Policy Paper and Case Studies
Capturing UN Preventive Diplomacy Success: How and Why Does It Work?

Dr. Laurie Nathan Professor of the Practice of Mediation and Director of the Mediation Program,

Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame

Adam Day Senior Policy Advisor, United Nations University, Tokyo, Japan

João Honwana Former Director in the UN Department of Political Affairs

Dr. Rebecca Brubaker Policy Advisor, United Nations University, Tokyo, Japan

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Executive Summary

This paper presents the findings and recommendations of a research project entitled *Capturing UN Preventive Diplomacy Success: How and Why Does It Work?* The project was led by the Centre for Policy Research at the UN University,[1] in collaboration with the UN Department of Political Affairs and with support from the UK Permanent Mission to the UN.

The aims of the project were to deepen the UN's understanding of successful preventive diplomacy; produce a framework for assessing preventive diplomacy; and contribute to improved planning of preventive diplomacy missions. Primary research was conducted through six in-depth case studies on UN preventive diplomacy: Guinea (2008-10); Lebanon (2011-17); Malawi (2011-12); Nigeria (2015); Sudan (2010-11); and Yemen (2011).

The project defined preventive diplomacy as *diplomatic action taken to prevent conflicts from becoming violent and/or to prevent conflicts with low-level violence from spreading or escalating into large-scale violence*. It focused on both the immediate results of diplomatic interventions and the interventions' links to longer-term peace sustainability.

The project developed a conceptual framework that provides a general explanation for how and why UN preventive diplomacy succeeds. The framework has three components: the logic of successful preventive diplomacy, which addresses the question of how the preventive diplomacy was successful; the critical success factors, which addresses the question of why UN preventive diplomacy was successful; and the sustainability of successful outcomes.

The logic of successful preventive diplomacy

Successful preventive diplomacy prompts a shift from a volatile and escalatory conflict dynamic to a dynamic of containment and de-escalation. This shift results from the decisions and actions of three categories of actors: the conflict parties (i.e. those with the power to decide whether to escalate to large-scale violence in a given setting); the preventive diplomacy interveners that endeavor to influence and support the conflict parties' decisions in a non-violent direction; and other actors with influence over the conflict parties.

In order to comprehend the reasons for success in a given case, it is necessary to investigate all of these categories, which constitute the engine room of preventive diplomacy. It should be stressed, however, that the *primary decision-making actors are the conflict parties*. It is they, and not the preventive diplomacy actors, that determine whether violence breaks out, escalates, subsides or is avoided.

Where violence is imminent, preventive diplomacy can help the parties to back down and to manage or resolve their disputes in a non-violent and face-saving manner. It is successful when it enables the conflict parties to find a *way out* of the escalatory dynamic and to recalibrate their cost-benefit analyses in favor of a non-violent course of action.

Critical success factors

Six critical success factors emerged from the project case studies:

1) The conflict parties had not yet decided to resort to large-scale violence. This created the potential for successful diplomatic interventions.
2) The parties consented to preventive diplomacy by the UN. Where consent was not forthcoming at the outset, it had to be won by the UN. Alternatively, the UN at times deferred to a regional organization that took the lead.
3) There was a high level of international and regional cooperation and unity. The main dynamics in this regard were that the UN Security Council was united; key international and regional actors supported UN leadership on preventive diplomacy; and/or UN preventive diplomacy was undertaken in partnership or coordination with other international actors.
4) International leverage was used effectively. This was especially true of soft leverage, which included the UN Secretary-General's Good Offices exercised through an envoy; a unified stance by the international community; and the deployment of UN resources and technical expertise to support prevention efforts. Our cases did not reveal a clear pattern regarding coercive forms of leverage.
5) The UN envoy had the right set of attributes and skills. This often included deep knowledge of the conflict and the parties, a regional or cultural affinity with the parties, and skills in communication and persuasion.
6) There was good internal UN coordination and cooperation. The UN Country Team and the UN regional offices are crucial partners in preventive diplomacy efforts by envoys.

Sustainability

Preventive diplomacy is a form of operational conflict prevention rather than structural conflict prevention. It takes place in moments of acute crisis where the risk of large-scale violence is imminent, and it focuses more on the escalatory dynamics than on the structural causes of the conflict.

The relatively narrow focus of preventive diplomacy does not detract from its importance. If successful, it prevents the outbreak of large-scale violence and can create political space for attending to the requisite structural reforms.

However, the outcome of successful short-term diplomatic interventions may be unsustainable in the medium- to long-

term if the structural causes of violence are not addressed. In some of our cases short-term preventive diplomacy was linked to structural prevention, such as through efforts to address authoritarianism, political and socio-economic grievances, electoral reform, security sector reform, and a lack of inclusion in governance.

Our cases also identified the importance of institutionalizing operational prevention. Where there is an ongoing risk of large-scale violence, operational prevention should be viewed as a continuous rather than a short-term function. Our cases show that this can be done in various ways at national, regional and international levels.

Policy Recommendations

From the case studies, we developed recommendations, which have varying practical implications at different levels of the organization (e.g. the Security Council, the Secretary-General, the Department of Political Affairs, the envoy and his/her team, etc). The five areas of recommendations are:

1) **Professionalization and preparation:** continue to professionalize preventive diplomacy; develop a planning tool for preventive diplomacy; link preventive diplomacy planning to the broader UN system; and incorporate the views of the conflict parties in assessments.
2) **Preventive diplomacy strategies:** adopt a flexible approach to mandates; develop strategies based on the proven success factors; identify the roles and responsibilities of the UN and other actors at an early stage; and support domestic prevention actors and mechanisms.
3) **Preventive diplomacy tactics:** keep the Security Council informed and united; share the preventive diplomacy burden with regional bodies and other entities; engage all the conflict actors; build trust with the conflict parties; and develop an appropriate public communication strategy.
4) **UN resources:** take advantage of the human and other resources available in the UN system, including the relevant UN country team and regional office; invest in the regional offices; and break down the economic/political divisions at the regional level.
5) **Sustaining peace:** link preventive diplomacy to structural prevention; contribute to building operational and structural prevention capacities at international, regional and national levels; understand subnational/local dynamics; and develop guidance on sustainability.

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose and scope of paper

This paper presents the principal findings and recommendations of a research project entitled *Capturing*

UN Preventive Diplomacy Success: How and Why Does It Work? The project was led by the Centre for Policy Research at the United Nations University, in collaboration with the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA) and with support from the UK Permanent Mission to the UN. The paper was based on field- and desk-based case studies, an in-depth literature review, interviews with UN officials and experts on preventive diplomacy, and a consultative workshop with UN officials and experts in January 2018.

This introductory section presents the policy context, rationale, overview of the project, definition of preventive diplomacy, and research questions. Section 2 presents a conceptual framework for understanding how preventive diplomacy works, identifies the critical success factors and addresses the challenge of sustaining peace; this section also highlights key findings on preventive diplomacy from the work of other analysts. Section 3 illustrates the framework and findings via three case study synopses. Section 4 provides a set of policy recommendations drawn from the case studies and wider research.

1.2 Policy context

From its inception the UN has undertaken and promoted preventive diplomacy in conflict situations.[2] Over the past ten years, DPA has dedicated significant resources to improving the preventive diplomatic capacities of the UN, including the creation of the Mediation Support Unit, the Stand-By Team of Senior Mediation Advisers, three regional political offices, and increased reporting on preventive diplomacy. More recently, and pointing to the value of preventive diplomacy in addressing the risks of violent conflict worldwide, Secretary-General António Guterres has called for a "surge in diplomacy for peace."[3] Politically-driven efforts to prevent conflict are at the heart of the Secretary-General's vision and the major reform initiatives in recent years.[4]

At the same time, UN reform is designed to make "sustaining peace" central to the Organization's efforts, bridging conflict prevention through peacemaking and on to post-conflict recovery.[5] Grounded in the principle of inclusive national ownership, the concept of sustaining peace requires that all interventions look beyond a narrow focus on cessation of hostilities and work to address the root causes of violent conflict.[6] This requires breaking down longstanding silos within the UN, making the political, development, and human rights pillars work more cohesively to prevent violent conflict.[7] Any surge in preventive diplomacy will need to support these broader objectives of sustaining peace and work across the entire Organization.

1.3 Rationale for the research project

The High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations stated emphatically that "the international community is failing at preventing conflict."[8] Similarly, a recent World Bank/UN report noted that violent conflict is surging after

decades of decline, putting the international community's commitments to sustainable development at risk.[9] Secretary-General Guterres has observed that "our most serious shortcoming – and here I refer to the entire international community – is our inability to prevent crises."[10]

While the UN and international actors have certainly failed in key moments, we should not overlook the many cases of successful conflict prevention, in which the UN has often played a key role. When violence is averted, the result is less dramatic and visible, and less likely to be reported. In contrast, civil wars in places like Syria and South Sudan are a dramatic daily reminder of the costs of failed prevention. We seem to take successful conflict prevention for granted, focusing instead on the human suffering playing out in the unsuccessful cases.

DPA conducts in-depth reviews of its conflict prevention activities. However, these nuanced and sensitive case analyses have not been transformed into evidence-backed tools or institutional learning.[11] Despite having been involved in a wide array of conflict prevention interventions with mixed outcomes, the UN has failed to assess its preventive diplomacy experiences in a comparative and systematic way.[12] As a result, it has not built a rigorous knowledge base or repertoire of good practice for preventive diplomacy, limiting the ability of the Organization to improve over time or put in place more effective planning processes.

