

2 Inter-governmental Organizations and Preventing Conflicts: Political Practice Since the End of the Cold War

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Introduction

This chapter concentrates on the various ways in which conflict prevention and early warning have become part of the political agendas of international agencies. The agencies discussed are inter-governmental institutions, i.e. international organizations like the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU). The importance and role of NGOs in early warning and conflict prevention are discussed in the next chapter.

As mentioned in the Introduction, after the end of the Cold War international organizations became increasingly interested in the ideas of conflict prevention and early warning as possible cornerstones for new or improved policies to resolve or contain conflicts. In view of intensive and complex conflict situations such as in Somalia and Bosnia, as well as the failure of the United Nations and other organizations to end these bloody civil wars, it was felt that it would be better to respond to conflicts at a much earlier stage, preferably before the eruption of violence or, at any rate, before violence would escalate. One would stand a better chance to resolve or abate a conflict when passions would not yet have been aroused and the parties to the conflict would consequently still be more amenable to the reasoning of intervening agencies; in other words, precisely the arguments that are articulated by those sections of the academic and NGO communities which are involved in the research or propagation of conflict prevention and early warning.

However, while early warning and conflict prevention have become part of the vocabulary of international diplomacy, this does not automatically mean that inter-governmental organizations and their member states have actually designed and pursued strategies of conflict prevention. Since the early 1990s many words have been devoted by politicians, diplomats and (international) civil servants to the concepts and ideas underlying conflict prevention and mechanisms of early warning. Yet the question in this chapter is whether international organizations have devised any concrete plans, policies, institutions and mechanisms for the prevention of conflict and, if so, whether these have been activated at all in specific situations. And if international agencies have indeed begun to engage in conflict preventive practices, what have been the results of these new activities?

In concentrating on the practice, rather than the scholarly constructs, of early warning and conflict prevention, this chapter will also discuss what kind of developments and events are treated by international organizations as signals of potential violent conflict, quite apart from the question of whether such events or factors should – from the perspective of social science theories on early warning and causes of conflict – be considered as the real indicators of impending or escalating violence. Related to this, the chapter provides a general, comparative outline of the underlying concepts of security as used by these institutions, as well as of the mechanisms and procedures, if any, that are geared towards preventing the eruption or escalation of violent conflict.

Early Warning and Conflict Prevention in Politics: Conceptual Fluidity

The first thing that strikes one when investigating the actual practice of conflict prevention in international politics is the lack of conceptual rigour, indeed the sloppiness, with which the notions of early warning and conflict prevention are surrounded. Both conflict prevention and early warning are hardly ever defined or conceptually distinguished from each other, or other terms and notions. In practice the two terms are used almost interchangeably. This is in stark contrast to theoretical perspectives on early warning which, as shown in the Introduction, treat early warning as a specific aspect of, and necessary prerequisite to, conflict prevention in general. While it is true that, as is discussed in chapter 4, there is a symbiotic relationship between early warning and conflict management – or, for that matter, prevention – since action with regard to abating, resolving or averting strife is always based on some sort of early or late warning signal, the notions of early warning and conflict prevention point in essence to empirically distinct phenomena.

Yet in the glib practice of international diplomacy the concepts of early warning and conflict prevention are frequently used in a vague, inarticulate way, almost as magic code words which conform to a new and fashionable trend in academic parlance and which are faithfully listed alongside other concepts or methods of tackling conflict, such as fact-finding, mediation, conflict resolution and conflict management. In this context early warning and conflict prevention are at times not only used interchangeably, but also as synonyms for other concepts. For instance, in the Organization of African Unity the notions of early warning and conflict prevention are regularly articulated with regard to its new strategy and institutional approach towards conflicts. However, the OAU's new policies and procedures in this area were essentially meant to speed up its reaction to conflicts which have already erupted into violence. This improvement in its response capacity was vital, since, for years, the organization's responses to conflicts were slow in coming or did not come at all. Thus, although this book employs the concepts of early warning and conflict prevention in the context of both eruption and *escalation* of violence, it is clear that in the case of the OAU, as well as several other organizations, the use of other terminology would actually be more

appropriate: for example, conflict resolution or conflict management – the latter referring to containment or reduction of violent conflict rather than its prevention as such. Nevertheless, it must be realized that the distinction between conflict resolution/management and conflict prevention is not clear-cut, but that these involve instruments that are part of a continuum of activities which are undertaken at different points of the life cycle of a conflict.

Early Warning Systems in Practice

While early warning and conflict prevention are therefore rarely defined, some exceptions can be noted. For example, the OSCE's High Commissioner on National Minorities defined early warning as an instrument that should

provide the relevant CSCE bodies with information about escalatory developments, be they slow and gradual or quick and sudden, far enough in advance in order for them to react timely and effectively, if possible still leaving them time to employ preventive diplomacy and other non-coercive and non-military preventive measures.¹

Yet fully-fledged early warning systems, based on theoretical models of systematic collection and analysis of indicators, are few and far between. As pointed out in the next chapter, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the United Nations operate certain early warning systems, but in the case of the UN efforts at collection and analysis of indicators became scattered across the Secretariat's departments after the demise of ORCI. Thus, in 1994 Dedring concluded that UN practice with regard to early warning was characterized by incomplete designs, half measures and a lack of conceptual rigour.² The implications of the participation of various institutions and agencies, each with their own preoccupations, agendas and perceptions, for the operation of an early warning system are discussed in chapter 4.

Nevertheless, as shown in chapters 3 and 7, since 1994 there has been some streamlining of UN activities with regard to the processing, analysis and sharing of early warning signals among the major organs of the Secretariat. Moreover, in a more general way the UN's capacities at fact-finding have increased over the years. This has relevance for any potential conflict preventive strategies, most notably for regional organizations – like in Africa – whose resources for developing early warning systems are limited.

In a less conventional way the OSCE possesses an early warning capability in the guise of the High Commissioner on National Minorities. OSCE documents stipulate

- 1 M. van der Stoep, 'Key-Note Speech to the Seminar on Early Warning and Preventive Diplomacy, Warsaw, 19-21 January 1994', in *CSCE ODIHR Bulletin*, 1994, no. 2, p. 8.
- 2 J. Dedring, 'Early Warning and the United Nations', in *The Journal of Ethno-Development*, 1994, no. 1, p. 104.

that the Commissioner will provide early warning and, as appropriate, early action at the earliest possible stage in regard to tensions involving national minority issues which have not yet developed beyond the early warning stage, but, in the judgement of the High Commissioner, have the potential to develop into a conflict.

For the OSCE he represents an important means for the gathering of information and the identification of conflict. His mandate involves two principal functions: persuading parties to seek accommodation and, if violence is imminent, attempting to de-escalate. In the second phase his so-called 'trip-wire' function is activated: if he concludes that there is *prima facie* risk that a situation will lead to a conflict he may issue a formal 'early warning' to the Senior Council of the OSCE, which will discuss it at its next meeting. The Commissioner may then ask the Council to allow him to enter into further contact with the parties, which OSCE documents call 'early action'. If, after such further consultations, he concludes that the situation will escalate or develop beyond a level that he is able to cope with, he may transfer the case to the Council.³

While the Commissioner has as yet never issued a formal early warning nor engaged in formal early action, these provisions must not be confused with the Commissioner's real early warning function: this consists of the continuous collecting of information, the following and assessing of events and, if need be, engaging in consultations with the parties with the object to promote dialogue, which generally takes place at a stage before formal early warnings are issued to the OSCE's Senior Council. Most observers agree that the High Commissioner constitutes a relatively successful example of early warning. For example, his work in the Baltic countries is a case in point when assessing his abilities to help de-escalate disputes between ethnic or cultural communities.⁴ However, in the execution of his mandate he is hampered by limited resources and this OSCE functionary does not, of course, represent a genuine early warning 'system' as prescribed in theories on early warning. Moreover, the practical importance of the Commissioner in terms of early warning of conflicts is limited by the narrow focus on inter-ethnic relations as a potential source of violence.

