Is there a preventive action renaissance?
The policy and practice of preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention

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■ Executive summary

Preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention are intended to stop armed conflicts before they escalate. Conflict prevention is a broader concept referring to the monitoring, containment, and reduction of risk factors that shape war onset, intensification, and spread. Both constructs were conceived in the latter half of the 20th century, which was characterised by a sizeable array of international or interstate wars. There has since been a growth in capacities to anticipate and prevent conflicts before they erupt. This report considers historical trends, emerging opportunities, and recurrent challenges associated with preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention. Recommendations for future conflict prevention activities include sharing but not aligning conflict analyses, aligning conflict analyses with local understandings and terminology, researching drivers of peace separately from drivers of violence, studying the micro-determinants of success in preventive action, beginning a dialogue on the co-ordination of preventive action, and ensuring sufficient and flexible financing for preventive action.

Introduction

Preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention are intended to stop armed conflicts before they escalate to widespread violence. In practical terms, preventive diplomacy refers to the use of mediation and resolution to avert a descent into war. Conflict prevention is a broader concept referring to the monitoring, containment, and reduction of risk factors that shape war onset, intensification, and spread. Both constructs were conceived in the latter half of the 20th century, which was characterised by a sizeable array of international or interstate wars. There has since been a growth in capacities to anticipate and prevent conflicts before they erupt. Notwithstanding a resurgence of interest in preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention by the United Nations (UN), "preventive action" continues to face daunting constraints. Commissioned by NOREF, this report considers historical trends, emerging opportunities and recurrent challenges associated with preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention, and makes recommendations for future action.

Drawing on an extensive review of the academic and policy literature and a review of UN resolutions and declarations, the report detects a number of general trends:

- The transformation in the organisation and intensity of violence from inter- and intrastate conflicts to protracted turbulence and transitions is precipitating a shift in preventive action.
- New and emerging quantitative and qualitative evidence reveals that preventive action – including preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention – is contributing to reduced conflict onset, duration and recurrence, although informed explanations of why this is the case are more limited.
- Over the past two decades there has been a rapid growth in rhetorical commitments to preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention, with a growing emphasis on comprehensive approaches (including operational, structural and systemic prevention) emphasising national and local capacities.
- The ever-expanding array of goals expected of preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention may also be contributing to an expanding gap between discourse and practice.
- There is nonetheless a progressive institutionalisation of conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy – including mediation capacities – within the UN, with a focus on expanding partnerships with regional and non-UN agencies.

- The past two decades have also witnessed a significant expansion in the number of non-UN agencies and organisations involved in preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention, creating new opportunities, but also collective action dilemmas.
- The preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention communities are following new approaches, such as insider mediation and peace architectures; adopting innovative practices; and including new players, such as mayors of cities and private groups.

There appears to be a renewed appetite among diplomats and practitioners from UN member states and agencies to invest in preventive action, including both preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention. In fact, 2012 was dubbed the "year of prevention" by the UN secretary-general, and related activities feature prominently in his five-year action agenda (see UN, 2012b). Given global financial uncertainty and the austerity measures undertaken by member states as a result of the post-2008 global financial crisis, the financial appeal of prevention is hardly surprising. The allocation of modest resources to preventing violent conflict rather than paying for dramatically more costly relief, recovery and reconstruction efforts makes economic sense (see Gowan, 2011). Moreover, there is evidence that investments in prevention – from negotiating peace agreements to monitoring election violence – are worthwhile.[2] Even so, preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention measures continue to confront limited political traction and donor support. While this stems from challenges associated with anticipating future risks, the slow uptake is also due to the transforming nature of violence. There are concerns that 20th-century tools may need upgrading to match 21st-century forms of instability.

The transformation of organised violence

After decades of open and proxy warfare during the cold war era, the prevention of international and internal armed conflicts assumed a higher priority in the 1990s.[3] Major atrocities – the genocide in Rwanda, ethnic conflicts and genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and state collapse in Somalia – concentrated minds both within and outside the UN Security Council and General Assembly. An over-riding concern was to identify ways to prevent simmering conflicts from escalating into full-scale wars and to limit the prospect for suffering and regional contagion. Yet, curiously, there has been a pronounced downturn in the number of armed conflicts since 1989, when they were peaking at roughly 50 per year. Today, international and civil wars are fewer, smaller and more localised (see Goldstein,

2011). As Mueller (2009) observes, civil wars have virtually "ceased to exist" and many are closer to organised crime than classic forms of war.[4] Armed groups are increasingly acting at a global level, whether extracting rents from cocaine in Colombia, from coltan in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, from citizens in El Salvador, etc. Many of these new forms of violence bear the hallmarks of armed conflict (including surpassing thresholds of direct deaths and involving groups exerting robust command and control), even if they are not formally described as such, in some cases threatening municipal, national and even regional security.[5]

Although scholars and diplomats are increasingly aware that the character of organised violence is changing, they are less certain about why this is the case. They are even less sure about what this transformation implies for 21st-century preventive action. Indeed, researchers tend to agree that declines in interstate conflicts and civil wars are due to the changing strategic calculations of major powers in the post-cold war era, as well as an unprecedented rise in UN-mandated interventions (see Wallensteen, 2012). Moreover, many concede that smaller rebellions and mid-sized insurgencies are less likely to escalate into full-blown conflicts thanks to the emergence of a dense network of prevention-focused international, regional and national institutions (see Kumar, 2011; Van Tongeren, 2011). This is not to say that protracted low-intensity forms of violence are insignificant or no longer a concern. On the contrary, they are often deeply entrenched, geographically diverse and exceedingly difficult to end.[6] What is more, explosive social unrest in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria and elsewhere has underlined the limits of international response. Likewise, the growing scale of organised criminal violence fuelled by transnational criminal networks is challenging traditional definitions of conflict and forcing a rethinking of entry points for intervention (see Muggah, 2012a; Muggah & Krause, 2009).