The present project seeks to address this shortcoming by evaluating cases where the UN played a positive preventive diplomacy role, and by drawing general lessons about what works in a range of settings. The rationale for the focus on successful cases is the assumption that the dynamics and causes of success are not as well understood as those of failure, and that useful lessons can be drawn from positive experiences.[13]

1.4 Project overview

The aims of the project are to deepen the UN's understanding of how early diplomatic action works to prevent violent conflict; provide a basis for more effective preventive diplomacy; produce a sound and user-friendly framework to assess preventive diplomacy; and contribute to improved planning of preventive diplomacy missions. The project has four related deliverables: (1) six in-depth case studies on UN preventive diplomacy; (2) the present policy paper synthesizing the findings of the case studies and building a conceptual framework for successful preventive diplomacy; (3) an assessment framework for evaluating preventive diplomacy interventions; and (4) a proposed planning tool for preventive diplomacy.

The case studies were selected as they all faced a high risk of imminent violence, where UN diplomacy played a positive role in preventing escalation to large-scale violence. The case studies were Guinea (2008-10); Lebanon (2011-17); Malawi

(2011-12); Nigeria (2015); Sudan (2010-11); and Yemen (2011).[14] To ensure a broad range of experiences, the project also drew on existing DPA case studies,[15] external reports on other conflict prevention settings, and a January 2018 expert workshop convened by UNU-CPR.

A distinctive feature of the research for this project was UNU-CPR's strong collaboration with DPA and the field missions involved, which provided the researchers with access to confidential UN documents and ready access to high-level UN officials involved in the interventions. On this basis, the project has been designed for immediate relevance and uptake by the UN and key member states/partners involved in preventive diplomacy.

1.5 Methodological challenges

The project faced two major methodological challenges. The first was the difficulty of determining the timeframe for the case studies. In many cases, longstanding tensions in a country reached a boiling point where widespread violence appeared likely, and the function of preventive diplomacy was to quickly intervene to help the parties de-escalate. In some settings the de-escalation appeared to "stick," and even to address some of the underlying root causes of conflict; in others there was serious violence in a later period. For example, in the Yemen case the 2011 diplomatic intervention almost certainly prevented major violence at the time, but two years later the country became mired in some of the worst violence in the world today. The extent to which the case studies can burden preventive diplomacy with sustained peace was one of the most difficult challenges facing this project, particularly given the policy context described above and the wide-ranging academic debate about what contributes to enduring peace in fragile contexts.[16]

Second, the cases frequently presented settings where the UN was merely one of many preventive actors, including major bilateral players, regional organizations, and domestic actors. In these circumstances it was difficult to determine precisely what impact the UN interventions had made to the key decision-making by the conflict actors.[17] Was the positive outcome due to the efforts of all of the interveners, or only some of them, or none at all? It is also possible for the conflict actors themselves resolve a crisis with little external influence. It may therefore be difficult to determine the degree to which a positive outcome is attributable to the UN. In such situations, it may make more sense to think of the UN's contribution to change, rather than attribution for success.

Our emphasis on decision-making by the conflict parties offers a way to understand conflict dynamics without unnaturally placing the UN or other external players in the center of the process. The cases suggest that conflict actors take decisions for widely different reasons, and often the mixture of factors that drive a specific decision are difficult to identify perfectly. Understanding this requires triangulation of the observations and findings of the research or assessment. This cannot be

determined simply by interviewing UN diplomats. It is also necessary to make every effort to ascertain the views of the conflict parties and/or individuals that have a deep and accurate knowledge of the conflict parties' decisions.[18]

The discussion below grapples with these challenges and seeks to develop a viable, realistic lens through which to understand the UN's role in preventive diplomacy. The approach is designed to situate preventive diplomacy within the broader reform agenda of the UN, including Sustaining Peace and reforms to the peace and security architecture.

1.6 Defining preventive diplomacy

UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali defined preventive diplomacy as "action 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."[19] The focus on conflict per se may be misleading, though, since many societies experience conflict that is not destructive or violent. Similarly, there are societies suffering from serious and widespread violence that do not fall neatly into the term "conflict."[20] Rather than focus solely on the term "conflict," it is more relevant to consider violence to be the central issue of concern, examining situations where the risk of widespread violence is acute.[21]

This project has therefore defined preventive diplomacy *as diplomatic action taken to prevent conflicts from becoming violent and/or to prevent conflicts with low-level violence from spreading or escalating into large-scale violence.* Following this definition, the project focused on settings where violence appeared imminent, or was already present at a low-level, and there was a well-founded apprehension of widespread, large-scale violence. Put colloquially, the challenge of preventive diplomacy in such situations is to "nip potentially violent conflict in the bud" or to "prevent the small fire from spreading or becoming a large fire."

1.7 Research questions

The immediate question raised by the above definition is whether preventive diplomacy succeeded in its goal: Was large-scale violence averted? If large-scale violence broke out and/or spread, there is a strong case to say that the preventive diplomacy failed. However, this does not necessarily mean that the UN interventions were flawed and should not be repeated. Evaluative questions can still be raised about the quality and relative effectiveness of those interventions.

If, on the other hand, the situation de-escalated and large-scale violence was averted, an argument can be made that preventive diplomacy may have contributed to the positive outcome. The questions then concern the causes of the de-escalation and the extent to which the UN interventions contributed to the outcome. These questions are at the heart of the case studies and are the subject of the Assessment Framework developed through this project.[22]

A further, equally important question arises in relation to positive outcomes: Was the prevention sustained beyond the immediate crisis? This question is obviously important because successful prevention may be short-lived. The importance of the question has been heightened by the recent UN resolutions and statements on "sustaining peace."[23]

The UN Security Council resolution on sustaining peace and the subsequent World Bank/UN Prevention Study argue that long-term prevention of violent conflict is achieved by addressing root causes and building inclusive, nationally-owned peace processes.[24] Similarly, the General Assembly has required that UN mediation be founded on the principle of inclusivity, thus requiring an approach to preventive diplomacy focused on root causes.[25]

This points to an inherent tension within the definition of preventive diplomacy, and how to define success. On one hand, preventive diplomacy must be seen through a narrow lens and often a short time-frame. If the immediate risk of widespread violence is reduced, the intervention can in some sense be called a success. There are strong arguments, from our case studies and elsewhere, that a break in the escalatory cycle can have an important impact, and open the door to other calming efforts.[26] There is also a persuasive point that preventive diplomacy should not be burdened with the full weight of sustainable peace—envoys are often called into a growing crisis with a mandate to broker a quick de-escalation, not necessarily build the foundations for sustained peace.

However, given the UN's policy prerogatives to treat conflict prevention in a holistic and cross-pillar manner, this project examines *whether the immediate preventive intervention is linked to longer-term sustainability.* This can take many forms. The intervention itself can work to address the more deeply-rooted societal issues driving the risk of violent conflict; the intervention can be linked to structures and capacities that persist beyond the immediate crisis; or the intervention can be considered within a broader strategy of conflict prevention aimed at structural transformation.

In this paper we explore the relationship between preventive diplomacy, which tends to be seen as reactive, short-term interventions in the immediate crisis moment, and the challenge of peace sustainability and long-term prevention by addressing the root causes of violent conflict (c/f section 2.4). This establishes two criteria for success: (1) preventing widespread violence that appears imminent, and (2) linking the intervention to longer-term sustained peace. It suggests that there are no bright lines between success and failure, that there will always be a range of other lenses through which to define an outcome. But within this approach, there is scope to draw lessons from positive outcomes, to determine which interventions work best, and to identify how the UN has contributed to a reduction in the risk of large-scale violence.

2. Conceptual Framework and Research Findings

2.1 Introduction

UN preventive diplomacy takes place across a wide range of conflict settings, and the reasons for success in one case may differ greatly from another. However, based on a comparison of cases, this paper proposes a conceptual framework that provides a general explanation for how and why UN preventive diplomacy succeeds.

The framework has three components:

1) **The logic of successful preventive diplomacy.** This component addresses the question of how the preventive diplomacy was successful. It focuses on the actions and decisions of the conflict parties and the actions taken by preventive diplomacy interveners to influence the parties' decisions in a non-violent direction. It situates the UN within the wider context of external interventions and assesses the extent to which the decisions of the conflict actors can be attributed to the UN.

2) **Critical success factors.**[27] This component addresses the question of why UN preventive diplomacy was successful. While some of this analysis may relate to existing conditions on the ground, the component focuses on issues that are primarily under the control of the conflict parties (e.g. the decision to resort to violence), as well as those that are under the control of the UN (e.g. the appointment of an envoy, and the approach taken).

3) **Sustainability of successful outcomes.** This component addresses the question of whether the positive outcome was of a short-term nature or sustained. It looks at whether and how preventive diplomacy interventions were linked to longer-term processes, structures and capacities.

The rest of this section discusses the conceptual framework. Section 3 presents three case synopses to illustrate the framework.

2.2 The logic of successful preventive diplomacy

Successful preventive diplomacy prompts a shift from a volatile and escalatory conflict dynamic to a dynamic of containment and de-escalation. This shift results from the decisions and actions of three categories of actors: the conflict parties (i.e. those with the power to decide whether to escalate to large-scale violence in a given setting); the preventive diplomacy interveners that endeavor to influence and support the conflict parties' decisions in a non-violent direction; and other actors with influence over the conflict parties.[28]

In order to comprehend the reasons for success in a given case, it is therefore necessary to investigate the conflict parties' decisions and the reasons for their decisions; the interventions of preventive diplomacy actors; and any influential actions taken by other actors. This is the *engine room* of preventive diplomacy. We cannot understand successful preventive diplomacy without going into the engine room.

Although the literature on preventive diplomacy tends to concentrate on the role of the diplomatic interveners,[29] it should be stressed that the *primary decision-making actors are the conflict parties*. It is the conflict parties, not the preventive diplomacy actors, that determine whether violence breaks out, escalates, subsides or is avoided.