The Organization of American States (OAS) does not have a structure that can be considered as anything approaching an early warning system. Indeed, conflict prevention has so far hardly figured, or not at all, among the Organization's policy objectives. Similarly, while the OAU has made conflict prevention a formal policy goal and the capacity of its Secretariat for monitoring conflicts has undergone limited improvement, it would go too far to speak about an early warning *system*. Until now the Secretariat's resource base has been too precarious while the number of staff involved is, as yet, minimal. While there are ideas within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for a 'conflict observatory', here one cannot yet speak of any early warning

3 *The Challenges of Change*. Helsinki Summit Declaration and Decisions, ch. II, sections 13-20, Helsinki, 10 July 1992.

4 See R. Zaagman, 'Conflictvoorkoming in Europa: De Hoge Commissaris inzake Minderheden van de CVSE', in *Atlantisch Perspectief*, 1993, no. 6, pp. 17-19.

system either. The organization has, until now, focused solely on the existing (rather than potential) conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The institutional structure of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) was for long kept deliberately lean, while plans for an enhanced role in the management, resolution and prevention of Southern African conflicts are relatively recent. During the early 1990s plans were in this respect considered for a SADC security committee, which would process information on military matters and security threats and share data on these issues among experts. Clearly, this would go towards what might be called an early warning structure – and, indeed, this concept was articulated when plans for the security committee were discussed. When the committee was formally established in 1996 under the name of 'Organ on Politics, Defence, and Security', one of its principal objectives was stated to be the protection of Southern Africa's peoples against instability arising from the breakdown of law and order. Cooperation in regional security and defence through conflict prevention, management and resolution became an official goal of the Organ in question, while it was directed to use preventive diplomacy to pre-empt conflict in the region within and between member states, among others by developing an early warning system and through the promotion of democratic institutions and the observance of human rights. Finally, the Secretariat of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) lacks a significant personnel base that could (help) operate an early warning system. Moreover, while ASEAN has a mechanism for the prevention of environmental problems, its emphasis on national sovereignty and non-intervention make an extension to the area of conflicts difficult.⁵

Conflict Prevention: Official Policies versus the Practice

Apart from the fact that there are few genuine early warning systems around, inter-governmental organizations can, more generally, boast very little concrete action or success with regard to the prevention or escalation of conflicts. It seldom happens that they are activated before the outbreak of violence, although the preventive deployment of UN troops in Macedonia represents a celebrated exception. Interestingly, the decision to send contingents to this former Yugoslav republic was taken with a clearly preventative goal in mind.⁶

However, it is the OSCE which, with its elaborate system of consultations and other instruments, comes closest to realizing a conflict preventive strategy. Yet even if

5 The data on ASEAN in this chapter are drawn from the contribution by Jurjen van der Vlugt in the Clingendael *Occasional Paper* 'Conflict Prevention and Early Warning in the Political Practice of International Organizations' (The Hague, 1996).

6 See for example J. Dedring, 'The Security Council in Preventive Action'; paper presented to the 1997 Executive Seminar of the Department of Peace and Conflict Research of Uppsala University – *Preventing Conflicts: Past Record and Future Challenges*, Krusenberg, 20-22 August 1997.

it manages to clear up misunderstandings, contain disputes or prevent the eruption of violence, practice points at numerous conflicts in which the OSCE was unable to prevent large-scale hostilities or in which it did not come up with a quick response or any (adequate) response at all. The conflicts in former Yugoslavia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Chechnya illustrate its inability to prevent violence, while the situation in several central Asian republics and the Kurdish region of Turkey bears witness of the absence of any (swift and adequate) response. The same is true for the OSCE's response to the crisis in Kosovo, even though this region was potentially more sensitive to the destabilizing effects of the civil war in Yugoslavia than Macedonia.⁷

The civil wars in Croatia and Bosnia were first handled by European institutions. As it was only after the situation had deteriorated that the UN was called in, one cannot really blame the world body for responding only once violence had spread. Moreover, the UN can boast the preventive deployment of troops in Macedonia, which at least helped to contain the conflicts geographically. In 1996-1997 a multinational protection force, mandated by the UN Security Council,⁸ abated escalating civil strife in Albania. This was done with limited success, although rather belatedly and thus not without the considerable expenses incurred by military intervention – which the philosophy behind early warning and conflict prevention seeks to avert in the first place.⁹ The UN's intensive efforts to realize peace settlements in Mozambique and Cambodia are other cases that, to a greater or lesser extent, represent exercises in the prevention of future violent conflict, i.e. after the conclusion of a preceding phase of fighting. However, these examples are the exception rather than the rule, while subsequent developments in Cambodia show how fragile UN-brokered peace agreements aimed at ending complex, protracted civil wars can be.¹⁰

The UN's approach towards the unfolding events in Somalia (1988-1992), Rwanda (1992-1994) and Zaire (1996-1997) seems to be more typical of actual trends: responses that involved too little and came too late. The catastrophic course that American and UN intervention took in Somalia, though afterwards thoroughly analysed in a UN-sponsored study to learn lessons for the future,¹¹ had in this respect a negative

7 As the tiny Serbian community in Macedonia made this territory less important in the expansionist designs of the rulers in Serbia proper. This point is aptly observed by Dedring, 'Security Council in Action', p. 13.

8 See Security Council Resolution S/RES/1101 (1997), 28 March 1997.

9 See Z. Racsmany, 'Too Little, Too Late: The Failure of Conflict Prevention in Albania'; paper presented to the 1997 Executive Seminar of the Department of Peace and Conflict Research of Uppsala University – *Preventing Conflicts: Past Record and Future Challenges*, Krusenberg, 20-22 August 1997.

10 Some interesting insights in internationally sponsored 'peace processes' can be found in S.J. Stedman, 'Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes', in *International Security*, vol. 22, no. 2, fall 1997, pp. 5-53.

11 See *Comprehensive Report on Lessons-Learned from United Nations Operation in Somalia, April 1992 – March 1995* (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Germany; Life and Peace Institute, Sweden; and

effect on the political will of Western countries to prevent or de-escalate complex conflict situations – especially if it concerned domestic conflicts in countries where Western interests are marginal.

The record of other inter-governmental organizations is equally modest, if not disappointing. Since the end of the Cold War the Organization of American States has been active in ways that are only indirectly relevant in terms of conflict prevention. Thus its so-called 'Santiago mechanism' aims at a swift collective response to *coup*-makers, who are immediately suspended from OAS membership. As this approach involves a quickened response to an existing domestic dispute or conflict with the objective of averting at least its further escalation, this OAS instrument can be said to go in the same direction as a genuine strategy of conflict prevention.

Nevertheless, recent years point to an ambivalent record with regard to the new OAS commitment to the maintenance of democratic governments – and thus throw into doubt its willingness to engage in activities aimed at preventing escalation of domestic conflicts as a result of *coups d'état*. OAS pressure on usurpers of power in Guatemala helped domestic forces in that country to withstand the army, with the result that the latter's *coup* attempt collapsed in a matter of days. Yet developments in Peru and Haiti did not lead to an equally forceful stand by the OAS. Thus when President Fujimori of Peru arrogated considerable powers to himself, the OAS did not attempt to get back to the *status quo ante*. Admittedly, it called on members to cut aid to Peru, threatened the imposition of other sanctions and conferred with Fujimori. Yet in the end it asked him to achieve his objective by way of constitutional reform that should be approved in OAS-monitored elections. Although the constituent congress formed for this purpose was boycotted by the largest opposition parties and the subsequent approval of Fujimori's reforms by way of a plebiscite hardly amounted to respect for the democratic process, the OAS restored Peru to its former status in the organization. US concern for Peru's stability and its support for American anti-drugs efforts were crucial here.¹²

Similarly, the OAS was unable to force the Haitian military to give back power to President Aristide. It is true that the OAS quickly condemned the *coup* of General Cédras, instituted a trade embargo and began consultations with the Haitian leader. However, at the time both the Bush administration and several Latin American countries opposed stronger measures when it became clear that Cédras would not be moved. A majority of Latin American states also refused to refer the matter to the UN Security Council on the grounds that the situation in Haiti did not constitute a threat to international peace and security. In the end it was the Clinton administration that

Norwegian Institute of International Affairs in collaboration with the Lessons-Learned Unit of the UN Department of Peace Keeping Operations: no pl., December 1995).

