The G8, the United Nations, and Conflict Prevention

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Conflict Prevention:
Performances, Prospects, and Potential

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What Conflict Prevention Is Not

Political scientists and practitioners alike traditionally consider conflict prevention an elusive concept, mainly due to its counterfactual nature. The objective difficulty to define it satisfactorily at a theoretical level, coupled with the problem of providing a tangible empirical projection, has induced some mainstream scholars and policy makers to discard conflict prevention *a priori* as a valid theoretical concept, as well as a useful course of action. However, the complexity of the concept is not so overarching as to be unsusceptible to both definition and praxis. A useful initial approach in defining conflict prevention could be to consider what conflict prevention is not.

In the first place, conflict prevention should be distinguished from preventive diplomacy. Preventive diplomacy is one aspect of conflict prevention, but conflict prevention is more than preventive diplomacy. Diplomats have definitely long been familiar with preventive diplomacy. The United Nations Charter spells out the classical panoply of the modes of preventive diplomacy: 'negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means' (United Nations 1945, ch. 4, art. 33). It seems clear that such instruments can be effective in preventing classical, or inter-state, conflicts. In other words, they constitute the right approach to prevent risks such as the deterioration of relations and possible future conflicts between, for example, Hungary and Slovakia over the Gabcikovo dam, or between Chile and Argentina over the Beagle Channel. They have worked in the recent past.

A totally different story relates to conflicts of an internal nature. These have not totally replaced inter-state conflicts. On the contrary, they are often intertwined, even if today internal conflicts certainly constitute one of the main problems for world peace and stability (see, for example, Brown 1996).

Second, conflict prevention is not peace enforcement. Enforcement action can also have the function of preventing worse evils and wider conflicts. Yet, it would be misleading to believe that once the line is crossed into the use of force, operating in a preventive mode is still possible. For this reason, it is doubtful whether conflict prevention can include sanctions, which the UN Charter identifies as being — together with military action — one of the coercive tools of enforcement (United Nations 1945, ch. 7).

Third, conflict prevention is not conflict management. Once armed conflict has broken out, the attempt to limit or stop it belongs to another sphere of international action, both conceptually and operationally. But even when open conflict has not yet broken out but is already looming, it is unclear whether true preventive actions are possible. In that case, the only possibility is to try 'strategies that the fire department may employ to prevent fire when the match has already been struck' (Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations 2000). It is interesting to note — as a sign of growing political awareness of the need for a root-cause approach to conflict prevention — that the foreign policy plank of the Democratic platform for the U.S. presidential election of 2000 was based on the concept of forward engagement. It was defined as follows: 'Forward Engagement means addressing problems early in their development before they become crises, addressing them as close to the source of the problem as possible, and having the forces and resources to deal with these threats as soon after their emergence as possible' (Democratic National Committee 2000). In the different context after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, but essentially following the same logic, the National Security Strategy elaborated by the Bush administration in September 2002 called for a 'forward-reaching, pre-emptive strategy' against hostile states and terrorist groups, while also expanding development assistance and free trade, promoting democracy, fighting disease, and transforming the U.S. military (Lombardi 2002).

Fourth, peacekeeping can be used also with a preventive focus. This was the case in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, where since 1992 first the UN, then the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and now the EU have been responsible for several internationally sanctioned preventive peacekeeping missions.[1] Despite the so-far limited practice of such peacekeeping, based on the rather long-term experiment in Macedonia, it can be considered an area with considerable potential. However, mainstream peacekeeping has traditionally been a *post factum* affair, and it would not be appropriate, at least not until the practice of preventive peacekeeping has been consolidated, to include it in the category of conflict prevention activities.

Fifth, conflict prevention means the prevention of violent conflict, not of disputes and controversies. Indeed, differences of interests and values and controversy are not negative in themselves. They are the very essence of politics, and, indeed, of life in general, whereas the pretence of assuring universal quiet and uniformity is not compatible with freedom and dynamic growth, both economic and social. What has to be prevented is the use of violent means to address differences.

