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# Diplomacy and Good Offices in the Prevention of Conflict

**A Thematic Paper for the United Nations - World Bank  
Study on Conflict Prevention**

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## ***About this Paper***

The new UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, has made prevention his top priority. Conflict prevention is now understood not only in terms of averting the outbreak, but also the continuation, escalation and recurrence, of conflict.<sup>†</sup> The Secretary-General has recognised that in order for the UN to shift from its current, largely reactive, posture to a prevention-oriented approach, it will need to better integrate its peace and security, development and human rights pillars of work.<sup>‡</sup> Sustaining peace and sustainable development will need to work hand in glove, rather than along two separate tracks as has often been the case in the past. In an effort to help shift the system toward this new approach, the UN and the World Bank are undertaking a joint flagship study on the prevention of violent conflict. This thematic paper on diplomacy and good offices in the prevention of conflict was produced as a backgrounder for the UN-World Bank study.

## I. Background

This thematic paper examines the conditions under which preventive diplomacy has been effective in helping to shift the calculus of key actors to resolve conflict through peaceful means rather than violence. It focuses on recent cases where the potential for escalation was acute as well as lessons from a broader range of settings. The paper draws on the academic literature in this field but, given the dearth of empirical research on recent diplomatic prevention efforts, it is based heavily on policy-oriented papers, internal UN assessments, expert interviews, and the authors' own experiences as practitioners.

The paper defines preventive diplomacy broadly as "any diplomatic action taken to prevent disputes from arising between parties, to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts, and to limit the spread of the latter when they occur."<sup>1</sup> This definition would also include the Secretary-General's "good offices".<sup>2</sup>

In the context of the UN-World Bank flagship study—which identifies structural factors, institutions and actors as making up the socio-political systems that are central to understanding and preventing violent conflict—this paper focuses on diplomacy as a means to engage with individual actors. It views diplomatic interventions not as a panacea for prevention but as one important element in what must necessarily be broad-based prevention efforts that focus also on structural and institutional factors. The paper draws some lessons from early, upstream diplomatic efforts in averting escalation, but given space constraints it principally examines threshold moments where risks of violence were high.

We acknowledge from the outset that preventive diplomacy is a complex enterprise without certainty of success, and one that from the outside can appear limited to political encouragement and persuasion.<sup>3</sup> We argue, however, that engaging with key decision-makers on the ground is essential to any effort to prevent violent conflict, as only they can affect the trajectories of their societies in the short term. And while preventive diplomacy does carry the risk of becoming a band-aid obscuring the deeper problems ingrained in a society, if done effectively, it can halt a descent into violence and offer breathing space for longer-term solutions to emerge.

Based on a review of the academic literature, policy documents, and a range of case studies,<sup>4</sup> this paper identifies key variables that impact the extent to which preventive diplomacy is effective in influencing lead actors in their strategies in situations at risk of conflict. It also offers concrete recommendations for practitioners and policy experts focused on preventing violent conflict.

## II. Five Key Variables for Effective Preventive Diplomacy

Four variables necessary for successful preventive diplomacy by the UN include: (1) consent, (2) timing, (3) knowledge/relationships, and (4) leverage. Some of these can derive from the circumstances on the ground; others must be

generated. None is ever perfectly present in a conflict situation. All are affected to a certain degree by the changing nature of conflict since the mid-1990s,<sup>5</sup> which has created a far more complex set of potential interlocutors for UN actors engaged in prevention and has challenged the traditionally state-centric model for diplomacy. But looking at recent engagements by the UN and regional partners, there is strong qualitative evidence that strategies which bring the variables together can help to influence lead actors at key decision points. How to link the typically short bursts of diplomatic activity to longer-term interventions—given the multi-decade timeframe for transforming institutions—is a key question, and the basis for a final element considered in this paper: (5) sustainability.

### 1) Consent

The primary responsibility for the prevention of violent conflict rests with member states. Whether or not they and other lead actors on the ground are open to receiving assistance in defusing tensions or averting violence is fundamental in shaping the prospects for diplomacy. We here consider "consent" as the willingness of the parties to a dispute to permit the UN to play a role in resolving it. Where that willingness is clearly expressed and sustained through a crisis period, the likelihood of a successful engagement is far higher. But even where a party is reluctant, or where a role for the UN is unclear, there are positive steps that can be taken to build consent.

In several cases, parties have requested UN good offices outright, sometimes allowing disputes to be addressed early and quietly without the outside world being aware.<sup>6</sup> For example, when street protests in Malawi in July 2011 threatened to lead to greater violence, Malawi's Ambassador in New York asked the Secretary-General what the UN could do to help. A Director-level UN envoy was dispatched who, working closely with the UN Country Team on the ground, facilitated an agreement by which the Malawian opposition called off larger street protests in favour of a structured dialogue with the government, thereby averting further deaths and channelling grievances to the negotiating table. Similarly, in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2008, the leaders in both Kigali and Kinshasa were favourable to involvement by UN envoy Olusegun Obasanjo to resolve a crisis following armed clashes between Congolese forces and the CNDP rebel group in the Goma area. This openness to third party engagement by the two lead actors—in part because they themselves were unwilling to sit together openly—set the stage for a successful diplomatic effort.

On the whole, however, we find that such explicit invitations are rare (or, if they are forthcoming, they might come from one conflict side but not the other).<sup>7</sup> More often, preventive diplomacy is about gradually building the trust and the space to be able to engage. While good offices are consensus-based and not something that can be imposed, they can be used with varying degrees of pro-activeness. There are several well-known historical examples of when the Secretary-General and his envoys were able to build consent directly with the parties.<sup>8</sup> A recent case is that of the UN envoy to Yemen, Jamal Benomar, who entered the

country in April 2011 shortly after the start of the popular uprising, uninvited<sup>9</sup> and purely under the aegis of the Secretary-General's good offices, without waiting for a mandate from the Security Council or the General Assembly, "to see how the UN could be helpful."<sup>10</sup> In the broader context of the crisis mediation led by the Gulf Cooperation Council, Benomar initiated low-key consultations with a cross-section of Yemeni society which culminated in a roadmap for the political transition following the GCC-negotiated departure of President Saleh. Consent for this work was not expressly given the UN at the start, but built incrementally, in the doing.

Consent is linked to sovereignty, and concerns over sovereignty and external interference remain one of the biggest barriers to early preventive diplomacy. Our case studies underscore that such concerns run higher in some countries and regions than in others: the neighbourhood matters in terms of how easily the UN can engage. Further, it is an irony of prevention that real political space often only opens up once a crisis is already escalating. In Burundi in 1993, for example, the UN mediator was not permitted to enter the country until major reprisal attacks had caused international outcry; similarly, in Guinea, a 2009 massacre in Conakry opened the door for a far more robust role for the UN, AU and ECOWAS. Absent an action by the Security Council to override sovereignty—which happens almost by definition after a conflict has broken out rather than in the early preventive stages—it is critical that preventive diplomats adopt a bespoke approach to generating consent, based on the sensitivities of the parties involved.

The deployment of elder African statesmen in several crisis settings—for example in Guinea, Burkina Faso, Kenya, and eastern DRC—has appeared to ease concerns of Western interference, and has fostered an atmosphere of cooperation by the parties. In other cases, such as Malawi (2011) and Nepal (2003), the use of lower level UN envoys with deep knowledge and good relationships avoided the unwanted publicity that can accompany the involvement of a former head of state, and proved highly effective. The same is true of a growing number of UN Resident Coordinators who have supported nationally-led dialogue or prevention initiatives in places such as Lesotho, Comoros, Colombia and Fiji. Partnering with regional organisations—with the GCC on Yemen, ECOWAS and the AU on Guinea, the EU and OSCE on Kyrgyzstan—is another technique for allaying sovereignty concerns and increasing legitimacy for the UN's engagement. At the same time, these regional organisations may be more willing to intervene to protect the neighbourhood, as President Jammeh discovered in January 2017 when ECOWAS sent troops into the Gambia to enforce the elections result and ensure his ouster.

