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THE UN SYSTEM OF CONFLICT PREVENTION

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The UN System of Conflict Prevention

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Introduction

In addressing this issue, I should note two points at the outset. First, conflict prevention has been an essential aspect of the United Nations since the drafting of its Charter in the last years of World War II ... at least in theory. The frequency of conflict during the Cold War and after its end suggests, however, that this role of the UN remained rather theoretical for much of the organisation's history. In part, this is a result of the bipolar contradiction in the Security Council and in the UN as a whole. However, it also reflects the fact that, despite the title of this paper, there is no UN system of conflict prevention, if we understand "system" as a complex structure of interacting units working together in a more or less regular or ordered way towards a common purpose. I suspect that the organisers of this meeting would be less than pleased if I simply stopped here. And to do so would be irresponsible, since one reason the UN is not very effective at conflict prevention is the absence of an effective structure to undertake this task.

With this in mind, I will start with a brief summary of major aspects of conflict prevention. I shall then proceed to examine how the issue of conflict prevention developed in the United Nations during the Cold War. I shall then turn to the euphoria of the post-Cold War era and the ambitions many had for the UN as a conflict prevention mechanism after the Cold War. I shall then comment on two experiences of attempted conflict prevention by the United Nations - preventive deployment in Macedonia and the failure of the UN system to respond to warnings of impending crisis in Rwanda in 1994, before going on to discuss why these high hopes were misplaced. I shall conclude with a number of observations on the major proposals floating around to make the UN a better instrument of conflict prevention.

Conflict Prevention

The prevention of conflict embraces a wide array of activities. These may be divided in term of their proximity (political and temporal) to actual hostilities. In the most immediate sense, it may involve political and military steps when the signs of impending conflict are clear to prevent the actual outbreak of hostilities. These may involve, for example, the good offices of the Secretary General through special representatives, or for that matter the preventive deployment of peace-keeping forces. Its effectiveness is predicated on efficient early warning, on the political willingness of the Secretary General and/or the Security Council to act quickly, and, in the event of a decision on deployment, on the willingness of troop contributing states to provide the necessary forces.

At one remove from the crisis stage, it may involve diplomacy intended to prevent the maturation of a crisis where signs of growing tension are perceived. This presumes a reliable

methodology for identifying such situations and adequate intelligence about the situation in question.

Conflict prevention may also involve efforts to address the root causes (political, ethnic, religious, environmental) of conflict. In this respect, the task conflict prevention blends into international efforts at political and economic development.[1] The point is to design assistance programs and conditionalities on them in such a way as to promote conditions conducive to peace. Thus, one might see environmental assistance (viz. hydrological projects) coupled with conditions ensuring equitable resource distribution as a form of "deep" conflict prevention. Another example might be economic assistance coupled with equity criteria regarding national minorities. Political conditionality on assistance with the intention of promoting minority rights in diverse societies is also an example. Programming in constitutional and legal reform is another.

At the risk of sounding excessively academic, one methodological problem is worth stressing here. That is the impossibility of neatly separating conflict prevention activities from those oriented towards conflict resolution. At their extremes the two are clearly distinguished - a peace conference is not a conflict prevention activity. A water-sharing program in conditions of incipient conflict is not a conflict resolution activity - no conflict has occurred. However, things get murkier in the middle, since efforts to resolve suspended disputes (resolution) are often closely tied to efforts to keep them from breaking out again (prevention). Hence, a classic peacekeeping force is in place in the first place to prevent inadvertent resumption of hostilities (prevention) and to reduce the probability of escalation and spillover (prevention), but also to provide reassurance to the parties as they proceed with negotiations on settlement (resolution). So, if it appears that I am mixing these categories up during the analysis that follows, that is because they are mixed up.

