

STRUCTURAL CONFLICT PREVENTION THROUGH A NATIONAL APPROACH



Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

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Executive Summary:

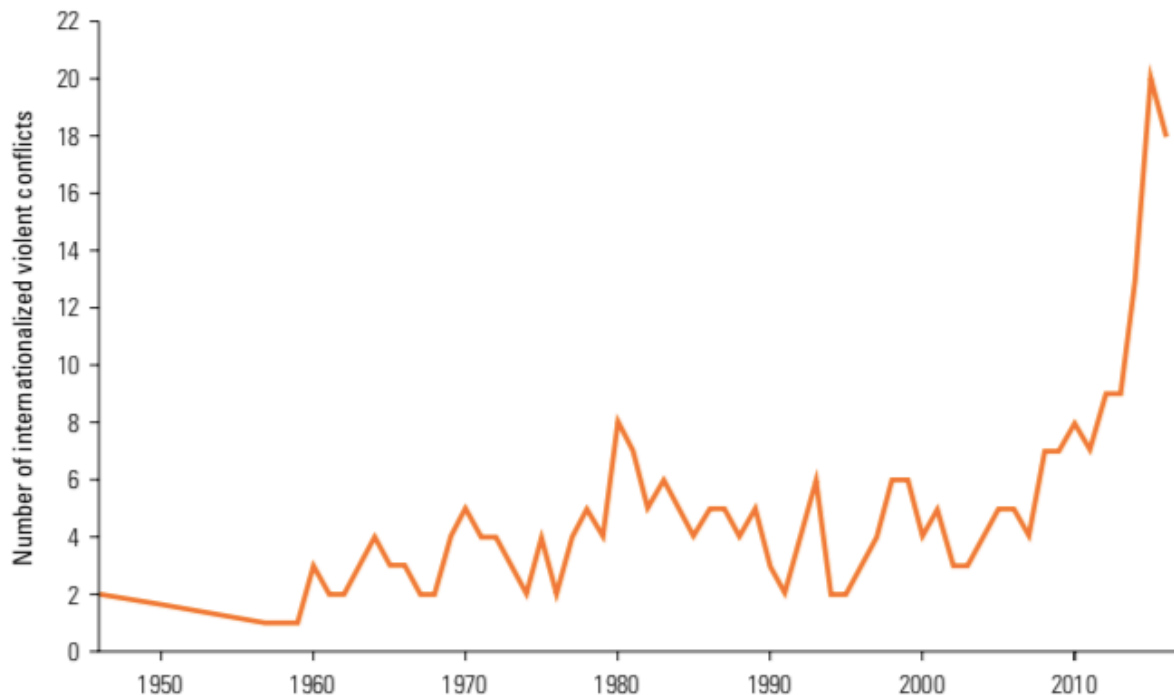
The root causes of post-Cold War conflicts have been intra-state rather than inter-state. It means that the inherent problem often derives from within the parties engaged in the conflict rather than from an external factor. At the same time, the relationship between states has never been more interconnected. Since the end of World War II, the international community has delegated more authority on regulations to international organizations such as the United Nations. The shifting behavior of states from the "ancien régime" into a more "internationalist" behavior shows the willingness of states to empower international institutions to regulate their behavior. With the rise of global governance, international institutions regulate states' behavior, such as in terms of economics and development. However, in terms of peace and security, states are still favoring the old custom. Moreover, since post-Cold War conflicts are often within the state apparatus, the roots of conflicts are often political. With the recognition that the roots of conflict are political, it is also connected to the notion of power-seeking competition. For this reason, the conflict prevention tools and mechanisms have to be adjusted accordingly. The major focus of conflict prevention mechanisms is on the often neglected "structural prevention" measures as opposed to "preventive diplomacy." UN tools on conflict prevention have focused extensively on "preventive diplomacy." "Preventive diplomacy" is an operational measure that often works on an ad hoc basis, with a greater possibility of failing since it has such limited capabilities to prevent the outbreak of a conflict. The UN has conflict prevention tools such as special envoys, political missions, peacekeeping operations, regional offices, and mediations. Structural prevention, on the other hand, works as a long-term investment in creating a peaceful society by employing the ideas of institution building, economic development, and grassroots community building. Thus, for effective and efficient measures of conflict prevention, structural prevention will benefit the international community the most.

