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MICAH ZENKO and REBECCA R. FRIEDMAN

Despite repeated calls for a coordinated UN early warning system for preventing conflict, early warning is currently performed piecemeal by seven UN bodies and one ad hoc initiative. Due to the difficulties inherent in the UN's structure – the transparency of the organization and member states' sensitivity about perceived encroachments on their sovereignty – the UN cannot, and arguably should not, develop a comprehensive early warning system for preventing conflict. Instead, the UN could improve its ability to analyse and absorb early warning information already in the system by: reforming the Executive Office of the Secretary-General; strengthening the early warning and assessment capacities within the aforementioned bodies; soliciting greater cooperation with the US intelligence community and regional organizations; and promoting enhanced inter-agency cooperation.

Since Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali released *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-keeping* (1992), every significant internal review of the UN's role in the maintenance of peace and security has called for the urgent need to develop a comprehensive and coordinated conflict early warning system.[1] Despite the repeated efforts by the Secretariat to promote and implement the findings of these reports, member-state obstructionism has precluded development of a UN-wide early warning system of sociopolitical crises that could lead to political instability or armed conflict. Indeed, there is presently no UN-wide coordinating mechanism to collect, assess, prioritize and integrate all of the early warning reporting from the sources noted below; nor are there plans for a debate on the creation of one. What Secretary-General Kofi Annan noted in 2006 remains as true today as it was then: 'I regret to report that no significant progress has been made in this area. In fact, unlike some regional organizations, the United Nations still lacks the capability to analyze and integrate data from different parts of the system into comprehensive early warning reports and strategies on conflict prevention'.[2]

However, the current capability deficit resulting from piecemeal early warning and assessment is less significant than it would appear. Most UN staff and officials interviewed for this article believe that the information required for effective early warning already exists within the UN system, can be provided by NGO or private sector sources or is freely available over the internet. Early warning and assessment already drive country-based programmes and contingency planning in the seven UN bodies and one ad hoc initiative that either have, or are making progress toward developing, early warning systems: Department of Political Affairs, UN Development Programme (UNDP), Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), World

Food Programme (WFP), Office for the High Commissioner for Refugees (OHCHR), Office of the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG) and the Global Pulse (formerly known as the Global Impact and Vulnerability Alert System, or GIVAS). While capability gaps exist in each, these shortcomings must be addressed specifically and not through a UN-wide effort. Hence the UN's challenge lies primarily in building a robust capacity to analyse multiple streams of information from both inside and outside the organization. Indeed, the UN does not and could not have a system-wide early warning and assessment function; instead, the UN could improve mechanisms to effectively transmit information from field offices to headquarters, among early warning units, and from subsidiary bodies to decision makers at UN Headquarters.

To plan, develop and implement effective preventive strategies, decision makers usually require early warning about socio-political crises that could lead to instability or armed conflict. Ideally, this should include a comprehensive picture of the drivers of potential conflicts, a net assessment of the capabilities and intentions of the relevant parties, and specific recommendations for possible entry points for prevention or for adjustments to ongoing preventive activities. In addition, effective early warning needs to be both vivid and specific enough to attract the attention of decision makers receiving multiple sources of competing information. Each of the seven UN bodies, and the Global Pulse initiative, has their own established mandates, which largely determine their early warning and assessment system, including the collection and screening of data from internal and external sources, analysis by staffers with regional or thematic expertise, and notification to authorities through formal reporting or periodic meetings. Each of the seven also provides early warning and assessment of a range of indicators, including socio-economic crises that could lead to instability or armed conflict. As such this article is not meant to be an exhaustive survey of all possible early warning, but for those bodies most closely connected to warning for the purposes of conflict prevention.

The UN bodies analysed have a range of early warning outputs that vary in terms of frequency, formality and distribution. Some early warning reports are produced daily, while others circulate weekly, monthly, quarterly, annually or periodically. These early warning materials can also take a diversity of forms: ad hoc briefings, colour-coded risk rating maps, matrices, seismic and meteorological data and compiled news items – to name but a few. Finally, early warning outputs vary widely in terms of their intended audience and distribution. Some reports are intended only for internal distribution within a single UN body – such as situational awareness reports from DPKO missions – whereas others seek to inform the global public of important issues – such as Global Pulse.

This article has three sections. The first examines existing early warning and assessment capacity in UN bodies and evaluates their mandates, structure, reporting outputs and effectiveness. The second section outlines the obstacles posed to a comprehensive and coordinated UN early warning system, explaining why such a system cannot be permitted to operate effectively by member states. The third section offers recommendations for optimizing early warning and assessment on the basis of present structures. The analysis in this article is based primarily

upon dozens of interviews with UN staff and officials within the relevant agencies, in addition to the UN's published materials.

Existing UN Early Warning and Assessment Capacity

This section records the capacities of the UN bodies involved in early warning as of mid-2010.

Department of Political Affairs (DPA)

The DPA has an early warning mandate 'to identify potential or actual conflicts in whose resolution the United Nations could play a useful role'.[3] Since it was established in 1992, the DPA has grown to meet the constant demands from the UN system on its broad range of country, regional and thematic expertise. In effect, the DPA not only serves as a think-tank for the UN, but also has an additional operational role in the planning and management of special political missions. The current head of the DPA, Under Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe, has also advocated promoting DPA's expertise in a consultative role, helping people in the field to solve difficult problems related to conflict prevention.