A vital implication of this point is that preventive diplomacy actors must have a very good understanding of the conflict parties' perspectives on violence and non-violent courses of action. In general, our cases suggest that a conflict party's perspective on violence tends to be based on a mixture of rational, normative and emotional considerations. The rational considerations entail an assessment of the comparative costs and benefits of alternative courses of action. The normative considerations relate primarily to ethical views on violence, and the emotional dynamics of high intensity conflict include enmity, hatred, suspicion and demonization.[30] Depending on their political orientation, different conflict parties, and factions and leaders within the parties, may place different weight on these considerations.

Moving beyond a strict "rational actor" framework, this approach acknowledges that individuals operate in structural and institutional contexts of power; conflict actors are influenced by underlying economic relations (who controls wealth and property), social norms (identity politics, race, gender, ethnicity) and ideology (values, beliefs), all of which combine with major impact on how decisions are made.[31] Our case studies also indicate that the conflict parties may be internally divided in their deliberations on the way forward, with moderates (or pragmatists) and hardliners (or ideologues) adopting different positions regarding the use of force.

Large-scale violence usually has a strong instrumental dimension: it is a means to an end. Notwithstanding the importance of the structural causes of violent conflict, the dominant dynamics in cases where there is an imminent risk of large-scale violence are "the calculations by parties to the conflict of the purposes served by political violence."[32] These dynamics are "the purposeful actions of political actors who actively create violent conflict" to serve their domestic political agendas.[33] The Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict argued similarly that "mass violence invariably results from the deliberately violent response of determined leaders and their groups to a wide range of social, economic and political conditions that provide the environment for violent conflict, but usually do not independently spawn violence."[34]

In situations where violence is present or imminent, it is possible that one or more of the conflict parties defuses the crisis without much influence from preventive diplomacy actors. But an escalatory dynamic – characterized by action-and-reaction, growing polarization, intense mistrust, inflammatory threats and mutual demonization – militates

against this. It creates an *inherent risk of progression towards greater violence.* In addition to the instrumental purposes served by violence, the escalatory dynamic has its own momentum. It heightens tension, reduces the space for the parties to back down without losing face or an advantageous position, and thereby increases the risk of violence.

The function of preventive diplomacy is precisely to help the parties to back down and to manage or resolve their disputes in a non-violent and face-saving manner. In short, the essential logic of preventive diplomacy is that it helps the conflict parties to find a *way out* of the escalatory dynamic and to recalibrate their cost-benefit analyses in favor of a non-violent course of action.

UN preventive diplomacy endeavors to prevent large-scale violence through a number of different types of intervention.[35] In our cases, the following types of intervention were most prominent:

- **Undertaking good offices.** This entailed attempting to persuade the leaders of the conflict parties to refrain from violence, facilitating dialogue between them, encouraging them to respect agreements they had previously consented to and, in some instances, mediating a negotiated agreement (c/f section 3).
- **Support for domestic and regional prevention.** The UN provided political and technical support to official and non-governmental domestic actors engaged in conflict prevention, as well as to prevention efforts by regional organizations (c/f section 2.4).
- **International coordination.** The UN sought to coordinate the conflict prevention efforts and harmonize the positions of other international actors, including regional organizations, members of the UN Security Council and neighboring states. This constituted a compelling form of pressure in its own right and often prevented the conflict parties from playing off one international actor against another (c/f section 2.3.3).

A particularly noteworthy feature of our cases is that UN preventive diplomacy takes place on an increasingly crowded field. Often the UN works alongside (and sometimes in competition with) a wide range of international, regional and national actors engaged in conflict prevention work. Sometimes, too, the UN is a relatively minor player, helping to support regional initiatives, or work alongside a major bilateral partner.

2.3 Critical success factors

Whereas the logic of successful UN preventive diplomacy explains how preventive diplomacy works, our case studies indicate a number of critical success factors that explain why it works in certain circumstances. Although every case is unique, six success factors are common across our cases: (1) the conflict parties have not yet decided to resort to large-scale violence; (2) the parties consent to preventive diplomacy by the UN; (3) there is a high level of international cooperation and unity; (4) international leverage is used effectively; (5) the UN envoy has the right set of attributes and skills; and (6) there is good internal UN coordination and cooperation. Each of these factors is discussed below. Thereafter we highlight key findings on preventive diplomacy from the work of other analysts.

2.3.1 Conflict parties have not decided to resort to large-scale violence

UN preventive diplomacy depends on the conflict parties not having decided to resort to large-scale violence. Rather, they are weighing up whether violence will help them achieve their aims (and they may have already resorted to low intensity violence); they may be engaged in an internal debate in this regard; and the escalatory dynamic may be moving them towards violence, even if this is not their firm intention. In such situations, de-escalation is possible and the UN envoy has something to work with. But if one or more of the conflict parties has already made an irrevocable decision to engage in large-scale violence, there may be little, if any, space for preventive diplomacy.

In short, the *need* for preventive diplomacy arises from the fact that the conflict parties are contemplating large-scale violence and are locked in an escalatory dynamic that has its own momentum, and the *potential* for preventive diplomacy arises from the fact that the parties have not decided to resort to large-scale violence. They are standing at the edge of the abyss and can still pull back. The challenge of preventive diplomacy lies in taking advantage of the potential to shift the parties' decisions in favor of non-violent courses of action. To do this, preventive diplomacy interveners must develop appropriate strategies based on the wide range of considerations that inform the deliberations of each of the parties.

2.3.2 Conflict parties consent to UN preventive diplomacy

UN preventive diplomacy can only be successful if it has the consent of the conflict parties. More specifically, the parties must consent to preventive diplomacy; they must consent to preventive diplomacy by the UN (as opposed to preventive diplomacy by another actor); and they must accept and have confidence in the UN envoy.

The parties' consent to preventive diplomacy by the UN can derive from a range of factors. These include the UN's long-standing engagement in peacemaking and conflict management in a country (e.g. UNSCOL in Lebanon);[36] the UN's engagement in humanitarian relief (e.g. in relation to the Boko Haram crisis in Nigeria); the reputation of a UN envoy and the relations of trust he or she has built with the conflict parties over a period of time (e.g. Nigeria and southern Sudan); the deployment of 'elder statesmen' that are respected by the parties;[37] and idiosyncratic factors, like the personal relationship between the UN Secretary-General and

a country's permanent representative to the UN (e.g. Malawi). There is persuasive evidence that the regional political offices of the UN—such as the UN Office in West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS)—have developed relationships and knowledge that foster consent in a range of conflicts.[38]

Consent for a UN role can also arise due to external factors beyond the UN's control. For example, in 1993 the Burundian government refused the UN envoy entry into the country until a major reprisal attack prompted international pressure for an intervention.[39] A massacre in Guinea in 2009 similarly triggered international outrage and a change in the government's willingness to accept a UN role.

In some instances, the UN is able to secure the consent of the parties relatively quickly and easily. In the Malawi case, for example, both the government and the civil society opposition groups were receptive to UN engagement at the outset. This was also the case in the Nigerian elections of 2015. Other such cases include the conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 2008, where the governments of both the DRC and Rwanda were receptive to a mediation role by the UN envoy.[40]

In other instances, the parties do not consent immediately to UN engagement. The UN then has two principal options. The first is for the organization to refrain from playing the primary preventive diplomacy role and instead support a regional body or some other actor that is able to play the primary role. The UN's support for the AU's prevention efforts in the southern Sudan referendum is an example of this (c/f section 3.2).

The second option is for the UN to patiently build relations and trust with the conflict parties until they become receptive to a preventive diplomacy role for the organization. Among our cases, Yemen provides a good example of this – the UN envoy was able to gradually build trust and consent with the parties through intensive in-country consultations over time (c/f section 3.3).

Although the emphasis here is on the consent of all the conflict parties to preventive diplomacy by the UN, two qualifications are in order: the consent of the host government is especially important because of the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs, which lie at the heart of the UN system; and in some instances consent from only one of the parties may be sufficient to lead to unilateral moves that enable de-escalation.

Across our cases, the UN envoy concentrated on the conflict parties, being those parties that were either involved in low level violence or threatening to become involved in violence. The parties included the government (in all cases); political leaders (Nigeria, southern Sudan and Yemen); civil society groups (Yemen, Malawi and Nigeria); and commanders of armed groups (Lebanon and Yemen). Focusing on these

parties reflects the core function of preventive diplomacy, namely to prevent the imminent decision to resort to large-scale violence. The question that arises is whether, in certain circumstances, this focus on conflict actors is too narrow in terms of the broader challenge of peace sustainability. For example, Guinea in 2010 underscores that one peaceful presidential election does not necessarily translate into sustained stability (c/f Section 2.4).

2.3.3 International cooperation and unity

Across the case studies, a factor contributing strongly to the success of UN preventive diplomacy was unity among the relevant international actors, which included regional bodies, neighboring states and major powers. The main dynamics in this regard were that the UN Security Council was united; key international actors supported UN leadership on preventive diplomacy; and/or UN preventive diplomacy was undertaken in partnership or coordination with other international actors.

International unity generated political and strategic synergy by drawing on the respective assets and resources of different international actors; it led to a strong, coherent and consistent message to the conflict parties; it constituted a compelling form of pressure on them; and it narrowed the space for the parties to resort to violence. In the 2015 Nigerian elections, for example, there was a unified international and regional position that the political parties should refrain from violence and accept the outcome of the vote. Similarly, the united position of the AU on the southern Sudan referendum, backed by the UN Security Council, bolstered pressure on President Bashir to accept the referendum and its outcome. In Yemen in 2011, the Gulf Cooperation Council's united position on the need for President Saleh to step down, endorsed by the Security Council, reduced his ability to be defiant.