12 H. Munoz, 'A New OAS for the New Times', in A.F. Lowenthal and G.F. Trevorton (eds), *Latin America in a New World* (Boulder, San Francisco and Oxford, 1994), ch. 10 and R.J. Bloomfield, 'Making the Western Hemisphere Safe for Democracy? The OAS Defense-of-Democracy Regime', in *The Washington Quarterly*, spring 1994, pp. 157-69.

stepped in to remove the Haitian military, with a subsequent role for the UN but very little for the OAS to do.¹³

One should in this respect not over-estimate the commitment of certain Latin American countries, or of the United States for that matter, to a compulsory defence of democratic standards through the OAS. The idea for the Santiago mechanism was cherished by the United States, Venezuela and Chile and got the backing of Argentina and some Caribbean and other member states. However, others, such as Mexico, Brazil and Colombia, were opposed to it. The problem is that, judging from US action against Panama's Noriega, American intervention is still a living reality, as is the desire of many Latin American countries to avoid such eventuality.¹⁴ This configuration of interests will obviously hinder any significant evolution of a conflict preventive mandate and role for the OAS.

The same conclusions might be drawn for Africa's inter-governmental institutions, though for opposite reasons. Despite the OAU's lip-service to conflict prevention and its modest efforts to contribute to peaceful change in member states, the organization is usually overtaken by events of violence: with its meagre resources and limited staffing available for conflict monitoring it can only respond, though admittedly more swiftly than in the past, to conflicts that have already erupted into violence. Moreover, with the prevalence of domestic conflicts on the African continent this means that, in practice, it limits itself to addressing the more serious conflagrations. While it is true that OAU envoys and Secretariat personnel have, since the end of the Cold War, been active in mediating in a variety of conflicts – ranging from the Nigeria-Cameroon conflict over the Bakasi peninsula, the civil war in Congo-Brazzaville to the separatist troubles on the Comoros – the organization has focused most of its efforts on the civil wars in Rwanda and Burundi. The Secretary-General kept a painfully low profile *vis-à-vis* the collapse of Somalia, while intervention in the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone was in effect left to the Economic Community of West African States. One can argue that because of the increase in the OAU's response capacity and its swifter reaction to conflicts as compared to the Cold War period, the changes in the organization's strategy towards conflicts go at least in the direction pointed out by the protagonists of prevention. However, as is the case in the OSCE, the OAU faces a structural lack of leadership, which, together with the defence of state sovereignty by African state elites, obstructs the development of a significant role in prevention of conflicts.¹⁵

13 Bloomfield, 'Making the Western Hemisphere Safe for Democracy' and M. Fortmann and J.Ph. Thérien, 'L'Organisation des Etats américains: un système de coopération régionale en transition', in *Relations Internationales et Stratégiques*, summer 1994, pp. 187-201.

14 See Bloomfield, 'Making the Western Hemisphere Safe for Democracy'.

15 See for an analysis of the OAU's past role in conflict mediation and the changes effected in this respect since the early 1990s K. van Walraven, *Dreams of Power: The Role of the Organization of African Unity in the Politics of Africa 1963-1993* (Aldershot, 1998).

Similarly, it was stated above that the emphasis in ASEAN on national sovereignty and non-interference will make it difficult to develop conflict prevention as a significant cornerstone of the organization's policies. ECOWAS has so far only focused on the existing conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone. In practice conflict prevention does not figure among the organization's (predominantly economic) policies and mandates. Finally, as shown in chapter 8, in SADC there have been certain developments regarding the evolution of collective norms and actual cases of conflict mediation and prevention that seem to mark it out from the examples set by the OAU and ECOWAS. However, as witnessed by the 1997 dispute between Zimbabwe and South Africa over the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security, there is also a problem of leadership in SADC – although in this case the issue is that there might be, as in the context of the Organization of American States, *too much* of it: South Africa's dominant position in the Southern African region is at the same time a *sine qua non* for a forceful SADC posture on conflicts and a potential obstacle to its evolution because of fears or resentment that the smaller member states may harbour about their bigger neighbour. Thus, from the start, this problem plagued the Nigeria-dominated intervention of ECOWAS in Liberia.

When Do International Organizations Respond? Signals of Conflict and Concepts of Security

In so far as the above-mentioned organizations have developed ideas on conflict preventive strategies, they tend to have divergent views on what kind of events or developments are supposed to be signals of possibly violent conflict. This has a direct bearing on their decision to respond or not to respond to certain developments. Moreover, it strongly affects the way in which they will react to a particular conflict.

The OSCE regards a broad range of developments as possible causes of conflict. These can be roughly divided in signals that emanate from the military sphere and signals in the so-called 'human dimension'. Those from the military sphere usually pertain to potential inter-state disputes and may involve unusual troop movements, hazardous military incidents and possible misunderstandings resulting from these events. Signals of potential conflict in the human dimension are often considered as possible causes of domestic strife. One should think here of violations of human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy, the rule of law and humanitarian principles.

While problems related to economic transition and development are understated as signals of potential conflict, it is inter-ethnic tension that is seen as a particularly important signal of impending trouble. OSCE documents do not explain how exactly inter-ethnic tension may generate (violent) conflict. However, the first High Commissioner has argued that, while 'ethnic relationships ... often have a centuries-old history, such conflicts very often have more immediate political causes'. In this respect he refers to the manipulation by politicians of psychological uncertainties and material difficul-

ties generated by the problems of economic transition.¹⁶ OSCE documents do not define what is meant by a 'national minority'. It is often used in a broad way to discuss inter-ethnic and inter-religious ties. Yet, as complaints by individual members of minorities have been excluded from the High Commissioner's mandate, it is clear that it is problems concerning an entire minority as such that are regarded as a potential source of conflict. The High Commissioner is also not allowed to concern himself with problems surrounding minorities if acts of terrorism are involved. This has, however, more to do with resistance by member states to OSCE concern with domestic security problems than with any contention that inter-ethnic tensions, marked by terrorist acts, could not be regarded as a signal of potentially escalating violence.¹⁷

The High Commissioner has, among others, concerned himself with problems concerning Russian minorities in the Baltic states, especially Latvia and Estonia; the problems of Slovak and Hungarian minorities in Hungary and Slovakia; minorities in Macedonia, Albania, Romania, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan; and the problems surrounding the Roma group of Gypsies in Europe. From some of the suggestions he has made to improve inter-ethnic ties in these cases, one may infer that lack of communication between government and minority is considered to be one aspect of the nature of the problems concerning minorities. Others are exclusion from public life, forced assimilation and lack of linguistic facilities, such as language education and broadcasting.¹⁸

In the United Nations there is an equally large array of events and developments that are considered as potential sources of violent conflict, whether inter-state or domestic. The list of those perceived signals is, however, less well explicated. Boutros-Ghali's *An Agenda for Peace*¹⁹ vaguely speaks of 'political developments', 'social and economic trends' and 'political indicators'. The time at which these have to be brought before UN organs is not made clear either, although this should be done 'at the earliest possible stage' and the whole idea underlying the Secretary-General's report is that it should be done before the eruption of violence. Naturally, some of the UN's specialized agencies such as the FAO and UNHCR operate early warning models that are centred around more specific indicators, such as refugee flows, failed harvests or drought.

In the OAS considerable emphasis is put on *coups d'état*, although these are interpreted as threats to hemispheric security rather than as signals of future potential

conflict in a particular country. There is hardly any emphasis on tensions emanating from economic difficulties.

The OAU does not seem to distinguish in, or to emphasize particular, events or developments as signals of potential conflicts, whether inter-state or domestic. However, in practice the organization has invested a lot of energy in trying to mediate in the conflicts of the Great Lakes, something which may be related to the Tanzanian origins of Secretary-General Salim. As ECOWAS has so far focused exclusively on the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone, not much can be said about its listing of signals, if there is any. Evidence on SADC and the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) is also inconclusive, although SADC has focused its attention on various – even potential – conflicts in the Southern African region, especially domestic ones. With minorities and human rights issues excluded from ASEAN's brief, its perception of signals relates predominantly to the military sphere and the area of inter-state conflict. However, ASEAN is also concerned with environmental problems as a source of potential inter-state tensions.