The DPA produces analytical reports and briefing notes warning of incipient crises to the Under Secretary-General for Political Affairs, who chairs the Executive Committee on Peace and Security (ECPS), comprising two dozen senior officials and usually meeting twice a month to discuss pressing country or regional issues. The Under Secretary-General for Political Affairs (USG–PA) also participates in the Secretary-General's Policy Committee, 'a cabinet-style decision-making mechanism' that provides strategic guidance to the Secretariat.[4] When crises are near a 'decision-forcing point', they are often brought to the Policy Committee, where under secretaries-general share their own departments' early warning analysis.[5] The USG–PA also reports warnings of potential conflict directly to the Secretary-General, who can raise matters informally with the Security Council at its monthly working lunches, or formally on the Council's programme of work.

For many years, the DPA was significantly understaffed given its growing set of responsibilities, including its country-level analysis and monitoring and support to special political missions.[6] In March 2009, the General Assembly approved the creation of 49 additional posts. Nevertheless, the DPA remains understaffed – with shortcomings especially in the Middle East and West Africa – and underfunded, which limits desk officers' travel to build relationships in the field, thereby weakening DPA's ability to identify early warning signals.[7]

UN Development Programme

Created in 2001, the UNDP's Bureau of Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) has a mandate 'to help countries prevent and recover from armed conflicts and natural disasters'.[8] The BCPR plays a quiet role in early warning, primarily through the work of its peace and development advisers, who are deployed jointly with DPA to support resident coordinators by integrating conflict prevention into country programming, and producing conflict assessments in politically

sensitive, pre-conflict countries. Described by many as the effective 'software' for UN early warning, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding, there are presently only 26 peace and development advisers deployed in 21 countries.[9] BCPR is highly dependent on voluntary earmarked contributions to support its work through the Thematic Trust Fund for Crisis Prevention and Recovery; therefore, any expansion of its work would require enhanced budgetary support from either the current European and North American funders, or others.

Since 1995, there has been an informal mechanism for inter-agency collaboration, the UN Interagency Framework for Coordination on Preventive Action – commonly known as the 'Framework Team' (FT) – which is housed in the BCPR and managed by a secretariat of three people at a cost of US$1 million per year. The FT includes staff and officials from 22 agencies and departments – though only five or six are active participants – who meet in plenary three or four times a year, and which convenes expert reference group meetings twice a month to discuss countries or thematic issues. Some participants claimed that the FT, in effect, acts as an 'early warning antenna' for the UN system, catalysing intervention on emerging crises.[10] Others within the UN and the NGO community noted that, while the FT provides useful support for developing the long-term priorities and plans for resident coordinators and UN country teams in states where there is no mandated special political mission or peacekeeping presence, it has no clear mandate, cannot compel the active participation of all relevant agencies and departments and is disconnected from the decision-making authorities in the Secretariat.[11]

Department of Peacekeeping Operations

The DPKO was established in 1992, with a mandate to plan, manage and deploy peacekeepers when authorized by the Security Council within the framework of the UN Charter. To support this mandate, it maintains a 24-hour Situation Centre that serves as a continuous link between UN Headquarters, field missions, troop-contributing countries and relevant NGOs. The Situation Centre has two early warning components, the Operations Room (OR) and the Research and Liaison Unit (RLU). The OR focuses on situational awareness, receiving information from the field and monitoring news sources. There are three desk officers on duty at all times, each covering a geographic region of concern. OR officers formulate special incident reports, provide a monitoring feed to senior leadership three times weekly and serve as a point of contact for senior managers. Although the OR of the Situation Centre is the 'most operationally responsive part of the UN', one officer noted that the setup is inadequate, with barely enough staffing and no depth – if even one OR desk officer is sick, the entire schedule is severely disrupted.[12] Created in 2007, the RLU provides background analysis to the DPKO, taking a longer view than the quotidian focus of the OR. The RLU collects data and produces early warning reports of political, military and security trends that affect ongoing or potential peacekeeping operations for senior decision makers.[13] In going beyond situational awareness to policy advice, the RLU has encountered resistance in the UN system, with concern from other

agencies that RLU reports will pre-empt UN commission reports, or will leak externally.

DPKO also produces a daily report for UN senior managers, and provides weekly and periodic briefings for senior UN officials and the defence attachés of troop-contributing countries, which have been described by some respondents as providing the most relevant and comprehensive picture of the security situation in countries facing conflict. DPKO early warning and assessment is also used by the Office of Military Affairs' Military Planning Service for pre-deployment assessments and in developing contingency plans for prospective, ongoing or terminating peacekeeping operations.[14]

In July 2006, DPKO created joint operations centres (JOCs) and joint mission analysis centres (JMACs) to 'ensure that all peacekeeping missions have in place integrated operations monitoring, reporting and information analysis hubs at Mission headquarters to support the more effective integration of mission-wide situational awareness, security information and analysis for management decision-making'.[15] Both JOCs and JMACs work with the Situation Centre as the point of contact in New York. JOCs serve a primarily operational function, with responsibility for managing operationally related information and monitoring implementation of mission operational activities. JOCs are also tasked with requesting and collecting situation updates, making them the provider of up-to-date and short-term analysis to the Head of Mission (HOM) and Senior Management Team (SMT). JMACs are the source of medium- and long-term analysis for the HOM and SMT. They integrate all-source information in accordance with the HOM's and SMT's information priorities, to support planning, decision-making and execution of the mission mandate.[16] According to a DPKO official, the JMAC programme has achieved mixed success. Coordination between JMACs and headquarters needs improvement, and HOMs often guard JMAC outputs to protect against 'second-guessing' from officials in New York.