There is a growing evidence base on the 21st-century character and distribution of organised violence. As noted above, scholars have acquired a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of conflict onset, duration and termination (see Blattman, 2010; Hegre, 2004). Based on past trends of conflict and non-conflict deaths, Krause et al. (2011) find that roughly 55,000 people are killed each year in war zones and another 396,000 die over the same period as a result of homicide in ostensibly peaceful settings. This suggests that nine out of ten violent deaths currently occur outside of traditional war zones, thus raising additional questions about the appropriateness of the

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2   See Department of Peace and Conflict Research (2012) for statistical assessments on the decline of conflict frequency and intensity.
3   The Carnegie Commission on the Prevention of Deadly Conflict, established in 1994, is routinely singled out by scholars and practitioners as the genuine "starting point" of serious engagement on the issues of conflict prevention. See <http://carnegie.org/publications/search-publications/?word=deadly+conflict>.
4   Mueller writes (2009: 310): "No matter how defined, then, there has been a most notable decline in the frequency of wars over the last years ... between 2002 and 2008, few wars really shattered the 1,000 battle or battle-related death threshold. Beyond the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, violent flare-ups have exceeded the yearly battle death threshold during the period in Kashmir, Nepal, Colombia, Burundi, Liberia, Chechnya, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Chad, Somalia, Pakistan and Uganda."
5   See IRIN (2013) for a review and other related trends.
6   The theoretical contributions on the microdynamics of conflict, including greed and grievance, particularly those of Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, are worth noting. See also Rangelov and Kaldor (2012).

international community's structure and standard crisis-response toolkit, focused as it is on stemming convention-al warfare. Moreover, researchers are expanding quan-titative state-centric assessments of conflict defined by the number of deaths per year to account for ever-more-sophisticated micro-level assessments of the motivations and means shaping the behaviour of armed groups.

The international community is currently faced with a wide range of settings beset by rapidly escalating turbulence, tensions and transitions, as opposed to outright armed conflict or warfare.[7] In some cases it is not clear if and how parties are able to guarantee the implementation of agreements or the extent to which they are susceptible to coercive or diplomatic pressure from outside actors. Rather than relying exclusively on the tools of negotiated settlement between opposing parties among or within dif-ferent states, policymakers and practitioners are starting to explore a new generation of tools designed to prevent and reduce organised violence before it explodes into something approximating warfare. Examples include inno-vative violence-prevention and -reduction efforts in urban areas of Central and South America and the Caribbean featuring alternate forms of mediation involving regional organisations, city mayors and former gang members, and the pacification of criminally motivated armed groups (see Muggah, 2013). Consequently, a number of criti-cal questions are beginning to emerge: can the interests of organised armed groups in Latin America or Central Asia be managed through preventive actions similar to those applied in armed conflicts? What international legal frameworks apply for third-party interveners? Which sorts of stakeholders or mediators are most likely to yield a pos-itive return? And when are the intensity and organisation of violent settings ripe for preventive action, particularly preventive diplomacy or conflict prevention?

The evolution of preventive action

Despite a widespread commitment to preventive action, a surprising level of confusion exists about the content of preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention. The absence of a shared definition among policymakers and practition-ers, and the regionally and culturally diverse meanings ascribed to the concepts have in some cases generated tensions. Certain proponents of preventive diplomacy conceive it as a form of "soft" mediation, while others refer to "muscular" diplomacy that includes credible threats of pre-emptive military action (see Zounmenou et al., 2012; Wallensteen & Moller, 2003; Ackermann, 2003). These differences also play out between and within different regional contexts. For example, to some stakeholders in sub-Saharan Africa, preventive diplomacy constitutes the consensual resolution of tensions and disputes, while to others in North Africa it indicates a more coercive form of appeasement that allows underlying drivers of conflict to

persist under a veneer of stability. The same holds true for conflict prevention, which some analysts perceive as including preventive diplomacy and multitrack diplomacy, others as a comprehensive package of activities that are conflict sensitive and peacebuilding in orientation (which are themselves ambiguous and contested concepts).

Unsurprisingly, scholars routinely disagree on what is defined as preventive diplomacy and conflict preven-tion. Many experts consider preventive diplomacy to be a constituent part of conflict prevention, while others view the two as more autonomous. There are also routine disagreements over the content of conflict prevention and whether it includes parallel concepts, such as conflict management, conflict resolution and conflict transforma-tion, which tend to be more specific.[8] Competing defini-tions unintentionally reduce both analytical precision and the operational utility of each concept. For example, Lund (1993) describes preventive diplomacy in broad terms, as

> actions taken in vulnerable places and times to avoid the threat or use of armed force and related forms of coercion by states or groups to settle the political disputes that arise from the destabilization effects of economic, social, political and international change.