The related concepts of security tend to vary as well. The one employed in the OSCE is very broad indeed and encompasses just about any aspect of domestic political and socio-economic conditions, as well as the various dimensions of inter-state relations. The Helsinki Summit Declaration of 1992 states that the OSCE's approach to conflict is based on the 'comprehensive concept of security as initiated in the Final Act', adopted in Helsinki in 1975. It argues that this concept relates the maintenance of peace to respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as to economic and environmental solidarity and cooperation. The protection and promotion of human rights and the strengthening of democratic institutions are seen as the 'vital basis' for comprehensive security. The underlying idea is that violations of human rights will often lead to tensions and conflicts inside states and sometimes to problems and disputes between states. Dictatorially governed countries are more likely to pursue aggressive policies than democratically controlled governments.²⁰

The security concept of the United Nations has traditionally focused on threats to *international* peace and security, although since the end of the Cold War it has increasingly shifted to include developments in domestic contexts. The example of UN intervention in Somalia is pertinent here. Moreover, the world body is active in various dimensions of human life, something that contributes to a broad view on security.

The security concept of the OAS has also steadily widened. Although it is not as comprehensive as the one employed in the OSCE, it now includes the values of democratic government and human rights. The Central American peace accords of the late 1980s began the extension of the security concept as used in the Western hemisphere. They involved agreements on free elections, confidence-building measures,

16 M. van der Stoel, 'The Role of the CSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities in CSCE Conflict Prevention', in *Studia Diplomatica*, 1994, no. 4, p. 62.

17 H. Zaai, 'The CSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities', in *Helsinki Monitor*, 1992, no. 4, pp. 34-36.

18 M. van der Stoel, 'Conflictvoorkoming in Europa: De Rol van de Hoge Commissaris van de CVSE inzake Minderheden', in *Internationale Spectator*, 1994, pp. 105-106.

19 B. Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peace-making and Peacekeeping*. 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).

20 M. van der Stoel, 'Conflicten voorkomen en bouwen aan de vrede: een uitdaging voor de cvse', in *NAVO Kroniek*, August 1994, pp. 7-12.

disarmament and international monitoring of these steps. By this they moved away from the old regime-oriented approach to security to include the values of democratization and human rights so as to create viable regional peace settlements. In the process, these agreements also emphasized the link between military security and the state of domestic socio-political configurations in the region.²¹

Whether the example of the OSCE formed a source of inspiration is not sure. The reference to 'confidence-building measures' might possibly suggest this, although the sources make no explicit mention of OSCE practice. In contrast, one can with certainty point to specific historical roots in the Americas themselves, when attempting to explain the evolution towards the more comprehensive security concept. Thus, the OAS Charter itself already contains references to the importance of human rights and 'representative democracy', as well as to an Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Later on this was elaborated in a convention for the protection of human rights and fundamental liberties. With the transition towards civilian democratic systems and the end of the Cold War, the context of this human rights system changed. The struggle against communism could no longer be used to excuse human rights violations. Moreover, with the emergence of civilian governments came closer convergence among Latin American elites on the importance of democratic values and human rights. The result was that the OAS became more interventionist in this field, tying these issues to its concept of security. However, the sources do not explicitly link the stronger emphasis on human rights and democracy to the OAS mandate of mediation in conflicts, even if the role of the OAS in organizing and/or monitoring elections in countries like Nicaragua, Haiti, Surinam and Peru at least implies such a link.²²

Similarly, the security concept of the OAU²³ has also broadened as a result of the arrogation of domestic conflicts to its area of competence (1990). In the past the organization could only concern itself with inter-state conflicts, or domestic ones which were marked by substantial extra-African involvement or which otherwise had developed implications for the state of inter-African relations. Yet the OAU may now also be activated with regard to domestic conflicts – whether or not these carry certain international repercussions. For example, humanitarian concerns as such may also be sufficient grounds for some kind of OAU response to violent developments inside member states.

Even if it is true that the organization does not have a blanket right of intervention and needs, for instance, the consent or cooperation of the member state concerned when it wishes to mediate, dispatch observers or send envoys, the 1993 Cairo summit gave it

the right to intervene in situations characterized by a total breakdown in order and massive human suffering. The Secretary-General, moreover, has consistently emphasized the importance of democratic change in member states, peaceful processes of transition and a potential role in this for the OAU. All this points to a concept of security that has considerably broadened as compared to the Cold War era. Nevertheless, while the organization has been involved in the monitoring of elections and national constitutional conferences, in the practice of dispute settlement its concept of security is still far from comprehensive: the OAU focuses, and its activation is largely dependent on, conflicts that have already entered a stage of (escalating) violence; there is little room to concentrate on, say, the negative and preliminary developments in the human rights situation of a member state where there is as yet no (large-scale) violence.

Similarly, since the attention of ECOWAS has until now been exclusively directed at the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, its security concept is, in practice, geographically limited. This may, of course, change as the organization's security role develops, although the institutions projected for the operation of its Defence Protocol were never put in place and its role in the Liberian conflict has not been free from controversy.²⁴ In any case, its security concept as yet does not encompass more than the military dimensions of security and the threats to security.

The concept of security that is at present emerging inside SADC is still unclear, although it does involve both domestic and inter-state developments. Moreover, the organization is slowly developing a norm-setting role for itself in the Southern African region with regard to some minimal qualitative parameters for domestic governance. If this trend is to continue it could lead to the evolution of a comprehensive security concept with a humanitarian dimension²⁵ comparable to that of the OSCE. This would set SADC apart from the other inter-African institutions.

Evidence on the security concept of IGAD is as yet insufficient for any firm conclusions. In 1993 IGAD widened its mandate to concern itself with the management, if not prevention, of conflicts. It has thus mediated in disputes between Ethiopia and Somalia and in the Somali and Sudanese civil wars. With regard to the latter conflict it was able, in the course of 1995, to realize a temporary cease-fire between the warring parties. However, while IGAD enjoys the financial and political support of certain Western countries, especially the United States and the Netherlands, bad

24 See Y. Gershoni, 'From ECOWAS to ECOMOG: The Liberian Crisis and the Struggle for Political Hegemony in West Africa', in *Liberian Studies Journal*, 1993, no. 1, pp. 21-43; the special issue of *Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, 1993, nos. 1-2; and E.J. Inegbedion, 'ECOMOG in Comparative Perspective', in T.M. Shaw and J.E. Okolo (eds), *The Political Economy of Foreign Policy in ECOWAS* (Basingstoke and London, 1994), ch. 12.

25 The formulation of such a security concept is strongly pleaded by K. Booth and P. Vale, 'Security in Southern Africa: After Apartheid, Beyond Realism', in *International Affairs*, 1995, pp. 285-304.

21 S.N. MacFarlane and T.G. Weiss, 'The United Nations, regional organizations and human security: building theory in Central America', in *Third World Quarterly*, 1994, pp. 277-95.

22 See for OAS concern with human rights also H.G. Espiell, 'The Organization of American States (OAS)', in K. Vasak and P. Alston (eds), *The International Dimensions of Human Rights*, vol. 2 (Westport, 1982), pp. 543-69.

23 The data on the OAU are drawn from Van Walraven, *Dreams of Power*.

relations between Sudan on the one hand and other IGAD members on the other hinder its development as the region's principal security structure.²⁶

Finally, the security concept of ASEAN is rather broad. Although the organization was never meant to be a military alliance, the management of security has turned out to be a major aspect of its evolution. It should in this respect not be forgotten, however, that ASEAN is not allowed by its member states to deal with human rights and minorities issues. Thus, while its security concept also covers environmental degradation, illegal immigration and natural resources, besides military aspects, this makes ASEAN's focus on security more narrow. Nevertheless, through the ASEAN Regional Forum the geographical scope of its security concept has expanded considerably.²⁷

Thus, each inter-governmental organization appears to have its own approach in terms of security concepts and its own perspective on the variables that it regards as signals of potentially violent conflict. It seems that these concepts and signals, as well as the priority attributed to them, are for the most part determined by the specific features and peculiarities of the regions concerned. There are, of course, similarities, which are essentially the result of global developments of the post-Cold War era which to a greater or lesser extent have confronted every region or continent: the end of interference by the superpowers in zones of conflict; the new mandates for international organizations to fill the vacuum they left behind; the economic marginalization of regions such as Africa; and the need to retain access to foreign aid – all these have led to greater demands being made on, and conditions being set for, internationally acceptable behaviour of governments. In this context international organizations must concentrate on new dimensions and aspects of violent conflicts and employ new security concepts that take into account the nature and quality of the political system in their member states. The example of the OSCE may have inspired some of the ideas on the management or prevention of conflicts that circulate in other organizations, as well as some of the measures that have in this respect been formulated. Yet evidence for this is inconclusive and remains limited to references to 'confidence-building measures' or organization-controlled 'management of change'.