What Conflict Prevention Is

In this light, therefore, conflict prevention can be defined as a range of activities undertaken by third actors in anticipation of violence and with the intention of reversing a cycle of rising tensions believed to culminate inevitably in widespread warfare. In

order to illustrate the logic of conflict prevention, it is also necessary to distinguish between the instruments of conflict and the causes of conflict.

The Instruments of Conflict

The disproportionate availability of weapons (disproportionate, that is, compared to what is necessary for reasonably sufficient self-defence) and, especially, the imbalance in such availability have been traditionally identified among the most frequent sources of conflict. There is thus no doubt that arms control and disarmament represent a substantial contribution to conflict prevention. Indeed, in the case of internal conflicts, small arms have therefore recently been identified as a main area for preventive international action. Yet, in a world that has seen the massacre — for the most part with primitive machetes — of probably ten times the number of victims of the Hiroshima bomb, one is forced, if reluctantly, to reconsider the otherwise very dubious and disingenuous slogan of opponents of gun control in the U.S.: 'Guns don't kill people. People kill people.' The control and limitation of the tools of conflict are thus necessary, but are definitely not sufficient.[2]

The same can be said about the way combatants fuel their struggle from the point of view of economic resources. Important cases in point are the conflicts in the Middle East and Central Asia over access to water and oil or the parallel trade in diamonds considered to be one of the main resources behind conflict in places such as Angola and Sierra Leone. It is significant that illicit trade in diamonds has been identified as one of the five initiatives for conflict prevention approved by G8 foreign ministers at their July 2000 meeting in Miyazaki (G8 Foreign Ministers 2000).[3]

The Causes of Conflict

If these are the key instruments of conflict, what are the central causes? In the 2001 report on the prevention of armed conflict, the United Nations spelled out, among the basic premises of the document, the following:

> Preventive action should be initiated at the earliest possible stage of a conflict cycle in order to be most effective. One of the principal aims of preventive action should be to address the deep-rooted socio-economic, cultural, environmental, institutional and other structural causes that often underlie the immediate political symptoms of conflict (United Nations 2001, 2).

After the historic defeat of communism, and the radical weakening of its theoretical foundation, Marxism, one would expect economic determinism to be on the wane. On the contrary, these days conventional wisdom maintains that conflicts, both international and internal, are caused by a struggle for markets, for natural resources, for land, or for a better share of the revenue within a given society (Nye 2001). As a corollary, the only problems really worth addressing for an effective conflict prevention

policy would allegedly be of an economic nature. Again, as in the case of arms, a partial truth prevails, one that should be incorporated with a grain of salt into a more complex and more complete picture.

A few things should be clarified. Poverty as such, in absolute terms, is not in itself conducive to conflict. There is no statistically relevant correlation between poverty and conflict. When addressing the correlation between economic factors and conflict, one should instead consider several points

The first is the trend of economic development, and especially events leading to worsening conditions, as widely elaborated on by Umberto Triulzi and Pierluigi Montalbano in Chapter 11 People do not usually turn to violence because they are undernourished. But they do when the price of bread doubles. So the deterioration of conditions should be monitored, rather than absolute levels.[4]

The second is the increased economic imbalance among social classes or ethnic groups. Many situations throughout the world prove that the combination of ethnic diversity and growing economic disparity is a sure recipe for violent conflict. 'It does not seem to be poverty itself that is the causing agent [of conflict]; the majority of poor countries are experiencing peace most of the time. It is the disparate development, along regional, ethnic or religious dividing lines, of poverty and need alongside privileged groups that leads to tension' (Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations 2000). It is amazing how clearly this fact becomes apparent just by scanning the news relating to so-called ethnic conflicts the world over[5]

The third is external imbalance, that is, increasing growth differentials among neighbouring countries. In a globalised world, the problem is that of proximity combined with diverging economic conditions Such consideration, for instance, is evidently one of the main elements of the Mediterranean strategy of the European Union, which includes a strong focus on conflict prevention (Aliboni, Guazzone, and Pioppi 2001).