Though the results are uneven and not easily replicable from one part of the globe to the other, a sustained regional presence has played an instrumental role in normalising dialogue on potential problems and increasing member state 'comfort levels' with prevention. Illustrative of this is West Africa, where the UN has a long history of supporting regional peace and security through political missions and peacekeeping operations. Since 2002, a key asset has been the UN regional office for West Africa (UNOWA<sup>11</sup>) in Dakar,

which was established with a Security Council mandate as a platform for preventive diplomacy and has proven its value in forging regionally-driven responses to a range of crises, from Burkina Faso and Guinea to the Gambia, Mauritania, Niger and Nigeria. The office's close working relationships, with ECOWAS first and foremost but also with the AU, are seen as a model for global-regional partnership. While hard to prove empirically, there is a sense that the track record of ECOWAS-AU-UN diplomacy – coupled with strong normative frameworks and an active civil society – has increased the openness of actors in the region towards external support in dealing with emerging crises.

## 2) Timing

In discussing the element of timing, we find a framework developed by Richard Gowan useful in highlighting the distinct stages of escalation from pre-conflict to conflict: i) "latent tension," in which potential causes of conflict have been identified; (ii) "rising tension," in which conflict is emerging and violence is spreading; (iii) "decision-points" (the "Rubicon moment") when actors are on the verge of deciding for or against violence; and (iv) "post-decision points" when actors have entered into either all-out violent conflict or fragile settlements.<sup>12</sup> Of course, realities on the ground are usually messier than this framework suggests, and diplomacy must work in conjunction with other preventive or crisis management approaches across all four stages. However, given that diplomacy can typically be mobilised more quickly than programmatic interventions, and has the potential to affect change in the short term, we argue that it has a particularly impactful role to play at moments of rising tension (stage ii) and around political decision points (stage iii); in fact it can often be the only approach, short of military intervention, that can help avert violence in these stages.

In Burkina Faso, for example, the World Bank, the UN Country Team and major donors were well aware of latent tensions (stage i) caused by widening inequalities and a growing resentment of President Compaoré's autocratic regime. The UN regional office for West Africa was monitoring the situation from its base in Dakar. When tensions rose in early 2014 in response to Compaoré's attempt to change presidential term limits (stage ii), the UN and ECOWAS deployed an early warning mission to Ouagadougou, which found that there was a high risk of violence should the regime persevere in its strategy. This warning was delivered into the hands of Compaoré himself, and reinforced by important actors such as the U.S., EU, and France. It did not work: Compaoré persisted. However, when the popular uprising against Compaoré erupted on 30 October 2014 (the "Rubicon moment"/stage iii), a joint UN-AU-ECOWAS mission was on the ground in less than 24 hours to mediate the crisis. Arriving in time to influence the situation at a key "decision point," this engagement helped avert greater chaos following Compaoré's flight and facilitated a fragile settlement (leading into a violence-free stage iv) under which the military accepted a civilian-led political transition.<sup>13</sup>

In Kenya, Kofi Annan's mediation following the contested 2007 presidential election got underway when interethnic

violence was already escalating, but it helped avert a descent into all-out conflict by persuading the lead actors to step back from the brink. The speed with which Annan was able to consolidate the international mediation effort, build up his team on the ground, and start negotiations on a political settlement has also been highlighted as an important factor of success.<sup>14</sup> In Kyrgyzstan, the rapid deployment of a mediating “Troika” consisting of high-level envoys of the UN, EU and OSCE helped stabilise the country in the wake of the popular uprising in April 2010 and was instrumental in persuading President Bakiyev, at a key decision point, to resign and go into exile rather than fight back.<sup>15</sup>

While timing is critical, it is only one variable that interacts with others and is difficult to isolate given the lack of counter-factual evidence. In the Syria crisis, the main problem was not timing but a lack of agreement between major powers on the course of action, which also deprived the mediation of its most important lever (see below). But there is a question of whether concerted diplomatic action early on could have made a difference. Unlike the rapid escalations in Libya or Yemen, Syria saw a slow descent into full-blown civil war. In early 2011, the crisis was still localised, and protesters were peaceful and unarmed. Many Western decision-makers assumed that Assad would either see reason and reform, or quickly fall. Some experts interviewed said that the first year of the uprising may not have been susceptible to any attempts at preventive diplomacy, given the nature of the conflict (regime on one side, loose coalitions on the other) and the already stark divisions in the Security Council. But others are of a different view. German Ambassador Peter Wittig, who was on the Council in 2011 and 2012, stated in a press conference in December 2012: “We believe that whenever conflicts arise, the international community, especially the Security Council, should act early on. We are staunch advocates of a preventive diplomacy. The later we act, the harder it gets. Syria is a very clear and, if I may say so, depressing showcase in this regard.”<sup>16</sup> Richard Gowan and Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro further note: “It is tragic that the Council did not head off the Syrian crisis escalating in 2011 before a settlement became almost impossible,” and argue that when Kofi Annan was appointed under General Assembly auspices as mediator in February 2012, his attempt to forge a negotiated settlement came too late, as both the Syrian Government and its opponents by then were trapped in an escalatory cycle of violence.<sup>17</sup>

The question of timing plays into an enduring challenge of prevention: the difficulty of moving from warning to response, and of performing triage amongst the many different potential conflicts at any given time. As one senior international official put it to us: “While it is relatively easy to identify countries at risk, it is harder to pick the one or two places which may see real disaster. Given that many situations in the world could go bad but happily do not, many governments bet on them ‘muddling through,’ and are willing to engage only in an emergency.” Syria is paradigmatic of this point given that the dominant narrative amongst Member States in New York in that first year of the crisis was that the situation would resolve itself (although the UN Secretariat tried hard to change that narrative, including through a series of briefings to the Council, starting in April

2011, which rang alarm bells and sought to spur action). Much existing analysis<sup>18</sup> shows that letting conflicts fester is often both riskier and costlier than addressing them early. The challenge is how to mobilise collective diplomacy earlier, in stages (ii-rising tensions) and (iii-decision points), when the instinct in a given case (considering all the other pressures and crises policymakers deal with) may be not to act until stage (iv-exploding crisis).

### **Investing in rapid response capabilities**

The UN, regional organisations and member states have already invested significantly to improve response capabilities, including through the establishment of early warning systems,<sup>19</sup> national infrastructures for peace,<sup>20</sup> targeted funding mechanisms for rapid response,<sup>21</sup> “Light Teams,”<sup>22</sup> and dedicated prevention structures.<sup>23</sup> Through voluntary contributions, the UN’s Department of Political Affairs, which has a lead role in the UN system for preventive diplomacy, has established a fund for rapid response that allows for greater flexibility in a fast-moving crisis than was ever achievable within the confines of the regular budget. The Department has also created a Mediation Support Unit designed to assist both UN and non-UN peacemaking efforts, and through its Stand-by Team it can deploy mediation experts to negotiating settings anywhere in the world within 72 hours.

There is broad agreement that prevention is a high-return investment. The biggest return comes in lives saved. But prevention also makes strong economic sense. The World Bank has calculated that “the average cost of civil war is equivalent to more than 30 years of GDP growth for a medium-size developing country”.<sup>24</sup> The most severe civil wars impose cumulative costs of tens of billions of dollars, and recovery to original growth paths takes the society concerned an average of 14 years.<sup>25</sup> Yet, the 2015 High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations found that the UN’s prevention and mediation efforts continue to be “chronically and severely under-resourced”<sup>26</sup> and remain a “poor relative of better resourced peace operations deployed during and after armed conflict.”<sup>27</sup> Investment in reliable resources for rapid and nimble diplomacy has shown results.<sup>28</sup> More is necessary.