Introduction:

The current state of international affairs has been fueled by the civil war crisis and its consequences, the refugee crisis, and the rise of transnational armed groups. Most of these issues derive from the anarchy within states. As states are the primary actors in international relations, each decision taken by a state leads to internal conflicts that lead to international conflicts. Most intra-state conflicts are within the state apparatus. Within this argument, the state is our primary concern. As a result, the paper will emphasize the bottom-up approach through national efforts on rule of law and justice, security, and economic livelihoods. Thus, the structure of the paper will be: (1) the definition of conflict focusing on intra-state conflict; (2) the roots of the most deadly intra-state conflicts in non-democratic countries; and (3) the emphasis on preventing the conflicts through the structural prevention method, in which a bottom-up approach means that the attention will be focused on the integration of local-based approaches into national-based approaches. Furthermore, the method's foundation was based on the integration of the peacebuilding approach into statebuilding.

Background

Figure 1: Number of Internationalised Intrastate Violent Conflicts, 1946-2016



Source: UCDP 2017.

In today's globalised world, an internal conflict will not remain confined within the borders of a single country for very long; it will spill over in a variety of ways to contaminate its immediate neighbours and affect the lives of people much further away. For example, the seeds of conflicts that affected Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea may be traced back to Liberia; narcotics sold on the High Streets of European capitals come directly from conflict zones in Afghanistan and, the tragedy of 9/11 may never have happened if Afghanistan had not been neglected the way it had been prior to 2001.¹ Thus, these failed states are able to provide a safe haven for a diverse array of transnational threats, including terrorist networks, global organized crime, and narcotics traffickers who exploit the dysfunctional environment.²

On the other hand, empirical experience with various conflicts in different parts of the world show that the collective efforts of the international community to help end wars and establish peace are often inadequate and the reasons lie on the insufficient knowledge and understanding of local and regional conditions and the low priority

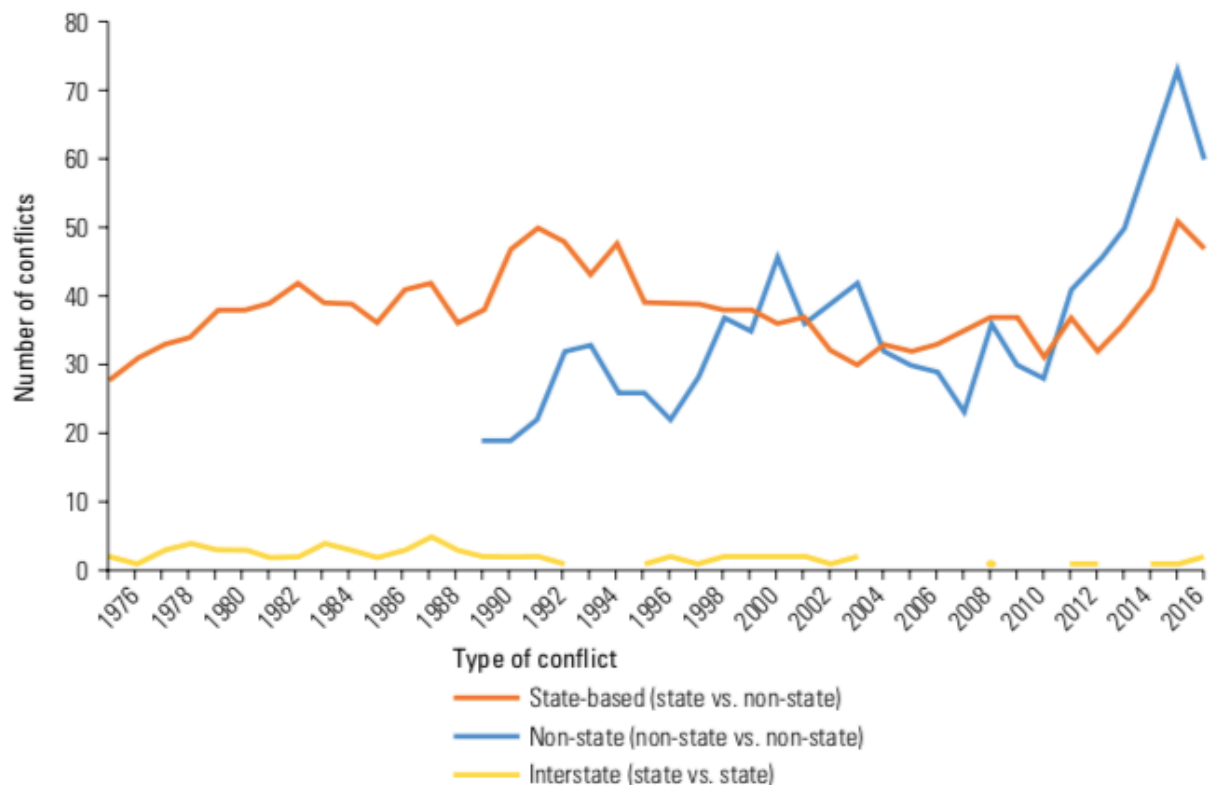
¹ Lakhdar Brahimi, "State Building in Crisis and Post-Conflict Countries." 7th Global Forum on Reinventing Government, June 2007, p.2