By contrast, in other cases, such as Syria and the South Sudan civil war in 2013, divisions within the Security Council and within the respective regions militated against effective preventive diplomacy by the UN and other actors. In the absence of international and regional unity, there is a danger that the UN's preventive diplomacy will be undermined by partisan moves by other international actors or by rival preventive diplomacy initiatives that work at cross-purposes and enable the conflict parties to exploit the differences among international actors.

Mobilizing and maintaining international unity has been one of the most important components of UN preventive diplomacy. In many instances the UN does this behind the scenes, helping to coordinate common messaging, convening events where others are the center of attention, and building unified positions amongst external actors. This was the case in Lebanon, where the UN established the International Support Group to maintain Security Council unity on Lebanon during the Syria crisis. It was also demonstrated when the UN convened a high-level meeting ahead of the southern Sudan

referendum, bringing together influential heads of state, the AU and the Security Council. During the 2015 elections in Nigeria, the UN played a key role in ensuring that the international community applied soft but firm pressure on political parties to avoid violence and ensure acceptance of the election results.

2.3.4 International leverage

The term "leverage" covers a wide range of dissimilar strategies, from coercive measures like use of force and sanctions to softer measures like financial incentives and persuasion.[41] In line with the above logic of successful preventive diplomacy, we use a broad definition focused on *the means by which the UN is able to influence the decision-making of the conflict actors.* The UN may have significant leverage merely by its presence, if the parties are receptive; conversely, even the tough approaches by the UN may have little influence over actors who are compelled by other factors.[42] Ultimately, leverage is a relational concept, describing the extent to which one actor can influence the other; as such, it is highly context- and actor-specific. It is therefore difficult to draw firm conclusions about what does and does not work. Nevertheless, some general observations can be made on the basis of our case research.

First, at the soft end of the range, our cases suggest that preventive diplomacy by a senior UN official can itself be a form of diplomatic pressure that commands the attention of the parties.[43] In the Malawi crisis of 2011, for example, the risk of further violence was high at the moment of the UN's intervention, but the low-key approach of the UN envoy provided the parties with "space for tempers to go down," and as such significantly influenced their decision-making. UN envoys speak with the authority of the Secretary-General and, potentially if not explicitly, with the authority of the Security Council. As discussed above, it is also clear from our cases that a unified stance by the international community constitutes a strong form of pressure on the conflict parties (section 2.3.3).

Second, our cases indicate that the deployment of UN resources and technical expertise can constitute soft leverage in support of UN diplomacy. For example, the UN funded and deployed experts to support the national dialogue in Malawi; it funded and deployed experts to backstop UN-brokered talks in Yemen in 2011; funded and supported the National Peace Committee and the Independent National Electoral Commission during the 2015 elections in Nigeria; supported the national elections in Sudan, which contributed to the successful referendum for southern Sudan; and provided substantial resources to Lebanese institutions as part of the refugee response plan, giving the UN greater leverage to curb escalatory rhetoric by Lebanese politicians. In varying degrees, the use of funds and technical support enhanced the UN's influence on the decision-making of the key actors.

Third, our cases do not reveal a clear pattern regarding coercive forms of leverage. In both the Malawi and Nigeria cases, the UN envoys deliberately pursued a non-threatening approach and believe that their soft diplomacy would have been undermined rather than enhanced by a tougher approach or by Security Council involvement. In other cases, the UN envoy gained leverage by holding a "stick" in the background. In Yemen, the Security Council supported the negotiated settlement reached by the UN envoy, but also threatened "further measures" against any party that undermined it.[44] But while the joint UN-AU-ECOWAS mediation in Burkina Faso in 2014 appeared to gain leverage via the AU's threat of large scale sanctions against the regime,[45] our Guinea case study indicates that AU sanctions in 2010 may have entrenched the military junta's position. At the most coercive end of the spectrum, the joint UN/AU mediation efforts on The Gambia in 2017 were significantly bolstered by the decision of ECOWAS to temporarily take over the capital with military forces.[46]

Fourth, nor do our cases reveal a consistent pattern regarding international pressure in response to human rights violations. In the Malawi case, some UN officials were of the view that a more public UN stance against the human rights abuses and killing of civilians by the police would have been counter-productive, reducing leverage over the government.[47] The UN envoy felt similarly in the case of the Nigerians elections in 2015, preferring to express criticism privately.[48] In the southern Sudan referendum case, the UN envoy engaged with President Bashir on a regular basis despite the ICC arrest warrant against him. In contrast, following a massacre in Guinea in 2009, it appears that the threat of an ICC process against President Camara may have helped secure his agreement to set up a commission of inquiry, a key step in the mediation process.[49]

In the peer review process for this policy paper, some UN officials felt that a clear public position by the UN in favor of human rights accountability was necessary to safeguard the impartiality and principles of the UN. In Nepal in 2003, for example, the UN appeared to gain leverage by stressing the need for human rights accountability. However, other former and current envoys have suggested that an overly critical public stance on human rights can feed domestic fears that the UN is interfering in domestic affairs, and even exhibiting "neo-colonialist tendencies." While this difference of views was not resolved by our research, it underscores the need to consider and plan for how human rights may impact the public/private messaging of the envoy and/or the relationship with the parties and the population.

Fifth, the UN sometimes deploys its resources most effectively in support of other actors' diplomatic efforts. This was partially the case in the southern Sudan referendum process, where the UN envoy facilitated a shift of the bulk of the post-referendum arrangements to the AU, largely taking on a third-party support role for himself. This did not diminish the

UN's leverage, but rather allowed the UN more effectively to combine forces with the AU on key issues. Joint approaches where the UN works with a regional actor—such as the UN-AU-ECOWAS effort in Burkina Faso in 2014, and the joint work with the AU and ECOWAS in Guinea in 2009-10 — are often useful in overcoming sovereignty barriers and adding pressure on the parties.[50]

2.3.5 Attributes, skills and approach of the envoy

In preventive diplomacy, the attributes, skills and approach of the leading diplomats are obviously important. Our cases indicate that the selection of an appropriate envoy—one suited to the given situation and constellation of actors—is crucial and that the following attributes and skills are especially significant determinants of success:

- **Knowledge and relationships:** Where the UN envoy and his/her team have a deep understanding of the conflict setting, dynamics and parties, they are able to more effectively engage on the ground and develop a fine-tuned approach to different conflict actors. The envoy's pre-existing relationships with the conflict actors and members of the conflict-affected society are also beneficial.[51] Often, the UN Country Team provides an important resource in this regard, offering well developed relationships and capacities in-country to the UN envoy. In recent years, these capacities have been boosted by the creation of UN regional political offices, which are sometimes the launching pad for preventive diplomacy interventions.[52]

- **Affinity with the parties:** In a number of cases, the fact that the envoy hailed from the region, spoke a local language or had a shared religion with the parties positively impacted the UN's engagement. For example, the UN envoy to Malawi was from the region; the envoy for Yemen was from the Arabic-speaking world; and the envoy working on the southern Sudan referendum was from Eritrea. In these cases, the affinity heightened the parties' trust in the envoy, reduced suspicion of his/her agenda and enabled the envoy to speak frankly to the parties. This can be very important in overcoming domestic concerns about potential infringements of sovereignty.

- **Communication, coordination, and persuasion skills:** UN envoys tend to be highly experienced diplomats who have acquired a depth of experience and expertise from years in the field and at UN Headquarters. In our cases of successful preventive diplomacy, three skills in particular stood out: the ability to communicate effectively with diverse actors, including governments, political parties, security services and civil society; the ability to play an effective coordinating and harmonizing role at international and regional levels; and the ability to develop strategies and arguments that help shift the

conflict parties' deliberations away from large-scale violence.[53]

- **International coordination:** Some of the most effective interventions by the UN have entailed harmonizing the positions of international actors and coordinating their efforts. This entails patient and continuous work behind the scenes and may include playing a supportive role to other actors in the lead of preventive diplomacy, rather than seeking the limelight.

- **Discretion:** Many of our cases underscore the importance of adopting a non-threatening, discreet posture, avoiding public criticism of conflict parties, and emphasizing national ownership in the process of determining the resolution of disputes.[54] Even if it is necessary in some instances for international actors to express criticism of a party, the envoy might only do this privately so as not to prejudice the party's consent for the preventive diplomacy mission.

Although the role and attributes of UN envoys are critical to the success of preventive diplomacy, it is worth emphasizing that the envoys do not work in isolation from the rest of the UN system. They are supported by other UN officials, departments and entities in numerous political, technical and organizational ways. As discussed below, internal UN coordination and cooperation is a "force multiplier" and this is true also of the UN's ability to harness a wide range of actors in a conflict situation. The active support of the top UN leadership is especially important. In addition, the envoy's arrival in a conflict country is often preceded by a long-standing UN presence in that country. While agreeing with the mantra of "hire the right envoy," we would therefore add "attached to the right team, supported by the right strategy, and with the right resources."

2.3.6 Internal UN coordination and cooperation

While most of the literature on preventive diplomacy focuses on the role of the envoy, UN interventions are a team effort involving an array of UN officials, entities and support structures. This is particularly the case when regional dynamics in intra-state conflict have required engagement across state boundaries, involving regional offices and partnerships with regional organizations. During the 2009-10 crisis in Guinea, for example, UNOWA deployed a UN envoy who then joined an UN-AU-ECOWAS mediation team, with lines of support running to New York, Dakar and Addis, and with engagement by DPA, UNDP and the UN Country Team in Guinea. Developing an effective strategy in this context was as much a matter of coordination among these entities as it was engagement with the conflict parties.