Meanwhile, Munuera (1994) offers a narrow interpretation of conflict prevention as "the application of non-constrain-ing [non-coercive] measures … primarily diplomatic in na-ture". In contrast, Carment and Schnabel (2003) argue that conflict prevention should be "broad in meaning and mal-leable as a policy" and extend the definition to "a medium and long-term proactive operational or structural strategy undertaken by a variety of actors, intended to identify and create the enabling conditions for a stable and more pre-dictable international environment". These terminological disagreements over the parameters of preventive action stretch back more than two decades.
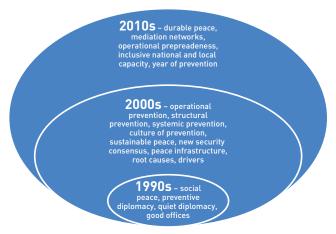
Although there are disagreements in policy and scholarly circles, it is nevertheless possible to trace the evolution of preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention both within and outside the UN. A rudimentary treatment of preven-tive diplomacy can be traced to the UN's (1992) *Agenda for Peace*, which highlighted threats to so-called "social peace", including various forms of social and economic exclusion, ethno-religious strife, and ecological challenges – all of which required early interventions. Noting that "the time of absolute exclusive sovereignty … has passed", the *Agenda for Peace* called for more engagement with pre-ventive diplomacy, including "actions to prevent disputes from arising between parties, to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of the latter when they occur". While not providing a precise defi-nition, the then-UN secretary-general, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, differentiated preventive diplomacy from peacemak-

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7   The situation in Syria is an example of a full-blown civil war that transitioned from simmering tensions and turbulence generated during the so-called "Arab Spring".
8   Consultation with Gay Rosemblum-Kumar, January 2013.

ing – which he viewed as the resolution of large-scale conflicts through formal agreements – and from its cousin, peacekeeping. Key tools included in the early preventive diplomacy arsenal included confidence and trust building, the establishment of early warning systems, informal and formal fact-finding missions, and even the promotion of demilitarised zones. The *Agenda* also devoted a chapter to conflict prevention, highlighting the importance of resolution, management and mitigation, as well as noting the growing multilateral character of prevention efforts (see Tanner, 2000).

Figure 1:
The evolution of preventive action concepts in the UN

Source: Compiled by the authors

The expansion and institutionalisation of preventive action was purposefully advanced by the 1995 *Supplement to an Agenda for Peace.* The document highlighted major changes in the scale and distribution of UN efforts to promote peace and called for "new and more comprehensive [sic] concepts to guide those activities and their links with development work". Noting that "old concepts are being modified" owing to shifts in the landscapes of war, the *Supplement* noted how international intervention should "extend beyond military and humanitarian tasks to include the promotion of national reconciliation and the re-establishment of effective government". Preventive diplomacy activities were expanded to include quiet diplomacy, the use of good offices and discrete activities, such as the supervision of ceasefires, verification of human rights violations and observation of electoral violence.[9] The *Supplement* unintentionally conflated preventive diplomacy with conflict prevention, setting the stage for terminological dissent a decade later. While coming under heavy critique for amounting to lip service or as "too little, too late" (Stedman, 1995), a growing community of practitioners galvanised around the concepts (Lund, 1995; 2003; Carnegie Commission, 1997). Indeed, the Carnegie Commis-

sion set out the concepts of "operational" and "structural" conflict prevention that would profoundly shape thinking for the decade to come. While the 1990s were described by some as a lost decade (Tanner, 2000), the evidence seems to suggest otherwise.

The first decade of the 21st-century witnessed the progressive fusion and mainstreaming of preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention. Beginning with the 2001 *Prevention of Armed Conflict* report and the 2006 *Progress Report*, the UN called for a shift from a "culture of reaction to a culture of prevention". Calling on UN member states, agencies, regional organisations, civil society, the private sector and others, there was a call to "operationalize" prevention, invest in "structural" prevention and engender "systemic prevention" as anticipated by the Carnegie Commission. This was part and parcel of a totalising "comprehensive approach" that included

> structural prevention efforts to address the root causes of conflict, operational prevention to ensure the effectiveness of early warning mechanisms, mediation, humanitarian access and response, the protection of civilians and targeted sanctions, and systemic prevention to prevent existing conflicts from spilling over into other states (UN, 2008).

The 2004 report of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change additionally emphasised a "recommitment" to the prevention of a wider range of threats beyond armed conflict (including resource disputes, climate-change-induced conflicts, terrorism and transnational crime, new forms of migration, and weapons of mass destruction) and for collective strategies of response; in particular, investment in local capacities.[10] These and other reports[11] effectively bound together preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention with a view to building up capacities within states. Although seldom stated as such, they acknowledged that internal conflicts required solutions internal to the states and societies experiencing the conflict.

The past few years have witnessed a renaissance of preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention. Two UN documents in particular – the 2011 report on *Preventive Diplomacy: Delivering Results* and the 2012 *Strengthening the Role of Mediation in the Peace Settlement of Disputes, Conflict Prevention and Resolution* – are this decade's *chefs d'oeuvre.* The former underlined the critical place of the UN Department of Political Affairs as a core player. It also highlighted the role of resident political missions, special envoys and groups of friends in promoting comprehensive approaches. Moreover, it called on a redoubled commit-
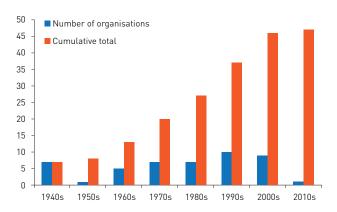
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9   It is also worth noting that the 1998 report on the *Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa* (UN, 1998) made similar points. It highlighted the importance of addressing shifts in warfare, but also of negotiation; mediation; the use of good offices; fact-finding missions; and judicial efforts to facilitate dialogue, defuse tensions, promote reconciliation and "institutionalise" peace.