It is worth noting a final dimension to the timing variable, and that is ‘ripeness’: the readiness of parties to engage in a political process. While the concept of “ripeness” is typically used for situations in which conflict is already underway, the notion that conflict parties need to be ready for mediation also applies in a preventive diplomacy setting. Yet, the timeframe for a crisis to escalate into violent conflict may be at odds with the willingness of parties to seek a path away from violence. The above Syria example is telling here. As noted by Raymond Hinnebusch and I. William Zartman in their analysis of the mediation by Kofi Annan and Lakhdar Brahimi: “A point of entry for the mediator was never favourable, since at no time did the parties and their supporters feel the conflict to be a mutually hurting stalemate. It was not, therefore, ripe for effective mediation, and any strategy for ripening it was necessarily weak. The mediators spent an initial period urging a sense of ripeness—that is, a sense that neither side could win and

both were incurring high costs—but found that they did not perceive the costs as unsustainable, at least compared to the cost of succumbing. Annan's six principles failed in good part because the two sides had not yet tested their relative capacities in all-out combat."<sup>29</sup> The literature on third party mediation contains a wealth of excellent analysis on "ripeness" which goes beyond the scope of this paper to discuss.

### 3) Knowledge and Relationships

Local knowledge and constructive relationships with key actors in a conflict situation are essential elements in any successful preventive diplomacy engagement. A challenge for the UN has been to become more field-oriented in its approach to prevention overall and to improve local knowledge and relationships, not just in countries where it already has a political mission or peacekeeping operation on the ground, but also in so-called "non-mission settings" where it is represented by a development-focused Country Team.<sup>30</sup> (In fact, many preventive engagements take place in areas where the UN does not have an in-country peace operation, and hopes never to need one.) The below case studies demonstrate the importance of 1) being present on the ground, 2) the credibility of the mediator, 3) the ability to speak truth to power, and 4) speaking to all conflict parties.

#### *Being present on the ground*

The establishment of the three UN offices for preventive diplomacy in West Africa (UNOWA, 2002 – later UNOWAS with extension of its mandate to include the Sahel), Central Africa (UNOCA, 2011) and Central Asia (UNRCCA, 2007) has placed the UN's finger on the pulse in these regions, enabling improved relationships through sustained contact. Through frequent visits around the region, the SRSGs of these offices and their teams have become established interlocutors, whose coming and going in regional capitals does not signal a UN diplomatic intervention—something to raise sovereignty concerns—but is seen instead as part of normal political dialogue. When crises do emerge, for example in the lead-up to the elections in Nigeria and the Gambia in 2015 and 2016 respectively, UNOWAS SRSG Chambas was able to make use of a pre-established network of contacts. He was also able to draw from the existing regional expertise of UNOWAS and deploy staff from there directly to the countries concerned. During an attempted coup in Burkina Faso in September 2015, the presence of SRSG Chambas on the ground was a surprise to the coup-makers; they had assumed that all international actors had already left the country following an international support group meeting. In the words of a senior UN analyst who accompanied Chambas at the time: "Our presence on the ground, which they [the coup-makers] had not anticipated, actually played against them. If you're sitting in New York, then condemnation is condemnation. But if you're sitting in front of them in the same room – and we made it clear we were not going anywhere until the situation was resolved – then you have a different level of engagement with the actors, and you are able to bring a much tougher message to them."

Presence was similarly important in other cases. During the

2009-10 crisis in Guinea following a military coup, Chambas' predecessor, Said Djinnit, conducted 45 missions to Conakry from Dakar, meeting with a broad array of stakeholders, including the relatively isolated military junta, to help resolve problems, deal with setbacks and keep the political process on track. In the Kyrgyzstan crisis of 2010, UNRCCA SRSG Miroslav Jen spent significant time in Bishkek to conduct high-level talks with the government and elites, channeling UN political, financial and technical support to the transition. In Gabon, SRSG Abdoulaye Bathily of UNOCA started regular discussions with all lead actors, including President Ouidema and the opposition, in late 2014 in the context of a deepening political crisis ahead of the August 2016 presidential election. The SRSG's engagement intensified as the election drew close and, in the difficult post-electoral situation, helped calm tensions, including by securing the release of opposition leaders held in de facto detention. In none of these cases would it have been logistically possible to conduct this kind of hands-on diplomacy out of New York, nor would New York-based UN officials have had the required anticipatory relationships on the ground. There is a paradox, however: while there is strong member state recognition of the importance of the work carried out by the three existing regional offices, UN proposals to establish similar offices in other regions have so far not met with support.

Even where a mediation effort does not benefit from a regional office, a willingness to spend significant time with a broad range of actors on the ground not only builds knowledge and relationships, but also the credibility of the mediator. The Yemen Envoy, Jamal Benomar, was recognized by the Yemeni public as particularly effective due to his "frequent visits to several cities around Yemen, which none of the other mediators or international players had done before."<sup>31</sup> Where this on-the-ground work was not possible—for example restrictions on movement inside Syria meant the mediation team tended to meet with actors outside of the country—both knowledge and relationships suffer. Certainly, if the UN mediator is prohibited from accessing the country ahead of time—as in 1993 when the Burundian government did not consent to the envoy's deployment into the country until after massive reprisal attacks had already taken place—prevention starts off on the back foot.

In addition to in-person contact by the mediator and team, the UN can supplement its knowledge of a given situation with a conflict assessment, such as the one conducted by DPA well ahead of the Nigerian elections in 2015, or the UN-ECOWAS joint early warning mission that deployed to Burkina Faso amidst escalating tensions in the country in 2014. These should be geared towards an understanding of political decision points, where influential actors might choose to pursue or reject violence at a critical juncture. While assessments are regular business for the UN across all settings, more dependable funding for prevention-oriented work could allow for more in-depth and frequent assessments of conflict-prone situations, rather than focusing on areas where violent conflict appears most imminent.

#### *The credibility of the mediator*

Using a mediator with an established track record and credibility in the region is the most expedient way to

ensure constructive relationships. Bringing in former President Obasanjo to the 2008 ceasefire talks involving the CNDP armed group in eastern DRC, Kinshasa and Kigali immediately afforded the process greater regional clout and connections, given his status as a former head of state and prior relationships with regional governments. He was also a particularly good choice to deal with the CNDP armed group as his status as a former soldier appeared to give him credibility with their military leadership.

Indeed, the persona of the mediator can sometimes keep a critical relationship alive. In the context of the April 2010 popular uprising in Kyrgyzstan UN envoy Jan Kubiš was widely respected by national stakeholders and had significant access to both the provisional government and to ousted President Bakiyev and his supporters – as well to the other envoys sent by the EU and OSCE. The effort to secure the President's peaceful resignation was a collective one, but during the critical period immediately after Bakiyev fled Bishkek to Jalalabad, Kubiš was the only regular channel of communication with the deposed leader, and appears to have influenced his decision to go into exile rather than to fight back. Bakiyev had armed supporters at his disposal, but chose not to exercise this option.<sup>32</sup>

Diplomacy is an intensely personal process, still more art than science. Building trust and credibility with lead actors is often as much a question of chemistry as substance. Some envoys are able to forge strong connections quickly, whereas others are never able to bridge the divide. And while chemistry can only partially be controlled via the choice of envoy and approach, one lesson is clear: It is nearly always better to build rapport in calm situations, rather than try to forge trust in the crucible of a crisis. In Guinea, UNOWA SRSJ Said Djinnit had deliberately cultivated relationships with many sectors of society, including trade unionists and opposition forces, which proved key to his diplomacy once these actors were catapulted to the forefront of the political transition following the military coup of December 2008. Similarly, the positive relations the UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) built over time, in particular with the Nepal Army and Maoist Army, allowed it to defuse potential crises that may well have derailed the entire peace process. For example, it was able to use its relations on both sides to convince Maoist forces to release Nepal Army personnel they had abducted in the run-up to the 2008 Constituent Assembly elections, preventing an Army raid on Maoist facilities.<sup>33</sup>

Where such rapport is disrupted, it can directly impact the mediation process. In Malawi, for example, the lead for facilitating political dialogue between the government and civil society shifted from the UN Department of Political Affairs to UNDP to the UN Office in Nairobi over a two-month period in 2011, which was unsettling to the negotiating teams and prompted one UN official to critique the process, "You don't change teams in the middle of a race."