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

The OCHA began as the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA), which was created by UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182 in December 1991. The resolution mandated that DHA facilitate 'international cooperation to address emergency situations and to strengthen the response capacity of affected countries … in accordance with international law and national laws'. When evaluating the work of the DHA, Secretary-General Kofi Annan found that it had taken on too great an operational role. To remedy this he placed operational responsibilities elsewhere, changing DHA into a coordinating body, the OCHA.[17] OCHA's mission is to 'alleviate human suffering in disasters and emergencies; advocate for the rights of people in need; promote preparedness and prevention; and to facilitate sustainable solutions'.

In its present form, crisis prevention is a central tenet of OCHA's work; as such, early warning is crucial to successful execution of its planning and coordination. The OCHA's Coordination and Response Division maintains an Early Warning and Contingency Planning Section, which advises the Under-Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator and senior

management of potential emergency scenarios and preparedness actions. The Early Warning and Contingency Planning (EWCP) section utilizes a methodology that includes social, economic, political and environmental indicators to assess risks, evaluate trends and produce early warning products in the form of 'snapshot' assessments and, if necessary, more in-depth analyses of the human security sectors in a given country.[18] OCHA also works with the Emergency Preparedness Section in Geneva and regional offices to develop common approaches to vulnerability assessment, risk analysis, emergency preparedness and contingency planning.[19]

OCHA houses and chairs the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), which coordinates humanitarian efforts among 17 UN and non-UN partners under the leadership of the Emergency Relief Coordinator. Hence OCHA, and the EWCP section in particular, has responsibility for drafting the quarterly humanitarian-focused Early Warning–Early Action Report, which represents the consensus view of all IASC participants on the status of world crises, concerning trends, and minimum preparatory actions for immediate execution by country teams.[20] The report monitors 70 to 80 countries, eight regions and a 'global' category for potential transnational crises such as the El Niño effect on weather and pandemic influenza. OCHA circulates the final report to the IASC and also shares it with an expert reference group that determines the 'minimum preparedness actions' for each country team and assigns lead UN agencies. The three most critical scenarios from each report are referred to the emergency directors, who use the report's conclusions to make operational decisions on prepositioning of humanitarian aid or immediate intervention. Finally, the OCHA representative to the FT shares the conclusions of each quarterly report under the standing agenda item to discuss countries of concern. According to an OCHA official, the inter-agency process is critical to effective early warning because there is 'strength in unity' in that member states cannot blame a single agency if they disagree with the conclusions of the Early Warning–Early Action Report.

World Food Programme

The WFP is mandated to use food 'as an aid to economic and social development'.[21] In 2004, UNGA Resolution 58/214 recommended the strengthening of coordination and cooperation to integrate UN early warning activities and expertise. WFP led the IASC Early Warning Working Group and, in that capacity, pioneered the Inter-agency Humanitarian Early Warning website (HEWS-Web), which was based on the WFP's already-extant Global Early Warning system. HEWS-Web reports on sources of natural disasters – including storms, flooding and volcanic and seismic activity – based on data from external partners. The eight-person Emergency Preparedness and Response Branch (ODAP) located at WFP headquarters in Rome prepares a quarterly-updated socio-political trends map, which used to be featured on HEWS-Web, but was removed in early 2010. WFP is currently working to develop a successor to HEWS-Web, known as 'HEWS-II', using grant money received from an NGO's voluntary unenacted contribution. The new system will focus on socio-political analysis, creating a product similar to the OCHA Early Warning–Early Action Report. Although

some IASC partners no longer participate in HEWS-Web, all IASC members are expected to contribute to HEWS-II.[22]

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

The OHCHR is mandated to 'promote and protect the enjoyment and full realization, by all people, of all rights established in the Charter of the United Nations and in international human rights laws and treaties'.[23] Under the leadership of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, it oversees the 'special procedures' of the Human Rights Council – mandated special rapporteurs, special representatives of the secretary-general, independent experts, or working groups – that monitor and publicly report on thematic issues or human rights situations in specific countries. When a special rapporteur or working group notices human rights violations portending conflict, they can sound the alarm through mechanisms including regular reports to the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly as well as urgent appeals and letters of allegations – both of which can be made public – to member states about potential human rights violations. Presently, 55 mandate holders address 31 thematic and eight country issues that cover a range of human rights-related topics.[24]

Although special rapporteurs have sometimes succeeded in mobilizing the international action to prevent large-scale human rights violations, their warnings often fall on deaf ears. In perhaps the most notorious example, the special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary executions visited Rwanda in 1993 and flagged the country as a possible site of genocide; he returned again in 1994 and reported that the situation had worsened. However, neither the Rwandan government nor the UN reacted to his reports. A similar, albeit smaller-scale, scenario unfolded in Gujarat, India in 1996. Further, special procedures suffer from impediments that arise in the Human Rights Council. Mandates for new special procedures have increased rapidly, without commensurate increases in funding, staff or any support for media strategies. The composition of the Council – and particularly the presence of the 'Like-Minded Group'[25] that opposes active, effective special procedures – has also hindered the ability of the Council to address country-specific situations through special procedures and even Council debates.[26] As a means to improve the responsiveness to human rights warnings, or to bypass the Council when necessary, it was recommended that two to three analysts within the Executive Office of the High Commissioner be dedicated solely to monitoring and reporting trends within countries of concern.[27]

