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‘Early Warning Analysis for Humanitarian Preparedness and Conflict Prevention’

“Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?”¹

“There’s an old joke. Uhm, two elderly women are at a Catskills mountain resort, and one of them says: “Boy, the food at this place is really terrible” and the other one says, “Yeah I know. . . and such small portions.”²

1. Introduction

Like the two elderly women at the Catskills resort, member states have often viewed early warning as an unpalatable meal of which they want enormous quantities – at least rhetorically. Early warning of varying types is now a central function of many inter-governmental organisations, regional organisation, think tanks and non-governmental organisations – and with good reason. The early 1990s witnessed substantial growth in the number of civil wars where the strategic objectives of belligerents included the deliberate targeting of civilians through killing, forced displacement, the starvation of populations, rape and torture. These experiences and the cost incurred in ‘managing’ crises have led to a re-focussing on preventing violent conflict, rather than engaging in triage once a crisis is underway.³ A systematic approach to understanding early warning indicators and risk evaluation is an important first step in tailoring any such preventive measures.

Within the context of the United Nations, the evolving member state understanding of early warning can be seen in a variety of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. General Assembly Resolution 46/182 (which laid the foundation for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs predecessor, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs) contained an operative paragraph stating that the UN should strengthen its “*analysis and dissemination of early-warning information on natural disasters and other emergencies*”. More recently Security Council Resolutions 1265 and 1296 (on the protection of civilians), have made clear the need to identify situations where the protection of civilians could be threatened.⁴

The need for effective, timely early warning is no less acute in the area of conflict prevention; indeed, Operational Paragraph 5 of Security Council Resolution 1366 (on the Prevention of Armed Conflict) re-emphasises the Secretary General’s role under Article 99 of the United Nations Charter (in bringing cases of early warning or possible prevention to the attention of the Council). A specific role is also envisaged for the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) in Operational Paragraph 11 of that same resolution, wherein the Security Council: ‘Expresses its

¹ T.S. Eliot, “Choruses from ‘The Rock’”, as contained in: *Collected Poems: 1909-1962*. (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., originally published, 1934), p. 147.

² Woody Allen, playing Alvy Singer in his movie *Annie Hall*. Written by Woody Allen and Marshall Brickman. Directed by Woody Allen.

³ For a short history of early warning analysis, see Howard Adelman, “Humanitarian and Conflict-oriented Early Warning: A Historical Background Sketch”, in K. van Walraven (ed.), *Early Warning and Conflict Prevention: Limitations and possibilities*. (Netherlands: Kluwer Law International, 1998), pp. 45-49.

⁴ In Resolution 1265, the Security Council undertakes to “address the causes of armed conflict in a comprehensive manner in order to enhance the **protection of civilians** on a long-term basis”.

intention to continue to invite the Office of the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator [ERC] and other relevant United Nations agencies to brief its members on emergency situations which it deems to represent a threat to international peace and security. . . .⁵ Arguably, this indicates the Council's desire to see early warning functions pushed to a lower level than that envisaged under Article 99 of the Charter. This wider role for the ERC is mirrored in Annex Paragraph 28 from this summer's General Assembly Resolution on the Prevention of Armed Conflict. This is significant, in so far as it suggests an incrementally increasing comfort among member states with early warning as a function of the UN system.

The Secretary-General's June 2001 *Report on the Prevention of Armed Conflict*, made clear that preventive action "should be initiated at the earliest possible stage of a conflict cycle in order to be most effective".⁶ This requires prompt recognition of, and response to, early warning signals with realistic preventive measures tailored to the needs of the country or region in question. Such a comprehensive approach should include:

*...short-term and long-term political, diplomatic, humanitarian, human rights, developmental, institutional and other measures taken by the international community in cooperation with national and regional actors.*⁷

In short, there is a need to make early warning, conflict prevention and preparedness measures operational.⁸ Already, structures exist within a variety of institutions to make use of this information. Within the UN, the Framework Team for Coordination is intended to assist in the coordination of inter-agency preventive work. On the humanitarian side, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee has developed contingency planning guidelines and routinely undertakes inter-agency missions.⁹

Ideally, early warning analysis provides information in a form that is easily digested by senior decision makers, whether governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), or international governmental organisations (IGOs). Those analyses must not only establish where crises are more likely to occur, but also, help shape strategies aimed at preventing and preparing for humanitarian crises. This paper outlines a method for analysing information and a list of relevant 'variables' (framed in the form of questions), which can be aggregated into seven factors (Annex 1). These seven factors can then be assessed and weighted, making an overall assessment of risk level possible. As will be argued, we do not need an infallible assessment, but rather a reliable idea of where our preventive and preparedness efforts should be focussed.