Fourth, the focus should be on socioeconomic roots of conflict, rather than on economic roots. People are affected not by production levels or aggregate figures, but by concrete conditions, by a quality of life in which factors such as education or the state of the environment play a very significant role.

And last, economic factors do not directly produce conflict. They must always go through a stage of explicit formulation of grievances and organised political action. Groups do not confront each other because they are poor or disadvantaged, but because they feel deprived of their rights, sometimes threatened in their very survival, by some other group[6]

Attention should thus shift from economics to politics. In all conflict, and especially in inter-ethnic conflict, material root causes of a socioeconomic nature constitute a potential that does not translate into actual group confrontation by some natural mechanism. It does so because, usually thanks to successful political and ideological action on the part of leaders, groups come to believe that the only way to guarantee their rights (from the right to speak their own language to the right to have a fair share of national wealth; from the right to have their political weight recognised sometimes

to the very right of survival) is to use force, and preferably to constitute their own political entity. So-called ethnic conflicts are usually about the nation-state: which state, whose state (Burton 1990; Horowitz 1985).

Conflict prevention, therefore, can be attained mainly by proving that rights can be protected without violence. It can also be attained by proving that political losers (even when regular elections do take place) do not lose their life or their livelihood, and at a minimum must share power. For example, the August 2001 Ohrid agreements in Macedonia, which were mediated by the EU and the U.S. and accepted by both ethnic communities, were a serious attempt at conflict prevention intended in this sense (Ackermann 2002). This attempt should prompt a reflection on democracy and on the way it is actually applied beyond the respect of its formal rules and procedures. Africa is an especially relevant area of concern, given an often harsh, zero-sum nature of political competition.

Nor should one forget what has been defined as 'the incendiary role of corruption'.[7] Indeed, good governance and the rule of law are the most effective tools in conflict prevention. Without the accountability of leaders and without recognised and effective channels of grievance formulation and redress, violence on the part of desperate losers and insecure winners is always looming.

An International Agenda for Prevention

On the basis of the preceding analysis, it is possible to draw some basic conclusions on a possible preventive international agenda. First, power entails responsibility. Therefore those countries with more economic and political clout should take upon themselves the commitment to submit their international action to a conflict impact assessment, similar to what is already accepted for the preservation of the environment (despite controversies over the U.S. acceptance of the international environmental regime). They cannot pretend not to know that what they do, or fail do to, has profound consequences on the possibility of conflict. One of the most significant cases is development assistance. It should be clear that development, although always positive in strictly economic terms, can become a destabilising and conflict-generating factor insofar as it disrupts the old equilibrium and, as it is often the case, favours one sector of the population (often one ethnic group) to the detriment of another (Morrow 1990). Conversely, development assistance should be explicitly and consistently tailored to pursue not only development, but specifically development without conflict.[8]

Second, preventive action must be as comprehensive as possible. Although the politics of conflict is central, the causes of conflict are always manifold and complex.[9] Thus it would be useless to address the problem with a single-factor approach, be it weapons, economic aspects, political leadership, ideology, or human rights (Grant 1993). It follows logically that conflict prevention especially demands from international actors (starting with the most influential) that they should show coherence — that is, consistency in policies and actions. However, frequent deadlocks at the

level of the most legitimate international forums, such as the UN Security Council (UNSC), indicate that rather narrow political considerations still determine the larger policy choices for the most influential international actors.

