Comment on Ken Menkhaus's Paper

Strategic deficits in peace building and conflict prevention

Stein Tønnesson

Ken Menkhaus's excellent 'Conflict Prevention and Human Security: Issues and Challenges' surveys the literature on 'conflict prevention', distinguishes between different types of prevention, identifies prerequisites for prevention, singles out useful suggestions from the literature of the last decade, and concludes, *inter alia*, that 'conflict prevention must be broadly defined, to include strategies addressing both proximate and underlying causes of conflict'.

Certainly, we need an analytical framework for tailoring strategies to specific conflict-prone countries or regions, but we should not broaden our key terms so much that they lose their distinct meanings. The term ' ', along with terms like 'conflict management' and 'conflict resolution', helps us to extend our thinking without overburdening 'conflict prevention', which should perhaps be reserved for what Menkhaus calls 'early prevention' and 'late prevention'.

The comments below draw on the results of a conference on efforts by the four Utstein countries (Germany, The Netherlands, Norway, and the UK), which was held in December 2003 at Leangkollen, outside Oslo, at the end of a research project. That project was led by Dan Smith, a former director of the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO) and now the general secretary of International Alert in London.

Stein Tønnesson is Director, International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO).

Both Smith and Menkhaus argue that the main constraint on conflict prevention is not the lack of early-warning capacity or appropriate tools, but rather a strategic deficit.

Menkhaus on 'conflict prevention'

Menkhaus's paper touches on —both in the narrow sense of post-conflict efforts to prevent the resurgence of violence and in the broad sense of rectifying the structural root causes of deadly conflict. Menkhaus points out how interventions to prevent conflict have increased since the end of the Cold War, how conflict prevention has moved higher on the agendas of the United Nations, the US, and the European Union (he does not discuss NATO); and how nongovernmental organisations and research institutes have become involved. He notes the extant criticism of broad 'conflict prevention terminology', which may define prevention out of existence by equating conflict prevention with the correction of all social inequities and the advancement of broad economic and social development goals. He distinguishes five dimensions of conflict prevention: 'structural', 'early', 'late', 'conflict management', and ' '—which he defines narrowly, as 'initiatives designed to prevent a recurrence of armed conflict'. Appropriately, he devotes most of his attention to 'early' prevention, which happens in time to keep local actors from taking up arms, and 'late' prevention, which tries to keep them from doing so after they have decided to move into armed conflict but before they have actually done so. These two dimensions form the core of conflict prevention.

The paper's main contribution is its list of six prerequisites for effective prevention, and its discussion of which of these are least developed. The missing ingredients, Menkhaus says, are not operational capacity or tools, but analytic capacity, a strategic framework to guide coherent preventative action, and political will. Beyond the common call for more political will, he suggests the promotion of a 'culture of prevention'.

Two technical points should be made here. First, Menkhaus often uses the term 'conflict' interchangeably with 'armed conflict' and 'deadly conflict'. Peace research analysts usually hold the view that conflicts are welcome, but they should be managed non-violently. A quick read of Menkhaus's paper might suggest a disagreement on this point where none actually exists. Second, his argument about intrusive prevention strategies needs clarification. In his discussion of a 2000 paper by Renata Dwan, he argues that, to be effective, intrusive preventative strategies may have to be implemented first and legitimated later. Next, however, he argues that developing countries need to

be involved in negotiating the terms of interventions, as they have been in negotiating trade agreements, for such interventions to gain legitimacy. There is a contradiction here.

In what follows I do not challenge most of Menkhaus's points. Instead, I juxtapose some recent thoughts about ' ' against 'conflict prevention', to see how they may relate to each other.

The Utstein 'peace building'

Former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali introduced the term ' ' in his 1992 report to the Security Council *Agenda for Peace*, which also talks about 'conflict prevention'. Both terms have since gained popularity within and beyond the UN. Yet neither term has an authoritative definition, and most development projects in conflict-ridden areas are still planned with little consideration of the effects they might have for ongoing armed conflicts, or for reducing the risk of deadly conflict.