⁵ Arguably, there is some ambiguity in defining the nature of the invitation— whether open as in '**you are always welcome to come to my home for tea**', or closed as in '**please come to my house for Earl Grey tea and biscuits this Friday at 3 pm**'. The issue at stake here is first, the nature of the invitation (at the ERC's discretion or the Council's) and second, what the invitation entails in terms of the scope of the matters on which the Council expects to be briefed. Regardless of which interpretation, it seems reasonable that if a member state wrote to the President of the Council and invited the ERC or equivalent to brief, it would surely be difficult to decline.

⁶ Kofi A. Annan, *Report on the Prevention of Armed Conflict*. (New York: United Nations, 2002), p. ix.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ For a concise summary of efforts underway within the UN system, see: Tapio Kanninen, "Recent Initiatives by the Secretary-General and the UN System in Strengthening Conflict Prevention Activities", *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*. (Netherlands: Kluwer Law International, 2001), pp. 39-43.

⁹ The [Inter-Agency Contingency Planning Guidelines for Humanitarian Assistance \(2001\)](http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/jasc/IACContingencyPlanGuide.pdf), which are available on the Inter-Agency Standing Committee website, at: <http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/jasc/IACContingencyPlanGuide.pdf>

Those who gamble on horses, commonly have criteria that they use to place bets – the pedigree of a horse, the condition of the track, the reputation of the jockey and so on. In addition, however, having weighed the different factors many end up betting based not only on the objective information, but also upon hunches. Early warning analysis is sometimes viewed in a similar manner, and it is commonly greeted in equal measures by amusement and scepticism. For many, it is either missing the point (really, the absence of political will and financial resources to engage in preparedness and prevention), an unnecessarily complex academic exercise, or an exercise in predicting what is patently obvious: “for early warning”, one friend who works for an NGO laughed “read the New York Times”.¹⁰

Contrary to these arguments, this paper outlines a policy relevant early warning template which can be used in a variety of institutions, including international governmental and non-governmental organisations and within governments. It examines the types of information that should be included, listing indicators that are aggregated into seven over-arching factors. Finally, it outlines a template for early warning analysis for the development of both conflict prevention and preparedness measures.

Politically, early warning analysis for preparedness and preventive measures remains a sensitive task, but there are also substantive difficulties. The relative predictability that characterises the natural sciences is all but unavailable in the social sciences. Even the most robust statistical analyses of causes of conflict leave a substantial amount of the variability in the dependent variable (conflict) unexplained. As a result, it is useful to think about early warning in probabilistic terms and aim only to establish where a humanitarian crisis is more likely, not inevitable. **This probabilistic account, however, is sufficient as our contingency planning, preparedness and preventive efforts should be on a relatively loose trigger.** We don’t need an absolute date, place and time of a future crisis in order to know that the analysis should trigger an immediate policy response.¹¹

While templates aim to be comprehensive, it will be impossible to cover every possible cause of conflict – again underscoring the need for expert analysts to apply the template presented here.

2. Creating templates for early warning analysis

¹⁰ On the question of political will, there are a number of reasons why states have paid increasing attention to conflict prevention. **First**, the financial cost of managing crises underway compared to cost of preventing a crisis. **Second**, the potential that exists in cases where peacekeeping forces are deployed for political backlash in troop contributing countries if they sustain casualties. **Third**, some argue that in the case of humanitarian intervention, there has been an increased reluctance to accept those displaced by conflict. **Fourth**, there is a concern over the use of secession as a conflict management strategy – that is the potential for a patchwork of ethnically based states would ultimately be highly unstable. Secession, in essence, provides a short-term solution that creates the potential for long-term instability. **Finally** and arguably most importantly, in preventing violent conflict substantial human suffering is avoided. Nevertheless, it remains difficult to prove that a preventive strategy was successful as this requires a demonstration that the measure undertaken prevented what did not happen, from happening.