Office of the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide

The OSAPG, created in 2004, has the explicit mandate to 'act as a mechanism of early warning to the Secretary-General, and through him to the Security Council, by bringing to their attention potential situations that could result in genocide'.[28] Juan Mendez, the first special adviser, and his successor, Francis Deng, took steps to fulfil their role both quietly, through notes to the Secretariat that are reported

to the Security Council by briefing each incoming president of the Security Council, and publicly, through the release of short statements (for example, regarding the Democratic Republic of Congo in December 2008 and Sri Lanka in May 2009).[29] There is an ongoing debate in the OSAPG over whether the Special Adviser's role is to 'name and shame', or if such an approach would close doors to places where the Special Adviser could make a difference. And, as the OSAPG works to define its approach, the office's UN partners have not yet established how best to leverage the OSAPG to further their conflict prevention agendas.

In the autumn of 2009, the OSAPG released an 'Analysis Framework' for early warning, developed in consultation with UN and non-UN experts. The framework contained eight categories of factors used by the Special Adviser to determine if there might be a risk of genocide in specific situations. However, it could be tailored to provide early warning of potential armed conflict before it rises to the level of genocide. At the time of writing in mid-2010, it was underutilized, with only one person tasked to collect and screen information and assist in the compilation of reports of potential genocide in key countries. One OSAPG officer noted that a handful of additional staff would substantially enhance the office's ability to do early warning. Nevertheless, OSAPG hoped that this framework would be adopted by early warning units across the UN system.[30]

In mid-2009, plans for integrating the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) into the OSAPG were presented to the General Assembly. Rather than developing new early warning data, R2P–OSAPG would sift through information already in the system, particularly information from field agencies to headquarters, and analyse it through an R2P lens. This would require adjusting the existing OSAPG early warning framework, as the R2P concept has a more ambitious scope, declaring that 'each individual State has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity'.[31] Proposals for a joint R2P–Genocide Prevention Office was to be submitted to the General Assembly later in 2010, although the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and the Special Adviser for R2P are already de facto operating in tandem.[32] Of course, additional resources are a prerequisite for any expansion of the OSAPG office, and R2P has only recently become adequately mainstreamed to expect funding through the normal UN budget.[33] In September 2009, after a heated thematic debate months earlier, the General Assembly adopted by consensus its first resolution in support of the concept of the R2P.[34] With General Assembly endorsement, and Security Council support in Resolutions 1674 and 1706, the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on R2P planned, as of January 2010, to request funding from the Fifth Committee for a few additional posts for the OSAPG to include early warning for the additional three crimes found in R2P.[35]

Global Impact and Vulnerability Alert System

In April 2009, the Group of 20 (G-20) London summit communiqué 'call[ed] on the UN, working with other global institutions, to establish an effective mechanism to monitor the impact of the [financial] crisis on the poorest and most

vulnerable'.[36] In July, the UN unveiled the Global Pulse, which aspired to create a 'decision support network that enables rapid and effective action to protect poor and vulnerable populations in times of compound global crises'.[37] A first iteration of the Global Pulse's analytical and technical monitoring platform was being developed in collaboration with a small number of 'adopter countries', UN agencies and outside experts. The Global Pulse initiative aimed to collate existing UN data sets to improve cross-sector analysis of development challenges. In addition, it will explore how new and emerging technologies – such as mobile phone-based data collection – could be harnessed to allow greater access to updated economic and social impact data.[38] The first two Global Pulse reports (September and November 2009), warned of the lasting socio-economic effects of the financial crisis on poor and vulnerable populations.[39]

While still a work in progress, it appears that the Global Pulse initiative will focus primarily on collecting, sorting and evaluating timely data from a wide variety of sources on apolitical humanitarian and economic indicators. Some Secretariat officials insist that Global Pulse is not an early warning system, as conflict early warning in the UN is 'too hot to touch'.[40] Indeed, the risks of officially labelling Global Pulse a conflict warning system were particularly acute during its nascent stages, when it was not well funded or established. Another UN staff member involved in developing the Global Pulse concept, however, believed that it could evolve to become a mechanism for a comprehensive UN early warning system.[41] Regardless, the datastreams that it tracks have provided useful instability indicators for conflict prevention practitioners. In any case, it is difficult to predict the exact course of Global Pulse given its technological sophistication and innovative nature, which is scheduled to develop over five to ten years with substantial input from external actors.[42]

'We're in a Glass House'