Our cases indicate three ways in which coordination can increase the chances of success in preventive diplomacy:

- **Presence in-country and/or the region:** Many

preventive engagements take place in non-mission settings, where the UN is represented by a development-focused Country Team. In several of our cases, this in-country field presence was a crucial partner for the UN preventive intervention, contributing early warning, knowledge of the conflict setting, and important relationships well ahead of the envoy's arrival. The establishment of regional political offices in West Africa, Central Africa and Central Asia has added to this presence in and near potential conflict zones.[55]

- **Additional leverage:** As indicated by our case studies on Lebanon, southern Sudan and Nigeria, existing UN development projects and/or technical support to key processes like elections are often entry points and force multipliers for preventive diplomacy engagement. Where the UN has succeeded in leveraging these assets, it has been through a common strategic approach among UN entities.

- **Creating international/regional unity:** One of the common themes of successful preventive diplomacy has been the unified position of international and regional players. While an envoy can do some of this heavy lifting, our cases highlight the important role played by the broader UN system in amplifying the message of unity and bringing key member states on board. Structured relationships, such as the UN Office to the African Union and the regionally based offices, have helped build stronger coordination.

2.3.7 Findings from other work on preventive diplomacy

Our project did primary research on six cases, focusing principally on the UN, and reviewed a wide variety of secondary cases where the UN had some role to play. Our findings are largely consistent with those that appear in the published literature on preventive diplomacy by a range of international organizations. In order to complement our UN-focused findings, it is helpful to note here some of the general conclusions and recommendations derived from this literature.

Eileen Babbitt draws the following lessons from comparative research on preventive diplomacy by intergovernmental organizations (IGOs):

- The mandate of an IGO is important in conferring on the organization the authority to engage a potentially violent conflict in a timely manner, and it can also offer flexibility in terms of the sources of conflict it is able to address. Prevention efforts can be undermined if mandates limit either timing or flexibility in ways that preclude early engagement.

- Operational prevention by an IGO is most likely to succeed if one of two conditions is present: either the intervention is requested, and the conflict parties therefore are willing to seek agreement; or the IGO has enough leverage to entice or threaten the parties into a deal. If neither of these conditions is present, the chances of preventing violence are small.

- Norms can be a useful basis for influence, reminding parties of their common values or to appeal to "good citizenship" more broadly. They can also facilitate face-saving, allowing governments in particular to make concessions in the interests of 'good norms' rather than in response to pressure or demands from opponents.

- For both short term and longer-term prevention, the IGO must employ a high standard of professional skill in mediation and diplomacy. Among other things, this means being impartial; appreciating the importance of inclusion and knowing how to operationalize it; being creative in generating options; and designing a problem-solving approach that incorporates the interests of all parties.

- The most sustainable prevention occurs when the relationship between disputant groups is not only improved, but is also incorporated in domestic laws and/or institutions that guarantee its continuation.[56]

In addition, Michael Lund conducted a valuable review of the preventive diplomacy literature. A verbatim summary of recommendations from his review is as follows: act at an early stage, that is before a triggering event; be swift and decisive, not equivocal and vacillating; use talented, influential international diplomats who command local respect; convince the parties that the third parties are committed to a peaceful and fair solution, and oppose the use of force by any side; use a combination of responses, such as carrots and sticks, implemented more or less coherently; provide support and reinforcement to moderate leaders and coalitions that display nonviolent and cooperative behavior; build local networks that address the various drivers of the conflict, but avoid obvious favoritism and imbalances; if necessary to deter actors from using violence, use credible threat of the use of force or other penalties such as targeted sanctions; neutralize potential external supporters of one side or the other, such as neighboring countries with kin groups to those in a conflict; work through legitimate local institutions to build them up; involve regional organizations or regional powers, but do not necessarily act entirely through them; and involve major powers that can provide credible guarantees, but use UN or other multi-lateral channels to ensure legitimacy.[57]

2.4 Sustainability

The risk of large-scale violence in a given country derives from both escalatory conflict dynamics and the structural conditions that put the country at risk of large-scale violence. In general, the structural risk conditions include authoritarianism, repression, human rights abuses, weak state institutions, inequality, and marginalization and discrimination based on ethnicity, religion or some other form of identity.[58] Our

cases support the findings of the World Bank/UN Prevention report, that "exclusion from access to power, opportunity and security creates fertile ground for mobilization to violence, especially in areas of weak state capacity or legitimacy."[59] In any particular case some of these conditions, or others not listed here, may be especially prominent.

Preventive diplomacy is a form of operational conflict prevention rather than structural conflict prevention.[60] It focuses more on the escalatory dynamics than on the structural conditions. It takes place in moments of acute crisis, where the risk of large-scale violence is imminent. Often there is a clear trigger for the crisis—a contested election, a leader who refuses to step down or an external shock to a fragile society. In these situations, preventive diplomacy aims to prevent a conflict from becoming violent and/or to prevent a conflict with low-level violence from spreading or escalating into large-scale violence (c/f section 1.5). It does this by attempting to shift the decision-making calculations of the conflict actors away from violence (c/f section 2.2). The aims, methods and timeframe of preventive diplomacy are thus different from those of long-term structural reform.

The relatively narrow focus of preventive diplomacy does not detract from its importance. A comparison of successful and failed cases of preventive diplomacy highlights the vital role of preventive diplomacy in preventing situations of imminent or low-level violence from escalating into catastrophic large-scale violence. Since successful preventive diplomacy defuses tension and leads to de-escalation, it can also create political space for attending to the requisite structural reforms. [61]

Notwithstanding the relatively narrow focus of preventive diplomacy, however, the outcome of successful short-term diplomatic interventions may be unsustainable in the medium-to long-term if the structural causes of violence are not addressed. Given the UN's emphasis on sustaining peace, it is therefore necessary to consider how short-term preventive diplomacy can be linked to longer-term prevention efforts. In doing so, care should be taken to not overburden preventive diplomacy with the full weight of sustainable peace.[62]

Our cases indicate two ways in which preventive diplomacy has been linked to longer-term prevention, discussed below.

2.4.1 Linking preventive diplomacy to structural prevention

Ideally, even the most crisis-driven intervention should be planned within a "comprehensive approach to sustaining peace,"[63] which looks at the longer arc of governance, development and socio-economic equality for a country. At a minimum, preventive diplomacy should be sufficiently embedded in this broader analysis and strategy to ensure that the intervention does not feed or exacerbate the structural conditions. More ambitiously, it should be explicitly linked to initiatives that address the structural causes of crisis and large-scale violence. In our cases, this was done in the

following ways:

- In Malawi, the initial UN preventive diplomacy intervention in 2011 led to a UN-facilitated national dialogue that was intended to address the political and socio-economic grievances that had given rise to violence and created the risk of further violence.
- In Yemen, the UN preventive diplomacy in 2011 led to an agreement that addressed the structural problems of authoritarianism, clientelism and exclusivity: it entailed the resignation of President Saleh, who had been in office for over thirty years; the holding of elections; and, through the elections, confirmation of a consensus candidate as the new president. While the subsequent descent into war in Yemen underscores the limitations of this process, the intervention was designed to address both immediate conflict prevention and longer-term sustainability.
- Prior the elections in Nigeria in 2015, the UN supported the efforts of the government and the Independent National Electoral Commission to reform the electoral system. The objectives were to increase the efficiency and transparency of the system, reduce the potential for fraud and other misconduct, and thereby enhance the prospect of free, fair and credible elections.
- The political negotiations around the southern Sudan referendum and post-referendum arrangements were complemented by the deployment of a new UN peace operation in South Sudan, mandated to help address some of the problems relating to governance, underdevelopment and rule of law that had driven conflict risks previously.
- The 2010 Ouagadougou Agreement between the conflict parties in Guinea contained explicit security sector reform provisions, which were a key demand of the opposition and a signal that the UN would support improvements to the security services.

It is easy to speak of the principle of inclusivity, but in practice the UN often faces difficult decisions that may limit its ability to be both effective and fully inclusive. Frequently, a crisis emerges between a government and an opposition movement and/or an armed group, meaning the UN focus is necessarily on those with the power to affect the immediate risk of violence. But the resulting deals often elide the large portions of society not represented in the process. And while there is widespread agreement on the need to enhance the meaningful participation of youth and women in decision-making generally, in practice there is not always apparent opportunity to do so in the crisis management moment itself.[64]

2.4.2 Institutionalized Operational Prevention

The conventional view of preventive diplomacy is that it is

a short-term intervention intended to reduce the imminent risk of violence.[65] Ideally, as noted above, such interventions should be accompanied or followed by efforts to address the structural causes of violence. But in some countries at risk of violence there may be little political space for this and, in any event, structural prevention is a long-term endeavor.[66] Where the structural risk factors are present and there is consequently an ongoing risk of violence, preventive diplomacy and other forms of operational prevention should be *institutionalized*. They should be viewed as continuous rather than short-term functions. Our cases indicate that this can take different international and domestic forms:

- In Malawi, the UN-facilitated national dialogue was not only a forum for structural prevention. It also played a preventive diplomacy role over several months, helping to defuse the crisis and ease political tension between the government and civil society. In the longer term, the national dialogue laid the seed for the development of a national peace architecture and the government's adoption of a national peace policy in 2017, supported by the UN. The peace architecture and national peace policy are themselves domestic forms of institutionalizing operational prevention.
- In the lead-up to the southern Sudan referendum in 2010, the UN and the AU worked closely together to ensure that both parties allowed the referendum to take place. One key step in this was to shift critical post-referendum arrangements to a separate forum, led by the AU and supported by the UN. Following the referendum, this AU-led process continued, with the UN supporting it. While there has been serious and widespread violence in South Sudan since the referendum, the continuous activity of the AU and UN on North-South issues has helped prevent violence between Sudan and South Sudan.
- Shortly before the 2015 elections in Nigeria, the National Peace Committee (NPC), comprising eminent leaders from civil society and the religious sector, was established as an ad-hoc forum to prevent violence and reduce electoral tensions between political parties. The risk of large-scale violence in Nigeria remains high in relation to the next election and more generally. The NPC is therefore in the process of becoming a permanent body, possibly with statutory status. This move to institutionalize domestic preventive diplomacy was encouraged and is supported by the UN.
- In Lebanon, the Office of the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL) was set up in the wake of the 2006 Israeli-Lebanese war to help reduce the risk of further hostilities and normalize relations between the two countries. UNSCOL has played an ongoing preventive diplomacy role not only on these issues but also with respect to risks of violence in Lebanon as a result of the war in neighboring Syria. As such,

the initial envoy-led preventive diplomacy of the UN has been institutionalized and expanded over time to address a broader range of risks.