¹¹ For humanitarian purposes, it is also useful to evaluate the scale of a potential humanitarian emergency. This, loosely, can be calculated as the number of affected multiplied by their needs, where needs are defined as WATSAN, shelter, food, non- food items et cetera. **The idea is to have a rough estimate for planning purposes, not an infallible assessment.** For humanitarian purposes, it is also critical to build crisis scenarios in order to have an idea of how a potential crisis could unfold, where any displaced are likely to gather et cetera.

National and international bureaucratic organisations often have no shortage of information (from both inside and outside their organisations) or capacity for analysis. The challenge, therefore, lies in organising and interpreting that information for action in an accelerated decision making process where only small windows of opportunity exist for the implementation of preparedness and preventive measures. However, by using templates to structure an analysis in a form that can be easily understood and used by senior policy makers, the bureaucratic machinery can be sparked into a process that develops holistic, politically realistic preparedness and preventive measures.

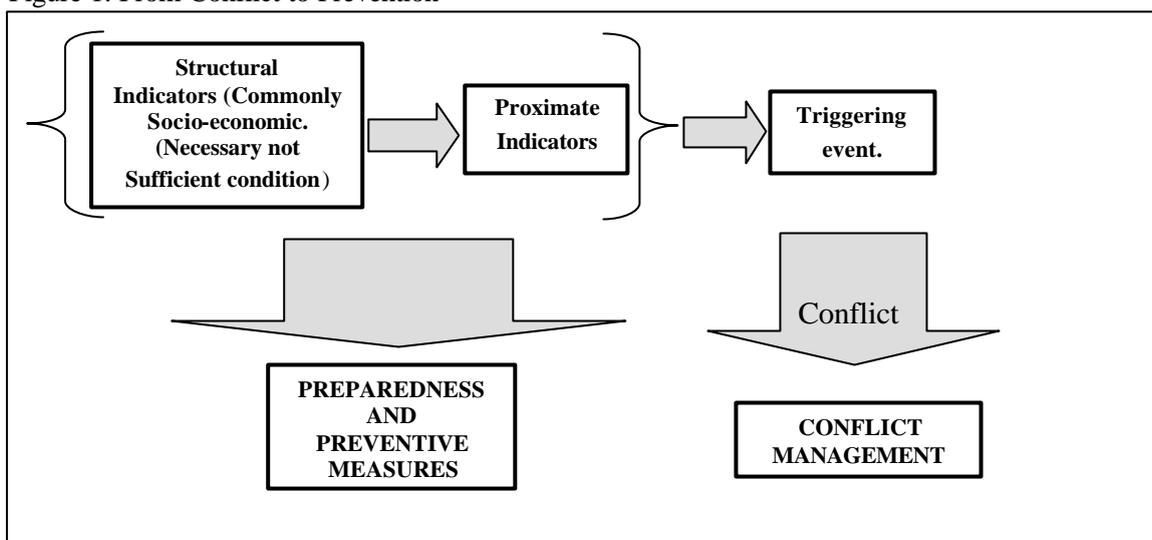
The factors identified in Annex 1 emerged organically or from the ‘bottom up’ from a review of the policy literature, recent case studies and the experiences of various international organisations. They attempt to capture the nuances of any given situation while maintaining a level of simplicity and ease of use. The list presented in Annex 1 is therefore a ‘living tool’ to be updated and refined in light of experience ‘on the ground’ and new research.¹² The principle underlying these analyses is that **one cannot isolate the humanitarian component of a crisis – either in its cause or consequence – from its broader social, political and economic context**

Figure 1 shows three types of variables commonly included in most early warning methodologies: structural (often a necessary but not sufficient condition for conflict),¹³ proximate (labelled as such because they are ‘closer’ to the onset of conflict) and triggering event (or the match that lights the structural and proximate ‘fuel’).¹⁴

¹² Indeed, ongoing research in areas such as gender and HIV/Aids can help clarify how these two issues can serve as early warning indicators.