The Charter and Conflict Prevention

The activities of the United Nations in the area of conflict prevention are governed by the UN Charter. Article 1 defines the purposes of the organisation to be the maintenance of international peace and security and to that end "to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace"(1.1), to develop friendly relations among nations (1.2), and to achieve international co-operation in solving international political, economic and social problems (1.3). The mechanisms by which the organisation is to address the question of prevention and removal of threats to the peace are dealt with most obviously in Chapters VI - The Pacific Settlement

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[1] See, for example, the very large UNU-WIDER project on development and conflict prevention. It is perhaps not excessively cynical to view this new interest in conflict prevention on the part of the development community as instrumental in character. Levels of official bilateral and multilateral development assistance have been in steady decline for many years. Flying the conflict prevention flag may be one way of increasing the financial flows that support development activities. On the other hand, to the extent that this encourages greater sensitivity to the political and social implications of development, it is a good thing.

of Disputes (Arts. 33 and 35-38), and VII - Action with Regard to Threats to the Peace (Articles 39-51). The first batch includes efforts to induce parties to disputes that may threaten international peace and secure to resolve their dispute "by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of their own choice" (Art.33), Security Council investigation of disputes to ascertain the extent to which they constitute threats to international peace and security (Art.34) recommendation by the Security Council of methods and procedures for peaceful resolution (Art. 36.1), and, on request from the parties, the Council may make recommendations "with a view to pacific settlement" (Art.38).

Chapter VII deals in the main with responses to breaches of the peace and acts of aggression. These fall outside the ambit of prevention. On the other hand, it also addresses "threats to international peace and security." This element is relevant to conflict prevention. Chapter VII is a sort of sliding scale of potential responses once the Council determines that a threat to international peace and security exists. The first level is that the Council may call upon the parties to comply with such provisional measures as the Council may decide upon to mitigate the threat (Art.40). The second level concerns sanctions that may be imposed on one or more of the parties to get them to desist from activities that constitute a threat to international peace and security (Art. 41). The third covers action by military forces to maintain or restore international peace and security.

One or two observations on these aspects of the Charter as they relate to modern conflict are appropriate. First, they deal principally with relations between states, and they not explicitly cover non-state parties in conflict. This is problematic in the contemporary context, since most recent conflict has been internal (either secessionist, as in Georgia) or mixes internal conflict with external intervention (as in Bosnia-Herzegovina). The capacity of the UN to intervene in the internal affairs of member states is severely limited by Article 2.7 on domestic jurisdiction. This applies more specifically to non-Chapter 7 actions. Once a threat to international peace and security is identified, the sovereignty protection is significantly eroded. It is also fair to say that the meaning of sovereignty is evolving over time. Where historically, the prerequisite for recognition of sovereign status and, consequently, for protection under Article 2.7 was control over territory, the Security Council appears over time to be coming to the conclusion that the right to sovereign treatment by the community of states depends on a government meeting certain standards of performance with respect treatment of its own citizens.

The other important implication of the state-centricity of the Charter is that it raises some question about the neutrality of the UN as an *interlocuteur valable* in civil disputes. It is a club of states. The government party to an internal conflict is a member of this club. Movements or peoples challenging that government are not. The norms of the club (e.g. the principle of territorial integrity) favour the membership. As such, the UN's credentials as an impartial actor seeking to prevent or to manage conflict are questionable from the point of view of the disenfranchised.

Leaving aside these central pillars of the Charter basis for conflict prevention, one other aspect bears mention. This concerns the role of the secretary general. Article 99 of the Charter notes that the secretary general may bring to the attention of the Council any matter that he believes may

threaten the maintenance of international peace and security. This lays the basis for an investigative and early warning role for the Secretariat. It also implies (or at least it has been so interpreted) that the secretary general can claim a role independent of the Security Council in matters pertaining to peace and security. As Trygve Lie put it in 1946:

> ... the Secretary-General must reserve his rights to make such enquiries or investigations as he may think necessary, in order to determine whether or not he should consider bringing any aspect of [this] matter up to the attention of the Council under the provisions of the Charter.[2]

This evolved during the Cold War era into an extensive series of initiatives by successive secretaries general involving not merely investigation and early warning, but also the preparation and submission of proposals for settlement of problems that might evolve into threats to international peace and security, and also the informal mediation of disputes in their pre-conflict and conflict stages.[3] As Javier Perez de Cuellar has pointed out, this development was not foreseen by the drafters. But the inoperability of the collective security provisions of the Charter during the Cold War left space for creative expansion of the functions of the secretary general in the realm of peace and security.[4]

Conflict Prevention during the Cold War

As already noted, the capacity of the United Nations to prevent conflict was strongly constrained during the Cold War by the limited capacity of the superpowers to agree on identification of and response to threats to international peace and security. Indeed, since many conflicts of the period were to some extent proxy wars between the United States and the USSR, they had little interest in the use of multilateral instruments to prevent them.