Third, it is indeed true, as the G8 stressed at Miyazaki in 2000, that the world needs a culture of prevention, in the sense of developing a constant and alert awareness of the need for a preventive approach to international relations. At the same time, it also needs a culture *for* prevention. That is, it needs to be able to articulate, and to assist from the outside, cultural expressions of nations and groups that stress dialogue instead of the clash of cultures (or civilisations), that value difference as an asset rather than as a disharmony to be overcome or at most tolerated, and that do not build (in the first place in classrooms, mainly through the teaching of history) stereotyped, hostile images of other nations and groups.[10] The 2001 World Conference on Racism should have been seen in this light, making the most of its conflict prevention potential.

Fourth, both states and international organisations are using a regional approach to a preventive action or a post-conflict strategy. An important case in point is the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe. The regional dimension, however, is much more than a modality for outside assistance in the prevention of conflict. It is instead a specific strategy that can be pursued by concerned countries (or entities, in the case of the intricate territorial and constitutional formulas applied in the area of former Yugoslavia) and assisted from the outside.[11]

At the July 2000 Assembly of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said: 'The European Union, which is probably the most successful example of conflict prevention in the last half-century, began as an economic community — specifically, a coal and steel community. After the devastation of World War II, France and Germany decided to make another war impossible by jointly administering resources which were then the "sinews of war". Is it unthinkable that Africans could work together on similar lines? Why not create an "African Oil and Diamond Community"?' (United Nations 2000)

Preventive action is a responsibility that does not belong exclusively to governments and international organisations. It also belongs to private corporations, especially large ones. Indeed, given the impact that, in the world of globalised business, the operations of private firms have on the socioeconomic situations in many countries (most dramatically in those that are both economically and politically weak), it is apparent that leaving this aspect outside the discourse of conflict prevention would result in a fatal gap. Similarly to what is being done in the field of the environment, multinational corporations should be both summoned to respect existing rules and encouraged to develop and respect self-regulated codes of conduct with a view to contributing to the prevention of conflict.

In 1999, Annan promoted a global compact of world business leaders aimed at obtaining their commitment to policies that favour world governance by action in specific areas concerning human rights, labour, and environment. Nine principles were identified, in those three categories.

- Human Rights:
  1. Support and respect the protection of human rights;
  2. Make sure their own corporations are not complicit in human rights abuses
- Labour Standards:
  3. Uphold freedom of association and right to collective bargaining;
  4. Eliminate forced labour;
  5. Abolish child labour;
  6. Eliminate discrimination
- Environment:
  7. Support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges;
  8. Promote greater environmental responsibility;
  9. Encourage the development of environmentally friendly technologies (United Nations 1999).

It is true that addressing human rights, labour conditions, and environmental issues means addressing the root causes of conflict. But why should one not make conflict prevention not only an indirect consequence, but also an explicit goal of positive corporate action? It would be useful to introduce a tenth principle: World business will strive to submit its own policies and programmes to a conflict impact assessment.

Performance

The above guidelines make it possible, now, to assess the actual performance of the international community, as compared to the actions that ideally should be carried out in the pursuit of an effective agenda for conflict prevention

A cursory look at the history of the past ten years shows that performance in conflict prevention has been dismal. One can evade the problem by saying that the world will never know how many conflicts were prevented by wise and incisive policy. Yet there a succession of announced disasters (from Rwanda to Kosovo) should induce some strong self-criticism.

Has it been so because of the reluctance of the international community to act, to engage, and, especially, to pay the political and financial price for its action? Yes, in that the reluctance is evidently there. But no, in that if one considers events *ex post*, the international community — in particular, its more robust members — ultimately end up doing and paying quite a lot. So, while all were reluctant to decide and to act before the genocide in Rwanda (by now they should be willing to accept a sort of collective guilt for that terrible omission), in the aftermath of the horrendous slaughter they did, went, and spent.