¹³ Even where the dividing lines between variables are clear, there is ongoing and lively debate about the structural causes of conflict with at least eight credible data sets and a variety of conflicting results. Findings differ on a variety of key hypotheses, including whether democracy matters, the importance of primary exports and the role of horizontal inequalities – that is, between group disparities. For a discussion of the recent literature in this area and its policy relevance, see: Andrew Mack, “Civil War: Academic Research and the Policy Community”, *Journal of Peace Research*. (Vol. 39, No. 5, September 2002).

¹⁴ There are a variety of other formulations available in the early warning literature. This one has been selected as it covers all types of indicators while remaining simple in its structure. Similar debates occur over the use of terms such as ‘variables’, indicators and factors – terms which different disciplines and analysts each make a claim to. This diagram could also be adapted to reflect the fact that in many countries, conflict is cyclical.

Figure 1: From Conflict to Prevention¹⁵

By the time the level of a triggering event is reached, a country has likely moved beyond the point where conflict prevention/contingency planning are realistic policy options – rather conflict management will be the main (if not only) response possible. For this reason, early warning analysis tools should focus on structural and proximate indicators.¹⁶

The division shown in figure 1 is at least partially artificial, as an indicator can be manifest at both the structural and proximate levels. For example, the presence of fungible natural resources in weak states, is often a structural precondition for conflict as it can help finance belligerents activities, and can also be relevant at the proximate level, when, for example, a group attempts to gain or consolidate control of an area rich in natural resources.¹⁷

Similarly, identity is a structural factor which can be used instrumentally to mobilise a group to undertake violent action (here the mobilisation serves as a proximate indicator). For example, though Rwanda's ethnic 'divisions' were a pre-requisite to the 1994 genocide, they were

¹⁵ Though countries are often the primary units of analysis, early warning analysis should, where appropriate, be undertaken at the sub-national and regional levels.

¹⁶ In the immediate aftermath of conflict, many of the political barriers to programming that exist prior to a crisis are reduced if not eliminated. There is therefore a window of opportunity which the international community can take advantage of, to implement programming that politically would prove impossible in a pre-crisis country (for example introducing controls on the extraction and export of natural resources).

¹⁷ This is not to equate the types of analysis that yield these conclusions. One derives from case studies and a growing body of statistical research, while the second results from more traditional case study analysis.

mobilised by political elites, through political speeches and, in particular, the propaganda of Radio Télévision Libre Mille Collines (hereafter RTLMC).¹⁸

All too often, quantitative and qualitative methodologies are portrayed as mutually exclusive forms of analysis. Quantitative/statistical methods are particularly useful in analysing levels of structural risk, while proximate variables are often more qualitative in nature. An individual's training and professional experience inevitably skew the ways in which s/he analyses a given situation. As such, comprehensive lists of structural and proximate indicators and a template for analysis can help individuals think beyond their traditional frames of reference. Clearly not all indicators will be relevant and in many cases, there will be a few key issues that could cause conflict. However, without a full, complete picture of the situation in a country it is impossible to assess the overall risk and, as importantly, assess potential entry points for preventive and preparedness measures at a range of different levels. There are two additional advantages to creating a consistent template for early warning analysis. First, a body of indicators and a template which has been widely accepted will create a common understanding across policy-making communities, including NGOs, governments and inter-governmental organisations. Second, creating a consistent format or template for early warning analysis will help to ensure that the analysis can be easily understood and used by senior decision makers.

The key to constructing a workable, policy relevant methodology is balancing the level of detail in the analysis with the need for simplicity in its use. In order to ensure balanced analysis, a wide range of analysts at differing levels (for example, grassroots, academic and political - among others) should be engaged. Early warning templates must therefore simplify complex concepts without undermining the integrity of the analysis.

When developing a methodology one must use a manageable number of factors, each consisting of a comprehensive list of indicators (Annex 1).¹⁹ Those proposed here are designed to identify a crisis at a stage when preparedness and preventive action remain options, not for triage once a crisis is underway. In aggregating and filtering the enormous amount of early warning information available, they attempt to capture the nuances of any given situation in a manner that simplifies both the analytic process and the final output. There are, of course, many other ways in which they might be grouped, including by level of analysis (that is local, national, regional and international), or temporally, (short, medium or long term).