None the less, the organisation did make limited contributions to conflict prevention during this period. UN efforts in this regard had two major dimensions - peacekeeping under Chapter VI and the good offices function of the secretary general. In the former instance, the preventive aspect concerned the avoidance of escalation and spillover. In this connection, it is at least plausible (though methodologically unknowable) that the deployment of observer groups to the Kashmir limited the incidence of inadvertent conflict between India and Pakistan during the entire period of the Cold War, although the Indo-Pakistani wars of 1965 and 1971 suggest that the mechanism was hardly perfect. When the parties decided to take each other on, there was little that the United Nations could

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[2] As quoted in Thomas Franck and Georg Nolte, "The Good Offices Function of the UN Secretary-General," in Adam Roberts and Benedict Kingsbury, eds., United Nations, Divided World (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.144.

[3] For an extensive discussion of this role, see ibid., pp.143-182.

[4] Javier Perez de Cuellar, "The Role of the UN Secretary-General," in Roberts and Kingsbury, United Nations, Divided World, p.131.

do about it. Likewise, the deployment of UNEF I may have limited prospects for escalation of the Suez conflict, by giving the British, French, and Soviets a face-saving means of disengaging (in the case of the first two) or of avoiding engagement (in the case of the third). The principal means, however, whereby escalation was avoided was American economic and diplomatic pressure on Britain and France to abandon their action in the Canal Zone. Again, in the Congo, there is some reason to believe that the deployment of ONUC in the context of Congo's independence, Belgian intervention, and the subsequent effort of Katanga to secede may have limited prospects for competitive superpower involvement (of which, to judge from Khrushchev's rhetoric on the subject there was some prospect). Finally, the deployment of UNFICYP to Cyprus in 1964, and its presence on the line between Greeks and Turks since that time has, by dividing the two adversaries, limited prospects for inadvertent resumption of the conflict. Again, however, the war In 1974 suggested that the mechanism was far from perfect. Moreover, the case of Cyprus underlines one of the dangers of using peacekeeping mechanisms in conflict prevention. The deployment has effectively frozen the conflict. Its presence gives the parties the luxury of avoiding serious efforts to address the root causes and principal political dimensions of the conflict. It is, in other words a licence for irresponsibility.

The good offices function of the Secretary General was a more impressive mechanism in frequency if not in result. Here the focus has been on initiatives (either mandated by the Security Council or General Assembly, at his own behest on the basis of the inherent powers of his office, or at the invitation of the parties to a conflict) of the secretary general through quiet diplomacy to initiate and maintain communications between parties to a potential conflict, to mediate impartially between them through constructive suggestion. The focus during the Cold War was on interstate disputes or those relating to decolonisation. Among the numerous instances where the secretary general has performed this function are the Greek Civil War (1946), the Berlin Crisis (1948), the release of American air force personnel held by China (1955), the Suez Crisis (1956), the crisis in Lebanon (1958), the Laotian Civil War (1959), the Franco-Tunisian Crisis (1961), the Yemeni Civil War (1962), the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), the Arab-Israeli dispute (1967 to the present), the Bahrain dispute (1971), the Vietnam War (1964-5), the Afghan conflict (1980-1989), Iran-Iraq (1983-88), Namibia (1978-88), Central America (1986 in conjunction with the OAS secretary general), El Salvador (1989-92), Guatemala (1990-6), Cyprus (1964 to the present), East Timor (1982 to the present), the Falklands Islands (1982), and the Franco-New Zealand Rainbow Warrior dispute (1986).