² The Commission on Post-Conflict Reconstruction, "Play to Win: Final Report of the bi-partisan Commission on Post-Conflict Reconstruction." Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the Association of the U.S. Army (AUSA), January 2003, p.4

given by international players to the rebuilding of national institutions.³ Moreover, the record of success in assisting failed states emerging from violent conflict is mixed, with fifty percent of nations emerging from conditions of violent conflict slipping back into violence within five years.⁴ Thus, it is important to establish a viable national institutions, capable of ensuring lasting security for its entire population.

Introduction to State-based Conflicts

Figure 2: Conflict Trends



Source: UCDP 2017.

Conflict exists in all countries and in every level of society. Conflict per se is by no means a negative force, it is a natural expression of social difference and of humanity's perpetual struggle for justice and self-determination.⁵

When discussing the concept of conflict, perception should be included as a central concept since the conflicts and the opponent's intentions often are defined according

³ Brahimi, *Statebuilding*, p.2

⁴ The Commission, *Play to Win*, p.4

⁵ Sanam Naraghi Anderlini and Victoria Stanski, "*Inclusive Security, Sustainable Peace: A Toolkit for Advocacy and Action.*" Hunt Alternatives Fund and International Alert, 2004, p.1

to subjective perceptions. In other words, it is perceived as differences in issue positions between two or more parties at the same moment in time.⁶

The challenge, however, is to avoid the violent expression of conflict without suppressing the root causes completely. No matter how poor or oppressed a society is, or how provocative and manipulative political leaders may be, communal violence does not erupt so suddenly.⁷

Root Causes of State-based Conflicts

At the root of conflict and fragility lie injustice, human rights violations, inequality, exclusion, poverty, poor management of natural resources and the absence of inclusive political settlements and capable institutions.⁸ On the other hand, Carnegie Commission Report (1997) argues that violent conflict often resulted from the traditional pre-occupation of states to defend, maintain, or extend interests and power. The report suggests many factors and conditions make societies prone to conflict:

- Weak, corrupt, or collapsed states
- Illegitimate or repressive regimes
- Acute discrimination against ethnic or other social groups
- Poorly managed religious, cultural, or ethnic differences
- Political and economic legacies of colonialism or the Cold War
- Sudden economic and political shifts
- Widespread illiteracy, disease, and disability
- Lack of resources such as water and arable land
- Threatening regional relationships

⁶ Niklas L.P. Swanström and Mikael S. Weismann. *“Conflict, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Management and beyond: a conceptual exploration.”* Centra Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2005, p.9