The seven factors identified in the following section have featured prominently in recent crises. They are therefore not 'theory driven', but rather emerged from the 'bottom up'. **The examples provided are not exhaustive, but rather, are intended to illustrate and explain the types of**

¹⁸ Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide 1959-1994* (London: Hurst and Company, 1995), pp. 37-39. Indeed, the impact of long term ethnic hatred has, according to some, been over-exaggerated: "Il n'existe pas, en effet, de haine ancestral entre Hutus et Tutsis et les recherches historiques récentes démontrent que la prétendue domination absolue des premiers sur les seconds à l'époque précoloniale à été très largement surévalué." (Francois Soudan, "Sept questions sur un massacre", *Jeune Afrique* (no 1741, 19, 25 mai, 1994), p. 12).

¹⁹ I use 'factor' in a non-statistical sense.

trends and indicators that could lead to conflict. As noted above, Annex 1 contains a full listing of the factors and the individual indicators within each.²⁰

3. Key Early Warning Factors

1. Socio-Economic Conditions : is comprised almost exclusively of structural preconditions (or the underlying, long term root causes) that make violent conflict more likely. In addition to the question as to whether the country exhibits signs of structural risk (Figure 1, above) there is a question as to whether there is a widespread perception of rapid deterioration.²¹ In particular, is a structural variable such as ethnic identity being used instrumentally to mobilize support for violent action?²²

2. State and Institutions. States in the process of failure are more susceptible to violent conflict. Though research findings differ as to whether the political structure of the state matters, the key question is whether a state is moving towards failure and is therefore increasingly incapable (through formal and/or informal structures) of repressing, mediating or brokering between the varying interests that could result in violent conflict. General failure could in some cases be precipitated by the decay of criminal/judicial processes and unequal access to the state's institutions and/or the perception of high level corruption.

3. Regional/international dimension. This factor addresses how a crisis might spill over regionally and in turn how external actors may influence the development of a crisis (both positively and negatively). Are other states in the region potentially destabilized by unrest and are they likely to 'intervene' whether covertly or overtly? Even where well intentioned, international involvement can arguably have negative consequences where security guarantees are offered in support of peace agreements.²³ Similarly, the prospect of international sanctions can create an incentive to accelerate the pace of violence, before the international community is able to act. Insurgent groups may have camps in neighbouring countries as a platform for operations, caching weapons and training personnel.

²⁰ There is no formulaic manner through which to evaluate early warning indicators/risks and no single indicator (unless so broadly phrased as to be all but meaningless) will ever be both a necessary and sufficient condition for a complex emergency. We can clearly, learn a great deal about how variables tend to interact but their possible contribution to a future crisis should always be measured within the specific social, economic, security, political (et cetera) context of a country. The listing of key questions/areas for analysis presented here is therefore indicative and may not be exhaustive.

²¹ A good overview of the literature on early warning and conflict prevention can be found in Chapters 2-5 of Fen Osler Hampson and David Malone (eds), *From Reaction to Conflict Prevention: Opportunities for the UN System*. (Boulder Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002). See also: Nicholas Sambanis "A Review of Recent Advances and Future Directions in the Literature on Civil War", *Defense and Peace Economics*, 13 (2), June 2002.

²² This again illustrates how structural variables can be manifest at a proximate level.

²³ As one author notes, with regard to Rwanda and several other recent conflicts, they have entered their deadliest phase following signing of peace accords with international guarantees: "Where such security guarantees are not serious, problems will occur. In practice, then, such guarantees are often largely symbolic and rarely result in any serious action in the face of a breakdown in the implementation of peace agreements; they are tantamount to a bluff. When such bluffs are called, the consequences can be dire. In Rwanda, those consequences were not borne by international third parties but by the victims of renewed and vicious, warfare." (Bruce D. Jones, *Peacemaking in Rwanda: the Dynamics of Failure*. (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, 2001), p. 11).

Both the regional and international dimensions can be illustrated in the Great Lakes region of Africa, where unrest or violent conflict inevitably has consequences for neighbouring states and where former colonial powers have historically played a significant role. Diaspora communities have historically provided a ready source of funds to fuel conflict – for example, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have in the past tapped into a wide range of Tamil communities in both the developed and the developing world. Similarly, small arms have spilled across borders with enormous military and human costs, threatening security within and between states.