#### **Ability to speak truth to power**

Successful relationships in a prevention context should open channels for frank communication, where lead actors

can be provided with choices and shown the potential consequences of their actions. Noting that President Compaoré's status as a key Western ally had had bought him a certain amount of room for manoeuvre, Crisis Group stated in 2013: "...the lack of international criticism leaves Burkina Faso without an external alert system, with no country willing to provide it with an honest and frank appraisal of its structural problems."<sup>34</sup> However, when tensions escalated in 2014, an "external alert system" did kick in: SRSJ Djinnit gave the report of the UN-ECOWAS early warning mission to President Compaoré in person, as did, on a separate occasion, the head of the ECOWAS Commission. Both were reportedly blunt in underscoring the risks inherent in Compaoré's decision to seek to lift presidential term limits, and their warnings were echoed by the US, France and the EU. This level of forthrightness is not always easy to achieve in the typical short burst of diplomatic activity surrounding a crisis. As Crisis Group has pointed out, "persuading leaders like [Burundian President] Nkurunziza or [Congolesse President] Kabila to respect term limits should be a long-term project, not a hasty gamble." But sometimes a quick gamble pays off, such as US Secretary of State Kerry's decision to break protocol and suddenly visit Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan to persuade him to accept his loss in the 2015 election and avoid a new cycle of violence. Visible support from the Secretary-General for his representatives in the field, and a clear sense that they can speak strongly on the principles of the UN, is invaluable in this context.

#### **Talking to all conflict parties**

Diplomacy can no longer afford to be state- or elite-centric, it must also account for a broader range of actors who can influence the trajectory of a conflict. This is a challenge for the UN, which is a Member State-based organisation founded on the principle of sovereignty and has a structural bias in favour of governments. Where governments impose restrictions on the UN's access to civil society or the political opposition, the UN has faced the dilemma of either risking the wrath of a government for overstepping such boundaries, or losing credibility and relevance as an interlocutor in the eyes of non-state groups. This dilemma, which became salient in several contexts during the 2011 Arab uprisings, for example, impacts on the UN's potential role to engage in preventive diplomacy in questions of internal political unrest. Furthermore, the presence of violent extremists in many of today's civil war environments "complicates peacemaking because many of these groups (such as ISIS or Boko Haram) tend to pursue maximalist demands that are very difficult to meet or to incorporate into political settlements. What is more, key powers tend to discourage negotiations with such groups, which are often proscribed through UN, US, or EU terrorism designation lists."<sup>35</sup> The challenges of engaging with proscribed actors are the subject of ongoing thinking and analysis by mediation experts.<sup>36</sup>

#### **4) Leverage**

Teddy Roosevelt famously said diplomacy is about speaking softly but carrying a big stick. "Equipped with neither billions nor battalions,"<sup>37</sup> however, UN envoys typically do

not have automatic recourse to ‘hard’ leverage (carrots and sticks) to influence recalcitrant actors.<sup>38</sup>

In some cases we found that “speaking softly”, on the basis of the moral authority of the Secretary-General and the broad legitimacy of the United Nations, may be both appropriate and sufficient: In the Malawi crisis of 2011, for example, the lead actors were themselves for the most part looking for a way out, and the UN’s low-key facilitation provided them with “space for tempers to go down.”<sup>39</sup> The ensuing national dialogue process represented a sufficiently credible alternative to violence in the streets, and gave the protagonists political cover to opt for a peaceful resolution of their differences.

A number of diplomatic breakthroughs have been achieved over the years under such discreet good offices,<sup>40</sup> and space for this kind of diplomacy should be vigorously protected. The challenge, however, is to scale up the pressure, when it becomes apparent that the lead actors are not looking for a peaceful way out, that their motivations and incentives are pulling them towards violent conflict rather than away from it, and that talking alone is unlikely to halt escalation.

To gain leverage, UN envoys must work closely with those powers who have it, and align these behind their negotiating positions, as Annan was able to do on Kenya in 2008 (but not on Syria in 2012). An essential part of achieving political alignment is to secure the backing of the Security Council—formally or informally—which is oxygen for every UN diplomatic effort. In some of our case studies – such as the crises in Guinea (2009-10) and Burkina Faso (2014) – it was enough for this backing to be palpable but passive: The Council was briefed, united, and supportive of the Secretary-General’s diplomacy, while keeping much of its “muscle” in reserve.<sup>41</sup> In Yemen, the Council used its power on a sliding scale: it gave space to the UN envoy to pursue low-key consultations with Yemeni actors, and threw its united weight behind the negotiated settlement that emerged.<sup>42</sup> It then threatened “further measures”<sup>43</sup> against any party seeking to undermine the political transition – former President Saleh and his supporters had clearly emerged as spoilers by 2012 – and eventually imposed sanctions in early 2014 (though these came too late as by then the process was unravelling). In all cases, a key role for the envoy was to align the P-5 behind a common position to gain leverage.

On Syria, however, the Security Council was deeply polarised from the outset, depriving the mediation effort of one of its most essential levers. The US, France and UK raised the threat of sanctions early on and by the summer of 2011 were calling on President Assad to go. But Russia (together with China) made clear that it would stand by Assad. The Council’s failure, in June 2012, to endorse the “Geneva communiqué” – a detailed blueprint for a transitional Syrian government brokered by Annan – was a watershed: up until that point, the crisis had claimed 19,000 lives; after that, it escalated to the level of a full-blown civil war. Announcing his resignation in August 2012, Annan said the Geneva communiqué should have been automatically endorsed by the Council, adding: “Without serious, purposeful and united international pressure...

it is impossible for me, or anyone, to compel the Syrian government in the first place, and also the opposition, to take the steps necessary to begin a political process. You have to understand: as an Envoy, I can’t want peace more than the protagonists, more than the Security Council or the international community for that matter.”<sup>44</sup>

Securing the backing of the Council, while necessary, is often no longer sufficient, however. Given the growing complexity and regionalisation of civil wars over the last two decades, UN envoys have to invest in complex, multi-level “framework diplomacy”<sup>45</sup> to coordinate efforts and increase the levers that can be brought to bear. In Syria, Kofi Annan (and later, Lakhdar Brahimi and Staffan de Mistura) searched for leverage on three levels: the local (Syrian government and opposition), the regional (rival regional patrons), and the global (the Security Council and in particular the U.S. and Russia).<sup>46</sup> In Yemen, by far the strongest leverage over President Saleh and his close allies was held by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), led by Saudi Arabia. As the crisis deepened, the GCC lost confidence in Saleh and, with the backing of Western powers, drew up a one-page plan that called for him to step down (the incentives used were immunity from prosecution for Saleh and his close associates as well as the promise of an “honourable exit”; the ‘stick’ was the threat of hard-hitting financial sanctions). Benomar was able to insert the UN into the negotiations of the GCC – which commanded leverage the UN did not – to help Yemeni parties elaborate a vision for their transition. In other words, the GCC brokered an elite pact using “hard” leverage to peacefully depose Saleh, on which was built, through a “soft” UN intervention, a more detailed and inclusive plan for a Yemen without Saleh.

Similarly, in the wake of the 2014 popular uprising in Burkina Faso that ousted President Compaoré, the Council signalled its full backing of the UN-AU-ECOWAS mediation on the ground, but it was the AU’s threat of triggering large-scale economic and political sanctions that was pivotal in getting the country’s new military leaders to hand over power to a civilian-led political transition, thus averting further chaos and a high risk of violence. On the Gambia in January 2017, there was strong support by the Council for the position taken by ECOWAS, which further emboldened it to act: the ECOWAS military intervention—on 22 January deploying and taking over the capital Banjul— changed the dynamic on the ground and persuaded ex-President Jammeh to step aside.

In seeking to unpack the leverage variable and how it has played out in our case studies, we are not making an argument for diplomacy to become an instrument of coercion. Quite the contrary: the view at the UN has always been that more Chapter VI (peaceful settlement of disputes) means less Chapter VII (coercive measures). This goes back to the importance of early engagement, building trust and consent, and normalising the discussion of risk factors, as discussed above. When extra leverage is needed to give clout to diplomatic engagements, this can be done in a variety of different ways, on a sliding scale, starting at the level of inducements and incentives. In some cases, coercive tools such as sanctions, threats of prosecution by the International Criminal Court (Guinea, 2009) or military

intervention (Gambia, 2017) have produced important, even game-changing successes. But in others, they have wholly backfired (arguably, the referral of Libya to the ICC in early 2011 “left Qadhafi ‘boxed in’, more willing to fight”<sup>47</sup>). In general, as Crisis Group and others has argued, coercive tools should be used sparingly, pointedly, and as a last resort.<sup>48</sup>

A final point concerns the rationality of actors in high-intensity conflict settings. Though the majority of the academic literature assumes that all actors pursue choices that are in their best interests, we have found that the stresses of various situations can result in decisions that run counter to immediate self-interest, information asymmetries that lead to apparent mistakes, or unpredictable positions that do not necessarily fit an expected rationale. These all point to the limits, or at least possible unintended consequences of, outside leverage. The trajectory of junta leader Moussa Dadis Camara in Guinea is illustrative: following a September 2009 massacre in Conakry, Camara’s regime was placed under various forms of pressure and incentives to allow elections to take place and to enable an international investigation into the massacre. These included isolation (the US refused to work with his regime), suspension from ECOWAS, AU sanctions, and financial incentives (donors offered to pay USD 38 million for elections). According to internal DPA documents, these appeared to have little effect, and Camara’s regime in fact seemed to further entrench its position. However, a misunderstanding about potential prosecution by the ICC appeared to unnerve the other junta leaders; Camara was shot in the head by his aide de camp and evacuated to Burkina Faso. His successor, General Konaté, had no ambitions to cling to power and helped smooth the way for the transition.

### **Bringing the variables together**

There are examples when all four variables appeared to coalesce for a moment, and diplomacy by the UN and others was able to shift the calculus of lead actors to opt for a peaceful resolution rather than violence. While the cases of Guinea (2008-2010), Malawi (2011), Yemen (2011) and Burkina Faso (2014) manifestly differ from each other in many respects, in terms of diplomatic engagements the key variables of consent, timing, local knowledge and relationships, and leverage were all present to a considerable degree. The Gambia in 2017 was arguably a partial success for diplomacy: while political engagement was important in coordinating key external actors and ‘priming the pump’, it appeared to reach its limits given Jammeh’s intransigence and isolation. It was hard leverage in the form of the military intervention by ECOWAS that conclusively changed the dynamic on the ground. Conversely, in the early stages of the Syrian crisis, none of the variables were present: consent was absent; the UN arrived late; local knowledge and relationships were challenging to expand given that freedom of movement was curtailed for diplomats and the protests at the beginning were highly localised; and divisions in the Council and rivalries amongst regional powers rendered leverage elusive.

The variables are also inter-dependent. In Yemen, timely

engagement allowed the UN envoy to forge relationships with key actors over several critical months in 2011, and on that basis to be in a position to negotiate an inclusive roadmap for the transition in complement to the GCC initiative. In Burkina Faso, the speed with the UN-AU-ECOWAS mission deployed following the outbreak of the uprising in October 2014 as well as its pre-existing relationships increased its leverage to influence the situation at a key decision point. In Syria, the lack of leverage affected virtually everything else. We found that there is a tension between consent and leverage: where consent is freely expressed, the need for leverage may be lower; but sometimes consent is low precisely because there is a fear that permitting engagement will bring with it bigger ‘sticks’ such as unwanted attention from the Security Council.

An additional challenge, given the growing complexity of conflicts, is that mediation often has to negotiate simultaneously the local/national dynamic, and the national/regional one. An example of this is the 2008 ceasefire process in eastern DRC, where Special Envoy Obasanjo not only had to broker directly with a rebel group, but also coordinate between Kigali, Kinshasa and other capitals in the neighbourhood to ensure regional buy-in. In Nigeria in 2015 too, the broader national conflict was driven by a strong North-South tension, and local grievances. In response, SRSNG Chambas followed a “decentralised good offices” approach, visiting at least seven different Nigerian states in the period leading up to the elections and focusing directly on local players and regional dynamics in his mediation efforts. Similarly, Jamal Benomar’s approach to Yemen in 2011 simultaneously built off regular engagement with civil society and community leaders, while also gaining leverage from regional organisations (the GCC).

Finally, even if all four variables coalesce for a moment, they are dynamic, and can change over time. Three years after the successful negotiation of a peaceful post-Saleh transition in 2011, Yemen descended into open conflict, in large part because the regional leverage shifted. Likewise, Burundi has suffered repeated cycles of violent conflict since the diplomatic breakthrough in 1993, including a near civil war in 2016. In contrast, the “band-aid” of an imperfect agreement can often head off major conflict and even allow for sustained periods of relative peace. The Taif Agreement ending the war in Lebanon in 1990 may have had deep flaws but is still a reference point for avoiding violent conflict; the Dayton Accords may not have solved the underlying grievances in Bosnia Herzegovina, but persist to this day. Looking at how the four variables above can be translated into longer-term stability constitutes a fifth variable relevant for this study: sustainability.

### **5) Sustainability**

There are widely differing views as to why a diplomatic effort will or will not “stick.” Some analysts argue that “neither the well-intentioned efforts of the UN nor a propitious regional environment can substitute for meaningful domestic reforms in nation-building.”<sup>49</sup> This would point in the direction of institution-building and deeper efforts at structural reforms. Others are more critical of this development-focused approach, arguing, “structural prevention can risk

slipping into ever more over-ambitious goals and rhetoric, becoming a reform program for states and societies at high risk of violence.”<sup>50</sup> We argue that both points have validity: In the context of an immediate crisis, too much focus on structural factors, root causes and institutional weaknesses may overlook the immediate interests of the political and military elites capable of driving a situation towards or away from conflict. Preventive diplomacy does and should remain largely focused on agency and the core tasks of persuasion and political deal-making. At the same time, these efforts should be linked to longer-term arrangements that can engage society more broadly in addressing underlying drivers such as inequality, relative poverty and exclusion.

Our case studies include several examples of diplomatic engagements that attempted to do precisely this – provide both the immediate band-aid and the opportunity for a longer-term solution to emerge. As seen, in Yemen, the elite pact brokered by the Gulf Cooperation Council in 2011 removed President Saleh and opened the door for peaceful political change; the accompanying “Implementation Mechanism” negotiated with Yemeni actors by Benomar and his team laid out a detailed road map for an inclusive, potentially transformative transition post-Saleh. While many saw the agreements as flawed, they created a breathing space. As Crisis Group noted at the time: “While far from perfect, the GCC initiative and the implementation document offered a peaceful exit from a political and military stalemate that had brought the country perilously close to civil war.”<sup>51</sup>

In Malawi, the UN’s diplomatic engagement in August 2011 addressed the immediate crisis – the high risk of further violence and deaths in the streets – by providing a credible alternative to protests through a national dialogue process. While that process also had several flaws, it heightened the acknowledgement within Malawi of the need for a longer-term approach to conflict management<sup>52</sup> which eventually led to a consultation process with civil society in March 2012 on a national problem-solving mechanism<sup>53</sup> and the adoption by UNDP of a social cohesion programme with the government that included the setting up a national peace architecture.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, in the crises in Kenya (2007-08), Kyrgyzstan (2010) and Burkina Faso (2014-15), the mediators sought to link short-term diplomatic gains (preventing or mitigating violence) to longer-term processes (political transitions encompassing constitutional review or elections).

### **Maintaining a supportive political constellation**

It is beyond the scope of this paper to delve too deeply into this issue, but drawing on some of the examples above we identify three considerations when working to link preventive diplomacy to longer-term development and stability. The first is how to maintain the positive political constellation achieved via the diplomatic process. In Yemen, for instance, this constellation was key to success in 2011, but started falling apart by 2014, and the Yemeni process was overwhelmed by the worsening security situation. At the same time, the UN should recognise that many of these dynamics are beyond its control: deepening rivalries among the regional players involved in Syria may have inevitably spilled over into Yemen. Similarly, following the ceasefire

with the (Tutsi-based) CNDP in eastern DRC in 2008, changing relations between Kinshasa and Kigali, along with local dynamics involving the Tutsi populations in DRC, may have made the rise of M23 in 2012 inevitable (and in fact the M23 is again raising its head in 2017). With these limitations in mind, mediators should nonetheless consider what will replace the band-aid when it comes off. In some cases, regionally-based follow-up or support groups have played a helpful role in sustaining political attention and focus.<sup>55</sup>

### **Achieving buy-in**

A second consideration is how to achieve buy-in from a wide range of actors, during the diplomatic intervention itself if possible, but certainly as part of whatever is meant to follow the crisis management phase. As analysts have pointed out, perhaps the most basic role for the UN is to persuade political parties to stay within that follow-on process, be it a national dialogue, constitutional review, election or referendum.<sup>56</sup> There is a risk however that pressing for a rapid return to constitutional rule, or a political process more generally, without the full involvement of all relevant parties, may undermine longer-term sustainability. For example, the successful effort to avert a slide into full-blown civil war in Burundi in 1993 put in place a new constitution without the involvement of key armed groups on the ground who later became a source of instability. Mediation efforts must consider how to balance the “need for speed” to stop the violence, with that of inclusivity in the longer term.<sup>57</sup>

### **Linking the political process with development**

A third consideration concerns how and when to link the political process with development. In our view, early cross-pollination in both directions has proven most useful, where it has happened. This means including development actors in crafting a diplomatic engagement and, vice-versa, involving the political pillar more systematically in longer-term development planning.

The UN’s approach to Lebanon in 2012-14 offers an instructive example of bringing development, humanitarian and political streams together in a preventive setting. As the Syria conflict increased, the number of refugees flooding into Lebanon grew, from 18,000 in April 2012 to more than one million in April 2014, roughly one quarter of the overall population of Lebanon. This posed several interrelated risks, from the introduction of large numbers of Syrian Sunni Muslims being seen by some as a threat to the country’s delicate sectarian balance, the security risks of arms and fighters potentially arriving disguised within refugee communities, enormous financial strains on a country that largely subsidised basic services, and the broader regional risk that Lebanon could be pulled more directly into the conflict. According to the UN’s analysis at the time, the Syria conflict posed a serious and imminent threat to Lebanon’s stability.

In response, the UN developed a cross-cutting humanitarian/development Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP), aimed at supporting Lebanese institutions affected by the Syria crisis, and providing livelihood and humanitarian assistance to the Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Politically, the Secretary-

General established the International Support Group for Lebanon (ISG) composed of P-5 members, the League of Arab States, the EU, the World Bank and select other member states. The purpose of this was to highlight the risks facing Lebanon via joint messaging (thus maintaining Council unity at a moment of deep divisions more generally about the impact of Syria in the region), encourage donor support to the LCRP, and also make the case for donor support to key Lebanese institutions, including the army. The ISG was thus connected to the development and humanitarian approaches of the UN, but also capable of engaging politically with the Lebanese authorities and with key regional and international stakeholders. The inclusion of the World Bank helped ensure that the group was also oriented toward the structural challenges facing the country.

The ISG was generally seen as a success during this period, encouraging the raising of nearly USD 4 billion in pledges for the Lebanese army, and contributing to a strong donor response for the more than USD two billion appeal of the LCRP. Importantly, the ISG helped to maintain strong Council unity on at a time when its other positions on the Middle East could have caused friction and potential loss of support to Lebanon. Under the LCRP's line of work the immediate needs of the most vulnerable Lebanese and Syrians were targeted, while longer term issues related to employment and institutional capacity were also reflected. These complementary lines of political and donor support have been seen as instrumental in heading off a far worse situation in Lebanon.

Another positive example is Guatemala in 1994, where the UN mediator, Jean Arnault, brought the World Bank into the peace negotiations, and the World Bank agreed to relax fiscal austerity measures in order to ensure that these would not undermine the implementation of the peace agreement. In the words of a senior UN official: "The Guatemala talks were able to take advantage of the emerging international consensus between Bretton Woods and the UN. Wolfensohn saw that increased spending was necessary to consolidate peacebuilding, and also that the extremely conservative fiscal policies of the Guatemalan elite were detrimental to development."

There are also examples of "integration" where a double or triple-hatted UN representative was able to bring together development and politics effectively, as SRSG Michael von der Schulenburg did in his dual role as head of mission and mediator in the 2009 political crisis in Sierra Leone. The use of Peace and Development Advisers working, precisely, on the nexus of peace and development in Malawi, Guinea, Kyrgyzstan and elsewhere has also helped bridge the gap.

In general, however, we find that political and development actors still tend to operate as two separate communities, with little connective tissue between them. Where the political process is not linked to development, there is a risk that neither will thrive. The Central African Republic, for example, represents a "dramatic and instructive case of peacebuilding failure."<sup>58</sup> After the abrupt withdrawal of the UN peacekeeping operation in 2000, the "subsequent fifteen years of intervention could be characterised as a succession of UN peacebuilding mandates and small

offices trying desperately to catch up with an inexorably deteriorating political and security situation."<sup>59</sup> While good offices continued during this time, there was a failure to "mobilise resources on anything like the scale necessary"<sup>60</sup> to gear up peacebuilding in support of the political process, particularly in the key areas of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) and Security Sector Reform (SSR). Even modest funds for DDR and SSR, the SRSG at the time noted, if used strategically as in the Northwest region of the country, could create "an important dynamic" by "infusing resources into a region which prevented it from degrading for a time." In this regard, "Cooperation with the World Bank was one of the biggest successes we had." But the SRSG continued: "This begs the questions, what if we had done more in other areas? Could we have done something before the conflict erupted? Could we even after the conflict erupted? If we had used the funds in the Northeast (the region in which the Seleka rebellion originated in 2013) would they have felt less neglected?"<sup>61</sup> Further: "When the conflict erupted and the rebels were going into the towns, some of the peacebuilding tools may have impacted on the way the conflict evolved. But Libreville [the site of peace negotiations] was focused on power and the sharing of power, so although some peacebuilding tools were on the agenda, they were not at the centre." After Libreville broke down and the crisis overwhelmed the country in 2013-2014, the UN was obligated to deploy, once again, a multi-dimensional peacekeeping operation (MINUSCA)."

### III. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This paper has sought to examine under what conditions diplomacy has been effective, in a number of recent cases, in influencing the strategies of key decision-makers to opt for a path away from violence rather than towards it. The cases show that diplomacy, which at its core relies on the "wisdom and appeal of its arguments,"<sup>62</sup> faces long odds and, even when successful, often provides breathing space rather than a longer-term solution. Yet, given that diplomacy can be mobilised more quickly than programmatic interventions and has the potential to affect change in the short term, it has a critical role to play particularly at moments of rising tension and major political decision points ("Rubicon moments"); in fact it is sometimes the only approach, short of military intervention, that can help avert violence in these stages. In order to reinforce diplomacy's ability to perform this function as part of broader prevention efforts, we offer six recommendations below.

**Build a strategy out of the five essential variables:** There is no single way to intervene diplomatically to prevent conflict. In each case discussed above, a unique approach needed to be designed to engage with the conflict actors and avert escalation. Looking across these interventions, however, we have seen that effectiveness depends upon the ability of the UN (and others) to build trust and consent, take advantage of key timing opportunities, forge strong anticipatory relationships, establish leverage, and link bursts of diplomatic activity to longer-term peacebuilding. Building these elements should not be the result of ad hoc approaches, but should form the basis of a strategy from the outset. Developing a strategy that is embedded in a

regional presence, using established representatives with pre-existing knowledge and relationships, and based on improved political capacities on the ground will continue to strengthen the UN's preventive diplomacy going forward.

**Build flexible diplomatic platforms to resolve crises:**

Divisions in the international community today run deep, not just amongst global powers but also regionally. Compared to the 1990s, conflicts have seen a proliferation of external actors involved — sometimes as peacemakers, sometimes as combatants, and often mistrustful of each other. In many cases, complex “framework diplomacy” is required to bring key players together — or at minimum to reduce friction between them and ensure that the UN and regional bodies are not working at cross purposes. In practice, this should involve building ad hoc diplomatic platforms (different from the larger and more formal Groups of Friends) which can multiply the leverage that the Secretary-General and his Envoys bring to the table, increasing legitimacy and credibility. To be effective, such platforms “must provide the space for frank discussion and real bargaining”.<sup>63</sup> They should also provide a link to international financial institutions and other development actors, connecting diplomatic efforts to the economic system more broadly, as well as specialised NGOs. While the transaction costs of building such diplomatic platforms may be dauntingly high, as Crisis Group notes,<sup>64</sup> the alternative in some cases may simply be a hopeless fragmentation of efforts.

**Engage with all conflict parties:** Throughout this paper, we have noted the rising importance of non-state actors as a key aspect of the changing nature of armed conflict. And in some instances, the UN has shown itself capable of engaging with a broad array of important interlocutors below the level of the state. However, this remains an area without sufficient clarity for the UN, and one where the bias towards states may impede the Organisation's ability to deliver. Related to this is the need to get better at understanding not just the risk factors but also the “conflict inhibitors” within a given society that can keep the situation from spiraling, and to support these.

**Build prevention on trust, not threats:** As the above cases demonstrate, the sovereignty barriers to political engagement can be high and difficult to budge, often meaning that action comes too late to avert bloodshed. Rather than look to scale the barriers, the UN should work to repackage prevention—away from placing countries

on watch lists and towards normalising a discussion of risk factors and refocusing on positive support to at-risk countries. Low-key, discreet engagement not only allows the UN to build a better sense of the situation on the ground, but allows for anticipatory steps in the escalation phases. Regional presence is critical in this regard.

**Link diplomacy to programmatic interventions:** Preventive diplomacy should remain focused on agency and the core tasks of persuasion and political deal-making to halt escalation or avert imminent violence. The clear value added of the UN in this context is its ability to influence the decision-making of individual actors. And we have put forward evidence that even a band-aid solution often buys sufficient time for sustainable solutions to be put in place. As such, efforts should be linked to longer-term arrangements—such as national dialogue—that can engage society more broadly in addressing structural and institutional factors such as inequality, relative poverty and exclusion. One challenge in achieving such linkages is that diplomatic and development actors have tended to operate in two separate communities, with little connecting tissue between them. The “sustaining peace” approach seeks to break down these barriers and should be reinforced, and preventive diplomacy should be seen as a system-wide asset that works across pillars. And both diplomatic and development approaches should ultimately prioritise the strengthening of local capacities for facilitation, mediation and dialogue, as only national mechanisms and institutions can sustainably transform conflict in the long run.

**Give diplomacy resources:** Good offices are relatively cheap, but they can deliver enormous results if they are adequately resourced and supported. Despite some improvements, however, preventive diplomacy continues to operate on a shoestring, relatively speaking. Providing greater, more consistent resources for diplomacy is critical for its success. Furthermore, our research has exposed a dearth in the quantity and quality of empirically-driven evaluations of preventive diplomacy engagements, and few systematic approaches to lessons learned.<sup>65</sup> Prevention may involve a certain amount of inference regarding the conflicts averted, but the difficulty of proving the counter-factual is overstated and cannot be a reason for not measuring impact. If the UN is going to attract more resources for its prevention work, it will need to get better at recording, assessing, and drawing lessons from its engagements with a view to improving this vital body of practice.

## ENDNOTES

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- † Security Council Resolution 2282 (27 April 2016).
- ‡ Guterres highlights the importance of recognizing the links between peace and sustainable development, UN News Centre, 24 January 2017.
1. See "An Agenda for Peace: Preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping" (A/47/277 - S/24111), 17 June 1992.
  2. Since the founding of the United Nations, the "good offices" of the Secretary-General have been used in a variety of settings, from Cyprus to the Middle East and Afghanistan. For mandate and usage, see, for example, Teresa Whitfield, "Good Offices and Groups of Friends", in *Secretary or General? The UN Secretary-General in World Politics*, ed. Simon Chesterman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 87: "The concept of good offices is not itself mentioned in the UN Charter. It is, perhaps, implied within Article 33(1) [...], especially if read in conjunction with Article 99, which provides that the Secretary-General may bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which, in his opinion, may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security. As the phrase has come to be used within the United Nations, it can, however, very helpfully mean almost anything".
  3. See for example Crisis Group Special Report N°2, "Seizing the Moment: From Early Warning to Early Action" (22 June 2016), 18: "External actors often appear unable to do more than encourage contacts to behave responsibly."
  4. Primary case studies include: Burkina Faso (2014-15), the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (2008), the Gambia (2016-17), Guinea (2009-10), Kenya (2007-08), Kyrgyzstan (2010), Malawi (2011), Syria (2011-12) and Yemen (2011-14).
  5. By "changing nature of conflict" we refer to the rise in importance of non-state actors, the growth of transnational illicit networks, and the regionalisation of intra-state conflicts. These trends have been well documented in, for example, Sebastian von Einsiedel et al, "Major Recent Trends in Violent Conflict" (Tokyo: United Nations University, November 2014).
  6. Former UN Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuellar once stated: "No-one will ever know how many conflicts have been prevented or limited through contacts which have taken place in the famous glass mansion [the UN building on East 42nd Street], which can become fairly opaque when necessary". Cited in Adam Roberts and Benedict Kingsbury, eds., *United Nations, Divided World: The UN's Roles in International Relations* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988).
  7. For example, in many constitutional crises involving an incumbent head of state attempting to stay on beyond the mandated period, there is a tendency for opposition parties to request UN involvement while the government wishes to hold off international engagement. See, for example, the current AU-led, UN-supported mediation efforts between President Kabila and the opposition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
  8. See, for instance, Dag Hammarskjöld's boundary-pushing diplomacy to secure the release in 1955 of 17 U.S. airmen shot down by Communist China (this episode gave rise to the term "Peking Formula", which signified recognition of the independent role of the Secretary-General's office as derived from the Charter rather than a resolution or mandate entrusted to him by Member States). Another example is Hammarskjöld's decision to act as a guarantor for the parties in the 1956 Suez crisis.
  9. See Steven A. Zyck, "Mediating Transition in Yemen: Achievements and Lessons," (New York: International Peace Institute, October 2014), 3.
  10. Interview with UN official.
  11. In 2015, the office was formally re-named the UN office for West Africa and the Sahel, known by its new acronym, UNOWAS.
  12. Richard Gowan, "Special Report on Multilateral Political Missions and Preventive Diplomacy" (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2011), available at <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR299.pdf>.
  13. For a more detailed account, see the prevention case study on Burkina Faso prepared for the UN-World Bank Flagship Study on conflict prevention by Alexandra Pichler Fong.
  14. For a detailed account of Annan's mediation in Kenya, see Elisabeth Lindenmayer and Josie Lianna Kaye, "A Choice for Peace? The Story of 41 Days of Mediation in Kenya" (New York: International Peace Institute, August 2009).
  15. Case study of the UN's preventive diplomacy engagement in Kyrgyzstan (April-October 2010), prepared for DPA by the Center on International Cooperation at New York University.
  16. For the full transcript of Ambassador Wittig's remarks on 14 December 2012, see: [http://www.new-york-un.diplo.de/Vertretung/newyorkvn/en/\\_pr/speeches-statements/2012/20121214-wittig-sc.html](http://www.new-york-un.diplo.de/Vertretung/newyorkvn/en/_pr/speeches-statements/2012/20121214-wittig-sc.html)
  17. Richard Gowan and Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, "Syria", in *The United Nations Security Council in the Age of Human Rights*, ed. Jared Genser and Bruno Stagno Ugarte (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 453.
  18. See for example, the concluding section of Crisis Group, "Seizing the Moment", op.cit.
  19. For example, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the African Union

and a number of African sub-regional organisations (ECOWAS, IGAD) have developed early warning systems.

20. See for example, Ghana's National Peace Council.
21. Examples include the European Union's Instrument for Stability as well as the Immediate Response Facility of the UN Peacebuilding Fund.
22. The deployment of UN "light teams" to assist local actors in addressing risks related to conflict and human rights violations is an innovative feature of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's Human Rights up Front Initiative.
23. Examples include the AU's Panel of the Wise and ECOWAS' Council of the Wise.
24. The World Bank, World Development Report 2011, "Conflict, Security and Development", 5-6.
25. Ibid, 63
26. See "Uniting our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People", Report of the Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Peace Operations, 2015, 8.
27. Ibid, 16
28. For example, the annual budget of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel, which has played an important role in prevention efforts in Guinea, Niger and elsewhere in the sub-region, was only
29. Raymond Hinnebusch, I. William Zartman, et al., "UN Mediation in the Syrian Crisis: From Kofi Annan to Lakhdar Brahimi," (New York: International Peace Institute, March 2016), 19.
30. Steps taken in this regard include the deployment of Peace and Development Advisers to assist Resident Coordinators and Country Teams in supporting national capacities for prevention; the establishment of the three regional offices for preventive diplomacy in West Africa, Central Africa and Central Asia (mentioned in greater depth in the following paragraph); and the opening of smaller liaison offices to enhance cooperation with regional bodies in Southern Africa and elsewhere. While having these capabilities in place by no means guarantees effective preventive diplomacy, we highlight them here because it is much harder to achieve it without them.
31. Yemen Times, "Yemen Times Person of the Year: Jamal Benomar", 2 January 2012 (available at: <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1534/news/171/Yemen-Times-person-of-the-Year-Jamal-Benomar.htm>)
32. CIC Kyrgyzstan case study, op. cit.
33. Teresa Whitfield, "Focused Mission: Not so Limited Duration", New York University, 2010.
34. Crisis Group Africa Report N°205, "Burkina Faso: With our Without Compaoré, Times of Uncertainty", 22 July 2013, 26.
35. Sebastian von Einsiedel et al, "Major Recent Trends in Violent Conflict", 6.
36. Think tanks and NGOs that have done excellent work in this area include HD Center, Berghof Foundation, United States Institute for Peace, and the European Institute for Peace (EIP). Note that a paper on mediation that is being prepared by EIP for the UN-World Bank study on conflict prevention will discuss the challenges of engaging with proscribed actors in greater depth.
37. Cited in a speech by former UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, B. Lynn Pascoe, at the Council on Foreign Relations in June 2011.
38. Very instructive on the difference between U.S. and UN leverage are reflections by current UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman in a speech at the Brookings Institution in July 2012: "...Until you leave the U.S. Government you cannot fully grasp what it means to walk into a room backed at all times by the tangible power of the Presidency, the Pentagon and the dollar, the voting weight at the IMF and World Bank, and a permanent seat in the Security Council. They were assets that – almost without noticing – I carried with me as U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon and U.S. Assistant Secretary of State. ...If one has spent an entire diplomatic career with those assets, as I did, it is something of a shock suddenly to be without them. Initially I felt a sense of almost diplomatic nakedness: you mean I now have to rely only on my own powers of persuasiveness?"
39. Interview with civil society member of the negotiating team, cited in: Impact Assessment Report on DPA's Preventive Diplomacy Efforts in Malawi from July to September 2011 (April 2014), 15.
40. A now famous case is Ralph Bunche's negotiation of a settlement guaranteeing Bahrain's independence from the UK in 1971, to the satisfaction of the three parties involved, Bahrain, the UK and Iran. The Bahrain mediation has been considered "a textbook example of settling a dispute by quiet diplomacy before it degenerated into conflict", cited in Brian Urquhart, Ralph Bunche: An American Odyssey (New York: Norton, 1998).
41. Interestingly, the International Support Group for Lebanon, established in 2012 to secure Security Council unity and help protect Lebanon from the impact of the Syria crisis, may be one of the unsung instances of prevention in the Middle East. Over the past five years, the Council has been deeply divided on Syria, but capable of making high-level unified statements on Lebanon, and able to garner significant resources to help the country withstand the pressures of the refugee crisis. Here, Council unity has been carefully fostered in a difficult context.
42. See Security Council resolution 2014 of 21 October 2011.
43. See Security Council resolution 2051 of 12 June 2012. On this subject, then UK Ambassador to the UN, Sir Mark Lyall Grant, stated at a Council briefing on Yemen in December 2012: "Yemen demonstrates the value of the Security Council engaging actively in conflict prevention and coming together in a united way in support of the effective application of the Secretary-General's good offices, notably through resolution 2051 (2012), which lent strong support to the transition process and made clear the Council's readiness to consider further measures in response to actions

- aimed at undermining the political transition." (Available at: [http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_pv\\_6878.pdf](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_pv_6878.pdf))
44. Extract from remarks delivered by Kofi Annan on 2 August 2012, available at: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=42609#.WOG34T8E3M>
  45. Term coined by Crisis Group in "Seizing the Moment", op. cit.
  46. See Raymond Hinnebusch, I. William Zartman, et al., "UN Mediation in the Syrian Crisis: From Kofi Annan to Lakhdar Brahimi", op. cit.
  47. Crisis Group, "Seizing the Moment", 24.
  48. Ibid, 25.
  49. Jane Boulden, *Responding to Conflict in Africa* (Palgrave, 2013), referring to Burundi.
  50. Richard Gowan et al., "Back to Basics: The UN and Crisis Diplomacy in an Age of Strategic Uncertainty", New York University Center on International Cooperation, July 2010.
  51. Crisis Group Middle East Report N°125, "Yemen: Enduring Conflict, Threatened Transition" (3 July 2012), 2
  52. See "NTF: Observations of the Government-CSO Dialogue in Malawi and possible ways forward" by Peter Bartu and Andries Odendaal, 27 October 2011.
  53. See "Report on the Consultation on the Malawi Infrastructure for Dialogue and Collaborative Problem-Solving", 12-13 March 2012", UNDP.
  54. See "Development of a National Peace Architecture for Malawi, September 2013", Office of the President and Cabinet, Government of the Republic of Malawi, 2013.
  55. See for example the International Follow-Up and Support Group for the Transition in Burkina Faso, established in December 2014 to accompany Burkina Faso's civilian-led political transition following the uprising against President Compaoré.
  56. See CIC, "Back to Basics", op. cit., 4. It is worth noting also that the Mediation Support Unit of the UN Department of Political Affairs has to that purpose recruited mediation advisers with specialised expertise in process design to its stand-by team.
  57. On this point, the World Bank's World Development Report 2011 has a good discussion of "inclusive-enough coalitions".
  58. Report of the Advisory Group of Experts for the 2015 Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture, "The Challenge of Sustaining Peace", New York: 2015, 31
  59. Ibid.
  60. Ibid.
  61. End of Assignment report Ms. Margaret A Vogt, May 2011-July 2013. On file with authors.
  62. Hinnebusch and Zartmann, op. cit, 4.
  63. Crisis Group, "Seizing the Moment, op. cit, iii.
  64. Ibid, 20.
  65. It should be noted however that concerted efforts are already under way to improve this. The UN Department for Political Affairs, for example, has invested in several initiatives to provide an evidentiary basis for what works and what does not in prevention, including through the CIC assessment framework mentioned earlier, and a small but dedicated capacity in its Guidance and Lessons Learned Unit.