Responses to (Potential) Violence: Procedures and Institutional Arrangements

ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

One can observe both similarities and differences in the way international organizations attempt to process and respond to signals of conflicts, whether potential or existing. In

26 The data on IGAD were drawn in part from internal records of the Netherlands' foreign ministry. The above does not, however, necessarily reflect the views of the Netherlands government.

27 See note 5 above.

the OSCE emphasis is put on the role of member states themselves activating certain mechanisms. The so-called Berlin, Valletta, Vienna and Moscow mechanisms, as well as the one on 'unusual military activities', are pertinent here.

The 'Mechanism for Consultation and Cooperation with Regard to Emergency Situations', otherwise known as the Berlin Mechanism, is applicable in the whole area of OSCE activity and is thus in principle concerned with various signals of potential conflict. It may be invoked in case of 'a serious emergency situation which may arise from a violation of one of the Principles of the Final Act or as a result of major disruptions endangering peace, security or stability'.²⁸ It involves two phases. A state may seek clarification from another country when it considers that an emergency situation is developing. The requested information must be provided within two days and will also be transmitted to other OSCE states. If the problem is not solved, the initiating state may, with the agreement of twelve other countries, call an emergency session of the OSCE's Senior Council, which must be held within two or three days. The Senior Council may convene a meeting of the Ministerial Council of the OSCE or arrive at its own recommendations or conclusions.²⁹

The so-called Valletta Mechanism is not a procedure for the *prevention* of conflict but one for the settlement of conflicts that have already broken out. It may be applied in any conflict between member states, except those that – in the opinion of the state concerned – involve issues of territorial integrity, national defence or sovereignty. The Mechanism provides for the mandatory involvement of a third party. To this purpose one or more independent members may be selected from a resource list of experts. Although the Mechanism has never been used it was later strengthened with a procedure by which the Ministerial Council or Senior Council may direct disputants to seek conciliation. Such a decision may be taken without their consent ('consensus minus two').³⁰

The 'Mechanism for Consultation and Cooperation as Regards Unusual Military Activities' stipulates that states will consult each other on any unusual and unscheduled activities of their military forces outside their normal peacetime locations, which are militarily significant and about which a participating state expresses its security concern. Within two days a government must provide an answer to questions pertaining to such activities. Any state may request such clarification and request bilateral meetings or meetings of the OSCE as such to resolve the issue. These meetings must take place within forty-eight hours. The mechanism was activated three times in the early stages of the Yugoslav crisis, where it helped to de-escalate tensions between Belgrade and Italy and Austria with regard to their (then) common border regions.

28 Quoted in A. Bloed, 'Two Decades of the CSCE Process: From Confrontation to Cooperation', in A. Bloed (ed.), *The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: Analysis and Basic Documents, 1972-1993* (Dordrecht, Boston and London, 1993), p. 31.

29 *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

30 *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

States must also cooperate with each other in the area of hazardous incidents of a military nature, by reporting and clarifying what has happened.³¹

The mechanisms of the human dimension are a collection of procedures that aim at making states engage in dialogue, at collecting information and at finding solutions for problems related to human rights in their widest scope. Like the Berlin procedure they entail a phased approach, from clarification to consultation and, finally, to meetings of OSCE organs. These may then, for example, decide to send fact-finding missions. The most general procedures are the so-called Vienna and Moscow mechanisms. The first stipulates that states provide information on matters relating to the human dimension within ten days of a request to that effect from another government. It may lead to a bilateral meeting to discuss the matter and the other OSCE states may be informed of these developments. This may also be done at meetings of the Senior Council. The Moscow procedure supplements this by making it possible to dispatch independent experts to assess the relevant situation. A state may initiate the establishment of such a mission even against the will of the government involved, if it obtains support from five other countries. This creates the possibility for independent assessment of situations that carry the seeds of conflict. Moreover, the Moscow mechanism also allows the Senior Council to establish a mission of independent experts or rapporteurs; the voluntary invitation by a state of such experts; and the appointment of rapporteurs in case of a 'particularly serious threat' to the human dimension regulations. This last opportunity must concern cases of massive and gross violations. In such cases the mission may be established with the support of ten states and it can also be sent against the will of the government concerned.³²

Apart from the High Commissioner on National Minorities discussed earlier, the OSCE has two other instruments which have some relevance with regard to responding to potential or actual conflict, if only indirectly. So-called missions of long duration are used to address causes of conflict, while they are also engaged in early warning of impending violence. They are established by the Senior Council and can only function with the consent of the state involved. While short-term missions are usually established on an *ad hoc* basis and restrict themselves to fact-finding and analysis, long-term missions aim at softening or resolving conflicts by offering their mediation; collecting information; and signalling and preventing escalatory events. If they observe such developments they can warn other OSCE institutions. One of these is the High Com-

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33; E. Greco, 'The Role of the Conflict Prevention Centre in the Security System of the CSCE', in *Helsinki Monitor*, 1994, no. 1, pp. 5-15; and H. Vetschera, 'European Conflict Prevention: The Role of the CSCE', in W. Bauwens and L. Reyckler (eds), *The Art of Conflict Prevention* (London and New York, 1994), ch. 3.

32 Bloed, 'Two Decades of the CSCE Process', pp. 20-21, 31-33 and 41-43; R. Zaagman, 'De CVSE, "early warning" en preventieve diplomatie', in *Transaktie*, 1994, no. 1, pp. 58-75; and W. Höynk, 'Role of the CSCE and Other Organizations in Managing Crisis and Maintaining Peace', in *Studia Diplomatica*, 1994, no. 4, pp. 37-49.

missioner, who regularly consults such missions and uses the information collected by their members. These missions are active both in the military sphere and in the broad area of the human dimension.

An example of such a mission is the one that was sent to Kosovo, Vojvodina and Sandjak in former Yugoslavia, which attempted to encourage dialogue between the Belgrade government and non-Serbian communities; collect information on the human rights situation; and establish points of contact. Another long-term mission was dispatched to Macedonia in order to monitor its border with Serbia. Long-term missions were also sent to the Baltic states to improve relations between their governments and the Russian communities; to Moldova, with the objective of establishing a framework for a durable political solution of the conflict with Russian communities and formulate proposals for this; to Tadjikistan to establish dialogue between conflicting parties, verify their respect for OSCE commitments, assess the military situation and assist in the formation of legal and democratic structures; and to Georgia-South Ossetia, with the objective of identifying and eliminating sources of tension, establishing contact with the local population and government, supporting and controlling a cease-fire and helping in the development of legal and democratic institutions.³³

Finally, the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) may have some relevance in terms of early warning of violent conflict, as it facilitates the organization of OSCE verification meetings with regard to human rights, collects and provides information on human rights situations, organizes meetings to review implementation of OSCE human dimension commitments and participates and undertakes missions to member states.³⁴

ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH-EAST ASIAN NATIONS³⁵

ASEAN also focuses on the role of member states themselves in dealing with signals of impending conflict. However, its preference for bilateral, informal cooperation and the importance attributed to national sovereignty and non-interference preclude intrusive consultation procedures. The alliance is thus marked by a general aversion of formal institutions, which resulted in the Association being managed, from the beginning, by annual conferences of foreign ministers meeting in the member states on a rotating

33 Zaagman, 'CVSE, "early warning" en preventieve diplomatie'; R. Zaagman, 'Minority Questions, Human Rights and Regional Instability: The Prevention of Conflict', in R.L. Pfaltzgraff and G.R. Sullivan (eds), *Ethnic Conflict and Regional Instability: Implications for US Policy and Army Roles and Missions* (Washington, 1994), pp. 217-27; H. van Santen and H. Zaal, 'Peacekeeping and the Role of Preventive Diplomacy', in *Internationale Spectator*, 1993, pp. 646-50; Höynk, 'Role of the CSCE'; and P.W. Gorissen and H.G. Scheltema, 'CVSE, conflictpreventie en crisisbeheersing: Een tussenstand', in *Militaire Spectator*, 1994, no. 4, pp. 171-77.