This impressive list invites several observations. First, it is striking how many of these instances involved intra-conflict conflict prevention, that is to say the prevention of escalation and widening of the conflict. This reflects several considerations - not least the fact that the Council, the assembly and/or the Secretariat tend to become seized of an issue or problem only when it reaches crisis stage. This in turn reflects the inadequacy of intelligence, analytical, and other early warning functions of the Secretariat during the period in question. Third, the numerous failures in the list suggest that the persuasive powers of the Secretary-General are limited. States do not choose war lightly. It is usually a decision that reflects vital interest and a sense of urgency. In such circumstances, the deck is stacked against the mediator. Turning to the matter of success in conflict

prevention, there is little basis for effective identification of successful cases. This is so for several reasons. As Franck and Nolte point out, few records are kept of such ventures, leaving little empirical basis for evaluation. Moreover, again as they point out, the Secretary General is only one of many players involved.[5] Conflict may not emerge because the parties themselves back away from it for reasons of their own. Other third parties (e.g. the great powers) often applied significant leverage of their own to induce compliance in conflict prevention. For these reasons, it is perhaps better to focus on the **facilitative** role of the Secretary General, rather than on the significance of his good offices as a basic cause of conflict prevention.

Fourth, as would be expected for reasons discussed earlier, the emphasis in these efforts was obviously on inter-state disputes. Arguably, this enhanced the effectiveness of the secretary general. Both parties were generally members of the United Nations. Their equality of membership enhanced the impression of organisational impartiality. The applicability of the Cold War experience to post-Cold War realities in which internal conflict predominates is questionable.

Fifth, it may be that the capacity of the secretary general to develop an independent good offices role depended to an extent on the nature of relations among the Permanent Five. Their deadlock during the Cold War may have expanded his flexibility and capacity for independent action (within, of course, the rather narrow confines dictated by the Cold War confrontation). Once the Security Council overcame the bipolar confrontation and developed a more activist role of its own in conflict prevention, one would expect the council to take a far more active part in defining the activity of their "servant." There is indeed evidence to suggest that in the post-Cold War period, the capacity of the Secretary General to undertake independent political initiatives has been reduced.

Conflict Prevention in the 1990s

The role of the United Nations as a whole in the prevention and management of conflict has expanded markedly in the 1990s. Adam Roberts noted in this context, Security Council activity related to conflict grew rapidly in the relevant period. From 1948 to 1985, the Council averaged fifteen passed and five vetoed resolutions per year. In 1990, it passed thirty seven resolutions and vetoed two. In 1993, the Council passed ninety three, with one being vetoed. The number dropped back to sixty six in 1995. A number of these decisions had preventive components (e.g. Desert Shield to prevent any attack by Iraq on Saudi Arabia and the UNPROFOR deployment to Macedonia). In addition, as just suggested it has been far more active in instructing the Secretary General to investigate and mediate potential conflicts. The UN Secretariat has expanded its intelligence and analysis capability with the creation of the Department of Political Affairs. Access to national means of intelligence in co-operation with members has expanded considerably. The development and humanitarian assistance arms of the UN have attempted to write in a conflict prevention aspect into their relief and development activities. The Secretary General, in part operating on his own initiative and in part on the basis of Council instruction, has considerably

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⁵ Franck and Nolte, "The Good Offices Function,", pp.178.

expanded the good-offices function in areas as diverse as his 1991 initiative to secure the release of western hostages in Lebanon, the issue of Libyan refusal to extradite two intelligence operatives indicted for the bombing of Panam 103, efforts to resolve the internal conflict in Somalia in 1992, and mediation of the confli8ct between Croatia and Serbia in 1992.

The starting point for a consideration of post-Cold War conflict prevention efforts by the United Nations is the 1992 report of Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali "An Agenda for Peace." In this document, the Secretary-General laid out an impressive and ambitious agenda for preventive diplomacy including:

1. confidence building measures -exchange of military missions, regional risk reduction centres, transparency and communications enhancement measures. He placed particular emphasis on consultation in these areas between the United Nations and regional organisations.

2. fact-finding - informal and formal consultations by the Secretary-General or his representatives to acquire information necessary to assess the potential for conflict. The activity of such missions - in addition to securing information necessary for preventive by the United Nations might also "help to defuse a dispute by its presence, indicating to all parties that the Organization is actively seized of the matter as a present or potential threat to international peace and security."