To understand this phenomenon, Figure 6.1 applies the tools that can be put to work for conflict prevention to a timeframe, since the panoply of instruments is gradually reduced as violent conflict approaches: in the face of imminent confrontation, only

military tools can effectively exert a preventive role. It is worth emphasising that the best prevention is early prevention, and that early prevention addresses root causes. Early prevention means wide prevention; late prevention means narrow prevention. When peace reigns, there is no concern, no fear, no need to do anything in a conflict-prevention mode. And yet, when troubles start looming on the horizon (through mounting tensions and evident risks), there also arises the possibility to act with a full range and combination of options. One goes from culture (from inter-ethnic education and dialogue to the role, often perverse, of history and the way it is taught) to economics and on to politics.

Conflict prevention is unequivocally not — and should not be — an additional aspect of international relations. It should not entail specific mandates and *ad hoc* organisations. It is a special attention, a special focus, a special concern that should be systematically mainstreamed into every aspect of international activities. Given the multi-causal roots of conflict, everything, in a way, can have an impact. Thus, no all-encompassing mandate for a hypothetical 'conflict prevention organisation' is feasible. Moreover, such an organisation already exists — the United Nations. This is immediately clear if one examines its charter.

However, in the aftermath of the 2003 war in Iraq, the UN and its core institutions need to regain legitimacy, if their significant potential for conflict prevention is to be credible in the future. In the meantime, single-actor pre-emptive doctrines, such as the U.S. National Security Strategy, while technically more effective due to the
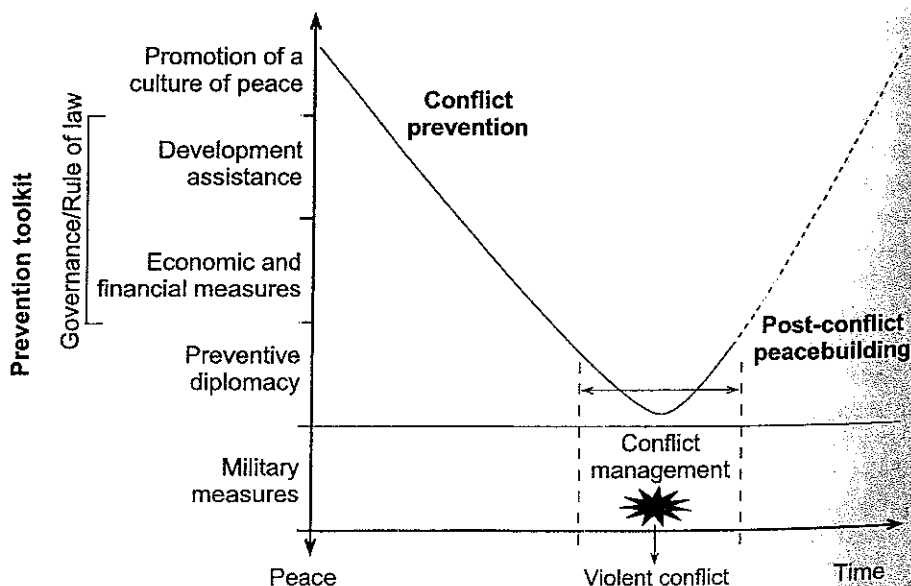

Figure 6.1   Conflict Prevention Curve

possibility of circumventing complex consensus-building mechanisms at a multilateral level, lack the international legitimacy vital for successful preventive activities Furthermore, it makes a lot of difference, for the very results achieved, if one acts with a conscious purpose in mind or not, especially because action throughout this wide array of goals and tools tends to be plagued by contradictions and inconsistencies. Development assistance is a case in point. It is significant that one of the guiding principles recalled by Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in its guidelines on conflict and development is to 'do no harm' (Development Assistance Committee 2001). Indeed, there can be cases in which a development programme is 100 percent successful if it is assessed in terms of growth of GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT, export results, and employment, and yet it nonetheless increases the risk of conflict. This is because it develops one area and not the next; because it includes a social (and often also ethnic) group and excludes the next; because it disrupts the previous equilibrium in situations that leave the losers and the excluded with no other way of redressing the balance than the use of organised, armed violence

Mainstreaming, coherence, and comprehensiveness are therefore the basic rules of conflict prevention. These are hard and complex tasks, but not impossible to accomplish. Indeed, the world already knows enough to determine what risks contribute to conflict and what, on the contrary, helps prevent it.