⁷ Anderlini, Stanski, *Sustainable Peace*, p.1

⁸ Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, *“Conflict Prevention: Opportunities and Challenges in Implementing Key Policy Commitments and Priorities.”* Stockholm: SIDA, December 2017, p.3

Structural Conflict Prevention

For decades, the approach to peace and security has been dominated by responding to conflict and it has proven difficult to persuade decision-makers to invest in conflict prevention.⁹

In this sense, the goal of prevention is to create a situation in which differences and conflicts can be addressed in a non-violent and constructive manner. Thus, In order to prevent violence, it is necessary to address the hostile mistrust and belligerence before it reaches a point where each side believes that violence is their only recourse.¹⁰ Moreover, it is crucial for these processes to be grounded in indigenous contexts and it must be locally driven, locally owned and locally led. In conclusion, conflict prevention is about making societies' resilient to violent conflict by strengthening the local capacities for peace including the systems, resources, structures, attitudes, and skills.¹¹

Furthermore, structural conflict prevention refers to a long-term development cooperation initiatives in a variety of sectors that aim to address root causes of tension and violence.¹² It addresses root causes of conflict such as poverty, political repression and uneven distribution of resources, which can, if left unattended, escalate into violence while also promoting human rights, protect minority rights and institute political arrangements in which all groups are represented.¹³

Building the capacities of a society to manage and address conflict peacefully requires a high degree of inclusiveness and participation of all sectors of society in dialogue, as well as peacebuilding; a high degree of local ownership of conflict prevention strategies and initiatives; and the strengthening of democratic institutions and empowerment of local actors through continuous consultation, assistance and training.¹⁴

To attain these goals, first and foremost it is important to have a thorough understanding of the factors, actors and conditions exacerbating conflict. It is also essential to identify the groups or individuals that are exacerbating the situation, and those that are aiming to mitigate conflict and promote non-violence and peace.¹⁵

⁹ Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, *"Conflict Prevention: Opportunities and Challenges in Implementing Key Policy Commitments and Priorities."* Stockholm: SIDA, December 2017, p.1

¹⁰ Anderlini, Stanski, *Sustainable Peace*, p.1

¹¹ Swedish International, *Conflict Prevention*, p.3

¹² Ibid., p.3

¹³ Anderlini, Stanski, *Sustainable Peace*, p.2

¹⁴ Ibid., p.4

¹⁵ Anderlini, Stanski, *Sustainable Peace*, p.4

In order to structurally prevent a non-violent conflict into an armed conflict, the International Alert Report (2004) suggests the following questions that can help identify and map actors in terms of their position, interests, strengths, affiliations and weaknesses:

- Who/what is the actor or stakeholder, including their source of support/legitimacy?
- At what level are they most active and effective (international, national, regional or local)?
- Are they representative of different sectors of the community (including marginalised groups)?
- What are their demands, their needs, their fears?
- What power/resources/capacities do they have?
- Who are they affiliated with or who influences them?
- Do they have a vision of peace?
- What does their vision include (e.g. autonomy, co-existence, land reform)

Bottom-Up Approach: National Approach

Nations cannot be built, especially not by foreigners descending on a country for a short period of time. As Francis Fukuyama (2006) points out, it is emerged through an unplanned historical-evolutionary process. Experience indicates that any statebuilding intervention will be sustained only through national structures. Thus, the establishment of a virtuous circle of trust and mutual accountability, and the assumption of rights and obligations by citizens require a statebuilding agenda that creates an inclusive state to support equitable economic, political and social orders.¹⁶

A more sophisticated and nuanced approach to statebuilding is also required, with careful planning and greater understanding of what is needed to successfully build a state.¹⁷

Therefore, there must be consensus on the type and shape of the state to be built and agreement between all parties as to the process that will be used to create that state. During statebuilding, public participation in the constitutional process must be conducted in a carefully planned civic education programme and a well-organised public participation that included local consultations.¹⁸

It is also important to consider the dichotomy that exists between new and old law and the extent to which a new law actually corresponds to conditions and behaviour

