneration of Africa's states. Here they distinguish between different types of INGOs – so-called 'programme' and 'advocacy' NGOs – and discuss their complex relations with donor and recipient states, as well as with inter-governmental institutions, and, related to this, the division of labour in the peace-keeping and peace-building areas. These relations, just as the interactions with other (I)NGOs, can be both collaborative and competitive. In discussing the roles of NGOs, the authors thus add a dimension to the analysis of conflict prevention, early warning and humanitarian intervention that was, until now, somewhat neglected. In linking the different types of organizations and institutions firmly to their realist analysis of 'the peace-building nexus', they also provide a more balanced and comprehensive perspective on early warning and conflict prevention as one of the major issues of post-Cold War politics.