10   More field-oriented and dedicated mediation support was demanded, along with greater emphasis on monitoring arrangements, confidence-building, promoting dialogue and national reconciliation mechanisms.

11   See UN (2008). This report mandated the UN Inter-agency Framework for Co-ordination on Preventive Action Team to establish an Expert Reference Group for country-specific support.

ment on the part of the UN General Assembly, Security Council, peacekeeping missions, country teams, regional organisations and member states to preventive action. The report rearticulated a wide range of categories of organised violence, including electoral, intercommunal, ethnic and low-intensity violence, suggesting a broadening engagement with on-the-ground realities. The second document additionally reiterated the wide range of tools available, from early warning and fact-finding missions to political missions, special envoys, "preventive diplomats" and others.

Figure 2: Non-UN "international" organisations involved in preventive action, 1940-2010[12]

Source: Compiled by the authors

Over the past two decades there has been a gradual shift from outsider-driven to more locally managed preventive action. Regional organisations are increasingly prominent players anticipating and responding to conflict in West Africa (e.g. ECOWARN), East Africa (e.g. CEWARN) and Southern Africa (e.g. CPR-EMSA), to name just a few.[13] There has also been a turn from late to early prevention – from "supermen" mediators to a "sprinkler system" of early response mechanisms and investments in peacebuilding to prevent the "recurrence" of conflicts. Similarly, UN reports have drawn attention to the importance of supporting "cycles" of prevention and reinforcing national and local capacities to manage prevention over the long term. For example, alongside its partners, the UN has invested in so-called "infrastructures for peace" or "peace architectures" in places as diverse as Ghana and Kenya (see Kumar, 2011; Van Tongeren, 2011).[14] Such infrastructures are designed from below and are intentionally embedded in formal and informal institutions. They combine networks of local community-based organisations, research

and academic centres, faith-based entities, and political and social associations engaged in actively monitoring disputes and sources of tension, drawing attention to signs of trouble to be ameliorated via conflict prevention or resolved through preventive diplomacy. They require building mechanisms for collective action to promote co-operative problem solving and institutionalising response mechanisms at the national, district and local levels to "transform" conflicts non-violently. As such, they assemble a combination of preventive action efforts and help identify appropriate and flexible responses to diverse and dynamic forms of collective violence.

This brief retreat to history is intended to clarify the evolving goals of preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention. It has not explored the wider engagement with humanitarian intervention and the responsibility to protect doctrine, which is beyond the scope of this review.[15] Notwithstanding an apparently broadening mandate, the UN and others have associated preventive diplomacy with a specific set of operational activities, such as the use of good offices, facilitation, mediation, conciliation, adjudication and arbitration. In contrast, conflict prevention advances a wider agenda involving, among other things, the strengthening of human rights oversight mechanisms and investments in ameliorating the underlying sources of conflict through improvements in governance, social and economic well-being, equality, and the management of common resources. While preventive diplomacy represents an attempt to "operationalise" the short-term prevention of violent conflict through monitoring, mediation and reconciliation, conflict prevention emphasises longer-term structural and systemic changes through investments in risk reduction. What also appears to be implicit in recent UN reports is that conflict prevention itself may have a role in creating the local conditions that, in turn, facilitate preventive diplomacy.

It is possible to very generally assess the evolution of preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention discourse on the basis of a more parsimonious assessment of UN Security Council,[16] UN General Assembly[17] and UN secretary-general[18] reports since 1990. As part of this NOREF report, the authors considered all online resolutions, reports and submissions featuring the expressions "peace", "conflict", "security" and "prevention" (in order to limit the universe of cases to a realistic sample). In addition, a list of key terms associated with preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention were analysed to determine the number and

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12 Figure 2 includes a review of "international" multilateral and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) involved in preventive action. It is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather illustrative of the growth before the 1990s and after in agencies that feature preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention as part of their mandate. Examples include multilateral organisations (e.g. NATO, the OECD, the EU), regional organisations (e.g. the AU, SADC, ECOWAS, ASEAN, the PIF, the OAS), bilateral entities, NGOs (e.g. the Carter Center, Clingendael, the CHD or HDC, Saferworld, International Alert, Interpeace, the International Peace Institute, Heidelberg, Swiss-Peace, the Berghof Foundation, Peace Nexus, the International Peace Bureau, the Institute for Multitrack Diplomacy) and others; see below for further discussion.
13 See <http://www.ecowarn.org/Login.aspx>; <http://www.cewarn.org/ and http://dai.com/our-work/projects/africa%E2%80%94conflict-prevention-mitigation-and-response-programs-east-and-southern>.
14 Indeed, the concepts first appeared in the UN's 2006 *Progress Report on the Prevention of Armed Conflict*. In it, "national infrastructures of peace" are "home grown, self-sustaining infrastructures for peace [sic]". See Ganson and Wennmann (2012) and Muggah and Sisk (2012).
15 See <http://www.globalr2p.org/> for a review of present debates on R2P and the recent Brazilian proposal advocating "responsibility while protecting".
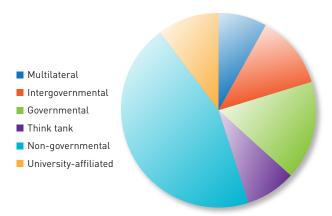16 See <http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/resolutions/>.
17 See <http://www.un.org/documents/resga.htm>.
18 See <http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/sgreports/1994.shtml>; <http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/docs/report2007.asp>.