Given the long-standing resistance of member states to monitoring for political crises or instability, it is difficult to envisage a comprehensive and coordinated UN early warning and assessment system dedicated to preventing conflict.[43] Indeed, as one senior UN official put it, contingency planning of any sort is 'a hypersensitive area'. According to a DPA officer, when the UN tried to do systematic warning in the 1990s, member states would simply contact the reporting agency and ask to be removed from the 'watch list'.[44] The 2001 'Brahimi Report' recommended that the Executive Committee on Peace and Security establish an Information and Strategic Analysis Secretariat (EISAS) to consolidate the 'various departmental units that are assigned policy and information analysis roles related to peace and security'.[45] While the Secretary-General twice proposed the creation of an EISAS to provide analytical support for ongoing field missions, the initiative was summarily squashed by the Non-Aligned Movement. Detractors feared that the EISAS could be coopted by national intelligence agencies, and that the probability of military intervention within a state would increase as a result of the highlighting of its potential internal instability or conflict.[46]

The UN undeniably exists in a 'glass house'; it is highly likely that any internal instability watch list would be leaked to NGOs or the press.[47] In early 2010, the IASC Early Warning – Early Action Report for IASC Member Agencies, an inter-agency early warning report described as 'highly sensitive and internal', was freely available on the internet in an updated form.[48] Member-state spying further undermines any possibility of secrecy or discretion within the organization.[49] Consequently, an early warning list of nations on the brink of a crisis that could lead to armed conflict would most likely be widely broadcast. Moreover, with the UN imprimatur, an official early warning report would carry more weight than the numerous NGO watch lists in circulation. From the perspective of a member state that appears on a UN watch list, three potentially damaging consequences could arise.

First, there is the general aversion of member states to being monitored by any outside organization for activities that occur within their sovereign territory. They fear that enhanced UN surveillance will be a precursor to international intervention in their internal affairs. The most vocal proponents of this position are Non-Aligned Movement nations committed to the principle of non-interference, primarily Cuba, Nicaragua, Myanmar, Venezuela and Sudan.

Second, there is the risk that the prediction of impending political crisis becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. One can imagine that an insurgency or violent political opposition could be emboldened by the UN's prediction that they might successfully unseat the government. In the case of incipient genocide or 'ethnic cleansing', UN reporting might accelerate or even trigger the brewing tensions that would lead to mass killing. Finally, UN prediction of a fraudulent election or post-election violence could inspire such a reaction, or even prevent the election from taking place at all. In each of these cases, the member-state government suffers as a result of being highlighted by the UN – no matter how justified the designation.

Third, there is a risk of adverse economic consequences of 'watch list designation'. For many developing nations, foreign direct investment is a crucial part of the national plan for economic growth. But from the investor's perspective there is a risk-to-reward calculus involved in putting money in developing or 'emerging' markets. Given official indication by the UN that a country was on the verge of political crisis, liquid capital would immediately flow out of the country as investors sought more secure assets. Bond ratings might also be lowered, further upsetting markets.

From Early Warning to Early Action

Translating early warning and assessment into early action presents another set of challenges. Many early warning staff and officials who produce specific reports of near-term crises believe that their efforts often go unnoticed by senior decision makers who face more pressing demands on their time. Even when a nascent crisis does capture the attention of senior decision makers and the Secretary-General, transmitting the matter to the Security Council – the UN body with the most robust capacity and mandated authority to respond – is difficult.

There are three ways that the Secretary-General can raise an issue on the Security Council agenda. First, the Secretary-General or any Security Council member can place an item on the agenda of informal monthly lunches. Although this is the simplest method of approach, discussion at a lunch does not ensure that the topic will appear on the Security Council agenda. Second, the Secretary-General can ask the Security Council President to put an issue on the Security Council agenda. In practice, this option has proven difficult primarily because the Council's rigid agenda is already packed with mission reports or thematic debates, but also because of the political sensitivity of addressing political crises involving certain member countries, such as Israel and Myanmar. Third, the Secretary-General may invoke Chapter 15, Article 99 of the UN Charter, which states, 'The Secretary-General may bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security'. In practice, however, Article 99 has been invoked formally on few occasions due to the cumbersome process and risk of political embarrassment that it entails for the Secretary-General if the Security Council declines to respond seriously.[50] Consequently, despite this provision in the Charter, in practice it is difficult for the Secretary-General to act under it.

In mid-2010, Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon initiated a new procedure for reviewing early warning of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing or crimes against humanity (the four crimes captured under 'R2P'). If the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide or the Special Adviser for R2P identifies a situation where one of these crimes may occur, and if the national government is 'manifestly failing to protect their populations from these crimes', the Secretary-General can ask the Special Adviser to convene a meeting of relevant under secretaries-general to define policy options for preventive action. These options are reported to either the Secretary-General or the Policy Committee; if he chooses, the Secretary-General may present the options to the Security Council by the mechanisms outlined above.[51]

Even without Security Council action, early warning can shape country-based programmes and contingency planning. There are also conflict prevention tools that do not necessarily require a Security Council mandate, such as mediation. In addition to ad hoc efforts by high-level officials, the DPA has housed a Mediation Support Unit (MSU) since 2006. The MSU's Mediation Standby Team is a six-person roster of country and thematic experts that can be deployed within three days for up to a month to support the mediation efforts by the UN, regional organizations and NGOs. In its first year, members of the Standby Team were deployed 26 times to ten countries in support of mediation efforts, for example, in Kenya and Madagascar.[52]

Recommendations and Conclusion

Given the existing capacity for early warning in the seven UN bodies and one ad hoc initiative, and the continued resistance of states to a comprehensive and coordinated warning system, what practical recommendations can be made? This article makes two types of recommendations: for improving the quality of early

warning information and analysis within each UN body, and for potential UN system-wide improvements in coordinating and exploiting early warning activities.