The difficulty of a root-cause approach to conflict prevention, however, does not stem only from inconsistencies and from the compartmentalised way in which foreign policy tends to be conceived and implemented. Another very significant limitation derives from what could be called the beneficiaries of preventive action.

Because the roots of conflict (whatever the economic precursors) are eminently political, countries at risk perceive every outside attempt to address them as an infringement of sovereignty. Sovereignty is in many cases the last refuge of *génocidaires* and ethnic cleansers But one cannot underestimate the strength and the legitimacy of this concern, voiced also by leaders and governments that are decent and credible members of the international community. This latter group includes countries such as India, one of the most articulate and consistent champions of sovereignty in international forums. Thus, inevitably, outside action is easier *post factum*, after conflict has broken the back of countries (and regimes) and even more so when the international community has established *de facto* protectorates and is able to carry out post-conflict peacebuilding with minimal local interference. Such peacebuilding, of course, has preventive effects (indeed, at preventing a relapse into conflict), but takes place in a totally different context

Prospects and Potential

The task is awesome. Political will is apparently even more scarce than financial resources And yet the prospects for conflict prevention, for its stable and substantial insertion as a component of the international discourse, are promising

June 2001 saw the release of two interesting documents: the report entitled 'Prevention of Armed Conflict' (United Nations 2001) and — at the European Council in Göteburg — the EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflict (European Commission 2001).

In April of the same year, the High Level Meeting of DAC had approved the supplement to the 1997 Guidelines on Conflict, Peace, and Development Co-operation (see Development Assistance Committee 2001). Conflict prevention is also being studied and addressed in many other multilateral forums, from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as well as in a number of nongovernmental institutions and organisations.

Sceptics may say that the fact that there seems to be a growth industry in conflict prevention is no guarantee that the result will be more actual conflict prevention. They may also add that this growing visibility of the issue is but one more manifestation of ineffective, if not counterproductive, moralism in foreign policy (Stedman 1995). This is an example of what Italians call *buonismo* ('good-ism').

This view is incorrect. In the first place, norms and principles are legitimate (and effective) components of international relations. Although values do indeed lend themselves to both controversy and instrumental utilisation, not taking them seriously implies missing important trends in public opinion that have weighty political repercussions. In a way, what has been said about human rights can also be said about conflict prevention, an aspect of international relations that today not even the most sceptical of sceptics would dismiss as irrelevant.

But the promising prospects for the preventive discourse do not derive only from the mere fact of the explicit attention that the issue is drawing in a multiplicity of forums. The way in which it is addressed is also extremely important.

If one reviews the basic premises spelled out at the beginning of the UN report on conflict prevention (United Nations 2001), the results are as follows. The first is the clear indication that 'conflict prevention is ... an activity best undertaken under Chapter VI of the Charter' — it is important to distinguish it from Chapter VII enforcement. The second is the statement that 'the primary responsibility for conflict prevention rests with national governments' At the same time, there is reference to the important role played by civil society. The third is the focus on 'the deep-rooted socio-economic, cultural, environmental, institutional and other structural causes that often underlie the immediate political symptoms of conflicts'. The fourth is the need for a comprehensive approach that encompasses both short-term and long-term political, diplomatic, humanitarian, human rights, developmental, institutional and other measures'. The fifth is the strong, mutually reinforcing link between conflict prevention and 'sustainable and equitable development'. The sixth is the need for co-operation of 'many UN actors' as well as 'member states, international, regional and sub-regional organisations, the private sector [nongovernmental organisations] and other civil society

In the European Union, conflict prevention (defined as an important element of all aspects of the external relations of the EU) has been introduced as a permanent dimension of both the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the European Security and Defence Policy, in view of the drafting and implementation of a coherent and comprehensive preventive strategy. It is important to quote the Göteburg document: 'all relevant institutions of the Union will mainstream conflict prevention within their areas of competence' (European Commission 2001).