distribution of concepts over time in UN statements. The intention was to identify synonyms, concepts and emerging paradigms, highlighting a diversifying range of objectives and sectors involved in both preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention (see Figure 1). The empirical assessment confirmed a discursive shift from state-led interventions with superman diplomacy and a preoccupation with interstate conflicts to a wider treatment of regional and non-state engagement, particularly with intrastate conflicts, and the use of a sprinkler system of interventions to prevent and reduce organised violence. In the process it was also possible to examine the proliferation of instruments and actors both within and outside of the UN devoted to preventive action (see Figures 2 and 3) (see GPP, 2009; Carter Center, 1996).

Figure 3: Distribution of non-UN organisations involved in prevention action (n = 47)

- Multilateral
- Intergovernmental
- Governmental
- Think tank
- Non-governmental
- University-affiliated

Source: Compiled by the authors

Does preventive action work?

According to many policymakers, the evidence base for preventive action – data showing where conflicts have been averted and by what methods – remains weak. Practitioners contend that the metrics of success for conflict prevention are notoriously hard to devise, given that the optimal outcome – the absence of conflict – could hypothetically have been achieved without any intervention at all. When stakeholders do agree that a conflict has been prevented, it is often unclear who ought to take credit. There is an inherent epistemological problem in measuring whether preventive action works, since what are needed are counterfactuals and evidence of intervention successes. Obtaining evidence for what does and does not work remains complicated for both practical and political reasons. Research has suggested that confidentiality is crucial in some mediation processes, thus preventing researchers from observing or fully understanding the factors that did or did not lead to successful conflict prevention. Yet macro-level studies of preventive diplomacy yield only general findings regarding the types of actions,

categories of mediators, or approximate timing of effective interventions that correlate with success or failure. What might work, when and under what conditions in a particular context – the dimensions practitioners mediating highly nuanced conflicts are required to know – remain poorly understood. Of course, research networks are increasingly tackling these challenges.

While research in the field of preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention is still in its infancy, a modest number of statistical and case study assessments have emerged.[19] Quantitative research has much to say about "what" is happening, but less to say about "why" it occurs. Meanwhile, qualitative research is more common, but typically unable to offer big-picture insights. Where research has been undertaken, statistical studies show that contrary to the received wisdom above, negotiation and mediation attempts to resolve conflict show a strong positive correlation. For example, Beber (2009; 2012), who examines 35 armed conflicts[20] and 151 mediation processes between 1990 and 2005, finds that while preventive diplomacy "works" in reducing conflict onset and duration, multiparty mediation is not necessarily more effective than single-party mediation.[21] In comparison, DeRouen et al. (2011) find that although preventive diplomacy seems to minimise the likelihood of extreme organised violence, the type of mediation is shaped by war type (international wars are more likely to be mediated), war duration (the longer the war, the higher the probability of mediation), war intensity (the higher the number of battle deaths, the higher the likelihood of mediation) and other factors.

A recurring question for many policymakers and practitioners is "What works and what does not?" While this appears to be a deceptively straightforward question, it manifestly is not. As hinted at above, one must first establish the outcome or dependent variable of "successful" preventive diplomacy or conflict prevention. Indeed, the lack of clarity in definitions, coupled with weak datasets, has possibly resulted in both the over- and under-identification of major failures and undue successes (Wall et al., 2001). It would be disingenuous to claim that "conflict avoidance" and "conflict termination" are the only positive outcomes of preventive actions. Rather than using the prevention of the onset of outright war as a condition of success, scholars such as Siram and Wermester (2003) claim that successful preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention should be contingent on history, risks and the very goals of discrete prevention actions. Leatherman et al. (1999) also note that success is informed by the political context and that outcomes vary depending on the stage of the conflict cycle. These and other scholars argue that success should be measured on a continuum that is sensitive to contextual and temporal factors. As Wallensteen

19 See Eisenkopf and Bachtiger (2012), Doyle (2011), Beardsley et al. (2006), Kydd (2006), Wilkenfeld et al. (2003) and Sambanis (2002b). Also consult DeRouen et al. (2011) and the New Civil Wars Mediation Dataset, which tracks information from 1946 to 2004 by mediation cases and civil war episodes.
20   Berber (2009; 2012) defines conflict as having at least 1,000 deaths during one calendar year between 1990 and 1995 and draws his data from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflicts Dataset.
21 There are some dissenters, however, including Frazier and Dixon (2006), who find that mediation is less effective in settling militarised disputes than military intervention, such as peacekeeping operations.

and Moller (2003) make clear, while most academics concede that "either/or" or binary models are to be avoided, there are still no agreed metrics to evaluate the outcomes of preventive actions. A case can be made to account for short-term and medium-term effects, as well as conflict termination, yet few genuinely robust assessments have been conducted to date.[22]

Opinion continues to be divided about the critical determinants of successful preventive action and how international responses can be scaled up and replicated, if at all (see Jentleson, 2000). Scholars typically focus on structural factors (smaller interstate wars are the least challenging), leveraged mediation (the importance of credible incentives and sanctions), the presence of third-party intervention (states tend to be more effective than non-governmental organisations [NGOs] – and private actors), timing (the sooner the better) and multiparty actions (the fewer the better).[23] While some academics welcome the shift away from state-centric approaches to preventive action to a more eclectic range of regional organisations, and non-governmental and private actors, there is a sense that the field is becoming increasingly crowded. While in some cases this is generating compelling new innovations, particularly at the grass-roots level, in others it is yielding competition and confusion. Although the UN and its member states continue to play the dominant role in preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention efforts, their presence and comparative advantages are on the wane. This latter development is, intriguingly, in line with the UN mandate.[24]