First, and most importantly, there is presently nobody in the Secretariat dedicated solely to collecting, analysing and integrating all the UN early warning reporting described above. Past efforts by secretaries-general to create a dedicated in-house capacity – such as Javier Pérez de Cuéllar's Office for Research and the Collection of Information – were discontinued by their successors.[53] The Secretary-General should designate trained professionals within the Strategic Planning Unit of the Secretariat to serve as a repository of early warning information, which would then be aggregated and transmitted for discussion under a standing agenda item at the Secretary-General's Policy Committee. Given that there are currently fewer posts designated for the Strategic Planning Unit than assigned to the Secretary-General's Scheduling Office, greater funding would be critical for employing more early warning professionals.[54] For reasons discussed below, this funding will likely have to come from extra-budgetary sources.

Even without a full-time early warning official, greater day-to-day prioritization of early warning by the Secretary-General and his under secretaries-general could make a significant impact. One UN manager noted that if the Secretary-General and under secretaries-general had even one hour per week devoted to early warning and conflict prevention, the entire UN system would shift greater focus towards early warning to meet the senior managers' requirements and expectations. In order to create space for high-level attention to early warning, many UN officials believe that terminating outdated agendas, mandates and missions would unclog the senior managers' schedules, as well as the Security Council's monthly programme of work.

Second, almost every UN early warning body is underfunded or understaffed to an extent that they cannot adequately fulfil their mandates. Consequently, early warning units independently prioritize those few countries or regions they believe are most pressing and most important for senior decision-makers. Such a narrow and near-term focus implies that there may be quieter emerging crises that are receiving little or no attention. Due to the resistance of member states in the Fifth Committee, it is unlikely that additional posts for early warning could be funded through the normal UN budget. The make-do solution has been for national governments or NGOs to provide voluntary unenacted contributions to fill the gaps. Expanded support from national governments and NGOs – in the range of US$30–50 million annually – would significantly enhance the capacity for early warning and assessment within each of the UN's early warning bodies.

Third, the US government maintains the largest, most comprehensive and best-funded intelligence system in the world. Approximately 100,000 people work in 16 different agencies with a budget of over US$75 billion per year, which includes military and non-military activities.[55] American and UN officials described some degree of intelligence cooperation through two existing channels, which could be significantly enhanced. The State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Humanitarian Information Unit (HIU) provides the first

channel. The HIU is a 15-person section that provides unclassified information – such as through its 'Conflicts Without Borders' biannual conflict map and socio-economic reporting – that is utilized by some UN humanitarian agencies.[56] In addition to educating UN humanitarian staff about the availability of HIU reports, the HIU should provide the UN with guidance regarding early warning best practices. The other channel consists of a highly secret mechanism by which US intelligence officials provide warning of threats to deployed UN peace-keepers or staff. While DPKO officials welcomed this support, they noted that the threat intelligence was 'too late, too vague, and too ad-hoc' to adequately and reliably warn the JMACs and JOCs. To remedy this inadequacy, DPKO and the US intelligence community should consider institutionalizing a mechanism for sharing more descriptive intelligence about threats to deployed peacekeepers at an earlier stage. This sharing could be regularized yet adequately informal so as to keep it secret. One possibility is for the Director of National Intelligence to designate a US military official, who is presently seconded to serve at the UN, as the conduit for intelligence-sharing with the DPKO – if this is not already happening.[57] Other countries with access to on-the-ground intelligence impacting on UN peacekeeping operations should consider similar procedures.

Fourth, several UN agencies described disagreements about how to prioritize their collection efforts, and to what degree to share raw and finished analysis. This was specifically noted as an occasional issue between the DPA and the DPKO. When asked how early warning was shared on a day-to-day basis, many of the staff pointed to the FT or personal relationships between staff doing similar work in different departments. However, as indicated above, only a handful of agencies participate actively in the FT, which has no mandate to compel cooperation, while others are highly sceptical of its effectiveness. One UN official suggested that the participating agencies are generally the most relevant ones, but many UN officials who work on conflict prevention and early warning knew little or nothing about the FT.[58]

Either the FT Secretariat should be enhanced with additional staff and a clear mandate from the Security Council or General Assembly, or a different inter-agency mechanism for sharing information between early warning offices could be created to replace the FT entirely. Joint strategic exercises to optimize data interoperability are a first step toward addressing the sharing issue. The Secretary-General and senior managers could also help to ameliorate this problem by working to inculcate a culture of collaboration in the UN system. Cooperation between UN bodies might be included in their mandates and rewarded when performed effectively. Additionally, collaboration training could be combined with early warning training and required for all relevant staff and officials.