While not strictly institutionalized, there is also a wide range of international groupings that can help preventive diplomacy have a more lasting impact. These include groups of friends,[67] international support groups,[68] regional frameworks,[69] and others. As the International Crisis Group has argued, the use of "framework diplomacy"[70] can provide important leverage to prevention efforts, and in some cases maintaining the framework can support and solidify the immediate gains. There are also cases—such as the multi-year Lebanon Crisis Response Plan—where diplomacy can help increase donor engagement in longer-term funding arrangements for countries in crisis. In contrast, where international cohesion cannot be maintained—such as the disintegration of the GCC in Yemen in 2012-13—the fragile peace can quickly disappear.

3. Case Synopses

This section presents synopses of three of our case studies—Malawi, southern Sudan and Yemen—with the aim of illustrating the preceding discussion on the logic of successful preventive diplomacy and the critical factors for success.

3.1 Synopsis of Malawi case study

In 2011, Malawi was in the midst of a growing crisis, characterized by authoritarianism, repression, corruption and deteriorating economic conditions. Mounting tension between the government and civil society culminated in mass demonstrations that were met by police force. In July 2011 twenty people were killed, 58 were injured, over 270 were arrested, and property was looted and damaged. The conflict escalated further as President Mutharika and civil leaders issued combative threats. The protest leaders demanded that the government address the grievances raised in a civil society petition or face more demonstrations in the form of a vigil. It was widely feared that the vigil would lead to violence.

In response to the crisis, the UN Secretary-General sent an Envoy to Malawi. The Envoy brokered an agreement between the government and civil society, in terms of which the two sides would engage in a national dialogue focused on the petition and civil society would postpone the vigil. The UN then facilitated the national dialogue. Both the agreement and the national dialogue served the function of preventive diplomacy, helping to de-escalate the conflict and avert violence. However, the national dialogue ultimately failed to solve any of the structural causes of the crisis.

The UN goals were to defuse the crisis, prevent violence and promote dialogue as a means of addressing the political and economic problems. To this end, the Envoy met separately with representatives of civil society and the government,

had a meeting with President Mutharika, and then facilitated a meeting between the two sides. Thereafter, the national dialogue commenced and continued for eight months. A further strategic goal of the UN was to ensure throughout that SADC supported its efforts.

The logic of the successful preventive diplomacy had the following elements:

- The conflict parties had not yet decided to resort to further violence. Rather, there were moderates in both parties who wished to avoid violence, and a debate between moderates and hardliners was underway in this regard. This gave the Envoy something to work with. He was able to present arguments and ideas that bolstered the position of the moderates and influenced the debate in favor of a non-violent course of action.

- The UN proposal for a national dialogue offered actual or potential benefits to all the conflict parties and provided them with a way out of the crisis without any of them losing face. Many civil society leaders were convinced that the dialogue, especially if facilitated by the UN, would be able to address their grievances. They were therefore willing to postpone the vigil. The postponement, being a de-escalatory and conciliatory move, made it easier for Mutharika to back down and accept the national dialogue.

- Aside from the substance of the national dialogue, the *process* of dialogue was de-escalatory. It implied mutual recognition and respect by the two sides, which was vital given the acrimonious and combative rhetoric and preceding violence.

The critical success factors were as follows:

- **Disposition of the conflict parties.** As noted above, there were members of both the civil society and government sectors who wanted to avoid further violence. Had this not been the case, or had the hardliners prevailed over the moderates, the preventive diplomacy probably would have failed. The preventive diplomacy thus took advantage of an existing potential for de-escalation.

- **Acceptability of the UN and UN Envoy.** Both the government and civil society regarded the UN as a neutral and credible arbiter and were willing for it to facilitate the national dialogue. They also viewed the UN Envoy favorably because he was a citizen from a neighboring state.

- **Approach of the UN Envoy.** The Envoy earned the trust of the conflict parties by listening carefully to them and expressing an empathetic appreciation of their concerns and needs. He was firm in advocating a non-violent course of action but refrained from bullying, lecturing or scolding the parties. He constantly asserted the importance of national ownership, insisting that decisions on the way forward lay with Malawians and not the UN.

- **Absence of public UN criticism.** The UN did not criticize the Malawi government publicly for the police shootings and the growing authoritarianism and human rights abuses. Although UN officials raised these issues privately with Mutharika, public criticism by the UN probably would probably have caused Mutharika to reject UN engagement.

- **International support and communication.** SADC and the donor community in Malawi backed the UN's efforts and were happy for the UN to take the lead on preventive diplomacy. The AU did not seek to get involved. Consequently, the UN role was not challenged by any rival preventive diplomacy initiatives.

3.2 Synopsis of southern Sudan referendum case study

In 2005, after a twenty-year civil war, the Sudanese government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. While this agreement envisaged the unity of Sudan, it also provided for a referendum at the end of a six-year period, enabling the people of southern Sudan to choose independence or unity. As the CPA entered its final year in 2010, it was clear that many of its key provisions had not been fully implemented. Relations between the two sides were volatile, and the vast majority of the southern population was preparing to vote for secession.

In the year leading up to the January 2011 independence referendum, there was growing alarm that the referendum could be a catalyst for a return to war. Uncertainty over Khartoum's willingness to allow the referendum to take place or recognize its result remained high, while the AU member states were not united on the question of secession. The lack of a clear roadmap for how the parties would negotiate post-referendum arrangements meant that both parties appeared willing to approach the brink of war to gain their objectives. In late 2010 major states warned of a "ticking time bomb" around the referendum, and internal UN assessments feared that a contested referendum could trigger a "descent into widespread instability."

Yet in the days running up to the referendum, President Omar al Bashir travelled to Juba and publicly promised to "congratulate and celebrate" should the southern people choose secession. This all but guaranteed that South Sudan would become an independent country within months. Khartoum's decision to accept the referendum played a direct and crucial role in stopping a return to war.

This shift from an extremely high risk of violent conflict to relative calm was partly due to intensive diplomatic efforts by a range of actors, including the SRSG of the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS), the AU, and key member states. Khartoum's

decision to accept the outcome of the referendum was in part the result of steps taken to reassure Bashir and his ruling party that the referendum would not spell economic or political ruin for them, and that there would be an impartially-led process to resolve post-referendum issues between Khartoum and Juba. The UN played a direct role in this in several ways, including support to the election process in Sudan in 2010; establishing an independent panel to oversee the referendum; coordinating messaging about the referendum with the AU and other key actors; and direct diplomacy with Bashir and his inner circle. Much of this took place behind the scenes, but there is strong evidence that it played a role in the positive outcome.

The logic of the successful preventive diplomacy is as follows:

- Both Khartoum and the SPLM were acutely aware of the costs of a return to war. Ultimately, the costs of trying to prevent or reject the referendum appeared too high for Khartoum, and Bashir took the crucial decision to support the referendum.
- Bashir and his party received significant assurances from key member states and the AU that Sudan's political and economic stability would not be imperiled by the referendum.
- Issues that could have derailed or delayed the referendum were placed in a separate forum for conflict management and resolution, namely the AUHIP-led negotiation process on post-referendum arrangements.

The critical success factors were as follows:

- While there had been a long history of violence between the parties and both sides maintained a strong military posture, neither side appeared ready to provoke outright hostilities in the lead-up to the referendum.
- There was an agreed framework led by the AU for resolving the key post-referendum issues, which assured both sides that they would not lose out and allowed the referendum preparations to proceed.
- The UN SRSG was trusted sufficiently by both parties to help bridge differences and give meaningful assurances.
- The UN approach protected the impartial role of the SRSG and allowed the UN to support other processes like the AU-led one on post-referendum arrangements.
- There was a unified message in support of the referendum by the UN, AU and key member states, reinforced by good relations between the UN/AU and the conflict actors.

3.3 Synopsis of Yemen case

The Yemeni youth uprising began in January 2011, with a small gathering of students peacefully demonstrating their solidarity with the protesters in Tunisia. Within the next few weeks the ranks of the protest movement swelled from dozens to hundreds, while broadening and diversifying its goals. The movement united around a set of demands that included a call for Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had held power for 33 years, to step down.

Saleh's regime used a range of tactics to defuse the momentum of the protests. However, neither Saleh's sticks nor his carrots reduced their ranks. Events took a significant turn when government snipers shot live ammunition at unarmed protesters, killing around fifty people and injuring hundreds. As the protests swelled, Ali Mohsin, Saleh's childhood friend and trusted army general, publicly resigned. This dramatically shifted Saleh's assessment of his position. He worried that the general's action would trigger mass resignations from the military and lead to its disintegration. Judging that the odds were stacking up against him, Saleh agreed in principle to step down. This prompted the start of negotiations on the terms of his departure.