Preventive action opportunities

Overall, the norms, rules and institutions related to preventive action have proliferated since Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld's first utterance of the phrase "preventive diplomacy" in 1960 (Lund, 2008). As signalled above, there appears to be a favourable normative climate allowing for the implementation of preventive action.[25] This climate has created a "renewed prevention agenda" and space for the emergence, albeit limited, of dedicated bureaucratic structures designed specifically to advance the preventive action agenda. For example, in 2001 the UN Development Programme established the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, which now deploys conflict prevention advisers and invests in architectures of peace. In 2006 the UN Department of Political Affairs set up its Mediation Support Unit to provide advisory, logistical and financial support, including a team of experts on

standby since 2008.[26] The use of special envoys over the past decade has increased dramatically.[27] As signalled above, recent UN secretary-general reports in 2011 and 2012 have highlighted the growth of preventive diplomacy and called for more predictable and generous financial support, enhanced capacity-building, and the formation of partnerships to strengthen the work of "preventive diplomats". What is more, the UN recently established a community of practice to improve knowledge transfers and an interagency framework for co-ordinating preventive action, including some 22 agencies and departments working with country teams to develop "integrated conflict prevention strategies".[28] Yet in spite of these examples, there are still comparatively few institutions in the UN or even outside of it with specific mandates to monitor situations on the ground, and many less to catch and address the causes of organised violence at an early stage.

As is widely recognised, the UN is not alone in advancing preventive action. For example, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation established the Comprehensive Crisis and Operations Management Centre in 2012 to improve response and facilitate "crisis identification". Regional bodies have also increasingly taken up the language of preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention, including in countries confronted with conflict and non-conflict forms of organised violence (Mancini, 2011). The African Union (AU)'s Peace and Security Council has been highly active, as have numerous other associated bodies such as the Panel of the Wise, the African Standby Force and the Continental Early Warning System. Subregional bodies, such as the Southern African Development Community and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), are particularly active in settling disputes both before and after they have turned violent. ECOWAS, for example, played a key role in mediation efforts in Guinea in 2009 and 2010, alongside the AU and UN. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) also established the Regional Forum mandated with monitoring and preventing conflicts; the Pacific Island Forum has mediated conflicts in Fiji; the Organisation of American States (OAS) has facilitated the resolution of tensions in El Salvador, Guyana and Honduras;[29] and the High Commission for National Minorities within the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has been closely engaged with regional preventive action initiatives, including in Georgia, Macedonia and Ukraine (see Babbit, 2012). More recently, the Arab League and Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) have taken a

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22 The OECD (2012) has recently launched a guidance note on evaluating conflict prevention and peacebuilding, but few scientifically robust assessments have yet emerged.

23 Some of these issues are reviewed in Muggah (2012b).

24 Article 33 of the UN Charter calls on parties in any dispute to "first of all, seek a solution by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements or other peaceful means of their own choice".

25 Ackermann (2003) attributes this to intensive awareness-raising and advocacy, acceptance, and the institutionalisation and internationalisation of relevant norms. For Ackermann (1999), the Macedonia case stands out as a particularly effective application of preventive diplomacy.

26 See <http://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/undpa/mediation_support> for more details.

27 A prominent example is the appointment of former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo as a special envoy for the Great Lakes region in 2008. He collaborated with the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, which led to the rapid disarmament and demobilisation of some armed groups and the meeting of Rwandan president Paul Kagame and Democratic Republic of Congo president Joesph Kabila for the first time in years.

28 Countries that are purported to have benefited from these efforts include Guyana, Ecuador, Mauritania, the Maldives, the Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Lesotho, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Yemen and Fiji. See <http://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/undpa/conflict_prevention>.

29 See Lesser (2012) for a review of the OAS electoral observation mission in Guyana in 2006. Lesser argues that the mission demonstrated the links between electoral violence prevention and conflict prevention.

strong step forward into this area, sending mediators to try to resolve political crises in Syria and Yemen, respectively, since the start of the so-called "Arab Spring".

National initiatives are also proliferating. In the U.S., the Obama administration's National Security Strategy highlights the importance of preventing violent conflict, and conflict prevention has been identified as a priority for the newly established Bureau of Conflict and Stabilisation Operations (see Williams, 2012). In 2012 the U.S. government also began work on an Atrocities Prevention Board mandated to stop genocidal violence and human rights abuses before they begin. Other national initiatives have been developed among developed and emerging economies, such as the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). As the prestige associated with conflict-ending or conflict-preventing mediation has risen in recent years, these countries – as well as increasingly important players like Qatar and Turkey – have allocated sizable resources to preventive action. Many have also led prevention initiatives themselves and financed a widening array of private actors, particularly non-governmental and for-profit mediation firms (see Eskandarpour & Wennmann, 2011). Beyond more traditional peace and conflict-focused organisations such as the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, FEWER, the International Crisis Group, Saferworld and International Alert, humanitarian and development agencies have also taken up the banner of conflict prevention. New networks and coalitions of NGOs are emerging – including the Alliance for Peacebuilding,[30] the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict[31] and the Mediation Support Network[32] – suggesting that the field is continuing to grow. As with gender, terrorism, climate change and other transversal priorities, "preventive action" is now a crosscutting theme to be addressed in fragile and conflict-affected countries.