In July 1999, the development ministers of Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and the UK met at the Utstein monastery in Western Norway. The four nations are now sometimes called 'the Utstein countries' (Sweden and Canada have since joined). The original four countries did not use the term ' ' in their 1999 declaration (Utstein Group, 1999), but they did say, under the heading 'conflict prevention':

> *Peace is a fundamental prerequisite for development. This is a responsibility of all actors. Conflicts that have reached a peaceful settlement may arise again unless underlying causes are removed. Development efforts should be used strategically not just to prevent and settle conflicts, but also to consolidate peace when settlement has been reached. (Utstein Group, 1999.)*

This and similar statements reflect the perceived need to broaden the term 'conflict prevention' to encompass more long-term efforts to change structures that are conducive to conflict, and to broaden ' ' to include development during and after armed conflicts and in potentially violent situations. Thus, in February 2001, the UN Security Council said that 'is aimed at preventing the outbreak, the recurrence or continuation of armed conflict' (UN Security Council, 2001). This broader definition inspired the research project led by Smith on Utstein efforts. The project examined 336 development projects undertaken between 1997 and 2001, and in Afghanistan in 2002, and produced

reports about each of the four Utstein countries and a synthesis report (Smith 2003a).[1] In his synthesis report, Smith proposes the following definition of:

> *Peace building is development within a context of crisis and war. It is a kind of development that is designed to contribute to ending or avoiding armed conflict and may be carried out during such conflict, in its wake, or as an effort to prevent its resurgence. (Smith, 2003a.)*

This equates peace building with development, but with the defining difference that the latter is carried out in the context of crisis and war. At the Leangkollen conference, Smith (2003b) added that an activity should be considered as peace building only if (1) the goal is peace building, and (2) the context is recent, current, or anticipated armed conflict. In Smith's framework, peace-building activities fall under four main headings that constitute the four colours in the peace building 'palette':

- security;
- political framework, institution building;
- economic framework, socioeconomic development;
- reconciliation and justice.

A peace-building project needs all four to be viable, though reconciliation and justice might perhaps be seen as part of the political framework. It is necessary to provide security through demobilising and disarming troops, training new police forces, and adopting and enforcing laws. A system of governance must be built that ensures all social groups are represented. The introduction of electoral democracy is often a big step in this direction, but it is not sufficient; it may even lead to renewed violence if minority groups are not provided sufficient guarantees of autonomy or cultural and other rights. Mechanisms to provide minorities a say in political decision-making are often necessary parts of a peace building strategy. One of the aims of peace building is to orient decision makers towards socioeconomic development rather than internal rivalry over scarce resources. For such orientation to be successful, development plans must provide opportunities for all the groups who have been involved in armed conflict or who might resort to arms. No group must be marginalised. Finally, there is the concern for justice and reconciliation. One sometimes has to choose between the two; this constitutes a serious dilemma. War crimes ought to be punished, but a peace agreement will often require amnesty or negotiated guarantees against persecution. The number of guilty

individuals from a period of sustained warfare will often be so large as to make just punishment impracticable. After the Khmer Rouge genocide, for instance, many if not most Cambodian families included both victims and executioners, and some of the top Khmer Rouge leaders received pardons from the King or the Cambodian government in order to persuade them to give up the struggle. Only a select few of the former Khmer Rouge are likely to be tried.

Peace building's aim must be to contribute to civil peace, nationally, regionally, and globally. From the 1960s to the early 1990s, there was a trend towards fewer international armed conflicts and more civil wars. That trend continued for a few years after the end of the Cold War, but then the number of internal armed conflicts also began to fall. There were fewer armed conflicts in 2002 than in any year in the previous 30 (Anthony and Wiharta, 2003; Eriksson *et al.*, 2003a, b), and possibly the fewest battle-related deaths globally in at least half a century. Following these trends, in the mid-1990s peace researchers reoriented their studies towards efforts to explain the onset, duration, magnitude, and settlement of civil wars. At the end of 2002, PRIO established a new Centre for the Study of Civil War, under the leadership of Scott Gates. One of the centre's working groups focuses on 'Civil Peace',[2] and work within the Centre builds upon, and is inspired by, recent research done by the World Bank (Collier *et al.*, 2003).

Strategic deficits

The main finding of the Smith *et al.* study is what he calls 'a major strategic deficit'; that much project planning is characterised by conceptual confusion and inexact terminology, and that some 55% of the 'peace building' Utstein projects have been unaffected by any broader country strategy. Often one effect of this strategic deficit is that too much aid is provided immediately after an armed conflict ends and too little is provided a few years later. While countries' peak absorptive capacity is usually in years four to seven, peak funding is in years one to four (Smith, 2003b). None of the Utstein countries has developed what may be called a policy on peace building. Moreover, the United Kingdom continues to use the term 'conflict prevention' broadly, and rarely refers to 'peace building' in its official documents.