4. Security. The overall level of security is a fourth critical factor, consisting of individual indicators that could include the systematic caching of weapons (for example in Rwanda), or drastic reductions in the price of small arms (which could provide evidence of a cross border flow). Similarly, the type of small arms available could be a significant indicator: are they weapons of war or for personal protection? The complex inter-relationship between factors can be seen in the case of Liberia, where Charles Taylor's troops acquired small arms and ammunition through the exploitation of agricultural products and mineral resources. The small arms used in Taylor's engagement in Guinea and Sierra Leone originated in Eastern Europe, and were shipped through Burkina Faso.²⁴

5. Public discourse, ideological factors and elite behaviour. In recent cases, public discourse has often reflected an attempt to mobilise popular will in favour of violent conflict – in this sense, it is a proximate indicator. It is also structural in that ideological factors may be long term and an important feature of the socio-political culture of the country. Critical issues therefore include whether the pre-conditions necessary to divide people and pit them against one another, exist. Are these divisions being used instrumentally by political elites?

In Rwanda, RTLMC began broadcasting shortly after the signing of the Arusha accords in August 1993 and played a critical role in building and sustaining the popular will necessary for the genocide.²⁵ Political elites played a particularly important role in setting up RTLMC (organised by President Habyarimana's wife, her brothers and other associates of the president), making speeches which reinforced ethnic divisions and in calling on individuals not to repeat the mistakes of the past massacres where Tutsi children had been spared. For example, the institutionalised propaganda of RTLMC was preceded by a 'ratcheting up' of exclusionary rhetoric by political elites.²⁶ A similar trend can be seen in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where Serb radio stations broadcast propaganda advocating the creation of a Greater Serbia in addition to misinformation about Muslims and the multi-ethnic government, in areas under Serb control.²⁷

6. Human rights and civil liberties. This factor contains mainly proximate indicators. Rights violations should be viewed in their socio-political context to assess whether they are in fact

²⁴ Edward J. Laurance, *Light Weapons and Intrastate Conflict: Early Warning Factors and Preventive Action, A Report to the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict*. (New York: Carnegie Corporation, 1998).

²⁵ Gérard Prunier cites the role of RTLMC, which following the death of President Habyarimana began providing calls to avenge the death of the President. Prunier continues: "Within the next few hours the calls turned into hysterical appeals for ever greater quantities of blood. It was difficult to credit that normal people could broadcast such things as 'You have missed some of the enemies in this or that place. Some are still alive. You must go back there and finish them off . . .' or 'the graves are not yet quite full. Who is going to do the good work and help us fill them completely?'" (Gérard Prunier, *History of a Genocide: The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide 1959-1994*. (London: Hurst and Company, 1995), p. 224).

²⁶ Human Rights Watch, *Playing the 'Communal Card': Communal Violence and Human Rights*, (USA: April 1995), p 7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

contributing to instability and the probability of a wider conflict. Are rights and civil liberties violations increasing and is a particular group being singled out? In some cases, pogroms have been preceded by the completion of identity lists. Civil liberties violations may include violations of the freedom of the domestic press, or harassment and/or curtailing the free movement of the international press.

7. Actors. In most if not all recent crises political actors have sought to mobilise popular support (for example, by instrumentalising identity). The existence of actors capable of fomenting a crisis or incapable of preventing one is a necessary cause of conflict. In addition to the positioning of elites and their attempts to mobilise support for war, a second question is whether a group capable of undertaking violent action is crystallizing (or has already done so)? For example, in late 1993 in Rwanda, two militias were formed, the Impuzamugambi (those who work together) and the Interahamwe (those with a single purpose), which subsequently played a central role in the 1994 genocide.²⁸ The question here is not only whether there is a group capable of undertaking wide-scale violence, like the Interahamwe or Arkan's tigers, but also, whether they are being mobilised and armed in an organised fashion.

The factors identified above are clearly not mutually exclusive. For example the factor related to human rights and civil liberties could be broken down into its constituent elements and assigned to the remaining six factors. Similarly, in factor two (state and institutions), a government could lose legitimacy due to its inability to prevent human rights violations. The advantage, however, of having human rights stand as an independent factor is that it allows an overall assessment of human rights violations trends, encompassing violations by the government, individuals, and even neighbouring states.