Obstacles to preventive action

The resurgence of investment in preventive action compensates to some extent for the previously limited attention to the issue. Yet certain knowledge gaps and operational obstacles remain that often impede the shift of preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention from ideas whose time has come into highly effective practices. One of the major challenges relates to coherence and co-ordination. Indeed, the rapid emergence of new stakeholders focused on preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention has generated tensions in relation to management and quality control. While the heterogeneity of these new players can offer exciting innovation, it also generates challenges for co-operation and possibly troubling duplication. Without better understanding of one another's efforts, agencies may replicate efforts or, worse, undermine each other's attempts and generate preventive action fatigue.

Indeed, there is a common complaint among officials, civil society representatives, religious leaders and activists in countries affected by collective violence that they are invited to an endless array of workshops, training sessions and conflict resolution forums. The highly diverse mandates and capabilities of the preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention communities – from grass-roots facilitators to high-powered international mediation experts – has also generated critical feedback on the ground and different forms of legitimacy from key stakeholders, and encouraged calls for the development of standards and codes of conduct.

Paradoxically, progress in decentralising preventive action to the regional and local levels has yielded some successes, but may unintentionally stifle more dynamic and effective forms of conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy. Research has long rallied around the benefits of localising preventive action, emphasising the role of regional, national and subnational stakeholders rather than international experts with less familiarity with the local context. The "downward shift" of preventive action has been heavily supported by regional organisations, national authorities, city leaders, scholars and civil society representatives around the world. It has led to the proliferation of regional initiatives by the AU, ECOWAS, ASEAN, OAS, GCC and others intended to prevent and resolve violent conflicts. While being a positive and long-sought development, the increased role of regional bodies has also confronted certain challenges. For example, regional institutions are primarily concerned with the interests of their member governments and not necessarily non-state actors. They tend to adhere to strict notions of national sovereignty in which many forms of preventive action are deemed to be inappropriate, if not hostile. The UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA), for instance, is only able to involve non-governmental stakeholders if national governments do not object.[33] At the same time, many regional bodies concern themselves primarily with situations that have already become a clear regional security threat or are occurring outside of the region and are, therefore, deemed "safe". This may result in activities occurring after the house has already burnt down. For example, the Arab League and GCC did not begin addressing political instability in the Middle East until the regimes targeted by the "Arab Spring" were already rapidly deteriorating.

Another counterproductive outcome of devolving preventive action is that it may result in a myopic agenda owing to policies of regional solidarity and non-interference. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ASEAN, 2012) addressed North Korea, Syria, Afghanistan and nuclear proliferation at its most recent meeting in July 2012 rather than the many

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30 See <http://www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org/>.
31 See <http://www.gppac.net/>.
32 See <http://www.mediationsupportnetwork.net/>.
33 Moreover, in 2010, the UNRCCA also provided its good offices and support for crisis response in Kyrgyzstan following the ousting of the former president. It worked closely with the UN country team, OSCE, EU, Collective Security Treaty Organisation, Commonwealth of Independent States and Shanghai Co-operation Organisation to foster dialogue between political leaders and civil society representatives. See UNRCCA (2012).

challenges confronting member states, including in southern Thailand, southern Philippines and elsewhere. Its preventive diplomacy agenda has, similarly, been steered away from drivers of violent conflict, which are considered delicate, and has instead focused on disaster relief, maritime security and partnerships, with mediation being one of several priorities, most of which bear little resemblance to preventive action. There is a risk that regional bodies close their eyes to problems in their own neighbourhood as an implicit agreement that members of the club will not meddle in one another's affairs. Unsurprisingly, these same regional bodies – whether due to political opposition among member nations, or capacity and resource constraints – also tend to have fewer linkages with civil society. They are state-centric and slow to develop partnerships insofar as they are statutorily able to do so. This creates a situation in which appropriate prevention activities may be delayed or undermined. The UN's regional solutions may lead to the handing over of selected prevention activities, including preventive diplomacy, to regional bodies that express a desire to become involved, despite having limited political will to ultimately take meaningful action.

Future horizons for preventive action

Each of the abovementioned challenges can be addressed through a variety of practical solutions. Preventive diplomacy and fragmented conflict prevention actors can be better co-ordinated through the introduction of incentives and communication platforms. There are also exciting new frontiers of preventive action that show promise, some of them emerging from unexpected places and actors, including Latin America and the Caribbean. Confronted with acute violence in cities as diverse as Bogotà, Medellin, Los Angeles and San Salvador, cities and municipal leaders are emerging as a new vanguard of diplomatic players. Uniquely situated at the interface of the international community and local residents, mayors are increasingly playing a role in developing tools to monitor and anticipate violence, invest in institutions to negotiate disagreements, facilitate interinstitutional co-ordination across multiple sectors and more.