¹⁶ Brahimi, *Statebuilding*, p.5

¹⁷ Kirsti Samuels and Sebastian von Einsiedel. “*The Future of UN State-Building: Strategic and Operational Challenges and the Legacy of Iraq*” International Peace Academy, November 2003, p. 5

¹⁸ Brahimi, *Statebuilding*, p.7

in practice. Thus, the tendency to prescribe universal constitutional advice, and broad rules and regulations that do not fit the country context and are not underpinned by broad, inclusive and participatory inputs from national populations must be resisted. The historic, cultural, institutional, ethnic and linguistic differences among countries are also cannot be ignored.¹⁹

Moreover, a global civil society consensus has suggested that peace and development can be best upheld by states that are inclusive, responsive, fair and accountable. The Crisis States Research Centre stress the importance of how societies are governed, the type of institutions that exist, and the emphasis placed on gaining societal trust.²⁰

Planning must also take into account the history and political culture of the state sought to be built, and seek to understand the ways in which international intervention will likely affect local power structures. Thus, one of the biggest challenges in state-building is the developing political consensus across disparate ethnic or religious groups. This is particularly difficult in countries emerging from ethnic conflict, or in non-democratic states where power has traditionally been held by only one identity group.²¹

Since patterns of marginalisation and exclusion are key futures in global violence and conflict trends, structural long-term conflict prevention initiatives can be thought of in terms of efforts to promote more inclusive politics, economies and societies.²² This idea is echoed by the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, which recognises constructive state-society relations being at the heart of successful peacebuilding and statebuilding.²³

Cultural inequalities between groups can also drive conflict. The equitability of access to security and justice services are appear to be a particularly important predictor for violent conflict. Decisions on official languages, religion or cultural events that favour some groups over others can also exacerbate social divisions, creating cleavages that can be mobilised for violence.²⁴

It is necessary to acknowledge explicitly the differences that may exist among various groups within a society and accommodate to the greatest extent possible their particular needs. Among the most important needs are the freedom to preserve important

¹⁹ Ibid., p.9

²⁰ Saferworld Issue Paper 2, “*Addressing conflict and violence from 2015: What are the key challenges? What works in addressing them?*” Saferworld, November 2012, p.2

²¹ Samuels, Einsiedel, *The Future of UN State-Building*, p.5

²² Swedish International, *Conflict Prevention*, p.3

²³ Saferworld, *Addressing Conflict*, p.2

²⁴ Swedish International, *Conflict Prevention*, p.3

cultural practices, including the opportunity for education in a minority language, and freedom of religion.²⁵

Evidence from the OECD highlights the importance of strengthening inter-group relations and suggests this could be a priority in any new global development framework. Measures to consolidate national identity, institutions of citizenship and inter-community communication are also particularly needed.²⁶ It is very crucial to emphasise the importance of state functioning through participation, inclusion, legitimacy, confidence building, responsiveness to public expectations and accountability. Thus, efficient institutions and good governance becomes central strategies for preventing the population to resort to armed violence because of unmet needs and perceptions.²⁷

Rule of Law and Justice

The rule of law is a goal in that it forms the basis for the just management of relations between and among people. It also means that a sound legal regime helps ensure the protection of fundamental human rights, political access through participatory governance, social accommodation of diverse groups, and equitable economic opportunity.²⁸

According to the Carnegie Commission Report (1997), effective participatory government based on the rule of law reduces the need for people to take matters into their own hands and to resolve their differences through violence.

On the other hand, strengthening justice systems should include developing fair laws; making courts, prosecution services and informal justice services efficient, fair, and answerable to the parliament and the people; ensuring and improving access to justice, and protecting human rights.²⁹

Tackling corruption and establishing the separation of powers to check against abuse is also critical. It argues that successful programme design could include supporting local justice and dispute resolution; focused anti-corruption initiatives that demonstrate that new initiatives can be well governed; and joint processes to investigate and prosecute corruption.³⁰

According to the World Development Report (2011) there are important lessons on what works in achieving justice and these include demonstrating that national resources can be used for public good before dismantling patronage systems; drawing

²⁵ Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, "*Preventing Deadly Conflict*." Washington, DC: Carnegie Corporation of New York, December 1997, p.28

²⁶ Saferworld, *Addressing Conflict*, p.6

²⁷ Swedish International, *Conflict Prevention*, p.3

²⁸ Carnegie, *Preventing Deadly Conflict*, p.28

²⁹ Saferworld, *Addressing Conflict*, p.5

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.6

on traditional/community mechanisms; including political and electoral reform within efforts for longer term systemic change; and prioritising actions that will demonstrate transparency.