3. early warning - the strengthening of systems designed to provide early notice of potential threats to international peace and security, including not only political/military trends, but also environmental, economic, and demographic variables. He cited in this context a need to develop capabilities to analyse and synthesise these indicators as a basis for designing UN responses.

4. preventive deployment in situations where parties to a dispute feel "that a UN presence on both sides of their borders can discourage hostilities," or where one state feels sufficiently threatened to request a UN presence on its side of the border alone. The concept was extended also to deployment **within** a country to alleviate violence or suffering, to assist in the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and - possibly - to assist in conciliation. The discussion of preventive deployment is noteworthy not least for its emphasis on the need to respect sovereignty, on the importance of consent, and on the necessity of impartiality, issues to which I shall return in a minute.

5. demilitarised zones - the deployment of UN personnel to areas where a settlement has been achieved but where there is a residual possibility of resumption of hostilities that might be mitigated by the separation of potential belligerents.[6]

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6 Boutros Boutros-Ghali, "An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peacekeeping" (New York: United Nations, 1992), paragraphs 23-33.

This was not merely a matter of rhetoric. The emphasis on preventive diplomacy had immediate institutional consequences with the establishment of the Department of Political Affairs in the Secretariat, which drew together the personnel working on political analysis in various parts of the secretariat under one roof, with a specific mandate to provide to the secretary general the information and analysis necessary for him to fulfil the preventive mandate. Crucial to this role was the provision of early warning.

In this connection, several difficulties in the function of early warning should be noted. Early warning requires comprehensive and high quality intelligence and information capability. It also necessitates an analytical capacity in house that is sufficient to digest and make sense of large amounts of data from a large range of sources on a wide array of different situations in far-flung parts of the world. The United Nations has never developed a substantial intelligence acquisition capability of its own, and, indeed, given the reservations not only of the Permanent Five, but also of the smaller states that are likely to be the targets of such interest and who are jealous of the prerogatives of sovereignty, it is unlikely to be able to develop such capability. It remains, consequently, highly dependent on the national intelligence capabilities of co-operating member states. As already noted, member states such as the USA have been more forthcoming with intelligence data since the end of the Cold War than they were during it. On the other hand, access to such assets is almost certainly partial and sporadic. States will share data when they perceive it to be their interest to do so, but are careful to avoid prejudicing national intelligence assets. The Department of Political Affairs and DPKO are insufficiently staffed to provide comprehensive real time analysis of breaking situations. The financial problems facing the United Nations for the foreseeable future make it unlikely that these departments will be expanded sufficiently to provide this capability.

Even if sufficient information were available and sufficient analytical capacity present in-house, this is not sufficient for reliable early warning. There is no real agreement on what constitute reliable indicators of impending crises. The kind of crisis that produces a peacekeeping response stems from a multiplicity of profound, proximate and catalytic factors present to varying degrees in different geographical and cultural contexts. Recent history suggests that different societies have different levels of tolerance for economic, social, and environmental pressure. There is consequently little precision in the science of early warning.

Finally, even if reliable early warning could be achieved, there is little guarantee that the United Nations will act upon it. Action under Chapter VI or Chapter VII requires approval by the Security Council. Such approval depends to a considerable extent on such factors as political interest and will of the Permanent Five, and, in the current context, the United States in particular. As shall be seen below, this is a key problem in crisis prevention.

During the 1990s, the UN has been involved in a number of practical attempts to prevent conflict. Two of the most prominent are the deployment of a preventive force (UNPREDEP) to Macedonia in the context of the crises in the former Yugoslavia and the role of UNAMIR in Rwanda.

UNPREDEP was deployed to Macedonia at the end of 1992. Authorisation to deploy occurred in the context of the deepening war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the fear that Serbia might also threaten Macedonia. In addition, instability in Kosovo and in the Republic of Albania carried some risk of spillover of ethnic tensions into Macedonia. The objective of UNPREDEP was to keep an eye on the evolving situation as well as "by its presence ... [to] deter such threats from any source."[7] As Mats Berdal points out, it was the first effort to translate into practical reality the idea of the use of UN forces to prevent the escalation of tension into violent conflict. UNPREDEP comprises a mixed Nordic battalion and a contingent of American soldiers and engages in active patrol and training in the mission area, "maximising the deterrent effect while symbolising the international commitment to avoid escalation."[8] The force also has an important early warning and intelligence function. Having forces on the ground provides the UN with more reliable and consistent information on the situation than would have been possible in its absence.