City mayors represent alternative entry points for prevention agendas, as well as a method of ensuring that the terminology and discourse of prevention are adapted to local understandings. In Bogotà, for example, four mayors have worked over the years to reduce organised violence through urban regeneration, community policing, local crime monitoring, localised disarmament and alcohol controls, witnessing a massive drop in homicides from 80 to 18 per 100,000 population members between 1993 and 2006 (see Lacas & Hoffman, 2011). Meanwhile, new forms of diplomacy are emerging in cities such as San Salvador where gangs such as Calle 18 and Mara Salvatrucha have pushed up homicide rates to among the highest in the world. A truce was brokered in 2012, however, by media-

tors who included a former guerilla fighter and congressman, and a Catholic bishop. Intriguingly, the OAS has monitored the truce with support from civil society and the private sector; organised violence dropped spectacularly in the interim. As a result, the government's Ministry of Security has increased funding for prevention programmes more than tenfold.[34]

While offering hints for the future, it is also the case that the evidence base of new and old preventive action can be strengthened. Fortunately, a host of informed recommendations are emerging from a wide range of actors ranging from the Carter Center and the International Peace Institute to the UN, the World Bank and many others.[35] A number of findings with implications for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs are discussed below.

Share, but do not align conflict analyses

A number of policy and research assessments of preventive action begin with the presumption that co-ordination and collective action will be facilitated by joint analyses of local conflict and context dynamics (see OECD, 2012; UNRCCA, 2012). They propose the development of standardised frameworks and the alignment of analyses across national, regional and international agencies. While the sharing of conflict analyses can certainly help distil possible interpretations of a violent conflict, aligning perceptions is also likely to result in the reproduction of generic and potentially flawed analyses. Multistakeholder conflict analyses tend to result in "laundry list" documents that include numerous possible explanations, but do not actually prioritise the key proximate and underlying drivers of violence. Rather, more diversified analysis – including data generated through new social and digital media – can potentially increase the likelihood that someone will "get it right". By vetting and validating different analyses with stakeholders on the ground and perhaps undertaking scenario exercises, it may also be possible to help identify – imperfectly and incrementally – elements of each analysis that may hold water and merit preventive or ameliorative responses.

Align conflict analyses with local understandings and terminology

Such analyses need not only be vetted with local stakeholders: they must also reflect their understandings of the conflict and the language they use to describe the dynamics at play. Overly theorised and prescriptive studies of the causes of violent conflict may have intellectual value, but may not be as useful to mediators and practitioners on the ground who are dealing not only with objective factors, but also with the local framing of these issues (see Ganson & Wennmann, 2012). It is the difference between identifying "ethno-political exclusion" as a driver of conflict and understanding that the lived experience of this exclusion is shame, a denial of dignity and intense frustration. Local

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34 This represents an increase to roughly 14% of the Ministry of Security's budget, from an historical average of 1%.
35 See <http://www.ipacademy.org/publication/meeting-notes/detail/354-what-works-in-preventive-dipolmacy.html>.

narratives and connotations are crucial to grasp in any conflict analysis and to ultimately inform preventive diplomacy or conflict prevention strategies.

Research drivers of peace separately from drivers of violence

From the World Bank's *World Development Report 2011* to the Global Peace Index, there is an increasingly empirical and instinctual understanding that factors that facilitate peace or enhance societal resilience may be markedly different from those that make conflict and violence likely. Understanding the drivers of peace, which are as contextually embedded as the drivers of conflict, is crucial for preventing conflict recurrence and establishing conditions – particularly through infrastructures for peace – that make conflict unlikely even amid periods of political, social or economic tension, turmoil and transition.

Study the micro-determinants of success in preventive action

Studies of the conditions and indicators for peace are emerging, yet research related to preventive action still has a long way to go (see MacGinty, 2013; Muggah, 2012c). The data limitations noted above make it unlikely that researchers will be permitted to observe, document and publish the factors that lead to a successful mediation effort. Published accounts are generally not detailed or accurate enough, commonly representing one perspective from individuals promoting a particular narrative. Hence, "banner headline" mediations may not be the most fruitful subjects for research. Instead, academics and scholar-practitioners may wish to turn to subnational and local – even community-level – conflict resolution and prevention activities to understand what does and does not work (i.e. the "micro-determinants of success"). Such studies can help close the gap between those who approach conflict and preventive action as a science and those who approach it as an art.

Begin a dialogue on the co-ordination of preventive action

The range of actors involved in preventive action is too diffuse and fragmented for any co-ordinating body to step in and impose a degree of order. The subject matter at hand is also too sensitive, and stakeholders would rightly be concerned about the ultimate goal of co-ordination and the use of any information they might share. However, there is an opportunity for a trusted stakeholder – e.g. a private foundation or widely admired NGO – to bring relevant groups together and discuss questions such as: Do you believe there is a need for increased co-ordination? What institution or set of institutions should host such a co-ordination mechanism? How would its purpose and goal be defined? Who should be included and excluded? How should sensitive information be safeguarded? These are just an initial collection of questions to be addressed in an open and participatory consultation process. Of course, the outcomes of any such dialogue would be far more mean-

ingful if donors were willing to allocate financing for future co-ordination efforts in advance.

Ensure sufficient and flexible financing for preventive action

The question of donor agencies necessarily lends itself to a discussion of who pays, for what and how. While donors have increasingly accepted the notion of preventive action, funding generally remains limited and earmarked for specific activities in specific countries. The "tyranny of the now" means that resources are rarely set aside for potential crises while current ones are wreaking havoc. Yet the notion of preventive action is rooted in flexibility and in an ability to put resources where they are needed with little prior notice. Hence, the formation of a dedicated, multidonor trust fund for preventive action that disallows earmarking for pet countries or projects is one way forward that is gaining some momentum and attention.
The opportunities noted above could, if acted upon, improve both the evidence base for and quality of preventive action in violence-affected environments around the world.

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