Security

People cannot thrive in an environment where they believe their survival to be in jeopardy, thus tackling violence and achieving security are linked to the need for police and wider security sector reform. Objectives for improving security and justice provision include democratic oversight and accountability and civil society empowerment; reform of defence, intelligence and security services, police, justice and prisons; and border management.³¹

According to International Peace Academy Report (2003), four essential elements provide a framework for maintaining a just regime for internal stability:

- A corpus of laws that is legitimately derived and widely promulgated and understood
- A consistent, visible, fair, and active network of police authority to enforce the laws (especially important at the local level)
- An independent, equitable, and accessible grievance redress system, including above all an impartial judicial system
- A penal system that is fair and prudent in meting out punishment

³¹ Saferworld, *Addressing Conflict*, p.4

Economy and livelihoods

According to the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (2017), the risk of conflict is higher among countries with lower per capita incomes and economic growth.

Several studies have highlighted a correlation between economic underdevelopment, employment and conflict – with 32 of the 46 countries at the bottom of the UNDP's human development index conflict-affected or fragile.³² Moreover, the OECD has set out a number of structural factors raising the risk of armed violence which include unemployment, economic grievances, rising expectations, urbanisation, and demography.³³ Although poverty is seldom a direct cause of violence or civil war, it is often a symptom of the decline of a state's capacity to protect and provide for its citizens.³⁴

Economic development is often associated with well-being which entails access to basic necessities, including health services, education, and an opportunity to earn a livelihood. Long-term solutions must be found through a state's own development policies, attentive to the particular needs of its society's economic and social sectors.³⁵

To correlate the wellbeing of the population and economic development, recommendations from the World Development Report (2011) for achieving job creation in conflict-affected and fragile contexts include:

- Large-scale community-based public works
- Simplifying private sector regulation and addressing infrastructure bottlenecks
- Investing to bring producers and markets together
- Multi-sectoral community empowerment programmes
- Providing access to finance
- Encouraging women's economic empowerment
- Action for the economic inclusion of marginalised groups

Peace is most commonly found where economic growth and opportunities to share in that growth are broadly distributed across the population. Economic growth without widespread sharing in the benefits of that growth will not reduce prospects for violent conflict and could, in fact, be a contributing factor to exacerbating tensions.³⁶

³² Saferworld, *Addressing Conflict*, p.5

³³ *Ibid.*, p.5

³⁴ The Commission, *Play to Win*, p.15

³⁵ Carnegie, *Preventing Deadly Conflict*, p.28

³⁶ Carnegie, *Preventing Deadly Conflict*, p.30

Fundamentally, the distribution of economic benefits in a society is a political question resolved through decisions regarding the kind of economic organization a society will construct, including the nature and level of governmental engagement in private sector activity. Poverty is often a structural outgrowth of these decisions, and when poverty runs in parallel with ethnic or cultural divisions, it often creates a flash point.³⁷

A second gap in the economic and social arena is in addressing the central role that natural resources often play in fuelling violence. In countries where a natural resource is a primary export commodity, the chances of these resources becoming a means to fuel instability and conflict are greatly increased.³⁸

Thus, promoting good governance requires a state to equip itself with a professional, accountable bureaucracy that is able to provide an enabling environment and handle macroeconomic management, sustained poverty reduction, education and training, and protection of the environment.³⁹

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³⁷ Ibid., p.32

³⁸ The Commission, *Play to Win*, p.16

³⁹ Carnegie, *Preventing Deadly Conflict*, p.33