Furthermore, the G8 itself has been very active. The Italian presidency of the G8 in 2001 felt that the issue (which it inherited from the Japanese presidency after its introduction by Germany in 1999) had a special interest in conflict prevention. This is because it allows the G8 to give a coherent and comprehensive signal of a common concern for world governance, and also for openness to dialogue and co-operation with both governmental and nongovernmental actors

In fact, conflict prevention, in its root-cause, non-enforcement, co-operative interpretation (the same interpretation that constitutes the premise of Annan's report), lends itself in a very special way to dialogue with developing countries. It addresses the prevention of conflict in relation with development, and not — as developing countries fear — as a zero-sum alternative between resources for security and resources for development. It is clearly an alternative to the use of force that, if prevention is not carried out or is ineffective, may become necessary to manage or stop conflict once it has broken out. At the same time, conflict prevention is also a privileged ground for dialogue and co-operation with nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society in general. This is both because it addresses the themes at the centre of their concern and activities (human rights, small arms, development, children in war, and so on) and also because the G8, in dealing with this issue, is giving a growing space to civil society and recognising its significant responsibility and positive contribution. In 2001, the G8 included two new items within the conflict prevention agenda: the role of private business and the role of women (and especially their organisations) in prevention. This is a significant addition that goes against the caricature of the G8 as an oligarchic, closed club of rich countries deaf to the demands and the role of civil society

Finally, the 2002 G8 Summit in Kananaskis must be examined from the point of view of the issue of conflict prevention. It is significant that under the Canadian presidency conflict prevention has been thoroughly mainstreamed. Indeed, it would be a mistake to infer a lower status for conflict prevention from the fact that the subject has received fewer explicit mentions and less explicit space — compared to previous documents — in the texts approved at Kananaskis. Of course, the main focus of the Summit was (inevitably) terrorism. Yet conflict prevention was an important dimension of the political approach dominating the discussions. In addition to two items that needed finishing touches, having already been addressed under previous chairs (water as a main aspect of conflict and development, and disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration, or DDR), a conflict prevention approach was very much evident in the way that Kananaskis addressed the situation in post-conflict

Afghanistan. It is important to note, in this respect, that the Conflict Prevention Officials Meeting (CPOM), the working group operating under the G8 political directors, focussed totally on Afghanistan, in particular addressing two specific aspects of conflict prevention on which it had previously developed guidelines and principles: security sector reform and DDR.

But perhaps the most meaningful and incisive demonstration of how to mainstream conflict prevention was given, under the Canadians, by the G8 Africa Action Plan, the initiative of support to that New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) that originated from the 2001 G8 Genoa Summit. There is no doubt, in fact, that the whole initiative is inspired by the same premise that the G8 has repeatedly endorsed: development is impossible in the presence of conflict and, conversely, conflict is made less recurrent by development. NEPAD makes this link very explicit, as does the G8 Africa Action Plan It is enough to run through the text in order to find several of the priorities identified by the G8 in its conflict prevention exercise starting under the Germans in 1999: DDR, small arms, natural resources fuelling conflict (in particular diamonds), and child soldiers. Moreover, the 2002 Kananaskis Summit gave a lot of attention to the closely related subject of preventive diplomacy, in particular in the case of the tensions between India and Pakistan Furthermore, the 2003 Evian Summit confirmed the trends laid out the year before: mainstreaming conflict prevention and its specific focus on Africa.

One could therefore venture to say that the conflict prevention exercise within the G8 graduated from priority setting and standard setting to the area of policy, moving from theory to practice, from the general to the specific. Thus, since 1992, as a general category of analysis and of mainstreamed political action, prevention has become one of the main areas for the G8, and perhaps one of the most promising.