34 *The Challenges of Change: Helsinki Summit Declaration and Decisions*, ch. VI.

35 See note 5 above.

basis. A small general secretariat was established only later. This means that there is no viable central institution necessary for the collection and processing of conflict signals. While the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation of 1976 went some way towards institutionalizing ASEAN's role in the resolution of conflicts, its relevant procedures are dependent on a 'High Council'. Although this organ was to be purely inter-governmental in structure it was, in fact, never established.

UNITED NATIONS

In the UN the processing of signals is mainly done through the work of the Secretary-General and his Secretariat, with the Security Council as the organ responsible for generating concrete action to be taken on the basis of those signals. The Secretary-General's role in processing signals of impending or actual conflict and issuing warnings of their eruption or escalation is essentially a part of his political mandate as ingrained in article 99 of the Charter. Thus, the chief of the Secretariat is supposed to bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter that *may threaten* the maintenance of international peace and security. The extension of the UN's security concept to include also developments at the sub-state level made the collection and analysis of data on domestic conflicts, as well as the execution of an early warning function based on these data, a natural element in the Secretary-General's mandate.³⁶ In this respect it is relevant to note that, already during the 1980s, the UN's role and capacity in fact-finding began to grow considerably. As discussed further in chapters 3 and 7 there was some streamlining of fact-finding with the establishment, in 1987, of the Office for Research and Collection of Information (ORCI). Although this organ was later abolished by Boutros-Ghali and the collection and analysis of conflict signals therefore continued to be scattered across several UN organs, the world body's fact-finding role remained of great importance. Thus, by 1993 the Secretary-General could observe that in the preceding year more fact-finding missions had taken place than in any previous period.³⁷

One may even conclude that, in so far as one can speak of a preventive approach to conflicts in the United Nations, its institutional manifestation should be sought principally in the resources, procedures and organs involved in collecting, analysing and processing information on tensions and conflicts. This work is without comparison in other organizations, although perhaps with the exception of the OSCE. This conclusion does not take into account, however, the difficulties inherent in the decentralized nature of the UN's approach to early warning.³⁸ Nevertheless, even though the UN's response to impending conflicts leaves at present much to be desired, the end of

36 See also Dedring, 'The Security Council in Preventive Action'.

37 See B. Boutros-Ghali, 'An Agenda for Peace: One Year Later', in *Orbis*, summer 1993, pp. 323-32.

38 See chapter 4.

the Cold War lifted the Security Council's paralysis – at least in principle – and enhanced its capacity to process signals into concrete preventive or containment action.

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

While in the UN action on early warning signals is supposed to be taken by the Security Council, in the OAS there is more than one institutional arrangement for producing a response to (impending or existing) violent conflict. A Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs may be held when a member state makes a request to that effect to the Permanent Council of the OAS, which decides on this by simple majority. The Meeting of Consultation may be held to consider any problems of an urgent nature and of common interest to the American states or to tackle developments as foreseen in the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance of 1947. This so-called 'Rio Treaty' encourages regional settlement of inter-state disputes and to this effect imposes a consultative mechanism. If an issue falling under the Rio Treaty is at hand – such as armed aggression involving a member state – the Meeting of Consultation is held without delay and the foreign ministers may decide on coercive measures such as sanctions or military action. The meeting may also decide on a course of non-coercive action, for example by offering mediation services to member states involved in a dispute.³⁹

In practice it is the Permanent Council of the OAS that has often constituted itself as a Provisional Organ of Consultation, leaving only the more serious cases to the ministerial meeting as such. Composed of member state representatives with the rank of ambassador, the Council acts as the executive organ of the OAS and meets twice a month at the headquarters of the organization in Washington. Its most important task involves the maintenance of peaceful relations between member states and aiding them in finding a peaceful settlement to their disputes. To this purpose it is assisted by an Inter-American Committee on Peaceful Settlement, made up of representatives of five countries elected on the basis of partial annual rotation. In offering their mediatory services and good offices, both Committee and Council are dependent on the consent of the parties to the dispute.⁴⁰

39 E. Fischlowitz, 'The OAS in the Inter-American Political System', in C.A. Astiz (ed.), *Latin American International Politics: Ambitions, Capabilities, and the National Interest of Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina* (Notre Dame and London, 1969), pp. 59-78; and P. van Dijk and C.M. Grossman, 'Het Inter-Amerikaanse Systeem: Handvest van de OAS, Verdrag van Rio, Pact van Bogota', in H. Meijers (ed.), *Volkenrechtelijke aspecten van Antilliaanse onafhankelijkheid* (Alphen aan den Rijn, 1980), pp. 514-47.

40 *Ibid.*; F.X. de Lima, *Intervention in International Law; with reference to the Organisation of American States* (The Hague, 1971); L.R. Scheman, *The Inter-American Dilemma: The Search for Inter-American Cooperation at the Centennial of the Inter-American System* (New York, Westport and London, 1988); Y. Salkin, 'Sommeil ou réveil de l'Organisation des Etats américains?', in

During the 1950s and early 1960s the OAS displayed considerable activity in the management of existing conflicts. Thus, from 1947 to 1982 OAS mechanisms were activated on thirty-three occasions, of which twenty-seven before 1970. The Inter-American Committee on Peaceful Settlement performed an important role in this area, offering its good offices to states engaged in a dispute, embarking on fact-finding missions and, in the more serious crises, threatening the imposition of diplomatic and economic sanctions. However, no state was condemned as an aggressor and every culprit was allowed to return to the *status quo ante*. When the Committee's role diminished in importance member states began to take recourse to *ad hoc* committees that were charged by the Permanent Council with similar duties.⁴¹

With the onset of detente, the rules of superpower competition began to shift and confrontation by way of proxies began to grow significantly. From the early or mid-1960s there were also growing pressures for internal structural change in Latin American countries and thus a rise in the incidence of the more intractable domestic conflicts. This was accompanied by sharp ideological cleavages, increasing political heterogeneity within the OAS, widening divergence in security concerns and subversion between member states. United States manipulation of OAS instruments resulted in more militarized forms of (supposed) multilateral operations and often involved the imposition of sanctions under the Rio Treaty. The Cuban crisis of the early 1960s and the crisis in the Dominican Republic in 1965 marked this important change. The result was that support for, and confidence in, OAS mechanisms subsided. During the Reagan years the OAS became to some extent paralysed.⁴²

From the mid-1980s, however, new initiatives were launched to enhance the relevance of the OAS in the management, if not prevention, of conflicts – including domestic ones. Thus, at its summit in Cartagena in Colombia (1985), the OAS amended its Charter in order to give its Secretary-General the formal right of political initiative. From now on the chief OAS official could draw the attention of the Permanent Council to any question that, in his mind, posed a threat to the peace and security of the hemisphere. The OAS also supported the Central American peace efforts of the Contadora Group, which mediated between the United States and its allies and the government of Nicaragua, Cuba and Salvadorian guerrillas. Moreover, the Secretary-General himself became more active in the settlement of disputes as well. Thus, he participated in the cease-fire accord reached with the contras in 1988; assisted in

Défense nationale, April 1992, pp. 109-19; and J.L.Z. Coronado, 'OAS Negotiations', in A.S. Lall (ed.), *Multilateral Negotiation and Mediation* (New York, 1985), ch. 2.

41 J. Byron, *Regional Security in Latin America and Africa: The OAS and the OAU in the light of contemporary security issues* (PSIS Occasional Papers, Number 1/84; Geneva, 1984) and Fortmann and Thérien, 'L'Organisation des Etats américains'.

42 Byron, *Regional Security in Latin America and Africa* and Fortmann and Thérien, 'L'Organisation des Etats américains'.

establishing a dialogue between the political forces of El Salvador; and together with the UN helped in monitoring the electoral process in Nicaragua.⁴³

In this context could be added the establishment of the Santiago mechanism discussed above. It was concluded that this mechanism amounts to an increase in response capacity of the OAS and that it thus has some, if indirect, relevance in terms of conflict prevention. Moreover, introduction and application of the mechanism confirms more clearly, as well as reinforces, the arrogation by the OAS of domestic conflicts to its area of competence. However, it was also shown above that the Santiago mechanism is aimed at the specific problems related to *coups d'état*, and not conflicts in general; that early warning and conflict prevention as such do not (or hardly) figure in the new mandate of the organization; and that any evolution towards a more forceful and speedy processing of, and response to, conflict signals is hindered by the sense of Latin American unease generated by United States hegemony of their hemisphere.

AFRICA

In the Organization of African Unity⁴⁴ the processing of signals of (impending and actual) conflict and the taking of concrete action on the basis of these signals are the joint responsibility of the functionaries of the Secretariat and the political organs representing the member states. Thus, the OAU institutions that concern themselves with, or are relevant for, conflict settlement are the General Secretariat; the Council of Ministers; and the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, its chairman and Bureau. The organ that was originally intended to play a central role in this area – the Commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration (CMCA) – was never seized with any conflicts. African states preferred to settle their disputes through other channels, as these do not – contrary to the CMCA – emphasize formal, legalistic procedures in the settlement of conflicts.

While the institutional reforms in 1992-1993 strengthened the Secretariat's role in this issue area, its officials have always been engaged in monitoring conflicts. To this purpose they drafted reports to the Secretary-General and formulated recommendations to him as to whether or not to launch mediation initiatives. This work has always been of a subordinate nature in OAU conflict management, as Secretariat functionaries have only limited autonomous powers: their task is restricted to advice and persuasion. Moreover, the functioning of the OAU and its staff has always been considerably affected by the constraints inherent in the organization's parsimonious budget (annually some thirty million dollars). The gathering and analysis of information has therefore been hampered by insufficient research facilities and limited funds for travel.

43 C. Rico, 'The Contadora Experience and the Future of Collective Security', in R.J. Bloomfield and G.F. Treverton (eds), *Alternative to Intervention: A New U.S.-Latin American Security Relationship* (Boulder and London, 1990), ch. 6 and Salkin, 'Sommeil ou réveil'.

44 The data on the OAU are drawn from Van Walraven, *Dreams of Power*, chs. VII-VIII.

However, in an effort to improve the effectiveness of OAU conflict management the Secretariat was reinforced, in 1992, by the establishment of a Division on Conflict Management inside its Political Department. The new Division must engage in the monitoring, gathering and analysis of information. This monitoring work should enable the Secretary-General and other OAU institutions to improve the effectiveness of OAU conflict management. One report of the Secretary-General speaks in this regard of the desire to establish an 'early warning system' with which not only to manage, but also prevent conflicts. This is not explicated further and seems to point more to the future than the present. Moreover, while the rationale of these institutional reforms was partially couched in the language of conflict prevention and early warning, it was noted at the beginning of this chapter that they were essentially meant to ensure a response *as such* or speed up the OAU's reactions to existing conflicts.

At least until 1993 the Secretary-General's role was rather limited as far as conflict management was concerned. When the OAU was founded in 1963 African states made it crystal clear that they were opposed to a Secretary-General having prerogatives in the political sphere. This, it was held, would endanger their cherished sovereignty. While incumbent Secretaries nevertheless tried, to a greater or lesser extent, to develop a political role for themselves, in the area of conflict management their influence was constricted by the OAU's limited resources; the lack of formal prerogatives; the various cleavages marking inter-African relations; the preference of member states for mediation by political figures; and, later on, the growing importance of the Assembly chairman.

The Council of Ministers and the Assembly of Heads of State and Government have always been central in OAU dispute settlement. As possibilities to exert influence in inter-African relations are relatively restricted and means of communications are rather underdeveloped, their sessions provide an important opportunity for behind-the-scenes negotiations and mediation initiatives. Mediators or groups of mediators are always selected (or self-appointed) on an *ad hoc* basis, with unilateral member state initiatives usually given the blessing of the Council or Assembly as a whole. In view of the concentration of domestic presidential power, disputants have always exhibited a strong preference for mediation by fellow heads of state. It is their prestige and influence, rather than the professional qualities of lower-rank diplomats, that constitute important conditions for successful mediation. As the president who is the current chairman of the Assembly usually enjoys added prestige, this head of state often has a particularly important role in conflict management.

While the OAU's first twenty years could boast, as compared to other international organizations, an average success record in abating conflicts, after the 1970s this went into decline as a result of a general deterioration in (mainly domestic) security contexts. As was mentioned above, until 1990 the organization could not concern itself with domestic conflicts, except those that had clearly developed important implications for inter-African relations – such as substantial extra-African interference. In 1990 this ban was officially lifted.

There was, however, a need for reform of the OAU's approach to conflicts in general – whether inter-state or domestic. Thus, the decentralized approach to conflicts entailed problems of coordination in regard to multiple attempts at mediation, as well as problems of continuity of effort. More importantly, it detracted from the OAU's promptitude. Opportunities for third party intervention depended to some extent on meetings of the policy organs, which are difficult to convene at short notice. Reliance on presidential mediation also diminished swift responses, as it makes intervention dependent on the political will of individual heads of state, their agenda and member state resources. This state of affairs could lead to disastrous consequences if the OAU was faced with high-intensity conflicts like the Ogaden war (1977-1979) or conflicts marked by large-scale human suffering, such as the Senegalese-Mauritanian dispute of 1989-1990.

Thus, the 1993 Cairo summit approved the introduction of the 'Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution', which aimed at improving cooperation between two OAU organs: the Secretariat, headed by the Secretary-General, and the Bureau of the Assembly. The Secretary-General was given the formal right of diplomatic initiative, which entitled him to undertake or send mediation and fact-finding missions or dispatch special envoys. Ever since their introduction, the Secretariat has been making active use of these prerogatives. The Secretary-General must exercise his new role under the authority of the Bureau of the Assembly and in consultation with its chairman. The new Bureau is composed of the chairman, his eight vice-chairmen and the outgoing president, who remains a member for one year. Moreover, the future Assembly chairman is, if he is already known, also a member of the Bureau. These are all member state representatives. The Bureau now convenes once a month at ambassadorial level, usually in Addis Ababa; twice a year at the level of foreign ministers; and once at that of heads of state. It may also be convened at short notice, in extraordinary session, at the request of the Assembly chairman, the Secretary-General or any member state. The Bureau has overall political responsibility and supervision and must report to the Assembly. It also takes decisions on the more far-reaching aspects of mediation initiatives, such as deployment of civilian or military observer missions.

As the Secretary-General has, besides executive tasks with regard to Bureau decisions, his own political prerogatives, the Bureau and Secretary-General must cooperate closely. The basic idea is that the Secretary-General launches a mediation initiative, on the basis of the Secretariat's monitoring work. Then he informs the Bureau of its outcome and the Bureau may be convened. The role of the Secretary-General is meant to provide the necessary speedy response, while the Bureau gives vital political backing and guidance. However, with regard to inter-state disputes the Bureau should still be able to mandate individual heads of state or the Assembly chairman to engage in mediation. *Ad hoc* committees may be appointed for the duration of a conflict. While copying established practice, the Bureau's involvement should provide these procedures with greater coordination and continuity.

The new mechanism is more than a paper reform. Apart from mediation efforts by the Secretary-General, the Bureau has been convened at different times as well. For instance, its ability to respond swiftly was borne out when it met in October 1993 on the same day of the *coup* attempt in Burundi. Besides response capacity the mechanism could, in principle, also improve upon the limited dynamics of OAU decision-making. Because of the large number of member states, decision-making in the Council of Ministers and the Assembly is by definition slow and laborious. The Bureau's limited membership, which annually rotates among the member states, should speed things up. However, as was argued above, the organization is usually still overtaken by the pace of events. While its response capacity has improved, its institutional and procedural provisions are still more geared to abating existing violent conflicts than to their prevention as such.

The institutional arrangements of ECOWAS in the area of conflict containment and prevention are as yet largely non-existent. As mentioned above, it has until now only focused on solving the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Procedures with regard to conflicts have been scarce, since the organization has a predominantly economic mandate. Moreover, intervention in the Liberian civil war took place on the basis of *ad hoc* arrangements since the institutions stipulated in the 1981 Defence Protocol were never established. This instrument stipulated a role in abating inter-state or domestic conflicts for the existing 'Authority' – the supreme organ of ECOWAS – as well as for a projected Defence Council made up of foreign and defence ministers and a Defence Commission composed of national chiefs of staff. In their absence it was a Standing Mediation Committee (SMC) and the peace-keepers of the ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) which represented the institutional manifestation of ECOWAS concern with Liberia. As yet, one can therefore not speak of general institutional and procedural arrangements for the processing of signals on violent conflicts in West Africa – neither existing nor potential.⁴⁵ With its Organ on Politics, Defence and Security, SADC seems in this respect to be one step ahead of the West Africans.

EVALUATION

Clearly, there are interesting parallels in the way in which inter-governmental organizations process signals to potential or actual conflicts. While ASEAN and the OSCE emphasize the importance of bilateral consultation procedures, in the UN, OAS and OAU processing of signals is mainly done through the work of the Secretary-General

45 See Inegbedion, 'ECOMOG in Comparative Perspective' and the articles in *Issue*, nos. 1-2, 1993. Also M.A. Sesay, 'Civil War and Collective Intervention in Liberia', in *Review of African Political Economy*, 1996, no. 67, p. 50. In August 1997 the annual ECOWAS summit decided to extend formally ECOMOG's mandate to cover, and try to remedy, the violent events and a recent *coup d'état* in Sierra Leone. See the report of the Pan-African News Agency of 2 September 1997.

and his Secretariat, though in cooperation with a semi-permanent organ made up of member states, whether plenary or limited in composition. During the 1980s and early 1990s the mandates of the chief officials of both the OAS and OAU were formally upgraded to allow them a role in conflict management comparable to that of the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

It is, nevertheless, obvious that the parallels in institutional approaches to conflicts are limited. For example, the Santiago mechanism of the OAS bears all the hallmarks of the *couleur locale* of Latin American politics. If one compares the processing of signals of (impending) violence in the OSCE with the way this is done in other inter-governmental organizations, one is immediately struck by the institution of the High Commissioner, as there is no equivalent to this functionary elsewhere. More generally, some of the OSCE's consultation procedures stand out for their intrusive nature as far as state sovereignty is concerned. The Moscow mechanism is a typical example. Some of the (consent-based) tasks of long-term missions are, however, comparable to Boutros-Ghali's ideas on post-conflict peace-building in the framework of the United Nations, which have been put in practice in the context of the peace settlements in Cambodia and Mozambique. The institutional reforms in the OAS and OAU were mainly aimed at generating quick responses, or any response at all. This had less priority in the United Nations, where procedural arrangements enable the organization, in principle, to react swiftly to emergencies. Finally, the performance of ECOWAS, SADC and ASEAN in managing conflicts has its own peculiarities. In so far as there are institutional manifestations, these stand more or less on their own.

Concluding Remarks

Inter-governmental organizations seldom have fully fledged early warning systems and concrete policies of conflict prevention. Yet they often possess several institutional and procedural arrangements that are relevant to the containment, if not prevention, of violent conflict. The OSCE seems in this respect to have gone quite some way in developing a preventative approach to conflicts. It has therefore been suggested that some of the OSCE's experiences could perhaps be usefully copied by other international organizations.⁴⁶ While little research has, as yet, been undertaken on this question, this could indeed enhance the organizational capacity of other international institutions *vis-à-vis* conflicts.

Nevertheless, one should caution against facile arguments about the possibilities of transferring those experiences to other political and cultural contexts – or, for that matter, against euphoric assessments of the OSCE. Thus, the OSCE is heavily depend-

46 See in this respect M.A. Ferdowski, 'Die KSZE als Modell?: Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Anwendung in der dritten Welt', in *Europa Archiv*, 1992, pp. 76-84.

ent on consensus between the member states, while the implementation of its consultation mechanisms is often interpreted as a hostile act of one state against another. The structural features of international politics – such as absence of leadership – come into play here.

One may, moreover, wonder whether international organization-managed change of domestic political and economic configurations and structures is not a bridge too far. For example, a detailed study of the failures of UNOSOM in Somalia ended by listing numerous tasks that the UN should in future try to take on, if it wanted to make a difference in situations marked by state collapse⁴⁷ – activities that belong, paradoxically, to the archetypal functions of a *state*, rather than of an international institution.

Thus, as mentioned in the first chapter, the growing importance of international organizations in conflict management is related not so much to a rational consideration of their capabilities and the requirements posed by a crisis situation, as to the effects of the end of the Cold War and resultant withdrawal of superpower concern with zones of conflict. International organizations have been given tasks that were partly performed by the superpowers – whose ‘solutions’ to conflicts were, of course, frequently worse than the original problem – without an increase in capabilities and stature comparable to that of those former leading actors. If media visualization of the misery of civil war may, at times, generate sufficient moral repercussions to force international institutions to take action, this in itself is usually not enough to compensate for the lack of political will among their member states to act. Interventions such as in Somalia are therefore easily derailed, while forceful action by the UN or other organizations may alternate with hesitation and precipitous withdrawal from the theatre of operation. The UN’s actions in Rwanda in 1994 are pertinent here.

Still, the ideas that have been articulated by political scientists under the headings of early warning and conflict prevention would, if implemented even to a limited extent, go a considerable way in shoring up the capabilities of international organizations to manage conflict. It is the task of researchers to investigate and extrapolate the conditions for working successfully towards such a qualitative change in international politics.

3 Humanitarian and Conflict-oriented Early Warning: A Historical Background Sketch

Howard Adelman

There are two historical sources for the use of early warning as a concept. One is to be found in the intelligence community. Early warning referred to a party ‘A’ possessing advance notification of an imminent hostile act by an enemy ‘B’, enabling A to undertake preventive action which could deter or even compel B to cancel the planned action. A second source is to be found in reference to natural humanitarian disasters, initially with respect to weather storms or earthquakes, but then applied to drought conditions in order to anticipate famines. Thus, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) developed the first early warning system that was not self-defensive. It was designed to enable the FAO to stockpile and locate food supplies to prevent famine.

The first type of early warning system was designed to enable action to be taken to deter an enemy’s threat or mitigate its effects. The second was also concerned with taking action, but to prevent or mitigate suffering of others.

In the UN system, early warning was initially associated with the first type and traditional intelligence gathering to detect, deter, prevent, or counter hostile acts against UN peace-keepers in the Congo.¹ The roots of its contemporary conception, however, are to be found in the humanitarian area. Intent on enabling the UN to prepare for and perhaps even mitigate the causes of forced migration, a 1981 study by Prince Sadruddin for the UN Commission on Human Rights set forth a number of push and pull factors which contributed to forced migration. Prince Sadruddin recommended the creation of an early warning system within the UN to study and track these push and pull factors. This emphasis was reinforced when the Group of Government Experts to Avert New Refugee Flows formally requested the UN Secretary-General to establish an office to gather more complex information on refugee flows, and to report on that information in a timely fashion.

With respect to the UN system, the UN initially attempted to model itself structurally on the nation-state model by appending an intelligence apparatus to the executive office. Pérez de Cuéllar initiated ORCI, the Office for Research and the Collection of

47 See *Comprehensive Report on Lessons-Learned from United Nations Operation in Somalia* (see note 9 above).

1 See A.W. Dorn and D.J.H. Bell, ‘Intelligence and Peacekeeping: The UN Operation in the Congo, 1960-64,’ in *International Peacekeeping*, 1.2, spring 1995, pp. 11-33.