No spillover or escalation of conflict has occurred. *Prima facie,* this suggests that the preventive deployment has had a deterrent effect. The problem is that we do not know whether the presence of the force served to dissuade the Serbs from aggression against Macedonia. It is at least plausible that events in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo preoccupied the Serbs sufficiently for them to be reluctant to take on a new challenge. In fact, I am not aware of any substantial analysis of the extent to which the Macedonian case corresponded to any rigorous set of early warning indicators. Moreover, the OSCE (which had a mission in Skopje and whose High Commissioner on National Minorities was active in Macedonia), as well as a number of individual states (e.g. the USA) have also engaged in preventive diplomacy related to Macedonia. So even if we accept that conflict prevention has worked in Macedonia, it is difficult to say how much of this success can be attributed to the UN. On the other hand, it is probable that the presence of the UN force had a reassuring and therefore stabilising effect within Macedonia, giving the government the space and the confidence to proceed with a more or less effective political transition. Here, too, however, assessment is difficult because we cannot know what would have occurred in the absence of the force.

Rwanda - UNAMIR

Although the focus of this conference is on conflict prevention in **Europe**, the experience of UNAMIR in Rwanda is sufficiently illuminating in terms of the potential problems of the UN system of conflict prevention that I have decided to include it none the less. This was a case in which reasonably unambiguous warning was present, but no effective UN response was forthcoming.

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[7] "Report of the Secretary General on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia," S/24923 (9 December 1992), para.17.

[8] Mats Berdal, Whither UN Peacekeeping?, Adelphi Paper No.281 (London: Brassey's for the IISS, 1993), pp.18-19.

To be fair to the UN, UNAMIR was not designed or authorised as a preventive deployment. Instead, it was a classic Chapter VI operation to observe the implementation of the Arusha Accord between the then Rwandan government and the RPF, signed in August 1993. That said, the UN was already aware of significant human rights violations in Rwanda.[9] Second, the mission took considerable time to get off the ground through no fault of its commanders. Although the first contingents of troops were in place by December 1993, the force never fully deployed and it took an unconscionably long time to establish a budget and an administrative capability for the force.

Five months later, in the midst of growing evidence of impending slaughter, the Security Council mandated a reduction in the size of the force on the ground from over 1000 soldiers to under 300. It did this despite a direct warning (in January 1994) from the force commander that a co-ordinated and massive assault on the country's Tutsi population was pending and his request for a re-enforcement of UNAMIR to prevent this from occurring.[10] New York apparently refused to re-enforce, as well as refusing to allow an expansion of the mandate to include protection of the informant whose information General Dallaire had reported and the seizure of the arms caches that were to be used. Instead, Secretariat personnel questioned the veracity of the informant and failed to pass the information and request to the Security Council because they anticipated that the Council would not approve an expansion in the force or its mandate. Council reluctance reflected financial concerns, but also the recent experience in and contemporaneous withdrawal from Somalia. When renewal of UNAMIR's authorisation came up in March, the Secretary General did not mention the evidence of impending crisis. When President Habariyama was killed in April, the genocide began. UN forces were targeted in order to get them out of Rwanda. The murder of ten Belgian peacekeepers brought a joint operation to remove all foreigners from Kigali, and subsequently a Belgian decision to withdraw its contingent. This was followed in late April by a decision to withdraw all but a small number of the members of UNAMIR. Although the force commander had hoped that the troop contingents would remain in proximity to the theatre in case reinsertion was accepted, they more or less immediately dispersed to their countries of origin.

All in all a sorry story. What does it tell us about conflict prevention?

Assessment

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[9] See the report by the UNHRC special rapporteur for Rwanda on his mission to the country in April 1993. A/48/824-S/26915 (11 August, 1993). I am indebted to Pierre van Hoeylandt for this reference.

