

LEARNING FROM CONFLICT

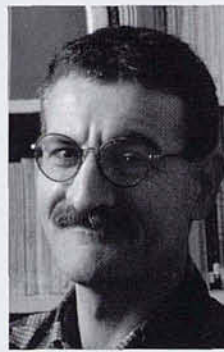
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t the close of the century of communications and technology, international society has not yet found the way to stop the spiral of violence and destruction surrounding many of today's conflicts, or of taking prompt action to regulate them positively and guide them towards a solution.

The internal nature of today's conflicts, their intra-state character and the weight carried by non-military factors such as ethnic, religious or cultural differences, mean that traditional systems of regulation and intervention are no longer the most suitable and cause a certain paralysis in the way these conflicts are dealt with. Furthermore, tragedies such as those of Somalia and Rwanda have shown the immaturity of international mechanisms when it comes to taking preventive action in the humanitarian field and, at the same time, in collaborating in the political side of conflicts.

From this outlook, the nineties can be seen as a moment of reflection and a trial to strengthen the role international institutions can play in the prevention and regulation of conflicts, especially the United Nations, and to provide mankind with early warning systems making it possible to deal with situations of tension the moment they arise and get right to the heart of the problem.

If we cannot avoid conflicts, then we must at least learn from them how to prevent their repetition or how to



reduce their death toll. Somalia, Rwanda and Iraq, for example, should have taught us that it is always a bad thing to sell arms to unstable countries or countries in open conflict; that it is a mistake to send troops from different countries which, though intervening under the auspices of the United Nations, are often there for reasons of strictly national interest; that it is impossible to pacify conflict situations if the social and cultural characteristics of the local societies are not taken into account; that urgent humanitarian aid is not enough without political measures to steer the situation onto

new tracks; that greater consideration must be paid to human rights in peace operations; that refugees and displaced people need adequate protection and support, etc. Unfortunately, the lessons are not easily learnt and the mistakes are frequently repeated. To escape the current cul-de-sac in conflict prevention and regulation, we need to improve and strengthen the work of the organisations making up the United Nations system and stimulate public interest in international issues in all countries of the world. The media and state policy-making centres have an enormous responsibility on this point; it is in fact a question of shaping a responsible public awareness committed to resolving and, especially, preventing conflicts, by acting on the causes.

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