Over the course of the next months, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), in collaboration with representatives of the P5 and the EU, assisted Yemeni parties in drafting what became known as the GCC Initiative. This agreement held that in exchange for stepping down, Saleh and his associates would be granted immunity for deeds carried out while in office. However, the agreement lacked an implementation plan and there was thus no clear vision for a post-Saleh Yemen.

In April 2011 the UN sent a Special Advisor, Jamal Benomar, to Yemen. After his first two trips he felt that the UN's added value lay in helping develop an implementation plan and in ensuring that the plan incorporated the views of both the elite parties at the negotiating table and those without a voice at the table (such the Houthis, the Southerners and the youth leading the protest movement). Months of consultations followed, in which Benomar gained a reputation as someone who could and would speak with all of the key constituencies, including those in the streets.

Benomar kept the UN Security Council constantly appraised of the situation and pressed them to engage with the situation in Yemen. In October 2011 the Council passed Resolution 2014 (2011), which urged the parties to comply with the terms of the GCC Initiative as well as with the terms of the implementation agreement drafted by the parties with the UN's assistance. There was also talk of 'further action' by the Council, should the parties fail to sign a peace deal.

In November 2011 Saleh finally agreed to direct and time-bound talks. The most likely reasons for this included: a fear of Security Council sanctions; a recognition that he could not win militarily; pressure from the U.S. and Saudi Arabia to step down; and an impression that support from some members of his base was wavering. Benomar oversaw and helped facilitate these talks, which concluded with the signing of a

transition deal. Three months later, after successful national elections, Saleh complied with the deal by ceding power to his deputy. Despite the dire prediction of imminent violent conflict in the first half of 2011, Yemen's center held, enabling the first largely peaceful and more or less voluntary transfer of power in the context of the Arab Spring.

In light of the way events have turned out in Yemen, some commentators have sought to peg current troubles on how the 2011 talks were handled. Given the state of affairs in Yemen today, their critiques bear examining. The first critique argues that a lack of inclusivity in the 2011 talks "sowed the seeds" for the later conflict. Three key constituencies were not party to the November 2011 agreement: representatives of civil society (including both leaders of the youth and women's movements), representatives of the Houthis, and representatives of Hiraak. These three groups were, however, promised seats at the National Dialogue Conference that would follow Saleh's resignation and form the basis for decisions about what form a future Yemeni state would take. Some critics argue that these groups' exclusion from the 2011 Agreement was one of the reasons for the eventual role some of them played as spoilers in Yemen's political transition process.[71] These voices contend that efforts should have been made to include these key constituents at the negotiation table in 2011 and thereby ensure their grievances were concurrently rather than subsequently addressed.[72]

This "hindsight" critique is an important one to consider, in light of the importance of both the northern territories and the southern question in the current conflict. However, international journalists, Yemeni commentators, Yemeni party members, close advisers to Saleh, foreign diplomats based in Yemen, and senior UN officials consulted for this study emphasized how hard it was to coax even the "formal" political parties (GPC and JMP) to sign a common document in 2011, *despite* their overlapping interests, shared stake in the existing governing structures, and personal ties. Many present in Yemen at the time argue that it is highly unlikely to imagine that these parties would have come to an agreement if even more constituencies, with even more divergent goals, fewer overlapping interests, and fewer personal ties would have taken seats at the same table. And if the parties had not succeeded in signing the agreement, most Yemen watchers predict that the country would have collapsed into civil war in 2011. Thus, arguments that holding off for a more inclusive agreement in 2011 would necessarily have reduced the likelihood of civil war in 2015, must be weighed against arguments that absent the elite deal stuck in 2011, Yemen would have collapsed into civil war four years sooner.

The logic of the successful preventive diplomacy in 2011 had the following elements:

- The UN's mediation efforts between April and November 2011 influenced key actors' decisions away from violence and towards a negotiated

settlement. The UN team did this by convincing parties to remain at the table when they wanted to walk out, and by reduced uncertainty through helping develop a roadmap for the months following the signing of the peace agreement. The roadmap, in turn, created the basis on which the parties could begin direct talks.

- The UN team also chose to build on rather than diverge from the existing GCC Initiative, which enabled Saleh to 'exit with dignity' despite international pressure to condemn any plan that included immunity for Saleh.
- The relationships that UN team built with constituencies outside the negotiation room in 2011 enabled the mediator's team to persuade these parties that any of their concerns that were not addressed in the peace deal could later be addressed during the subsequent national dialogue process.

The critical success factors include the following:

- **Disposition of the negotiating parties.** The conflict parties were not only well known to each other but, at least at the elite level, had a number of overlapping interests and long histories of both collaboration and tension. They wanted 'an honorable way out of the standoff' and were reluctant to risk all-out violence to achieve their goals.
- **Early action.** The UN Secretary-General sent an envoy to Yemen within just a few weeks of the outbreak of violence. There was no designated role for the UN in the GCC mediation at this stage, but the mediator used the space to first understand the situation and then advise on where the UN was most needed.
- **Well-suited mediator.** Jamal Benomar had a well-matched profile for this job. He and his team had the appropriate combination of experience and background to inspire a sense of trust with divergent stakeholders in Yemen.
- **Receptivity to the UN.** The UN's ability to build relationships of trust with the Yemeni regime and diverse stakeholders gave it an advantage over the U.S. and the Saudis. The UN was able to influence conflict actors by engaging broadly and showing its value to all sides.
- **Support from UN HQ.** The UN mediator benefited from strong support from senior management in DPA and the EOSG.
- **Security Council unity.** The UN Security Council was generally united in its approach towards Yemen.

4. Policy Recommendations

Based on the preceding analysis of what works in preventive diplomacy, in this section we make recommendations that

would enable the UN to build on its positive experiences and better engage in future crises. These recommendations, which have different practical implications at different levels of the organization (e.g. the Security Council, the Secretary-General, the Department of Political Affairs, the envoy and his/her team, etc), are as follows:

4.1 Professionalization and preparation

- **Continue to professionalize preventive diplomacy.** The UN has made major strides when it comes to professionalizing mediation capacities within the system, and the cases in this study underscore the resultant positive impact. Continued professionalization, including by broadening the roster of envoys specializing in preventive diplomacy, would be helpful. Additionally, enhancing the standing support capacities for mediation to include dedicated expertise in analysis, planning and communication would bolster future support teams for envoys.

- **Develop a planning tool for preventive diplomacy.** Preventive diplomacy is greatly enhanced by good planning, based on solid analysis of the structural risk factors, the immediate triggers and the deliberations of the conflict parties. Planning should identify the full range of UN resources and entities that could support diplomatic interventions to maximum advantage. DPA should invest in a dedicated planning process for preventive diplomacy.

- **Link planning for preventive diplomacy to the broader UN system.** While preventive diplomacy is often conducted under tight time constraints, an effort should be made to link the UN's political planning with other planning processes, including by the UN Country Team, the World Bank and national planning efforts. Understanding how a political process could be supported by longer-term plans to address the root causes of violent conflict (or indeed could impact ongoing support to national institutions) is crucial if preventive diplomacy is to be sustainable.

- **Assessment methodology.** Assessments of preventive diplomacy initiatives should not be based solely on interviewing UN diplomats and partners. It is also necessary to incorporate the views of the conflict parties and/or individuals that have good knowledge of the conflict parties' decisions.

4.2 Preventive diplomacy strategies

- **Adopt a flexible approach to mandating.** As with peace operations, our cases show that preventive diplomacy tends to benefit from early "scoping" mandates, followed by more specific mandates tailored to the situation. The added benefit of a broad initial mandate is that it seems to allay

sovereignty concerns and may keep expectations more realistic from the outset. Whether driven by the Security Council, the Secretary-General, or the Secretariat, flexible approaches to mandating that allow for low-profile initial consultations should be considered.

- **Develop strategies based on proven success factors.** Strategies for preventive diplomacy should cover the key success factors identified in this report, including how to (1) build and maintain the consent of the conflict parties; (2) ensure continuous international unity, especially within the Security Council and at the regional level; (3) apply a soft approach to leverage, with coercive threats and action to be considered only as a last resort; (4) promote human rights in manner appropriate to the situation and the requirements of preventive diplomacy; (5) endeavor to engage with all the conflict parties, regardless of their positions, and with other relevant stakeholders; and (6) link the immediate engagement with longer-term conflict prevention capacities in country.

- **Identify roles and responsibilities.** Early identification of which UN, national, regional or international actors are best placed to take on specific tasks is crucial to success. In some cases, these roles may shift over time—e.g. if issues around consent require that some tasks be shifted from the UN to a regional body—but initial clarity on roles will also foster unity of approach. Willingness to let a non-UN entity visibly lead has resulted in positive outcomes in several cases.

- **Support domestic prevention.** Domestic capacities for prevention are frequently effective or have the potential to be effective. A UN strategy should therefore prioritize national level actors and institutions wherever possible. Throughout its engagement, the UN can make a valuable contribution to sustaining peace by providing political, technical and financial support to domestic actors engaged in conflict prevention. These actors include both official bodies and non-governmental organizations.

4.3 Preventive diplomacy tactics

- **Keep the Council informed, united.** UN envoys may have little direct leverage over the conflict parties, but a unified Security Council is frequently a key to success. Envoys who dedicate the time and effort to cultivating and maintaining a united Security Council have a higher chance of success.

- **Share the burden.** UN envoys may be most effective when some key tasks (and credit) are shifted to other entities, which could be regional bodies. Appreciating the UN's comparative advantages and disadvantages should be part of the pre-intervention

analysis, and is crucial to remaining relevant and effective throughout an engagement.

- **Talk to everyone.** Envoys must endeavor to engage all the conflict actors, regardless of their positions and ideologies. It also necessary to engage with other domestic actors, both governmental and non-governmental, and this should include, where possible, political parties and women's, youth and religious groups.