[10] The relevant cable has, to my knowledge not been published. A French translation of the English original is available in *Rapport du Groupe Ad Hoc Rwanda à la Commission des Affaires Etrangères*, Sénat Belge, JMP/KTR/BVB/svd-30.12.96 (7 January, 1997). Although the authenticity of this version can not be confirmed, it is now generally accepted that such a cable was sent. See, for example, the DANIDA study on Rwanda.

The comparison between these cases suggests a number of problems with the sharp end of the UN system of conflict prevention. First is the relationship between early warning and preventive action. It is striking that the case (Macedonia) in which preventive deployment occurred was one in which there was no unambiguous early warning, but where, instead, there was a general fear of spillover and a political will to forestall it. In the other case, reasonably unambiguous warning of impending genocide was present and was conveyed to the Secretariat in New York by an observer mission already in place and possessing good tactical and operational intelligence.[11] Because the principal actors in New York lacked the interest and will to deploy to prevent the catastrophe, no response was forthcoming. Instead, functionaries in New York engaged in a rather seamy effort to discredit the warning, while self-consciously avoiding concepts (e.g. genocide) that carried legal obligations to respond.[12] If one is to believe the assessment of the commander of UNAMIR at the time, a thousand armed troops deployed preventively would have forestalled the genocide of the Tutsi. To some extent, therefore, the UN it lf was complicit in the outcome. As Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali put it:

> We must all recognise that we have failed in our response to the agony in Rwanda, and thus have acquiesced in the continued loss of human lives. Our readiness and capacity for action has been demonstrated to be inadequate at best, and deplorable at worst, owing to the absence of collective political will.[13]

There are several dimensions to the problematic relationship between early warning and response. First, and quite simply, the UN must focus on a wide range of issues simultaneously. This overloads administrative and decision-making circuits. There may simply be too much noise in the system for the relevant personnel to focus adequately on a specific case unless it gets really out of hand. Second, moving the system into action is a highly complex and energy and resource-consuming activity. It requires substantial investment in the Secretariat and Security Council to build the necessary consensus, and the marshalling of the financial and administrative resources to act. It is a truism that the existence of a crisis makes it easier to justify the investment of resources necessary for timely response. It follows that the people involved will be reluctant to devote the limited resources available to them to initiate a response in a pre-crisis situation where there is uncertainty that a full-blown crisis will emerge. The result is a tendency towards inertia.

This problem of the "rewards and costs associated with recognizing and correctly appraising

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[11] As one expert put it: "The violent spasm in Rwanda in 1994 was anticipated months in advance, although the magnitude of the killing was not precisely foreseen." Alexander George and Jane Holl, The Warning-Response Problem and Missed Opportunities in Preventive Diplomacy (New York: Carnegie Corporation, May 1997), p.3._

[12] John Erikkson, The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from the Rwanda Experience (Synthesis Report (Copenhagen: Steering Committee of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, March 1996), p.21.

[13] S/26488 (5 October, 1993).

the signal" exists at the national level as well since "taking available warning seriously carries the 'penalty' of deciding what to do about it."[14] As has been frequently pointed out, the UN is not so much an independent actor in world politics; it is an instrument of its members, and particularly of its most powerful members.[15] If a leader decides to act, he must mobilise public opinion in support of his/her decision, convince reluctant bureaucracies and competing political actors to go along. He/she must accept the risks of political costs should the response go wrong, particular given the heightened sensitivities of domestic publics to casualties. This is hard to do short of a crisis in which clear national interests are at stake. The result is a resistance at the level of member states to engage in early response.

A second point that emerges from the Rwanda case concerns the flow of information within the UN. Inaction in the case of Rwanda reflected not only the lack of political will of key states within it, but also the way in which warning was handled by the Secretariat. Essentially, the system ignored (some would say suppressed) the early warning that was provided by the force commander it had sent to Rwanda. It did so in large part because of the view that the Security Council would not permit the expansion of the force and its mandate necessary to address the identified impending crisis. One reason for the Secretariat's pessimism concerning an effective Security Council response was the deep financial crisis facing the organisation. This kind of anticipatory surrender is a standard problem in complex bureaucracies; it raises significant questions about the capacity of the UN to react effectively to warnings generated from the field.

A third issue raised by the Rwandan operation is one of serious importance in evaluating the UN's potential in conflict prevention. The events in Rwanda posed rather strongly a major weakness in the idea of preventive deployment. What happens when things go wrong, when a crisis is not prevented, and when UN personnel become targets in the local political competition, when an international presence is seen as an obstacle to the local parties in their effort to attain their own political and military objectives? The Rwandan experience suggests a propensity to cut and run rather than reinforce. The concept of preventive deployment - unless forces are substantial and heavily armed - presumes that the movement towards conflict is inadvertent, rather than being the result of the policies of one or another party. Where the parties want to proceed, they will do so. If the UN gets in the way, they will be targets. The problem then becomes one of extraction at minimum cost.

Proposals for Enhancing the UN System of Conflict Prevention

Proposals for addressing the shortcomings discussed above are legion. They range from the reform of the Security Council to include greater representation from regions likely to be affected

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[14] George and Holl (note 11), pp.4,6.
[15] See, for example, Chantal de J. Oudraat, "The United Nations and Internal Conflict," in Michael Brown, ed., The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), p.491.

by crisis and conflict so as to ensure that the interests of these groups of states get a more representative hearing, through the military level (viz. the prop... ...is for a standing operational headquarters and a rapid reaction brigade) to intelligence (the enhancement of UN access to national intelligence capabilities and of the UN's own capacity to collect and analyse information). Many of these are very sensible in and of themselves.

Expansion of the Security Council to broaden representation from those parts of the world that tend to be the object of UN intervention might go some distance towards legitimising a more interventionist UN role in conflict prevention amongst a constituency that is to say the least sceptical. Given that the Security Council would include more members from regions facing the negative consequences of crisis within them, and whose interests are more clearly affected, this might increase the Council's collective resolve to act. On the other hand, expansion might well reduce the capacity of the Council to act in concert. Moreover, effective response requires if not the active participation of the United States, then at least its goodwill. There is little reason to believe that expansion in and of itself would affect this variable.

Likewise, the innovations proposed to improve the timeliness of response (the standing UN Operational-Level Headquarters and the Rapid Reaction Brigade)[16] are sensible in that they would give the UN a capacity it does not currently have to mount quick responses before a crisis matures. It is plausible that this might prevent further deterioration of the situation in question and give local actors time and space to find compromises on the issues dividing them. On the other hand, there is little reason to believe that the existence of such capabilities would address the more fundamental question of reluctance to respond where vital interests are not at stake. Enhanced capability may strengthen political will, but it is no substitute for it. The fact that those countries intending to contribute troops to the Rapid Reaction Brigade have reserved the right of decision on the deployment of their contingents is not a good sign here. If one or two choose not to go, this obviously degrades the effectiveness of the structure as a whole. The idea of a followon force that is central to thinking about rapid reaction capability raises further concerns. Would the contributors to the initial force commit their forces if the decision on a followon force were not fully elaborated?

The same reservations apply to suggestions concerning the enhancement of the Secretariat's intelligence and crisis-planning capabilities. Improvement in the capacity to process information effectively and so better to inform Security Council decision-making is worthwhile in and of itself. It is also true, however, that such proposals seem rather autistic in the current financial and funding environment facing the Secretariat, Ted Turner notwithstanding. Again, moreover, technical improvements cannot substitute for political will.

All of this suggests that the UN role to play a substantial role in conflict prevention is

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[16] For an extremely useful discussion of proposals for the enhancement of UN rapid reaction capability, see Towards a Rapid Reaction Capability (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 1995).

severely constrained by its resource problems and by its reliance on the political will of its member states. Recognising this, the UN itself has strongly advocated a leadership role for regional organisations in the field of conflict prevention and management, not least in Boutros Boutros-Ghali's Supplement to the Agenda for Peace (1995). The analysis here would support this conclusion. The UN's strongest suit probably lies in the areas of good offices and informal mediation, although even here its effectiveness is limited by its state-centricity and the associated difficulties it has in coping with internal conflict.

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