4. Making Early Warning Factors Operational

The analysis completed should be comprehensive (in that analysts work systematically through all factors), though selective in reporting only those indicators that are central to the emerging situation. The generalised indicators must be calibrated to the differing political dynamics of different regions, countries and even within countries. It is therefore critical that those with local knowledge tailor any general indicator list to the specific circumstances of the country or region in question. It will also be critical that the analyst consider not only the current situation, but likely future trends, using their interaction to build possible scenarios. Rarely, if ever, will conflicts develop exactly as outlined in a projected scenario, but even where they do not, such scenarios can assist in evaluating the risk level and also represent as a first step in the development of preparedness and preventive measures. Finally, analysts will have to assess not only individual indicators but also each of the seven factors to determine not only the existing state ((1) Low (2) Low-Medium (3) Medium (4) Medium-High (5) High) but also, the 'trajectory' of risk (increasing, decreasing, or static). The relative significance of each factor when measured against the other factors should also be evaluated.²⁹ These can then be depicted visually through

²⁸ On the creation and arming of these militias, Bruce Jones comments "The akazu [a clan-based Hutu oligarchy that controlled the Rwandan state under President Juvénal Habyarimana] was gearing up for a major escalation." Bruce D. Jones, *Peacemaking in Rwanda: the Dynamics of Failure*. (Boulder Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), p. 35. For a succinct discussion of the use and training of these militias and the build-up to the genocide, see chapter 2 of that volume.

²⁹ For example, one factor could be 'medium/high risk' and deteriorating rapidly, but still of less overall significance than another factor where the assessment and trend-line are identical.

a system of coloured arrows (Annex 2). The overall assessment can then be represented graphically on a three by three matrix as shown in Annex 3.

Field-based analysts with good connections to civil society will be particularly well placed to determine the relative importance of each indicator and factor; particularly in assessing the perceptions of actors 'on the ground'. Diplomats and other policy analysts should, where possible, engage a wide variety of credible local actors, including, but not limited to NGOs, academics, faith-based groups and women's groups in order to enable the cross-referencing of information.

5. From early warning to prevention and preparedness

The standard by which early warning analyses are judged has often been unrealistically high – if a method does not yield the date, time and identify of the key actors in a crisis, it is often dismissed as useless. Early warning indicators and methods are, in the final analysis, blunt instruments and, as such, they will yield only a probabilistic account of where crises are more likely. The point, however, is that the level and quality of prediction need not be perfect to trigger the formulation of humanitarian preparedness and preventive measures.

While early warning methodologies and signals can provide good indications of where crises are more likely, they can also be so overwhelming that they create a perception that an emerging crisis is inevitable, creating a disincentive to act. In a world of scarce resources, few will be willing to commit those resources to cases which are portrayed as hopeless and for which preventive measures have not been developed.

Early warning analyses must therefore be used as a vehicle not only for identifying societies at risk but also for formulating clear, politically realistic policy options for decision makers. While it may be true that "where there is a will, there's a way" in developing preparedness measures and preventive strategies, it may be at least partially true that "where there is a way, there is a will".³⁰

One critical element in developing preventive strategies is determining what ameliorating factors, countervailing tendencies, trends or capacities exist that could mitigate against conflict at the national, community and household levels. These can provide a possible channel that a government, IGO or NGO might deepen or reinforce through its programming.

³⁰ I borrow this phrase from Michael Lund, who used it in a recent conversation. For more see, Michael Lund, "Operationalizing Lessons from Recent Experience in Conflict Prevention", in Fen Hampson and David Malone, (eds), *From Reaction to Prevention: Opportunities for the UN System in the New Millennium*, A Project of the International Peace Academy, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002).

6. Conclusion

Early warning analysis is a messy business and, inevitably, the results will be imperfect and understandably subject to questioning. While we can continue to search for the holy grail of early warning – that is the parsimonious polynomial equation which yields robust predictions, this should not come at the cost of the policy relevant tin cup that can be used today.

Civil conflict can have an enormous trans-national impact, whether in the form of regional instability, refugee flows, or, where the state ultimately fails, in creating safe havens for criminal and terrorist organisations. The international community must learn to see its own self-interest reflected in the completion of robust early warning analysis and the development of realistic medium to long-term preparedness and preventive strategies in response.

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