- **Build trust.** Envoys must build trust with all the conflict parties as a basis for giving frank advice to the parties' leaders, to be taken seriously when the envoys propose face-saving alternatives to violence, and to have credibility when they facilitate communication between the parties.

- **Public communication.** Public communication is a tool that is often overlooked when envoys are trying to keep a low profile. Yet even the most discreet negotiations still need a communications strategy, and maintaining the UN's impartiality while managing expectations often requires pro-active steps.

4.4 UN resources

- **Take advantage of UN resources.** UN envoys engaged in preventive diplomacy should maximize the human and other resources that reside in the relevant UN country team or regional office, many of which already possess a key set of trusted relationships with domestic actors. Envoys should work closely with the Resident Coordinator; identify local capacities that can help build a good knowledge base and contacts; and leverage existing UN development projects and/or technical support as entry points and force multipliers for preventive diplomacy.

- **Invest in the regional offices.** The UN's regional offices can play a crucial role in anticipating conflict risks, responding quickly, providing strong expertise, and establishing relationships. Providing these offices with greater analytic capacities, and with more full-time staff who can do "pre-mediation" activities like confidence-building and creating space for informal dialogue, will strengthen this positive role.

- **Break down the economic/political divisions at the regional level.** The risk of violent conflict is often driven by socio-economic factors, but the UN's response is too often a strictly political one. This divide is mirrored in the UN's structures, where economic commissions are generally siloed from political offices, and where political planning is divorced from political-economic analysis.[73] Breaking down this divide and using the substantial economic expertise and knowledge as a tool in diplomacy will help address this shortcoming.

4.5 Sustaining peace

- **Link preventive diplomacy to structural prevention.** Preventive diplomacy should be planned in the context of a comprehensive approach to sustaining peace. At the least, it should avoid exacerbating the structural conditions. At best, it should be linked to initiatives that address the structural causes of crisis and large-scale violence. The key UN agents for structural prevention on the ground are Resident Coordinators—the cases show that strong coordination between envoys and RCs can pay off.

- **Contribute to building operational and structural prevention capacities.** The long-term success of a preventive diplomatic intervention often depends on the continued existence of conflict prevention capacities at the local, national and regional levels. Both structural and operational prevention capacities may be required. Supporting national dialogues, national reform processes and international, regional or national operational prevention institutions is crucial to sustaining peace. The UN should incorporate this mindset from the outset of a preventive diplomatic intervention.

- **Understand subnational/local dynamics.** Our cases demonstrate that subnational and local dynamics are often crucial in determining the success of a process, and certainly critical in ensuring its sustainment beyond the immediate crisis. And while it is not always possible to build local capacities during a quick diplomatic intervention, building an understanding of how local dynamics might interact with the political effort and subsequent implementation of political agreements is important.

- **Develop guidance on sustainability.** The UN could usefully develop policy guidance on how to link preventive diplomacy to sustainable peace, taking account of the particular aims, imperatives and timeframes of both areas.

Endnotes

Cover Image: Afghanistan Observes 2007 International Peace Day. UN Photo/ Helena Mulkerns.

1 This project was conducted jointly between the Centre for Policy Research along with Dr. Laurie Nathan, Visiting Fellow at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, and João Honwana, former Director in the UN Department of Political Affairs.

2 See, e.g.: "Preventive Diplomacy: Delivering Results." Report of the Secretary-General, S/2011/552, 26 August 2011. See also: "An Agenda for Peace: Preventive diplomacy, peace-making and peace-keeping" (A/47/277 - S/24111), 17 June 1992.

3 Secretary-General, in First Address to Security Council Since Taking Office, Sets Restoring Trust, Preventing Crises as United Nations Priorities, SC/12673, 10 January 2017.

4 See: "Uniting Our Strengths for Peace – Politics, Partnership and People." Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations. 16 June 2015, para 61. ("there is an unassailable logic in investing early and adequately to prevent the onset of an armed conflict. Such investment would prevent the need for much larger investments in the ambulances and triage at the bottom of the cliff after many thousands of lives, even hundreds of thousands of lives, have been lost and billions of dollars spent on, and lost to, war").

5 "The Challenge of Sustaining Peace." Report of the Advisory Group of Experts. 29 June 2015, p.8.

6 Over the past decade, major international development actors have increasingly viewed political settlements as the way to address the challenges facing good governance and state fragility. Political settlements have in fact become the "framing concept" for various development agencies to understand their work in fragile, conflict-affected states. Preventive diplomacy, focused on reaching political settlements in conflict settings, should thus be considered within this literature. See, e.g.: DiJohn, Jonathan and James Putzel. "Political Settlements, Issues Paper." Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, International Development Department, University of Birmingham. 2009.; See also, Khan, Mushtaq. "Political Settlements and the Governance of Growth-Enhancing Institutions." (Unpublished), 2010, available at eprints. soas.ac.uk/9968/.

7 Secretary-General, in First Address to Security Council Since Taking Office, Sets Restoring Trust, Preventing Crises as United Nations Priorities, SC/12673, 10 January 2017.

8 "Uniting Our Strengths for Peace – Politics, Partnership and People." 2015, para 16.

9 "Pathways to Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict." World Bank/UN. 2017, available at openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28337.

10 "Secretary-General-Designate António Guterres." Remarks to the General Assembly on Taking the Oath of Office," speech by the UN Secretary-General on 12 December 2016, available at www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2016-12-12/secretary-general-designate-ant%C3%B3nio-guterres-oath-office-speech.

11 In 2011 the Center on International Cooperation was commissioned to provide an assessment framework for preventive diplomacy, upon which basis some case studies were carried out. The CPR-led project builds on some of this work—and indeed drew on CIC's expertise during the peer review process—but was developed in part due to a sense within DPA that a less onerous framework for such assessments was likely to generate more of the analysis needed for institutional learning.

12 See: "Preventive Diplomacy: Delivering Results." Report of the Secretary-General, S/2011/552, 26 August 2011. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon described the challenge as follows: 'We know when preventive diplomacy is effective, but proving this empirically is difficult. Our existing assessment frameworks are not well-suited to the complex realities we find on the ground, and important political outcomes can be hard to quantify…. Quiet diplomacy lives on in the oral tradition of the United Nations, of regional organizations or of a council of elders, but its intricacies are rarely committed to paper. However, in an era of budgetary hardship and scrutiny from treasuries and voters alike, we must improve our ability to monitor outcomes, measure impact, present hard evidence that prevention works and communicate."

13 The research will not be complete, however, until the theory and findings are also tested in relation to cases of failed preventive diplomacy. UNU-CPR has proposed a follow-on set of research where the Assessment Framework developed in the course of this project would be applied to a range of cases, including some considered "failures" for the UN.

14 For the Lebanon and Nigeria case studies, the project partners conducted field-based research.

15 This project considered internal UN material covering: Burkina Faso, Guinea, Gabon, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Syria, Kenya, Colombia, Burundi, and others.

16 See, e.g.: Wagner, Robert. "The Causes of Peace." Stop the Killing: How Civil Wars End, edited by Roy Licklider. New York University Press, 2003, pp. 235–268. (arguing that civil wars ending in negotiated settlements are more likely to result in renewed violent conflict than those ending in decisive victory); see also: Quinn, J Michael et al. "Sustaining the peace: Determinants of civil war recurrence," International Interactions. Vol. 33, 2007, pp.167–193. (arguing that conflicts ending in rebel victory tend to hold more than those where rebels lose, in part because post-war stability relies on the legitimacy of the victor in the eyes of the population); see also: OECD. "From power struggles to Sustainable Peace: Understanding

Political Settlements." 2011. (noting that peace negotiators "are faced with only modest incentives to adopt a long-term perspective").

17 See, e.g.: Cramer, Christopher, "Homo Economicus Goes to War: Methodological Individualism, Rational Choice and the Political Economy of War." World Development. Vol. 30, 2002, pp. 1845–1864. (pointing to the problem of oversimplification of findings in conflict settings); see also, Call, Charles, Why Peace Fails: The Causes and Prevention of Civil War Recurrence. Georgetown University Press, 2012. (noting that complex social phenomena like legitimacy and social inclusion tend to be measured through crude proxies, rather than methodologically sound approaches).

18 Drawing definitive conclusions based on limited datasets is also a difficulty facing researchers in this field. See, e.g.: Charles Call's 2012 study on why peace agreements fail, which draws on 28 cases of war recurrence. Call himself acknowledges that "few people would take an experimental drug that has been tested on only twenty-eight people." Call, C. 2012.

19 "An Agenda for Peace: Preventive diplomacy, peace-making and peace-keeping." 1992.

20 See, e.g.: OECD. "States of Fragility Report: Understanding Violence." 2016, available at www.oecd.org/dac/states-of-fragility-2016-9789264267213-en.htm. (examining a range of violence that does not fall easily into the term "conflict," and describing the ways in which deeply embedded forms of violence can permeate a society).

21 This project recognizes that there are also a wide range of different forms of violence in the preventive diplomacy context. For example, "competitive violence" arises in disputes over political power and resources, whereas "permissive violence" tends to arise where the state is unable to monopolize control over force in a setting. While it is beyond the scope of this study to delve into these forms of violence, it is worth noting that a differentiated approach to different forms of violence will help the initial analysis of risks. See unpublished literature review by Patrick Meehan for DFID's Stabilisation Unit, "What are the key factors that affect the security and sustaining of an initial deal to reduce levels of armed conflict?"

22 Questions about measuring causality and attribution are also the subject of major conflict resolution debates in academia. Some pieces on this subject include: Cramer, Christopher et al. "Evidence Synthesis: What interventions have been effective in preventing or mitigating armed violence in developing and middle-income countries?" Department for International Development. 2016.; Hartzell, