

Prevented Wars:

The Role of International Organizational Intervention in Successful Prevention

A Case Study Report

Margarita Tadevosyan, Ph.D.

Better Evidence Project

*Center for Peacemaking
Practice*



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Mission and Objectives

The **mission** of the Better Evidence Project (BEP) is to encourage, facilitate, and conduct research aimed at producing evidence that will guide practitioners and donors in reducing large-scale political violence where it exists or threatens to erupt in the near future.

To support this mission, BEP works towards these **objectives**:

- Promoting the idea that decisions about where and how to allocate peacebuilding resources should be based on hard evidence about what is and is not effective.
- Initiating, supporting, and doing research to develop such evidence.
- Disseminating such evidence and urging its use.
- Collecting, maintaining, and facilitating the exchange of relevant ideas and information, determining priority areas for projects, and disseminating useful information and evidence to the peacebuilding community and the public.

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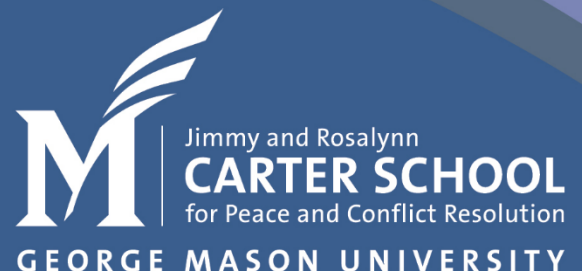
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About the Author

Margarita Tadevosyan is a post-doctoral fellow at the Center for Peacemaking Practice. She is a scholar-practitioner of conflict resolution and has extensive experience in convening and facilitating Track II reconciliation workshops, primarily in the South Caucasus. For many years, she has been collaborating with Dr. Susan Allen on facilitating conflict resolution workshops across the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict divide. She has also been involved in other forms of analytical work and conflict resolution practice in the South Caucasus working with Turkish-Armenian and Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict contexts.

Dr. Tadevosyan joined the Carter School as a full-time Research Faculty in 2020 after spending a year conducting privately funded research on preventing violent conflict and teaching as an adjunct faculty at the School of International Service at American University. Dr. Tadevosyan is Carter School alumna with a Ph.D. earned in 2019. Dr. Tadevosyan's current research centers around generating improved evidence on preventing violent conflict available to donors, policymakers, practitioners, and scholars in the peacebuilding community. As a post-doctoral fellow of the Center's Better Evidence Project Dr. Tadevosyan is working on research that will provide a wide range community of stakeholders with a better understanding of local conflict prevention and violence reduction practices and will generate updated and new evidence on the local perspective of the effectiveness of peace practices.

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Abstract

Recent research has focused on the role of international organizational intervention in preventing large scale wars. The idea of conflict prevention is not new; different scholars have scrutinized different aspects of conflict prevention. At the same time, most existing literature focuses on individual preventive interventions. Recognizing that conflict prevention is an established field both in academic and policy circles, this study provides additional evidence on how conflict prevention can be strengthened and further reinforced by engaging in a systematic analysis of previous cases of preventive engagement by international organizations. The goal of the research was to understand why and how certain interventions led by different international organizations were able to prevent the outbreak of violence and large-scale war and halt the spread of hostilities.

This study is a comprehensive review of 18 specific conflict prevention interventions carried out by one of the four large international organizations—the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Organization of American States (OAS), and the Commonwealth of Nations—between 1990 and 2015. With recognition of this diversity, the analysis sought to uncover and understand patterns that would provide additional evidence on how to prevent future wars and violent conflict. Based on the research findings Dr. Tadevosyan developed a targeted list of recommendations that can help intervening organizations to maximize their impact in preventing the outbreak of deadly violence.

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Executive Summary

This report provides an analysis of eighteen different preventive efforts carried out by international organizations between the 1990 and 2015. The aim of this analysis is to understand why and how certain interventions led by different international organizations were successful in preventing the outbreak of violence and large-scale war and halting the spread of hostilities. By extracting themes and patterns from existing experience, this study seeks to contribute evidence and structured, systematic knowledge to the field of conflict prevention and violence reduction.

The study adopts a qualitative methodology which consists of a desk review of secondary documents to investigate eighteen case studies. The cases include Bolivia (2000-2009), Colombia (2012-2016), Estonia (1993-1994), Fiji (2000), the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Macedonia) (1991-1993), Guatemala-Belize (2000-2014), Guinea (2008-2010), Guyana (2006), Honduras-Nicaragua (1999-2002), Kyrgyzstan (2010-2017), Lebanon (2011-2017), Malawi (2011-2012), Nepal (2007-2017), Nigeria (2015), Sudan/South Sudan (2010-2011), Tunisia (2011-2017), Ukraine (1994-2001), and Yemen (2011). In each of these cases, the countries faced increasing tensions domestically or with their neighbors and there was a highly probable risk of violent conflict breaking out. The main sources analyzed for this study were international organization reports, academic articles, and academic case studies of each of the countries under investigation.

From the analysis of the eighteen case studies, seven main factors emerged, including structural and environmental elements that facilitated successful preventive intervention. They are as follows: local active and passive factors, early engagement, a comprehensive approach, non-coercive means of engagement with governments, the coordination of efforts and leveraging the capacity of the most appropriate organization, engagement structures, and the reputability of the intervenor.

The study was not only able to identify these seven areas, as new evidence to strengthen our understanding of how to prevent violent conflict. The author also developed an extensive list of recommendations for each of these areas to be considered by those who are attempting to engage in preventive action. Recommendations for international organizations and future international intervenors are as follows:

Engage with local factors

1. Proactively engage with the leadership of the country with an offer to provide assistance in facilitating the de-escalation of tensions and/or conflict.
2. Look for and develop relationships with pragmatic voices within the conflict parties. While in some conflict contexts it might be difficult to find moderate and pragmatic leadership, international interveners need to use their reputation, resources, and expertise to soften the positions of the conflicting parties and support a degree of moderation.
3. Provide positive reinforcement for sustained commitment and political will to seek non-violent solutions to existing tensions.
4. Develop workable solutions on how to isolate potential spoilers and possibly create separate engagement spaces for them, so their influence on the main preventive action is minimized.

Facilitate early engagement

5. Leverage organizational resources and structures to support early engagement as much as possible. While in some cases the creation of new robust structures may be needed, in other conflict contexts organizations might already have structures and staff in place to facilitate early engagement. These resources should be cataloged and ready to deploy and leverage once a crisis situation is identified.
6. Develop internal policies and structures that seek to alleviate bureaucratic constraints and allow for early engagement without going through a long and tedious pipeline process.
7. Follow the example of the OSCE and establish special units/divisions within major international organizations, which are regularly involved in conflict prevention efforts with authority to act quickly without additional approval mechanisms from their HQs.

Develop a comprehensive approach

8. Identify one or two central issues within a specific conflict context that can be used as anchors for the intervention and generate traction with local and international parties.
9. Separate conflict issues and cast a wider net of preventive action. This would allow

organizations to cover a broader range of issues and, potentially, physical territory. In addition, this would facilitate more inclusive preventive action by targeting different issues and stakeholders.

Create space for government engagement

10. Identify appropriate and strong incentives that would help bring the formal leadership of a country to the cooperation table. The application of sanctions, public statements, and media narrative created to target the government engaged in conflict should have some built-in positive reinforcements that local leadership will recognize and pursue if they choose to.
11. Build personal relations with key interlocutors when possible, especially in those cultural contexts where personalities and personal ambition play a central role in the political landscape.
12. Communicate through non-ambiguous messaging and set appropriate expectations with local counterparts. This can help engage local leadership and keep them invested throughout the entire intervention.

Identify the best equipped organizations and coordinate

13. Conduct an assessment of core conflict issues and determine the entities best positioned to address those issues. Among the key points for consideration in this type of assessment are the history of previous engagements, in-house expertise, and the resources and capacities of the organization.
14. Attempt to achieve complementarity of efforts to leverage the capacities and strengths of individual organizations. This will allow interveners to cover a wider spectrum of issues and stakeholders and will help to reduce redundancy.
15. Develop and foster cooperation and coordination platforms within and between the conflicting parties. Increased cooperation and coordination can help reduce misunderstandings, defuse tension, and facilitate early response to possible violence escalation.

Strengthen engagement structures

16. Develop robust and updated conflict analysis to help map the actors, causes, dynamics and levels of conflict. This will ensure that the designed intervention is structurally sound, targets the right stakeholders, and focuses on key and relevant issues.
17. Initiate and engage in fact-finding missions when possible with the explicit task of soliciting opinions from a wide range of stakeholders within a particular conflict setting. These fact-finding missions can serve as an important preventive tool as they can allow for the identification of potential tensions before they even surface.
18. Follow and pay close attention to already existing processes that are initiated by local actors and determine how these processes can be safeguarded, supported, and advanced before setting up parallel initiatives. Supporting local processes helps to concentrate resources in one place and not pull them in different directions.
19. Engage national staff and utilize them as a foundational resource for gaining access to local networks, political leadership and, community leadership. Actively leveraging the expertise of national staff should become a policy choice of international intervening organizations.

Engage reputable lead personalities and organizations

20. Invite reputable regional leaders to become the face of an intervention. Regional leaders with a positive reputation can become the driving force behind preventive intervention. These leaders usually have unmatched geopolitical, cultural, and country specific expertise and knowledge that is likely hard to find elsewhere. In addition, regional leaders can already have access to the formal leadership of the country of concern as well as access to a wide range of actors within a country.
21. Involve highly reputable sources when possible. These can be defined specifically as subject matter expert organizations that can help to channel the intervention in a non-confrontational direction where decisions are guided by reputable data.
22. Seek proactively to increase the intervenor's positive standing within a certain country context through targeted engagement with a wide range of stakeholders. This can be achieved by creating feedback platforms such as public presentations and dissemination

events where the profile, agenda, and activities of the organizations involved are discussed with a wide range of interested parties beyond members of the country's formal leadership.

One major limitation of this study is the methodology used, which included an analysis of independently produced case studies for each of the countries under investigation. The methodology also does not account for the activities and efforts implemented by INGOs that possibly impacted the conflict context and overall preventive effort. The lack of original data and the ability to use stronger triangulation add a certain level of subjectivity to the analysis and recommendations.

Introduction – Why Conflict Prevention?

Conflict and destruction are not new for the human race. For centuries people have been engaged in different types of conflicts and wars. There have been wars to conquer new lands, to gain control over resources, to show dominance, and to proselytize. With the evolution of the human race, the creation of solid governance structures, and the development of more interconnected and globalized economies, one would assume that violent military conflict would subside, giving way to more harmonized and organic coexistence among people. However, the world is witnessing an alarming increase in violence, human suffering, and destruction that while is often contained within the borders of a single state, nevertheless generates enormous human suffering, flows of refugees and IDPs, and results in economic and environmental degradation. These factors further contribute to the fragility of the situation and have enormous potential to lead to even more violence and conflict.

Many countries have been embroiled in protected conflicts with devastating consequences. The Algerian civil war lasted for over a decade and claimed the lives of an estimated 150 thousand people. Afghanistan has gone through several consecutive phases of major armed conflict that have completely devastated the country and created international and regional instability. Conflicts are dynamics systems and there is consensus that once conflict ignites, they become difficult to manage and resolve. At times, countries can become trapped in conflict cycles, which makes conflict prevention all the more important. The eruption of violent

conflict is fraught with unpredictable consequences because the trajectory of conflict development is exceptionally dynamic. With this understanding in mind, there has been increased attention to the value of conflict prevention in recent years.

The idea of conflict prevention is not new. Since its inception in 1945, the United Nations (UN) had the objective of preventing violent conflict first during the Cold War and later following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, decolonization, and the emergence of dozens of nation-states. The concept of “preventive diplomacy” was first used by UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld in 1960 and later was revisited and revised by UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to better fit the post-Cold War context.¹ This revised concept of preventive diplomacy has two vectors. One emphasizes the need to prevent conflicts from emerging, while the other stresses the need to prevent the escalation of violence once conflicts surface.² Alice Ackermann draws attention to the ambiguity that exists around the understanding of the scope of conflict prevention and preventive action. The question here is whether “conflict prevention should be limited only to the early and non-escalatory stages of a conflict, or also encompass the escalation and post-conflict stages of a conflict or should it address only the immediate causes of conflict or also its underlying roots, or both?”³ She further argues that a review of the literature on preventive action suggests the pendulum of dominance swings towards a narrow conceptualization of preventive action. Within this paradigm, conflict prevention is understood as a set of targeted actions that pursue the goal of deterring, resolving, and stopping conflicts before their escalation to overt violence domestically and regionally. There is also ongoing debate as to whether or not prevention has to address the causes of conflict. The Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict emphasizes the role of structural prevention that addresses underlying conflict drivers and ensures conflicts do not arise in the first place. They also highlight the need to have frameworks in place to engage in operational prevention, which implies mitigation efforts when the threat of violence is already imminent.⁴

¹ Alice Ackermann, “The Idea and Practice of Conflict Prevention,” *Journal of Peace Research* 40, no. 3 (2003): 339–47.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 341.

⁴ Carnegie Corporation, “Preventing Deadly Conflict: Final Report,” 1997, <https://www.carnegie.org/publications/preventing-deadly-conflict-final-report/>.

Methodology

Recognizing that conflict prevention is an established field both in academic and policy circles, this study aims to provide additional evidence on how conflict prevention can be strengthened and further reinforced by engaging in a systematic analysis of previous cases of preventive engagement by international organizations. The goal of the research was to understand why and how certain interventions led by different international organizations were able to prevent the outbreak of violence and large-scale war and halt the spread of hostilities.

The major challenge for this research was to uncover and study something that did not occur – prevented wars or large-scale military conflict. The study adopts a qualitative methodology which consists of a desk review of secondary documents to investigate eighteen case studies. The cases under review include Bolivia (2000-2009), Colombia (2012-2016), Estonia (1993-1994), Fiji (2000), the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Macedonia) (1991-1993), Guatemala-Belize (2000-2014), Guinea (2008-2010), Guyana (2006), Honduras-Nicaragua (1999-2002), Kyrgyzstan (2010-2017), Lebanon (2011-2017), Malawi (2011-2012), Nepal (2007-2017), Nigeria (2015), Sudan/South Sudan (2010-2011), Tunisia (2011-2017), Ukraine (1994-2001), and Yemen (2011). In each of these cases, the countries faced increasing tensions domestically or with their neighbors and there was a highly probable risk of violent conflict breaking out.

The research scrutinized the preventive activities and efforts carried out by the following four international intergovernmental organizations: the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Organization of American States (OAS), and the Commonwealth. The African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are the other alliances and unions that were involved in the preventive efforts in one or more of the cases studies explored, however, they were not the central subject of the case study examinations. All of these organizations have some structural component, whether it is an explicitly developed unit/subdivision or it is a clause in the organizational charter, that allowed them to carry out a preventive intervention. These organizations have different areas of strength, carry a different level of expertise on different issues as well as possess a different level of coercive capabilities that can be applied to conflicting parties.

It is important to mention that the study specifically focused on the intervention efforts of international intergovernmental organizations. Other international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) have been involved and carried out unofficial Track II engagement activities in many of the examined cases. For example, the Carter Center in collaboration with the Center for the Study of Mind and Human Interaction at the University of Virginia, and the Institute of International and Social Sciences in Tallinn facilitated series of dialogues among Estonians and the Russian minority to help alter negative perceptions about each other. Conciliation Resources, UK based peacebuilding organization has been involved in building peaceful communities in Fiji, Search for Common Ground has been actively supporting democratic participation, reconciliation, justice, and other areas in Nepal throughout and after the signing of CPA in 2006. All these INGOs have their distinct approaches and methodologies that often complement the official Track I efforts. While it is important to recognize their role and involvement in these conflict contexts, for the purposes of methodological clarity it is important to note that their activities, role, and impact on preventive efforts were not examined and accounted for in this study.

The main sources analyzed for this study were international organization reports, academic articles, and academic case studies of each of the countries under investigation. The study recognizes that each country case is unique. The conflict environments are not only distinct, each with a particular set of actors driving the conflict, but they are also situated in a particular local and geopolitical context. With recognition of this diversity, the analysis sought to uncover and understand patterns that would provide additional evidence on how to prevent future wars and violent conflict. The analysis section that follows focuses on several key aspects that arguably contributed to the overall success of the interventions, which need to be considered when designing similar types of interventions in the future.

Short Description of the Selected Cases

Bolivia (2000-2009). Bolivia is one of the poorest countries in South America. Ethnic divisions fueled by inequality, weak institutions, and exclusion have resulted in a high level of social and political conflict in the country. Between 2000 and 2009 Bolivia went through one of

the most turbulent periods in its modern history. It changed presidents six times within a 5-year period, elected Evo Morales as the first indigenous president of the country, and experienced a constitutional crisis, which threatened further division and violence throughout Bolivia. The case study demonstrates the role of international preventive intervention in de-escalating the situation by providing technical assistance and advise to senior policymakers within Bolivia.

Colombia (2012-2016). The weak central government in Colombia and its inability to extend its authority to the peripheries of the country created a power vacuum that allowed for political and criminal violence to emerge. FARC-EP emerged as a central player in this conflict and was involved in various forms of criminal activities and guerrilla warfare that created enormous humanitarian problems. After almost fifty years of confrontation and numerous failed attempts to negotiate, the government of Colombia and FARC-EP finally reached an agreement that promised peace to this devastated South American country. The case of Colombia represents an internationally supported national-led process, where international actors played a secondary, but nevertheless important role in ensuring the sustainability of the preventive effort.

Estonia (1993-1994). After the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Estonia's independence, the country faced growing ethnic tension between Estonians and the Russian speaking minority population in the country. A large number of Russian speaking minorities in Estonia raised security and border issues for the country. A large number of former Russian troops present in Estonia was another central issue in the overall tense situation. While Estonians and Russians do not share a violent past, "the hurt on both sides ran deep and the threat of confrontation remained real."⁵ Similar to the case of Macedonia, this case was included in the study as a representation of successful prevention of possible violent escalation fueled by nationalistic and ethnic sentiments.

Fiji (2000). This island country in the South Pacific Ocean with a population of fewer than one million has been challenged by political turmoil since the mid-1980s. The country has experienced three armed coups d'état between 1987 and 2006. The coups underline the deep divide between ethnic Fijians and Indian Fijians. This case study is included to highlight the role of an international organization such as the Commonwealth and its ability to effectively play a

⁵ Joyce Nue and Vamik D. Volkan, "Developing a Methodology for Conflict Prevention: The Case of Estonia," 1999, 11.

conflict prevention role in divided countries with a diverse ethnic and religious composition.

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (1991-1993) (Macedonia). In the early 1990s, the situation in Macedonia started to alarm the international community given the possibility of it becoming the next hot spot in Europe, which was already dealing with other conflicts associated with the breakup of the Yugoslav republic. Ethnic tensions between Macedonians and Albanians, which were further fueled by nationalistic rhetoric from the leadership on both sides, were set to create a situation where the outbreak of violence was inevitable. This case is included in the study as it is often regarded as a particularly successful preventive effort carried out by the OSCE and, particularly the Office of the Higher Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) represented at the time by Max van der Stoep.

Guatemala-Belize (2000-2014). The ongoing territorial dispute between Guatemala and Belize dates back to the seventeenth century and is one of the longest running conflicts in Central America. Guatemala recognized the independence of Belize in 1990, without accepting the current drawing of the borders. Guatemala continues to claim about half of the current territory of Belize. This case was included in the research as an example of an ongoing territorial conflict that due to sustained preventive efforts has not yet erupted into violence.

Guinea (2008-2010). Guinea found itself at the center of a political crisis after the country's military junta announced its decision to stand in national elections. The opposition rally to protest this decision led to the killing of 150 unarmed protesters. The situation unfolded against the backdrop of a recent military coup and deteriorating economic conditions that left a majority of the population disenfranchised. These developments sounded an alarm that the country might be standing on the verge of civil war. The case of Guinea is included in this study to showcase the possibility of facilitating a peaceful political transition after an extremely turbulent period.

Guyana (2006). The country has a long history of electoral violence that has been exacerbated by racial divisions in the country. Several rounds of presidential elections (1992, 1997 and 2001) were followed by violence which increased concerns on the part of the international community that the 2006 presidential elections would follow the same pattern. The case of Guyana is included in the report to showcase the impact of preventive efforts in ensuring violence-free elections even in contexts where elections have previously been marred by

extreme violence and mistrust.

Honduras-Nicaragua (1999 – 2002). These two Central American countries had a significantly turbulent history with each other during the 1980s. However, the most recent escalation of tensions dates to the early 2000s when the two countries disagreed about the maritime border and sovereignty of four islands located in the disputed area in the Atlantic Ocean. The case demonstrates how international preventive efforts can lead to the sustainable resolution of conflict.

Kyrgyzstan (2010-2017). This former Soviet republic in Central Asia shares all the attributes of other former Soviet states, which include weak democratic institutions, constant power struggles, and continued ethnic tensions between, in this case, Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. In 2010, a popular revolution brought down President Kurmanbek Bakiyev and created a political vacuum that quickly filled with ethnically charged narratives. These narratives facilitated an escalation of violence between Kyrgyz and Uzbek populations in the South, which resulted in several hundred casualties and hundreds of thousands displaced. The case of Kyrgyzstan demonstrates how the engagement of an international actor, even after initial escalation, can help guide parties away from engaging in violence to support meaningful peacebuilding initiatives.

Lebanon (2011-2017). Stability in and around Lebanon is always fragile. The country is not only marked by deep religious and political divisions but is also vulnerable to spill-over conflicts and violence from the region. The unfolding crisis in Syria produced significant flows of refugees many of whom sought refuge in Lebanon. The arrival of over 1.5 million refugees to Lebanon put pressure on the country's social institutions and the conflict that raged in Syria had a negative impact on the Lebanese economy, which incurred significant losses. All these challenges gave rise to xenophobic sentiments in Lebanon toward Syrian refugees that threatened to escalate to violent conflict. In the case of Lebanon, the UN was able to use a wide range of available means to curb the risk of violent conflict escalation.

Malawi (2011 – 2012). In mid-2011 Malawi face a growing political crisis that was triggered by political and economic dissatisfaction among the population. Increasing prices for commodities such as medication, fuel, and milk fired up popular anger toward the government's inaction to address the deteriorating economic conditions. In addition, Malawians were becoming weary of the authoritarian governance style of president Bingu wa Mutharika whose

rule was marked by constant human rights abuses, media censorship, and intolerance. Public protests were met with government resistance that resulted in human casualties. Civil society and the government engaged in inflammatory, combative, and confrontational rhetoric. Both sides threatened to use violence if their demands were not met. The case of Malawi demonstrates how an international organization can play a positive role in de-escalating tension by facilitating national dialogue focused on addressing public grievances.

Nepal (2007-2015). “Nepal’s being among the most ethnically diverse – and socially stratified - countries in the world, with 36% of its population belonging to one of the more than 100 different indigenous nationalities with their own language and traditional culture.”⁶ This diversity, however, has created significant inequalities and resulted in the exclusion of certain groups from political and economic processes. An important factor in Nepal’s social, political, and economic canvas is the level of group inequality (horizontal inequality). As of 2007, Nepal was in the “bottom 10 countries in terms of uneven development and 176 out of 177 in terms of group grievance.”⁷ From 1996, Nepal also experienced a long and devastating civil war that ended in 2006 with the signing of a Comprehensive Peace Accord. Almost a decade after the inception of violence, conditions became conducive for the development of a peace agreement and the prevention of future hostilities.

Nigeria (2015). The 2015 elections were considered the first peaceful political transition in Nigeria since 1999. Yet, that electoral violence could led to human casualties and generate significant displacement and violence is not new for Nigeria. The 2011 general elections were marked by a high level of fraud and violence, and both the international community and local organizations had well-grounded concerns that the 2015 elections would repeat this destructive pattern. The case of Nigeria is selected for this study to demonstrate how intermarriage and mutual reinforcement of domestic and foreign efforts can help to deter the future escalation of violence.

Sudan/South Sudan (2010-2011). After several decades of civil war, which devastated the country, created enormous human suffering, and divided the North and South, a Comprehensive

⁶ Cale Salih and Sebastian von Einsiedel, “Conflict Prevention in Nepal: Background Paper for the United Nations - World Bank Flagship Study on the Prevention of Violent Conflict,” April 2017, 2, <https://i.unu.edu/media/cpr.unu.edu/attachment/2530/ConflictPreventioninNepal-Apr-2017.pdf>.

⁷ Ibid.

Peace Agreement was viewed as the roadmap that would help mend the deep divisions between the conflicting parties. With the slowly advancing South Sudanese referendum on self-determination, there was growing concern about the possible resumption of hostilities and the outbreak of a new war. The case of South Sudan is included to underscore the role of sustained diplomatic efforts to prevent violence around an independence referendum and avoid more human suffering and destruction.

Tunisia (2011 – 2017). Mass protests sparked by the self-immolation of a street vendor, which eventually culminated in the end of Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali's autocratic rule in 2011 set in motion a process that became known as the Arab Spring. A wave of revolutions and revolts shook the MENA region in the year that followed, however, Tunisia remained the only country out of sixteen in the region where the gains made during the Arab Spring were somewhat sustained and there was neither a significant escalation of violence nor the development of intractable conflict. The case study showcases the role of the UN in supporting Tunisia during this transition which helped it avoid the path taken by its regional neighbors.

Ukraine (1994-2001). After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, nation-building was underway in Ukraine. One of the challenges of this process was the consolidation and integration of national minorities into the new national canvas of the state. The large ethnic Russian population, wide-spread prevalence of the Russian language as well as historic Russian domination made this process even more challenging. In addition, the question of the status of Crimea, which housed the Black Sea Fleet added another dimension to the tension in Russian-Ukrainian relations. The case of Ukraine during this period demonstrates how preventive efforts can defuse the possible escalation of violence.

Yemen (2011). In 2011, Yemen was considered a "success story" case in the wave of Arab Spring uprisings. Unlike its neighbors in the region, Yemen managed to go through a relatively peaceful political transition and "launched an ambitious, inclusive national dialogue process."⁸ At the beginning of 2011, the political situation in Yemen was highly explosive. High oil revenues allowed the incumbent president to maintain and pay off a large network of allies, while grooming and preparing his own son to be his successor. This move was not welcomed by

⁸ Rebecca Brubaker, "Things Fall Apart: Holding the Centre Together through Yemen's 2011 Popular Uprising (April- November 2011)," 2018, 2.

two prominent representatives of the Yemeni elite – “General Ali Mohsin al-Ahmar, a longtime friend and ally of the President’s, and – Hamid Al-Amar – a billionaire and ambitious son of the founder of the main opposition party, Islah,”⁹ both of whom considered himself as the next rightful successor. The overall political situation was further exacerbated by the devaluation of the national currency, increased poverty rates, and high rates of unemployment among the youth. In addition to the brewing power struggle, the central government face a growing successionist movement in the South and a simmering rebellion in the North. The case of Yemen showcases the efforts of the UN to deescalate the immediate conflict and create an environment where some constructive progress was possible.

Structure of the Report

The paper is divided into seven sections based on the key themes that emerged from the analysis of the reviewed preventive interventions: 1) local factors. This section focuses on a discussion of factors that can enable or impede the implementation of preventive measures; 2) early engagement. This section highlights the ability of intervening organizations to utilize windows of opportunity in a timely manner to maximize the impact of a preventive intervention; 3) a comprehensive approach. This section extracts evidence from the reviewed cases to support the argument about the need to go beyond the immediate necessity of stopping violence to focus on fundamental aspects of conflict transformation; 4) engagement with governments. One of the key findings of this research is the need to find non-coercive ways to engage with a host government to maximize the sustainability and impact of violence prevention; 5) coordination of efforts and leveraging the capacity of the most appropriate organization. The discussion in this fifth section builds on evidence from the reviewed cases and introduces two additional dimensions to coordination and complementarity in peacebuilding: the need for local coordination and leveraging the capacities of the most appropriate organizations; 6) engagement structures. This section presents two additional structural factors that impact the success of preventive efforts; and 7) the reputability of the intervenor. This final section details the tremendous and often decisive impact the of personalities of lead intervenors can have on the

⁹ Ibid.

success of preventive intervention. Each section includes a set of recommendations developed based on existing experience and evidence from the field.

Local Factors of Prevention: Is the Door Open or Closed?

The vast majority of interventions, regardless of who the lead organization is, are rooted in their specific mandates that outline the legal and procedural scope of the intervention. While the mandate is a legal document that follows international norms and standards, its importance to violence prevention is two-fold. First, it can authorize early intervention at the initiative of the lead organization, and second, it can “provide flexibility in terms of the sources of conflict it is allowed to address.”¹⁰ An international or intergovernmental organization can stage an intervention if there is either a request from the host government or if the intervening organization has enough leverage to entice or threaten the conflict parties to make a deal.¹¹ A wide range of local factors typically come together to form the backdrop against which the preventive intervention develops.

The current international political system continues to recognize and prioritize the sovereignty of individual states, which implies that to “set a foot in the door,” international organizations have to first be able to open the proverbial door. Even with the most appropriate organizational structures and commitment to conflict prevention, the effects of preventive actions are likely to be marginal or ineffective if local conditions are not conducive for an intervention. In almost half the cases reviewed for this study, there were local factors that allowed for meaningful and robust preventive intervention to develop. Local factors that frame preventive intervention efforts can be divided into two main categories – *active* and *passive*. Each of these factors is reviewed in detail in the next section to provide a deeper understanding of how international organizations can recognize opportunities for preventive intervention.

Active Factors

In the context of conflict prevention, the author defines *active factors* as actions and

¹⁰ Eileen F. Babbitt, “Preventive Diplomacy by Intergovernmental Organizations: Learning from Practice,” *International Negotiation* 17, no. 3 (2012): 383, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-12341236>.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

statements made by the representatives of conflict parties (government, opposition, activist groups, etc.) that signal their readiness to accept and work with a preventive intervention. Active factors, in turn, can be *direct* and *indirect*.

In the catalog of direct active factors an *open and explicit invitation* by the host government stands out as the most enabling condition for an international organization to step in and carry out preventive work. For example, the initial six-month OSCE mission to Estonia was established in mid-December of 1992 after the visit of an OSCE delegation to Estonia at the request of the Estonian government.¹² This provided grounds for the OSCE to develop and deploy a mission that would address growing tension between the Estonian government and ethnic Russians around the issue of citizenship that emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. An explicit and open invitation was also a key factor in the OAS's election monitoring mission in Guyana. The OAS was closely monitoring the electoral developments in Guyana when "it received an invitation from the Guyanese Government in September 2005 to observe the 2006 regional and general elections."¹³ Since the Inter-American Democratic Charter allowed the OAS to engage with member states only after there has been a request for engagement, this open invitation provided the necessary condition for the OAS to establish its engagement strategy for Guyana.¹⁴ In contrast to an open invitation by the host government, in some cases, the initiative comes from the intervening organization itself. This proactive approach by the lead organization is only effective when there is no direct opposition by the host government to such an initiative. For example, in case of Yemen, the UN Secretary-General reached out to the President Ali Abdullah Saleh and requested permission to send a UN representative on a fact-finding mission.¹⁵ Saleh's agreement to this initiative allowed the UN to dispatch Special Adviser to Yemen, Jamal Benomar, which served as an opening to the UN's engagement in Yemen in 2011.

The purposeful and direct actions of conflict parties and intervenors are not the only

¹² Rob Zaagman, *Conflict Prevention in the Baltic States: The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania*, ECMI Monograph, #1 (Flensburg: European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI), 1999).

¹³ Taryn Lesser, "Preventive Diplomacy Work in the Organization of American States (OAS): The 2006 Elections in Guyana," *International Negotiation* 17, no. 3 (January 1, 2012): 434, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-12341238>.

¹⁴ Lesser, "Preventive Diplomacy Work in the Organization of American States (OAS)."

¹⁵ Brubaker, "Things Fall Apart: Holding the Centre Together through Yemen's 2011 Popular Uprising (April-November 2011)."

factors that help frame intervention efforts. Local conditions such as internal social and political platforms also can act as enabling factors for preventive interventions. The author refers to them as *indirect active factors*. Within this category, the political composition of the state stands out as a pivotal factor. The role of responsible and moderate leadership is pivotal for creating de-escalation opportunities and entry points for intervention. In the case of Macedonia, the presence of moderate and pragmatic elements within the government allowed for realistic and meaningful interventions to develop. The Macedonian government led by President Gligorov adopted a pragmatic approach toward all ethnic minorities in the country, including Albanians, and pursued a “policy of accommodation and power-sharing” within the government.¹⁶ On the other hand, even though Albanians continued to complain about their political and cultural rights, moderate ethnic Albanian leaders were “careful not to upset the delicate communal balance.”¹⁷ The presence of reasonable voices and leadership on both sides thus created a space where external preventive intervention was able to achieve results in addressing concerns and fears on both sides. Similarly, the success of the preventive intervention in Malawi is partly attributed to the presence of moderate elements within the conflicting parties. The civil society-led mass demonstrations against “bad economic and [to demand] democratic governance” were forcefully dispersed by the security forces, which resulted in the death of twenty protestors. Several dozen were injured, and hundreds were arrested.¹⁸ Even though, as the crisis unfolded, both the government and civil society could have taken a more rigid and uncompromising position, a segment of the civil society was eager to find a non-violent solution to the crisis.¹⁹ President Mutharika also agreed to engage in dialogue with civil society after careful consideration and a “pragmatic cost-benefit assessment.”²⁰ The presence of moderates in both camps and their ability to exercise power over hardliners created positive potential for de-escalation that was successfully exploited by the UN-led preventive action.²¹

Pragmatic and reasonable leadership with moderate political views needs to be combined with strong political will to ensure the sustainability of preventive action beyond initial

¹⁶ Alice Ackermann, “The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: A Relatively Successful Case of Conflict Prevention in Europe,” *Security Dialogue*, June 29, 2016, 414, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010696027004005>.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Laurie Nathan, “UN Preventive Diplomacy and Facilitation of Dialogue in Malawi (2011-12),” 2018, 2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

engagement. Constantly changing conflict dynamics often create crisis situations that can derail and undermine any preventive intervention. Commitment and strong political will from the conflicting parties ensure intervention efforts are sustained even during shifting political and social dynamics domestically. For example, UN involvement in assisting the peace process in Colombia underscores clearly that the process was only sustainable due to the political will on the part of the government and FARC to be part of the peace process.²² Similarly, in Estonia, the government used the public space to underline its commitment to follow the recommendations developed by HCNM,²³ while the OSCE mission itself was in constant communication with the host government to follow up on the implementation of the developed recommendations.²⁴

Passive Factors

In contrast to active factors, passive factors are not statements or actions made by the conflict parties but rather are events that occur within a given conflict environment. Taken together, these factors create an environment where preventive action can develop and thrive. One such passive local factor is the *absence of key spoilers* from the political scene or their deliberate inactivity. For example, the intervention in Guyana was able to move forward and register successes due to the assassination attempt against the president, who, by the assessment of many experts, could have played the role of key spoiler. “The assassination attempt against Camara that triggered his flight from the country opened the door to a mediation process that had otherwise hit a dead-end.”²⁵ If the case in Guinea highlights how the absence of a key spoiler opens a window of opportunity for successful prevention, the example of Ukraine before 2001 underscores how deliberate inaction of a powerful player can yield space for preventive measures to work. Review of expert opinions and literature on the HCNM’s involvement in Ukraine from 1994-2001 suggest that Russia’s choice not to play the role of spoiler and refrain from any actions in Crimea allowed the HCNM to contain the spread of violence. “Had the Yeltsin administration sought to more actively support and enable the separatists in Crimea, that conflict would certainly have escalated to a very dangerous level. The lack of active Russian support also limited the options

²² Cale Salih, “Colombia 2012-2016,” in *What Works in UN Resident Coordinator-Led Conflict Prevention: Lessons from the Field*, by Sebastian von Einsiedel, 2018, 40–58.

²³ Zaagman, *Conflict Prevention in the Baltic States*.

²⁴ Timo Lahelma, “The OSCE’s Role in Conflict Prevention: The Case of Estonia,” *Helsinki Monitor* 10 (1999): 19–38.

²⁵ Sascha Pichler Fong and Adam Day, “UN Preventive Diplomacy in the 2008-10 Crisis in Guinea,” 2018, 10.

available to the Crimean leadership, a fact that would seem to encourage dialogue and compromise.”²⁶

The ability of intervening organizations to contain the spread of violence and reverse the course of conflict greatly depends on an amalgam of local factors that create windows of opportunity. The capacity of intervenors to recognize and capitalize on these enabling local factors can facilitate constructive conflict prevention in other environments as well. Based on existing experience in the field, several recommendations for interveners include:

1. Proactively engage the leadership of the country in question with an offer to provide assistance to facilitate the de-escalation of tension and/or conflict.
2. Look for and develop relationships with pragmatic voices within the conflict parties. While in some conflict environments it might be difficult to find moderate and pragmatic leadership, international interveners need to use their reputation, resources, and expertise to soften the positions of the conflicting parties and support a degree of moderation.
3. Provide positive reinforcement for sustained commitment and political will to seek non-violent solutions to existing tension.
4. Develop workable solutions on how to isolate potential spoilers and allow for the creation of separate engagement spaces for them so their influence on the main preventive action is minimized.

Early Engagement

Volumes have been written about recognizing and engaging early warning signs in conflict situations. This small section aims to contribute to the discussion of the role and importance of early warning by adding evidence on the role of early and timely engagement in the successful prevention of violent outbreaks. In several of the examined cases, intervening organizations used their windows of opportunity and engaged early enough, which allowed for

²⁶ Angela Kachuyevski, “The Possibilities and Limitations of Preventive Action: The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities in Ukraine,” *International Negotiation* 17, no. 3 (January 1, 2012): 393, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-12341237>.

proactive intervention to contain and prevent the spread of violence. In the cases of Yemen, Estonia, Macedonia, Nepal, Ukraine, and Guyana, intervening organizations were able to mobilize and stage their interventions early enough to avoid further deterioration of the conflict situation.

While the bureaucratic machine of the international community is usually slow to move ahead with the commitments and decisions made, the importance of early engagement should not be underestimated. One of the factors that contributed to the success of the OSCE mission in Estonia was the organization's ability to deploy its mission within two months of the decision to act.²⁷ Similarly, in Yemen, early action was key in addressing the unfolding crisis. Within only a few weeks of the first violent outbreaks, "the UN Secretary-General reached out to President Saleh and requested his permission to send a Special Adviser to Yemen."²⁸

While some environments might be more challenging for early engagement, others can have a window of opportunity open for a much longer period of time. International interveners should look out for these opportunities and seize the moment in a timely manner. The prevention of electoral violence in Guyana provides grounded evidence of how early and timely engagement can prevent violence even in contexts where political violence is typically the norm. Even though Guyana had a long history of electoral violence, the 2006 elections did not cause any major upheaval. A review of the situation on the ground and actions taken by international actors suggests that this dramatic difference in post-election developments is due to the engagement of several international structures significantly in advance of when the elections were underway. It is a regular practice for the international community to commission short-term observers to monitor elections. At the same time, the evidence suggests that countries with a history of electoral violence, low levels of trust in the electoral system, and heightened political tension can benefit from more structured engagement that goes beyond the immediate observation of an electoral process. In the case of Guyana, the OAS deployed a long-term observer mission in addition to a short-term election monitoring team. The long-term observer mission provided expert support and advice in the lead up to the elections. The timing of the mission was critical in preventing the outbreak of post-electoral violence. Early engagement allowed the OAS to

²⁷ Lahelma, "The OSCE's Role in Conflict Prevention."

²⁸ Brubaker, "Things Fall Apart: Holding the Centre Together through Yemen's 2011 Popular Uprising (April-November 2011)," 11.

provide meaningful and transformative technical assistance to the election process in Guyana that ensured the peacefulness of the entire election and post-election process.²⁹

Early engagement is not only a function performed by the intervenor but also has to be built into the structure of an intervention. Nepal is one of the cases where such a structural element enabled intervenors to recognize early engagement avenues. In addition to representation in Kathmandu, the UN Resident Coordinator also established field offices beyond the capital city which positioned numerous eyes and ears on the ground with the ability to respond to early warning signs. The “four field offices with humanitarian and early warning capacities” facilitated the timely analysis of trends in the regions and beyond.³⁰ And finally, an important structural element that is central to early engagement and a timely response is the institutional ability to expedite the response time to an unfolding crisis. In this regard, the OSCE and HCNM stand out among other intervening organizations. As already mentioned in the case of Estonia, the OSCE deployed the mission in less than two months, while the HCNM had a mandate marked by independence which permitted the High Commissioner to take early action without waiting for approval from OSCE Headquarters.³¹

The limited evidence from existing conflict prevention cases underscores the importance of not only being aware of early warning signs but also the organization’s ability to act quickly and take early action. Early engagement and timely intervention help to put structures and support systems in place that enable these efforts to contain the spread of violence and alter the trajectory of conflict escalation. Based on existing experience in the field, several recommendations for interveners are as follows:

1. Leverage organizational resources and structures to support early engagement as much as possible. While in some cases the establishment of new robust structures might be needed, in other conflict environments organizations might already have structures and staff in place to facilitate early engagement. These resources should be cataloged and ready to deploy and leverage once a crisis situation is identified.
2. Develop internal policies and structures that seek to alleviate bureaucratic constraints and

²⁹ Lesser, “Preventive Diplomacy Work in the Organization of American States (OAS).”

³⁰ Salih and von Einsiedel, “Conflict Prevention in Nepal: Background Paper for the United Nations - World Bank Flagship Study on the Prevention of Violent Conflict.”

³¹ Kachuyevski, “The Possibilities and Limitations of Preventive Action.”

allow for early engagement without going through long and tedious pipeline approval processes.

3. Follow the example of the OSCE and establish special units and divisions within major international organizations that are regularly involved in conflict prevention with vested authority to act quickly without additional approval mechanisms from their HQs.

A Comprehensive Approach

Many factors contribute to the sustainability and long-lasting effect of conflict prevention. The current review of cases permitted the author to find some evidence that supports an argument about the need for a comprehensive approach to violence prevention and conflict resolution. Often it is easy for interveners to address the immediate consequences of conflict, focusing their attention on the most visible and urgent matters in a given environment. While these are necessary steps to “stop the bleeding,” a more comprehensive approach should follow to provide for the sustainability of these efforts. A comprehensive approach implies working and coordinating with a wider range of actors and engaging with conflict issues through education, technical training, confidence-building measures, dialogue, and other actions. At the same time, as the example of Macedonia demonstrates, to be comprehensive, preventive action must also include the development of political and economic incentives for conflict reduction and prevention.³²

A comprehensive approach to conflict prevention not only implies working on multiple issue areas simultaneously but also means finding a key anchor that can become the central building block of any intervention. In this regard, the OSCE’s approach in Macedonia highlights the positive effects of this approach. In Macedonia, the OSCE successfully linked conflict and conflict prevention with a human dimension. This empowered the intervenor to work on conflict prevention through strengthening good governance, the rule of law, and minority rights.³³ In this case, the OSCE helped to frame grievances as a need for “access” for the minority population, rather than an attempt to “break away” or “exit.” This framing sent a signal to the Macedonian majority that there was no existential threat to them and allowed for a wider environment for prevention to emerge. Anchoring a preventive strategy in the issue of human rights and its subsequent monitoring proved to be effective in the case of Estonia as well. The OSCE

³² Sophia Clement, *Conflict Prevention in the Balkans: Case Studies of Kosovo and the FYR of Macedonia* (Institute for Security Studies, Western European Union, Paris, 1997, Chaillot Pa, 1997).

³³ Terrence Hopmann, “An End to the Beginning of War: The OSCE’s Role in Conflict Prevention in Macedonia and Kosovo | Wilson Center,” 2005, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/end-to-the-beginning-war-the-osces-role-conflict-prevention-macedonia-and-kosovo>.

conducted regular monitoring of the human rights situation which helped to diffuse tensions between Estonia and Russia and helped to prevent the escalation of misunderstandings.³⁴

The issue of human rights is not the only anchor that can be used for comprehensive violence prevention. In many cases, conflicts are caused by wide-spread injustices that systematically target one of the sides of the conflict. As the case of Guinea highlights, the prevention of widespread violence in the country was successful due to the creation of a meaningful justice process to address the concerns of the low-power side of the conflict. The ability of the intervenor, in this case, the UN, to push for meaningful justice and anti-impunity processes provided reassurance to the opposition-coalition that their concerns would be addressed and helped to create a space where constructive dialogue was possible.³⁵

As the UN preventive intervention in South Sudan demonstrates, a comprehensive approach benefits from careful consideration of the linkages between different issues and how to reasonably separate certain issue areas. Such an approach ensures that progress in different areas of intervention is not held back due to setbacks in other areas, while still addressing the conflict from different angles. In South Sudan, intervenors succeeded in delinking highly political issues and creating separate processes for them. This approach helped to register progress in less political areas regardless of the progress on highly political issues. Creating separate forums for certain issues to be discussed and addressed reduces tension around the need to have an agreement on all issues at once and helps to not have issues held hostage to one another.³⁶

A comprehensive approach to conflict and violence prevention also implies serious investment in terms of the time and commitment of the intervening organizations. There is a tendency within international intervening organizations to have an “exit strategy” at the beginning of an intervention in order not to be stuck in a conflict setting indefinitely.³⁷ Conversely, as Richard Holbrooke testified regarding the situation in Bosnia, premature exit can “erode achievements.”³⁸ Cases of prevention in Estonia and Yemen illustrate the benefits of an intervenor’s commitment to invest time in prevention. In the case of Estonia, the OSCE made a choice to build its exit strategy on the progress achieved rather than a set deadline and date.³⁹ The centrality of committing time to prevention was also visible in UN’s efforts

³⁴ Timo Lahelma, “The OSCE’s Role in Conflict Prevention: The Case of Estonia,” *Helsinki Monitor* 10 (1999): 19–38; Rob Zaagman, *Conflict Prevention in the Baltic States: The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania*, ECMI Monograph, #1 (Flensburg: European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI), 1999).

³⁵ Fong and Day, “UN Preventive Diplomacy in the 2008-10 Crisis in Guinea.”

³⁶ Adam Day, “Preventive Diplomacy and the Southern Sudan Independence Referendum (2010-11),” 2018.

³⁷ Gideon Rose, “The Exit Strategy Delusion,” *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 1 (1998): 56–67, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20048362>.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

³⁹ Lahelma, “The OSCE’s Role in Conflict Prevention.”

in Yemen. As testified by one of the UN team members working in Yemen, “a high number of cups of tea that were necessary to consume or social gatherings to attend before one could ever get the “real story” of a key interlocutor’s opinions and interest.”⁴⁰ Commitment on the part of the intervenor to the conflict prevention effort is as equally important as the conflict parties’ commitment to the process. Sustaining focus, momentum, and the interest of all the parties involved, including the international intervenor, is central for any prevention effort.

To summarize, a comprehensive approach to prevention is one of the pillars that enhances the entire enterprise. A comprehensive approach not only requires addressing multiple issues simultaneously and finding a central component in which to anchor the intervention, but also requires the intervening organization find ways to delink different interconnected issues. A comprehensive approach is not an intervention that tries to address all relevant issues at the same time. Rather, it is an intervention that supports the development of separate and interlinked platforms within the scope of the preventive action so that progress on each issue can move forward independently. Based on existing experience from the field, several recommendations for interveners are as follows:

1. Identify one or two central issues within a specific conflict environment that can be used as anchors for the intervention and generate traction with local and international parties.
2. Separate conflict issues and cast a wider net of preventive action. This would allow organizations to cover a broader range of issues and, potentially, physical territory. In addition, this would facilitate a more inclusive preventive action by targeting different issues and stakeholders.

Engagement with Governments

The official leadership of a country and government structures with rigid positions and a need to maintain power are often at the heart of conflict. In the current state of realpolitik where power is usually asserted through domination and the manifestation of force – either physical or symbolic - international actors often rely on coercive measures to strong-arm governments into

⁴⁰ Brubaker, “Things Fall Apart: Holding the Centre Together through Yemen’s 2011 Popular Uprising (April-November 2011),” 116.

negotiations, concessions, or cooperation. Economic and military sanctions, military intervention, and the public denouncement of state officials are only a few of the measures the international community uses from its coercive toolbox to entice cooperation. While the effectiveness of these coercive tactics is a subject of different research, the study supports an argument for targeted engagement with governments in conflict countries. The evidence from Guinea, Nigeria, South Sudan, Malawi, Kyrgyzstan, and elsewhere highlights that successful preventive action relies on the ability of intervening organizations to find avenues of engagement with government structures in a way that does not completely marginalize them.

The need to engage with a government is highly susceptible to critique. Some might argue that engagement with a government might signal validation and/or international approval for their positions. Others might argue that without a reasonable amount of coercion no meaningful advancements can be made. At the same time, evidence from the cases reviewed for this study suggest that too much pressure on governments can be less effective compared to a combined approach, including both sticks and carrots. For example, in Guinea, the UN applied punitive sanctions against the government. However, there was clear indication that these sanctions would be lifted and there would be international assistance were the country to make positive advancements toward peace.⁴¹ At the same time, the intervening organization was able to identify and use appropriate incentives to engage with the government in a way that advanced preventive measures. A review of the South Sudanese case suggests the UN successfully identified the right incentives for the leadership that coincided with the leadership's own self-interests. The US designated Sudan as a state sponsor of terrorism and harsh sanctions applied to the country by the US and other Western states caused significant damage to the Sudanese economy. According to one of the UN officials involved in preventive action in South Sudan, the UN recognized that for the Sudanese president, his country's removal from the terrorist list and an alleviation of the sanctions was the "biggest carrot."⁴² This understanding framed the Obama administration's offer to South Sudan's president. Even though the parties failed to achieve consensus due to other factors involved,⁴³ the intervening organization was nevertheless on the right track in recognizing the window of opportunity that the right incentives can create with the

⁴¹ Fong and Day, "UN Preventive Diplomacy in the 2008-10 Crisis in Guinea."

⁴² Day, "Preventive Diplomacy and the Southern Sudan Independence Referendum (2010-11)."

⁴³ Ibid.

political leadership of a given country.

The appropriate combination of reward and coercion can keep engagement open with the formal leadership of a country and help advance preventive efforts. Often, the international community's response to an unfolding crisis consists of the complete isolation of the political leadership of a country, their portrayal as absolutely evil, marginalization on the international stage, and an attempt to marginalize them vis-à-vis their own citizens. The reviewed cases suggest these harsh tactics can only be marginally successful. Instead, international interveners should combine their criticism with signals of cooperation if the country's leadership shows signs of improvement. This means that while international intervenors may condemn and call out local leadership on its action, they must also find a way of keeping their channels of engagement and communication with governments open. As the case of Guinea shows, while the international community applied pressure to isolate the country's leadership, it also made sure they were not completely ostracized and still able to engage in discussions.⁴⁴

Often the leadership of conflict parties (especially formal ruling elites) are fearful of losing face and perceive any intervention as a threat to their legitimacy. Providing meaningful ways of preserving face while engaging formal leadership can help intervening organizations to further preventive action and minimize the chances of violence escalation. This important consideration was applied skillfully by the UN in Malawi, when throughout its engagement, the UN was careful not to demonize either of the parties and created space for them to maintain their legitimacy.⁴⁵ Similarly, in their engagement in Nigeria, the UN did not voice public criticism or condemn the government harshly or other political parties involved. This approach ensured the acceptability of the preventive diplomacy led by the UN who instead of condemning the country's leadership over elections and human rights issues continued to work quietly behind the scenes.⁴⁶ And finally, governments can become trapped in zero-sum thinking where any transition is equated with their complete physical and symbolic destruction. Experts working on the situation in South Sudan stressed that the political leadership there was extremely concerned and fearful that it would not survive the referendum and transition. Offering a meaningful way out in such cases is critical for preventive intervention. In the case of South Sudan, the African

⁴⁴ Fong and Day, "UN Preventive Diplomacy in the 2008-10 Crisis in Guinea."

⁴⁵ Nathan, "UN Preventive Diplomacy and Facilitation of Dialogue in Malawi (2011-12)."

⁴⁶ Laurie Nathan, "UN Preventive Diplomacy during the 2015 Nigerian Elections," 2018.

Union (AU) mediation successfully instilled confidence in President Bashir and the National Congress leadership that their survival was not at stake.⁴⁷

Setting appropriate expectations when working with the formal leadership of a country helps to reinforce preventive action. While intervenors can identify the necessary incentives to encourage local leadership to engage in these efforts, it is often necessary to provide constructive face-saving avenues and build trust with domestic governing structures. International intervenors should also aim to develop realistic expectations of what the host government can expect to achieve from engagement and cooperation. The case of Kyrgyzstan and the UN's engagement in preventing the spread of ethnic violence there underscores the importance of maintaining previously built trust with a government by setting clear expectations of what cooperation will yield. "Government was made to understand that 'infrastructures for peace' – a term used to express a set of formal and informal domestic institutions elaborated to prevent conflict and promote peace – would not lead to the establishment of much-needed roads, bridges, communication and sewage systems as the President had expected."⁴⁸ These clear expectations enabled the Kyrgyz government to anticipate what cooperation entailed and not step back from supporting preventive efforts when their expectations were not met.

Finally, developing trustworthy personal relationships with key interlocutors within a conflict setting can act as a supporting pillar for preventive intervention. Evidence from the UN's preventive engagement in Lebanon suggests "personal relationships matter when it comes to this kind of soft leverage."⁴⁹ Engagement was successful here because UN leadership was in constant communication with all the political actors in Lebanon thus making sure they felt personally important and heard. According to UN experts, building this personal trust and confidence with key leaders was extremely important as it creates space for political elites to turn to the UN and trust what they say when the crisis happens. "This personal trust and reliance are evidenced by the frequent requests by former Prime Minister Tamam Salam."⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Day, "Preventive Diplomacy and the Southern Sudan Independence Referendum (2010-11)."

⁴⁸ Cale Salih, "Bolivia," in *What Works in UN Resident Coordinator-Led Conflict Prevention: Lessons from the Field*, by Sebastian von Einsiedel, 2018, 112.

⁴⁹ Adam Day, "Firefighting on Multiple Fronts: Preventive Diplomacy in Lebanon through the Syria Crisis (2011-17)," in *Capturing UN Preventive Diplomacy Success: How and Why Does It Work?*, 2018, 52.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

To summarize, the evidence from Guinea, Nigeria, South Sudan, Malawi, Kyrgyzstan, and elsewhere highlights that when an intervening organization does not demonize and ostracize the formal leadership of a country in conflict and frames the intervention as non-threatening, there is a better chance of achieving meaningful cooperation and tilting the balance towards a non-violent solution. The ability of intervening organizations to offer the right rewards to a country's leadership that resonate with their self-interest as well as applying non-threatening pressure through consistent messaging are central to ensure the success of preventive action. Based on existing experience in the field, several recommendations for interveners are as follows:

1. Identify appropriate and strong incentives to help bring the formal leadership of a country to the cooperation table. The application of sanctions, public statements, and media narrative created to target the government engaged in conflict should include built-in positive reinforcement mechanisms that local leadership recognize and will pursue if they choose to.
2. Build personal relations with key interlocutors when possible, especially in cultural contexts where personalities and personal ambition play a central role in the political sphere.
3. Communicate through non-ambiguous messaging and set appropriate expectations with local counterparts. This can help engage local leadership and keep them involved throughout the entire intervention.

Coordination of Efforts and Leveraging the Capacity of the Most Appropriate Organization

There is no shortage of literature in the peacebuilding and conflict resolution fields that discusses the need for coordination and information sharing among different actors involved in advancing peacebuilding efforts. This research adds two additional dimensions: *the need for local coordination* and *leveraging the capacities of the most appropriate organization(s)*. These two aspects add depth and a new dimension to our understanding and conceptualization of successful conflict prevention.

The catalog of organizations as suitable intervenor in a specific conflict situation is diverse. Each available organization has a specific structure, expertise, and historical positioning that impacts its attractiveness as the main intervening actor in a particular conflict. For example, the UN and NATO have much stronger coercive leverage and can be successful in peace enforcement. Conversely, the United Nations Development Program and the Commonwealth respectively are better positioned to carry out developmental and political actions. Careful assessment of when and how the capacities of each of the available and interested actors can be leveraged is key in designing and implementing successful prevention. The experience of preventive action in Estonia, Ukraine, and Macedonia strongly supports the argument of placing the right organization in the position of catalyst for preventive action. Human rights and, particularly minority rights were at the heart of the grievances in all three of these cases. The OSCE, as a European regional organization, has a strong focus on human rights. Its engagement in these crises leveraged the expertise and reputation of the organization in the area of human rights and facilitated tangible results in these conflict settings.

Recognizing the potential and capacity of an organization to lead a particular intervention should not come at the expense of strong coordination among all the actors involved. Coordination should be understood in the broadest sense and include both interagency coordination and intra-agency coordination. The dynamic of conflict prevention in Macedonia and Estonia showcase how a high level of coordination can be pivotal in preventive action. In the case of Macedonia, the OSCE stands out as the catalyst in addressing the human rights/minority rights issues in accordance with its outstanding portfolio on human rights. However, had the OSCE acted singlehandedly, it would have probably been less effective and successful if its efforts were not complemented by other actors (the UN, NATO, EU, the US, INGOs) who stepped in at different times and offered their own expertise.⁵¹ A high level of coordination among these actors ensured the main aspects of the crisis were covered and there was a timely response to any potential escalation. Similarly, cooperation and coordination between the OSCE and the HCNM are often regarded as an important pillar of prevention efforts in Estonia. The reasonable and natural division of labor between these two bodies enabled meaningful and successful preventive to develop. Their activities also complemented each other. For example,

⁵¹ Radoslava Stefanova, "Preventing Violent Conflict in Europe: The Case of Macedonia," *The International Spectator* 32, no. 3-4 (July 1, 1997): 99-120, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729708456786>.

while OSCE political offices were often involved in public statements, the HCNM worked behind the scenes largely avoiding outward facing, public engagement.⁵²

Coordination and cooperation not only ensure the continued complementarity of efforts but also help to support a certain unity of approaches that can amplify the impact of intervention. Multiple actors in a conflict setting that are guided by their own organizational values, processes, and country priorities can fragment preventive efforts. Their presence and activities can even be counterproductive. The UN's ability to facilitate constructive dialogue in Malawi, among other factors, was due to a high level of coordination and complementarity that ensured parallel efforts did not contradict each other. Other regional organizations as well as donor organizations were "willing to 'join hands and collaborate with the UN, rather than run a parallel initiative of their own.'"⁵³ Coordination-based unity and consistent international responses to a crisis situation signals to the conflict parties the commitment of international intervenors to see the crisis situation through to its resolution. Preventive engagement in Lebanon supports this argument. Many analysts are united in their assessment that the rapid reduction of tension in the country can be attributed "in large part to the united position of the international community."⁵⁴

Any discussion of cooperation and coordination would be incomplete without addressing the issue of consistent and united messaging. Consistent messaging helps reduce ambiguity around expectations and sends clear signals to conflicting parties about the intentions of the international community. In practice, the centrality of consistent messaging was validated through the international community's involvement in supporting the independence referendum in South Sudan. Experts underline that the prevention of large-scale violence in the country was possible partly because the UN and the AU were united and consistent in their messaging and sending signals to the leadership of both parties.⁵⁵ United messaging from regional and international actors, as well as the leadership of Nigeria's immediate neighbors, played a pivotal role in the preventive efforts in Nigeria. In this particular case, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mohammed Chambas, acted as a liaison between key international actors and regional and sub-regional organizations on the ground (such as ECOWAS, the AU, the

⁵² Zaagman, *Conflict Prevention in the Baltic States*.

⁵³ Nathan, "UN Preventive Diplomacy and Facilitation of Dialogue in Malawi (2011-12)," 7.

⁵⁴ Day, "Firefighting on Multiple Fronts: Preventive Diplomacy in Lebanon through the Syria Crisis (2011-17)," 44.

⁵⁵ Day, "Preventive Diplomacy and the Southern Sudan Independence Referendum (2010-11)."

Commonwealth, and the EU). Neighboring states and other key political figures acted to ensure “consistent messaging to the Nigerian politicians’ and [apply] gentle but firm pressure from a united international community.”⁵⁶ The UN intervention in Yemen in 2011 serves as yet another example of the importance of united and consistent messaging from the international community. In October 2011, the UN Security Council (UNSCG) unanimously “adopted Resolution 2014, demanding all parties in Yemen to cease their use of violence to achieve their political ends and calling upon the parties, including specifically President Saleh, to sign and implement the Agreement the UN had helped develop.”⁵⁷ The value of such non-ambiguous messaging should not be underestimated. Experts testify that “the unanimous passing of Resolution 2014 and the language it included signaled to the parties on the ground that this was a rather rare instance of Security Council members, especially the Permanent Five, standing united on a way forward.”⁵⁸

Finally, coordination and cooperation need to move beyond the boundaries of international actors and include local actors. Fostering coordination, cooperation, and a degree of unity among local actors can help provide a stable foundation from which to engage in preventive action. This form of cross-cutting cooperation can also ensure the preventive process is not derailed easily. Some lessons can be drawn from the UN’s experience in Lebanon, where large-scale violence was avoided in part due to the UN’s ability to rally the Security Council’s support around prevention, as well as foster unity “within the Lebanese political leadership.”⁵⁹ Similarly, the preventive action in the Guatemala-Belize conflict specifically focused on facilitating “increased cooperation among the armed and security forces of Belize and Guatemala” as well as developing frameworks for technical cooperation between the parties.⁶⁰

The effectiveness of cooperation and coordination has long been recognized in the field of conflict resolution and prevention. Preventive engagements benefit when there is a complementarity of efforts working in tandem to cover a wider spectrum of issue areas, territory, and demographics. Coordination and cooperation help to avoid redundancy, overlapping and

⁵⁶ Nathan, “UN Preventive Diplomacy during the 2015 Nigerian Elections,” 5.

⁵⁷ Brubaker, “Things Fall Apart: Holding the Centre Together through Yemen’s 2011 Popular Uprising (April–November 2011),” 114.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Day, “Firefighting on Multiple Fronts: Preventive Diplomacy in Lebanon through the Syria Crisis (2011-17),” 52.

⁶⁰ Magdalena Talamas, “The Fund for Peace: Peaceful Settlement of Territorial Disputes and the Role of the OAS in Mediating the Belize-Guatemala Territorial Dispute,” 2014, https://www.oas.org/es/sap/dsdme/pubs/ROLE_OF_THE_OAS_Belize_Guatemala.pdf.

parallel activities. It also means a better use of both human and material resources. These basic premises of cooperation and coordination can be further strengthened by expanding the scope of this concept to support united and consistent messaging directed at all conflict parties. Operating within this overall understanding of cooperation and coordination, international intervenors should aim to leverage the capabilities of the organizations best positioned to carry out certain tasks and address issues within particular conflict environments. Based on existing experience in the field, several recommendations for interveners are as follows:

1. Conduct an assessment of core conflict issues and determine the entities best positioned to address these issues. Among the key points for consideration in this type of assessment are the history of previous engagements, in-house expertise, and the resources and capacities of the organization.
2. Attempt to achieve complementarity of efforts that leverage the capacities and strengths of individual organizations. This will allow these organization to include a wider spectrum of issues and stakeholders and will help reduce redundancy.
3. Develop and foster cooperation and coordination platforms within and between the conflicting parties. Increased cooperation and coordination can help reduce misunderstandings, defuse tension, and enable an earlier response to possible conflict and violence escalation.

Engagement Structures

There has been significant attention paid to the analysis of immediate actions taken by international interveners in conflict situations. An alternative approach that scrutinizes engagement structures can be helpful in adding depth to our understanding of preventive engagement and how success can be replicated in different conflict environments. Based on the limited evidence provided by the reviewed cases of prevention, two important considerations can help strengthen future preventive interventions. These are (1) solid conflict analysis and (2) prioritizing national initiatives.

Conflict Analysis

While it may be obvious that any engagement and intervention has to be built on strong conflict analysis, this step can often be omitted in the flurry of assembling an intervention mission. Conflict analysis helps intervenors to better understand the context where the intervention will occur. It is key in identifying the positions and interests of the conflict parties and aligning the expertise and resources of the intervening organizations with the needs on the ground. The lack of strong conflict analysis can result in designing an intervention that misses key conflict issues, excludes important stakeholders, or even deepens the divide between conflict parties. Strong and informed conflict analysis also helps to identify conflict dynamics at different levels and design an intervention that can address key issues. A review of the UN engagement in Kyrgyzstan provides compelling evidence on the importance of solid and systematic conflict analysis. In 2011, Kyrgyzstan became eligible for additional funding from the UN “for a set of six different peacebuilding projects related to administration of justice and building ‘infrastructures for peace.’”⁶¹ At the same time, “according to a number of observers, these projects likely fell short of their full potential as an opportunity was missed to ground them in a broader conflict prevention strategy embedded in solid conflict analysis. Indeed, no systematic conflict analysis had been undertaken to guide the work in the immediate aftermath of conflict and the conflict analyses that did exist were outdated and insufficient.”⁶² This major shortcoming was recognized by the UN Country Team in Kyrgyzstan, which resulted in them moving to informed and collective conflict analysis.

The UN interventions in Colombia and Bolivia provide strong evidence for the need for data-driven conflict analysis. In Bolivia, the original data collected and analyzed through the Project of Political Analysis and Prospective Scenarios (PAPEP) served as a prevention tool for the UN Resident coordinator.⁶³ The analysis used original data, which helped the Resident Coordinator to become an important interlocutor with high-level officials and find an entry point into the government. Original data collected through polling within the framework of PAPEP also helped to make the case to the country’s political leadership that “the majority of Bolivians

⁶¹ Josie Lianna Kaye, “Kyrgyzstan 2010-17,” in *What Works in UN Resident Coordinator-Led Conflict Prevention: Lessons from the Field*, by Sebastian von Einsiedel, 2018, 111.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Salih, “Bolivia.”

wanted a dialogue.”⁶⁴ This, in turn, kept the conversation going between the parties. In Colombia, the UN Resident Coordinator “strategically used data from his integrated analysis system, as well as other sources of analysis (such as the UN-commissioned study on the economic benefits of peace), to advocate for a ceasefire and confidence-building measures.”⁶⁵ Collecting original data might not always be possible in dynamic conflict settings. This does not mean, however, that robust conflict analysis is not possible. The case of Yemen provides an example where in the absence of hard data was overcome through active listening exercises led by the UN envoy Jamal Benomar. At the request of the UNSG, Benomar arrived in Yemen to facilitate information gathering from key interlocutors in the country, including representatives of non-governmental organizations, academics, activists, and others.⁶⁶

Conflict analysis allows the intervenor to identify actors, the causes and dynamics of the conflict, and develop intervention mechanisms with appropriate indicators to address them. While conflict analysis is never exhaustive, it can, nevertheless, help raise relevant points with different sets of actors and advocate for solutions and programs that better address underlying grievances.

Prioritizing National Initiatives

Due to their positioning, resources, and authority, internationally led initiatives have significant leverage to bring conflict parties to the negotiation table. At the same time, preventive action should also give serious consideration to nationally led processes where possible. The case studies reviewed for this report suggest the international community can advance preventive efforts by building on already existing national processes. International intervenors should prioritize national initiatives and throw their support behind already existing processes rather than developing their own initiatives. Locally led initiatives framed preventive action to mitigate electoral violence in Nigeria. In this case, the international community adopted the role of an outside actor who strongly endorsed the prevention effort led by national actors. As an international intervenor, the UN did not overstep and played the role of a supportive friend thus allowing for a locally developed process to progress. In the case of Nigeria, the UN’s

⁶⁴ Ibid., 26.

⁶⁵ Sebastian von Einsiedel, “What Works in UN Resident Coordinator-Led Conflict Prevention: Lessons from the Field,” in *What Works in UN Resident Coordinator-Led Conflict Prevention: Lessons from the Field*, 2018, 13.

⁶⁶ Brubaker, “Things Fall Apart: Holding the Centre Together through Yemen’s 2011 Popular Uprising (April–November 2011).”

involvement was “part of a broad stream of prevention endeavors and could support local initiatives rather than having to ‘go-it-alone’ or ‘swim against the tide.’”⁶⁷ This allowed for the preventive effort to remain concentrated in one stream and not lose energy and momentum by being pulled in different directions.

Emphasizing the role of local and national aspects of preventive efforts implies supporting reasonable local processes that are underway and also leveraging local resources whenever possible. The national staff of an international organization can be a valuable resource when embarking on a preventive mission. It is usually assumed the national staff of an international organization cannot be neutral when it comes to conflict dynamics in their own country. However, the case of Bolivia underscores how “national staff can play a crucial role in prevention.”⁶⁸ Local staff can not only contribute in-depth knowledge of the political, economic, and cultural environment but also provide access to important networks of political and social leaders. This is a significant asset within intervening organizations and should be recognized and utilized to advance successful prevention.

Supporting national and local processes can often mean the tedious and challenging work performed by international actors remains unacknowledged and behind the scenes. Preventive action in Latin America and Africa suggests that working under the radar and maintaining a low profile helps intervenors to register progress. For example, in Tunisia, the UN Resident Coordinator refrained from claiming credit in public for the “UN’s considerable electoral and constitutional support.”⁶⁹ Similarly, in Colombia, the UN was not front and center of the preventive engagement but rather supported national actors at their request. In this process, the UN Resident Coordinator avoided “presenting himself as a protagonist of the peace process for the sake of relevance.”⁷⁰

Paying specific and focused attention to several structural components of preventive engagement can help international intervenors be more robust in their preventive efforts. The two structural components that played an important role in the success of already commissioned preventive efforts are *strong conflict analysis* and the *support of nationally led initiatives and*

⁶⁷ Nathan, “UN Preventive Diplomacy during the 2015 Nigerian Elections,” 6.

⁶⁸ Salih, “Bolivia,” 27.

⁶⁹ von Einsiedel, “What Works in UN Resident Coordinator-Led Conflict Prevention: Lessons from the Field,” 10.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

actors. These two structural elements can serve as strong anchors for preventive efforts and ensure there are necessary resources to carry prevention forward. Based on existing experience in the field, several recommendations for interveners are as follows:

1. International organizations should develop robust and relevant conflict analyses that help map the actors, causes, dynamics, and levels of conflict. This will ensure the designed intervention is structurally sound, targets the right stakeholders, and focuses on key and relevant issues.
2. When possible, international actors must engage in fact-finding missions with the explicit purpose of soliciting opinions from a wide range of stakeholders within a particular conflict setting. These fact-finding missions can serve as an important preventive tool as they can identify potential tensions before they even surface.
3. International intervenors should follow and pay close attention to already existing processes initiated by local actors and determine how to safeguard, support, and advance these processes before creating parallel initiatives. Supporting local processes helps to concentrate resources in one place and not pull them in different directions.
4. Engaging national staff and utilizing them as a key resource to gain access to local networks, political leadership, and community leadership should become the policy preference of international intervening organizations.

Reputability of the Intervenor

The organization or person behind the preventive intervention matters. The reputability of the intervenor builds on the previously discussed concept of the most appropriate organization to intervene. In the previous case, the technical, human, and financial capacity and expertise of an organization, as well as its historic relationships and standing with one or more conflict parties were discussed. In the case of reputability, the focus is on local public perceptions of the intervenor. There are two important facets of the reputability of the intervenor: (1) the reputation and credibility of the organization and (2) the persona of the leader of the intervention. Most of the reviewed cases suggest the persona of the lead intervenor (Special Representative, Resident

Coordinator, Special Envoy, etc.) has a tremendous impact on how communities accept a preventive effort and its subsequent success. In addition to persona, the overall standing and reputation of the lead organization also plays an important role in the success of the intervention.

The Persona of the Intervenor

Choosing the face of the intervention wisely cannot and should not be underestimated. Taken together, deep knowledge of the country context, regional affairs, cultural peculiarities, and an ability to gain access to key stakeholders are the factors that contribute to the success of preventive interventions. The appropriateness of the lead persona was clear in the case of Guyana. The preventive engagement of the OAS in Guyana had two main pillars: the OAS Assistant Secretary-General Ambassador, Albert R. Ramdin, and a technical observer mission deployed to Guyana in the period leading up to elections. Ambassador Ramdin's role was to underline the OAS's interest in having elections conducted in a peaceful, free and fair manner, as well as promote "constructive interaction and dialogue among the principal political actors."⁷¹ Ambassador Ramdin's ability to carry out his mission and help facilitate dialogue between the opposition and the government to ensure subsequent peaceful elections largely depended on his personal background and previous experience. Specifically, Ramdin had previously worked in Guyana and had developed a good understanding of the history and bureaucratic apparatus of the country. His previous engagement gave him additional legitimacy. Moreover, his national origin benefitted him in the Guyanese context. He was a Surinam national with over twenty years of professional experience in complex contexts. "His nationality, origin and previous experiences working in the country also meant that he was intimately familiar with the region, especially its ethnic complexities, and therefore had a first-hand understanding of the issues."⁷² His engagement was welcomed by key stakeholders from the ruling party and the opposition, and the media, which enabled him to facilitate constructive engagement among these actors.

Drawing on existing experience of preventive action, it is clear regional representatives can make extremely good candidates to facilitate preventive efforts. Wisely and accurately selected presidents and other high-ranking officials from neighboring countries can speak authoritatively to the conflict sides and offer constructive guidance.⁷³ Such regional

⁷¹ Lesser, "Preventive Diplomacy Work in the Organization of American States (OAS)," 436.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 435.

⁷³ Fong and Day, "UN Preventive Diplomacy in the 2008-10 Crisis in Guinea."

representatives are often perceived and received as friends and their good intentions and genuine desire to be helpful is welcomed by the conflicting parties. Preventive efforts in Malawi, Tunisia, Yemen, and Guinea support this argument. In Malawi, the UN Secretary-General appointed João Honwana as his envoy to the country. The choice of an Envoy from Mozambique was extremely important to push forward the prevention agenda. Honwana's appointment was welcomed by both parties. He was perceived not only as a neighbor but also a friend of Malawi with deep knowledge and understanding of their history and culture. "An envoy from another region would not have been able to grasp the nuances and 'read the signs' of Malawi."⁷⁴ Similarly, during the crisis in Tunisia, the UN's preventive efforts were perceived as acceptable due to several factors which also included the fact that the UN Resident Coordinator was Algerian and "was widely seen as someone who understood regional – and cultural – dynamics intimately."⁷⁵ The face of any intervention not only has to have moral authority and weight within a specific country context but also has to be relatable to wider groups of stakeholders to generate traction for preventive intervention. Relatability is often based on professional expertise as well as personal experience. In Yemen, for example, almost the entire intervention effort was built around UN Envoy Jamal Benomar's persona. He was seen as reputable and was fully accepted by all the parties in Yemen. Not only was he Moroccan, which meant he spoke Arabic fluently, but he had worked in the MENA region for years. He was also relatable to youth groups in conflict in Yemen because of his own youth activism. "Benomar was known amongst the leaders of Yemen's youth protest movement for his own involvement in peaceful youth protests against his own government, when he was a teenager."⁷⁶ The combination of all these personal biographic facts allowed Benomar to gain the parties' trust and become a central element in facilitating preventive efforts in Yemen.

In the kaleidoscope of cases where the choice of the lead mediator facilitated far reaching constructive action, South Sudan represents a case where a powerful mediator (in this case, the US) was unable to play a constructive role in leading the action due to negative perceptions about its political preferences. While the US could have been an influential actor in the Sudanese

⁷⁴ Nathan, "UN Preventive Diplomacy and Facilitation of Dialogue in Malawi (2011-12)," 6.

⁷⁵ Josie Lianna Kaye, "Tunisia 2011-2017," in *What Works in UN Resident Coordinator-Led Conflict Prevention: Lessons from the Field*, by Sebastian von Einsiedel, 2018, 150.

⁷⁶ Brubaker, "Things Fall Apart: Holding the Centre Together through Yemen's 2011 Popular Uprising (April-November 2011)," 11.

context, it experienced a “credibility deficit. The US Ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, in particular, was seen by the NCP as an ardent friend of South Sudan and opponent of Khartoum, while the US Special Envoy to Sudan, Scott Gration, had not demonstrated his ability to deliver in the talks.”⁷⁷ Since American political figures were unable to play a constructive role in the Sudanese preventive intervention, the AU identified and delegated the president of Ethiopia, Meles Zenawi, to facilitate conversations with President Bashir. “Meles Zenawi was a dominant force within the AU, the most influential head of state amongst Sudan’s neighbors...He thus played an important dual role in trying to convince Bashir to take a constructive line on the referendum, while also acting as a guarantor of the AU’s position.”⁷⁸ This necessary “course-correction” once again provided compelling evidence about the potential positive role of regional leaders and underscores the role public perceptions of lead personalities in conflict intervention can have.

The discussion of this handful of cases clearly showcases that the personalities and personal profiles of intervenors are the most central structural elements of preventive interventions. These leaders can leverage their authority, reputation, and personal weight to push for necessary conversations to take place and actions to be implemented.

Credibility and Standing of the Intervening Organization

The reputation and personal profile of the face of the intervention is strongly linked with the reputation and standing of the lead intervening organization. The quality of previous engagements, as well as perceptions about real and hidden agendas impact the acceptability of an organization as a mediator. Previous negative experiences with an organization can prevent conflicting parties from engaging in a preventive effort with the same organization. At the same time, an intervening organization should proactively seek to boost its own credibility in a particular country context as a function of advancing a preventive effort. Several of the reviewed cases provide grounded evidence that through targeted and purposeful engagement with a wide range of actors, an intervening organization not only increases its credibility as an impartial mediator but can also rally the support of key stakeholders. In Guyana, for example, the OAS was engaged in a purposeful and targeted effort to understand community concerns and solicit feedback on the public’s perception of the mission’s role and expectations. This helped the OAS

⁷⁷ Day, “Preventive Diplomacy and the Southern Sudan Independence Referendum (2010-11),” 8.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 8–9.

to develop and integrate domestically driven solutions into the preventive action.⁷⁹ Similarly, in Yemen, the UN envoy's personal actions provided a credibility boost to the UN engagement. Benomar made a purposeful effort to better understand the situation on the ground. Through his direct fact-finding mission, he performed a listening exercise to hear and understand what was happening on the ground beyond mass media headlines. This approach helped to strengthen the credibility of the UN mission and emphasized the UN did not have a pre-existing agenda in Yemen.

The impartiality and credibility of the intervening organization can be further strengthened by including subject matter experts and reputable sources to support the preventive agenda. For example, as part of its preventive engagement in Guatemala-Belize, the OAS carries out investigations to verify incidents in the Adjacency Zone between the two countries. These activities prevented the escalation of “the conflict that could damage relations between communities, the security, and armed forces, as well as between the two countries.”⁸⁰ Given the nature of the OAS's engagement in this conflict environment, some of the “verifications demand a high level of precision in terms of cartography and coordinates reading.”⁸¹ The credibility and impartiality of these verifications were further supported by the involvement of the Pan American Institute of Geography and History which provides “experts and specialized equipment to ensure the utmost accuracy of the data.”⁸²

Personalities and profiles matter. Political figures who are designated as the face of a preventive intervention become a catalyst, driving forward the entire preventive intervention. Their previous experience, and their personal and professional background become inseparable from their appointment as Special Envoy, Country Representative or lead mediator. Profound regional knowledge, language fluency, and a deep understanding of the cultural and political context are among the factors that place a particular individual in a favorable position to become a respected and accepted face of a preventive intervention. At the same time, people cannot be separated from the organizations and political structures they represent. This implies that international organizations should become proactive in their efforts to boost their own

⁷⁹ Lesser, “Preventive Diplomacy Work in the Organization of American States (OAS),” 434.

⁸⁰ Talamas, “The Fund for Peace: Peaceful Settlement of Territorial Disputes and the Role of the OAS in Mediating the Belize-Guatemala Territorial Dispute.”

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

organizational credibility in a specific country to become an accepted intervening force. Based on existing experience in the field, several recommendations for interveners are as follows:

1. Invite reputable regional leaders to become the face of interventions. Regional leaders with a positive reputation can become a driving force of preventive intervention. These leaders usually have unmatched geopolitical, cultural, and country specific expertise and knowledge that is likely hard to find elsewhere. In addition, regional leaders can already have access to the formal leadership of the country of concern as well as access to a wide range of actors within a country.
2. Involve highly reputable sources when possible. These can be defined specifically as subject matter expert organizations that can help move the intervention in a non-confrontational direction where decisions are guided by reputable data.
3. Seek proactively to increase an intervenor's positive standing within a certain country context through targeted engagement with a wide range of stakeholders. This can be achieved by creating feedback platforms such as public presentations and dissemination events where the profile, agenda, and activities of the intervening organizations can be discussed with a wide range of interested parties beyond the formal leadership.

Conclusion

Gathering evidence on conflict prevention is challenging. Doing so puts pressure on researchers to prove something did not take place. This is an important exercise because it requires the critical examination of previous preventive efforts with the goal of revealing key elements that can be appropriately applied to other situations to avoid increased human suffering. This study has argued that an escalation of conflict and violence in each of the cases studies included in this report was mitigated as a result of the activities of external intervenors. More specifically, from the analysis of eighteen cases of preventive intervention, this report identified seven elements that played a role in their success in preventing the outbreak of violence. While this list is not exhaustive, their frequent occurrence in dissimilar conflict environments, across different historical periods, and in diverse geographical locations suggests some universality of

these elements and warrants their closer examination and further consideration.

1. ***Local factors.*** Just as an amalgam of factors come together to create a conflict situation, a different set of local factors frame intervention efforts. An explicit invitation by the conflicting parties, the political composition of the state, the existence of moderates among the conflict parties, and the actions or inaction of potential spoilers and many others create an environment where preventive actions become possible or reach a stalemate. Existing experience from the field suggests that taking advantage of opportunities based on these factors is the first steps towards designing preventive action. While many of these factors objectively exist with a given conflict environment, international intervenors have the capacity to harness them by engaging in proactive solicitation offers from host governments, fostering relationships with different actors from the political spectrum, and finding ways to isolate and/or engage potential spoilers.
2. ***Early engagement.*** Successful preventive action often relies on the ability of the intervening organization to not only identify early warning signs but also respond to those early warnings in a timely matter. Designing an intervention where early engagement is both a function and a structural element of engagement enables a faster response to potential crises. Existing evidence from the field suggests the intervener's ability to minimize bureaucratic delays can play a decisive role in the containment of conflict and the spread of violence. International organizations should strongly consider some degree of de-centralization that empowers certain units within organizations to respond more quickly to an unfolding crisis.
3. ***A comprehensive approach.*** In any intervention, it might be easy for intervenors to concentrate on the most urgent and visible issues. They might be tempted to focus on low hanging fruit. With time and resource pressures, this is sometimes inevitable. At the same time, however, evidence from the field suggests that successful interventions need to employ a more comprehensive approach to tackling issues. Within this context a comprehensive approach implies not only addressing several issues simultaneously but

also engaging a broad cross-section of the conflict society, including diverse groups of stakeholders and employing different programmatic approaches that are tailored to each specific issue. A comprehensive approach allows intervenors to create stronger webs of interconnectedness by delinking issues and developing parallel, interrelated issue platforms.

4. ***Engagement with governments.*** In many cases, the government of a country are at the heart of the conflict and often have a limited desire to cooperate and engage with the intervening organization. At the same time, the international community can choose to rely on coercive tactics to force key actors to compromise. While the effectiveness of these coercive tactics is a subject of different research, the current study supports targeted engagement with governments in conflict countries. Evidence from Guinea, Nigeria, South Sudan, Malawi, Kyrgyzstan, and elsewhere underscore that when intervening organizations does not demonize and ostracize the formal leadership of a country and frames the intervention as non-threatening there is a better chance of achieving meaningful cooperation and tilting the balance towards non-violent solutions. The ability of the intervening organization to offer the right rewards to political leadership that resonate with their self-interest as well as apply non-threatening pressure through consistent messaging is key to ensure the success of preventive action.

5. ***Coordination and choosing an appropriate organization.*** There have been volumes written about the need and importance of coordination among a wide range of actors involved in intervention and preventive efforts. This study builds on this basic premise and further suggests that coordination efforts should go beyond ensuring there are no parallel and overlapping activities. Rather, united and consistent messaging directed at all the conflicting parties is essential. Evidence from South Sudan, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, and elsewhere suggests successful preventive action centers on both a complementarity of efforts of the organizations involved (informed by coordination and information sharing) and leveraging the capabilities of organizations best positioned to carry out certain tasks. For example, the OSCE has a strong focus and expertise on human rights

and their involvement in Macedonia and Estonia, where the issue of human rights was at the heart of the unfolding crisis, yielded more tangible preventive results.

6. ***Engagement structures.*** The evidence generated from this research strongly supports the argument that engagement structures can become a strong foundation for successful prevention. Successful preventive interventions are built on comprehensive conflict analysis. While the need for comprehensive conflict analysis is self-evident, many intervention approaches fail to generate robust conflict analysis. This failure only serves to increase the likelihood of there being little or no community support for peacebuilding prevention. Robust and timely conflict analysis helps to map the conflict situation and identify the different levels of engagement that might be needed. Engagement structures also consist of recognizing and supporting nationally led initiatives, as well as the potential of local actors in these processes.

7. ***Reputability of the intervenor.*** The evidence generated from this research suggests the reputability of the mediator, country envoy, or facilitating organization is one of the cornerstones of successful preventive action. The choice of mediator must be more than a political decision. The key mediator/envoy should be an authoritative and respected personality that is respected by all sides of the conflict. Case studies from Guyana, Malawi, Guinea, Nigeria, Estonia and elsewhere provide viable evidence that the personality of the envoy and her ability to personally gain access to conflict sides can contribute to the overall success of a preventive mission. Including reputable sources and institutions to provide expert assessment, such as in the case of Guatemala, also ensured the parties accepted the results of the expertise provided and agreed to move on with recommendations.

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