Fifth, several regional organizations have mandates, and some existing capacity, for early warning and assessment: the EU's Policy Planning and Early Warning Unit in the European Council's Secretariat, the Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) in Europe's Conflict Prevention Centre, the Organization of American States' (OAS) early warning units within the Department of Sustainable Democracy and Special Missions, and the African Union's Continental Early Warning System, which is anticipated to collect and analyse information

supplied by the five regional economic communities. Enhanced UN–regional organization cooperation is a rhetorical priority for Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, who chaired a January 2010 summit with the heads of 14 organizations. Likewise, in January, the Security Council called for 'closer and more operational cooperation between the UN and regional and sub-regional organizations in the fields of conflict early warning, prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding, and to ensure the coherence, synergy and collective effectiveness of their efforts'.[59] However, according to the early warning staff at the UN and within these regional organizations, there is no formal sharing of information even for joint political or peacekeeping missions, and only a vague idea of what each other is doing through informal meetings.[60]

Any updated work plan for broader UN–regional organization cooperation could go beyond simply building capacity and include modalities for the formal sharing of timely and relevant early warning information, analytical reporting and best practices. For those regional organizations with more developed early warning capabilities – namely the EU, the OSCE and the OAS – closer cooperation may yield analysis and best practices useful to both parties. For regional organizations working to develop early warning systems – the AU, African regional communities and perhaps eventually the Association of South-East Asian Nations – cooperation will be more of a one-way street, the UN providing resources and expertise. In the short term, it is unlikely that the UN will receive valuable information in return. Nevertheless, the UN could invest in these developing regional systems to reap the rewards from future early waning capacities.

The UN has sufficient information within the system for the purposes of early warning and assessment. Additional information is available from private corporations at some cost – the *Economist* Intelligence Unit was mentioned by respondents – or freely from NGOs such as the International Crisis Group and Human Rights Watch. While developing a comprehensive and coordinated conflict early warning system would be the ideal arrangement, it will never be permitted by member states. Therefore, the practical solution might be to reform the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, strengthen the early warning and assessment capacities within the aforementioned bodies, solicit greater informal cooperation with the US intelligence community and institutionalized cooperation with regional organizations and promote inter-agency cooperation. With the fall-out from a global economic crisis, peacekeepers deployed around the world, and the looming spectre of climate change, the need for more a timely and relevant early warning system of socio-political crises that could lead to instability or armed conflict has never been greater. By taking steps to build upon existing early warning capacity, the UN is well within reach of its long-time goal to achieve a true culture of prevention.

NOTES

1. See *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-keeping*, Report of the Secretary-General, 17 June 1992, UN doc. A/47/277, paras 26–7; 'Facing the Humanitarian Challenge: Towards a Culture of Prevention', reprinted as introduction to *Report of the Secretary-General on the Work of the Organization*, 1999, UN doc. A/54/1, p.68; *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, 21 Aug. 2000, UN doc. A/55/305, pp.1,54; *Prevention of Armed Conflict*, Report of the Secretary-General, June 2001, UN doc. A/55/985, p.7; *Interim Report of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Armed Conflict*, Report of the Secretary-General, 12 Sept. 2003, UN doc. A/58/365, p.4; *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*, Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, 2004, UN doc. A/59/565, p.37; UN General Assembly, '2005 World Summit Outcome', 15 Sept. 2005, UN doc. A/RES/60/1, p.31; *Progress Report on the Prevention of Armed Conflict*, Report of the Secretary-General,18 July 2006, UN doc. A/55/985, pp.13,20,27,33; and *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect*, Report of the Secretary-General, 12 Jan. 2009, UN doc. A/63/677, pp.4,6,8,29,31–3.
2. *Progress Report on the Prevention of Armed Conflict* (see n.1 above), p.27.
3. *Prevention of Armed Conflict* (see n.1 above), p.19.
4. UN Department of Political Affairs, 'Policy Coordination: the Executive Committee on Peace and Security' (at: www.un.org/depts/dpa/ecps.html); Rama Mani, 'Peaceful Settlement of Disputes and Conflict Prevention', in Thomas G. Weiss and Sam Daws (eds), *The Oxford Handbook on the United Nations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p.315; *In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All*, Report of the Secretary-General, 21 Mar. 2005, UN doc. A/59/2005, p.47; *Policy Committee of the Secretary-General: Manual*, June 2008 (at: http://secint50.un.org/en/development/other/ecesa/private/documents/2009%20ECESA%20Documents/PCmanual-June%2008.pdf).
5. Interview with senior UN official, May 2010.
6. UN Economic and Social Council, *Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the In-Depth Evaluation of Political Affairs*, 9 May 2006, UN doc. E/AC.51/2006/4, p.11; UN Economic and Social Council, *Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the In-depth Evaluation of Political Affairs: Field Special Political Missions Led by the Department of Political Affairs but Supported by the Department of Field Support*, 14 April 2008, UN doc. E/AC.51/2008/2; and interview with UN officials, Nov. 2009.
7. 'Strengthening of the Department of Political Affairs', Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly, 5 Mar. 2009, UN doc. A/RES/63/261; and interview with UN officials, Nov. 2009.
8. UNDP–BCPR, 'Our Mandate' (at www.undp.org/cpr/we_are/mandate.shtml).
9. UN Development Programme Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, *Annual Report 2008*, July 2009, p.8l; UN Department of Political Affairs, *Politically Speaking*, Spring 2009, pp.16–17; interviews with UN staff and officials, Nov. 2009 and Jan. 2010.
10. Interview with senior UN official, May 2010.
11. Interviews with UN staff, Jan. 2010; UN Interagency Framework for Coordination on Preventive Action, 'The UN Interagency Framework for Coordination on Preventive Action', Nov. 2009.
12. Interview with DPKO staff, Dec. 2009.
13. Giselle Chang, 'Peacekeeping the Agency that Never Sleeps', *UNA–USA World Bulletin*, 19 Aug. 2009 (at: unausa.org/worldbulletin/peacekeeping).
14. Interviews with UN officials and defence attachés, Dec. 2009.
15. UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *Joint Operations Centres and Joint Mission Analysis Centre*, UN doc., POL/2006/300/04, 1 July 2006; Philip Shelter-Jones, 'Intelligence in Integrated UN Peacekeeping Missions: The Joint Mission Analysis Centre', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.15, No.4, 2009, pp.517–27.
16. UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (see n.15 above).
17. Kofi Annan, *Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform*, 14 July 1997, paras 76–7,180–93.
18. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Early Warning Unit: Methodology for Humanitarian Early Warning Analysis' (at: http://hdr.undp.org/docs/network/hdr_net/HS_Ocha_EW_Methodology.pdf). When OCHA's Early Warning Unit was re-named the 'Early Warning and Contingency Planning Section' and moved into the Coordination and Response Division, the methodology utilized was enhanced but remained consistent. See UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *OCHA in 2007: Activities and Extra-budgetary Funding Requirements*, Dec. 2006, p.34.

19. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Early Warning and Contingency Planning Section' (at: http://ochaonline.un.org/AboutOCHA/Organigramme/CoordinationandResponseD ivisionCRD/EarlyWarningandContingencyPlanningSection/tabid/1263/language/en-US/Default. aspx).

20. Interview with OCHA official, Feb. 2010.

21. UN General Assembly, 'World Food Programme', Resolution 1714 (XVI) (at: http://daccess-ods. un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=A/RES/1714(XVI)&Lang=E&Area=RESOLUTION).

22. Interview with OCHA Official, Feb. 2010.

23. UNHCHR, 'Mandate' (at: www.ohchr.org/EN/AboutUs/Pages/Mandate.aspx).

24. UN Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'Special Procedures Assumed by the Human Rights Council: Thematic Mandates', updated 15 Dec. 2009; 'Special Procedures Assumed by the Human Rights Council: Country Mandates', updated 1 Nov. 2009; Statement by Navanethem Pillay, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'Round Table on Special Procedures: Early Warning and Emerging Issues', New York, 23 Oct. 2009; UNHCHR, 'Human Rights Experts Have a Key Role in Early Warning', 23 Nov. 2009 (at: www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/KeyRoleEarlyWarning.aspx).

25. Historically composed of states such as Algeria, China, Cuba, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Libya, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia and Sudan – most of whom have poor human rights records by Western standards.

26. Jeroen Gutter, 'Special Procedures and the Human Rights Council: Achievements and Challenges Ahead', *Human Rights Law Review*, Vol.7, No.1, 2007, pp.93–107.

27. Interview with OHCHR Official, Oct. 2009.

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29. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 'Speaker Series with Juan Mendez', 16 Feb. 2006 (at: www.ushmm.org/genocide/analysis/details.php?content=2006-02-16); *Report of the Secretary-General on the Work of the Organization*, 2009, UN doc. A/64/1, p.13; UN OSAPG, 'The Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide' (at: www.un.org/preventgenocide/ adviser/index.shtml).

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31. '2005 World Summit Outcome' (see n.1 above), para.138.

32. 'Early Warning, Assessment and the Responsibility to Protect', Report of the Secretary-General, UN doc. A/64/864, 14 July 2010, para.17; interviews with UN officials, July 2010.

33. *Efforts of the United Nations System to Prevent Genocide and the Activities of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide*, Report of the Secretary-General, UN doc. A/HRC/10/30, 18 Feb. 2009, p.16.

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36. The London Summit 2009, 'Global Plan for Recovery and Reform', 2 Apr. 2009 (at: www. londonsummit.gov.uk/resources/en/news/15766232/communique-020409).

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41. Interviews with UN staff, Nov. 2009.

42. Interview with UN staff, Feb. 2010.

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46. William J. Durch, Victoria K. Holt, Caroline Earle and Moira Shanahan, *The Brahimi Report and the Future of UN Peace Operations*, The Henry L. Stimson Center, 2003, pp.38–40.
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50. A. Walter Dorn, 'Early and Late Warning by the UN Secretary-General of Threats to the Peace: Article 99 Revisited', in Albrecht Schnabel and David Carment (eds), *Conflict Prevention from Rhetoric to Reality*, New York: Lexington Books, 2004, pp.305,332.
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54. UN General Assembly, 'Proposed Programme Budget for the Biennium: 2010–2011', 29 April 2009, p.49.
55. US Office of the Director of National Intelligence, '"Remarks and Q&A by the Director of National Intelligence, Mr. Dennis C. Blair," at the Commonwealth Club of California, San Francisco, CA', 15 Sept. 2009 (at: www.dni.gov/speeches/20090915_speech.pdf).
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57. Provided there was Executive Branch notification to the appropriate Congressional committees, this would be legal under US law. See Code of Federal Regulations, title 50, 404g, 'Restrictions on Intelligence Sharing with the United Nations'.
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59. UN Security Council, 'Statement by the President of the Security Council', UN doc. S/PRST/2010/1, 13 Jan. 2010 (at: www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/RO%20SPRST%202010%201.pdf).
60. Interviews with UN, EU and OAS officials, Nov. 2009 to Feb. 2010.