Stronger political leadership is needed to craft a strategic framework for peace building. A group of likeminded countries ought to co-ordinate their efforts and push for comprehensive peace building plans. This will require drafting and adopting key

policy documents, and exchanges of experience, viewpoints, and conclusions among donor countries and multilateral agencies. Planners must draw on the experiences of conflict-ridden countries, whose political and civil-society leaders must be given access to arenas for international exchanges of ideas. Yet Smith does not call for giant new bureaucracies. His point is rather the need to reorganise or reorient existing institutions, and to link them in new ways.

Peace and development researchers can offer expertise, critique, and analysis to this process. They need to develop both theories and empirical knowledge about how armed conflict and socioeconomic development interact. They need to explore the causes, duration, and conclusion of civil wars. They should investigate the absorptive capacity of conflict-ridden societies for various kinds of humanitarian assistance and development aid. They should continue to evaluate peace building projects.

Menkhaus actually draws the same conclusions as Smith, albeit with regard to conflict prevention rather than peace building. He endorses Bruce Jentleson's view that preventative diplomacy is 'an idea in search of a strategy', and Stephen Stedman's warning that the urge to take preventative action can lead to ill-considered policies that 'lack strategic sense'. He concludes that the situation has improved somewhat, but that 'we are still far from possessing a strong strategic capacity'. He also cites the Carnegie Commission for Preventing Deadly Conflict, who in 1997 called for two distinct strategies: 'an operation strategy for imminent crises, and a structural strategy for addressing underlying causes of conflicts'. It might make sense instead to distinguish between a strategy of conflict prevention that addresses imminent crises and a strategy of peace building that also tackles long-term structural issues.

The main point here is that Menkhaus, Smith, and many other participants at the Leangkollen Conference agree that there is a major strategic deficit. Menkhaus concludes that our analytic capacity to predict and understand conflicts needs sustained attention, that our structural capacity to predict and alert is weak and ad hoc (though it has functioned on several occasions), and that our operational capacity to prevent conflict is strong. What we lack is strategic capacity to prevent conflict, 'to know which tools to use when'.

Terminology: Who are 'we'?

Menkhaus often says 'we' and 'our'. These terms seem to refer to what Scandinavians

often vaguely refer to as 'international society'—a concept that does not include local actors. He brings up the tricky issue of localisation in a section arguing for the creation of a 'culture of prevention'. He notes that a number of studies have concluded that there is 'no substitute for strong local capacities and norms for managing conflicts in a non-violent manner'. Seen from the local perspective, though, what is perhaps needed is a culture of non-violent conflict management, rather than one of 'prevention'. The term 'prevention' comes more naturally to the outsider—the UN, the great powers, regional organisations, coalitions of the willing—who need to know when and how to intervene. Local actors will not normally think and act in terms of prevention. No one wants to prevent himself. Maybe the best terminology for outsiders to use at the same time cannot be the best for local actors, who must seek at least a part of their legitimacy among the parties to the conflict themselves.

'Peace building' and 'conflict management' have more potential as terms for local use. Local actors are more likely to want to manage their conflicts and build peace than to prevent their own conflicts. However, switching terms by itself does not fill the need for strong local ownership of peace processes. The success of a peace process is determined mainly by the actions of local parties themselves. A good peace building strategy emphasises local empowerment, but for this, influential local actors must be prepared to engage themselves in forming and carrying out peace building strategies. The question then is whether the concept can be taken up by local governments and by political and social movements, or whether local actors need to develop their own terminologies, based on their own cultural and political traditions. Efforts to encourage the development of a locally embedded language of peace building and conflict management may actually form a significant part of any country-specific peace building strategy.

Endnotes

1. Smith's synthesis report, the Dutch, German, Norwegian, and UK reports, as well as Norwegian Development Minister Hilde Frafjord Johnson's keynote address at the Leangkollen Conference, can be downloaded from www.prio.no.
2. See http://www.prio.no/page/CSCW_research/CSCW_menu_main/9644/9652

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