Clearly, the promotion of conflict prevention on the agendas of the G8, the UN, the EU, the OSCE, and the OECD, among others, has been fundamentally important in developing a modern approach to international conflict. Yet much remains to be done on a practical level First, the most important mechanisms for international action, prime among them being the UNSC, need to be re-legitimised in the wake of the 2003 war in Iraq. If the process is to succeed, some reform of current international decision-making mechanisms might also be necessary.[12] However, because the core concept of conflict prevention entails encroachment on national sovereignty — generally taboo in current international law — it is crucial that the intervention be sanctioned by an institution that can credibly claim to represent the majority of states.

Second, when addressing the root causes of conflict, a reappraisal of traditional development strategies is required. The alleviation of poverty should be paired with a more comprehensive assessment of basic local needs in the target areas — political and sociocultural, as well as economic needs. Particular attention is needed in transition regimes and in ethnically diverse societies with recent histories of conflict. Adhering to fundamental democratic principles, while taking account of local leadership in decision making, is absolutely required. Such an approach is increasingly more political and cultural and less purely economic. Given the political nature of violent conflicts,

it would be more appropriate to shift the focus of current development assistance accordingly.

The third and final point to be made is that involving NGOs as well as powerful international corporations in the effort would be essential. Co-ordinating intelligence gathering and channelling information into early warning systems and risk analyses databases might be mutually beneficial to both governmental and nongovernmental actors. Comprehensive and multilateral efforts are clearly needed in order to embed a conflict prevention culture into the international normative establishment. The scope of such endeavours clearly transcends individual administrations. It is in this context that the G8's latest efforts over the past two years should be seen — in helping to consolidate an axiological framework essential for conflict prevention activities.

Notes

1   For details, see Ackermann (2002) and Stefanova (1997).
2   See, for example, the report of the International Action Network on Small Arms (2003) assessing the implementation of the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms
3   It is also interesting to note that of the other four initiatives, three can be classified as instruments (both as instruments for conflict and instruments against conflict): small arms, children in armed conflict, and international civilian police. Only one — conflict and development — addresses root causes.
4   The case of Zimbabwe — similar to what has happened in several conflict-plagued African countries — gives evident support to this proposition: 'In the last decade, the percentage of people living in poverty has surged from 40 percent to more than 65 percent. Wages have fallen to pre-independence levels. The government can no longer pay creditors, buy adequate fuel or supply medicines to hospitals' (Swarns 2000)
5   For example, from a report on inter-ethnic violence in the Moluccas: 'Muslim and Christian villagers, who have lived peacefully side by side for generations, have been attacking one another with home-made guns and bombs packed with nails   During the colonial era, the Dutch favoured the Christians, giving them choice government positions. But after Indonesia achieved independence, things swung the other way. In the 1960s and 1970s, the government encouraged thousands of Muslims from other parts of Indonesia to settle in the Moluccas under a policy aimed at diluting the overwhelming Christian majority Over the years and with incentive from Jakarta, many of the Muslims became prosperous merchants while Christians were relegated to farming and fishing   [According to a local observer], during the Suharto years, the military put all the problems under the carpet. Nothing was solved in an open or transparent manner. So when he fell, all of those old problems that were never fixed, mixed with economic deprivation and political struggles, started to erupt' (Chandrasekaran 2000).
    The same can be said for tribal conflict in Africa, where the ethnic factor is not *per se* conflictive, if not combined with socioeconomic diversification. This is, of course, the case for the Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda, but also for less genocidal and less well-known conflicts, such as the one between the Lendu and Hema tribes in the Congo: 'The Lendu, like the Hutu, are Bantu farmers who have lived in the region for many centuries. The Hema, like the Tutsi, apparently migrated from areas around the Nile more recently, though still hundreds of years ago. Like the Tutsi, the Hema tend to be richer, in this case farming plantations of cattle and coffee once owned by Belgian colonialists. The Lendu outnumber the Hema,

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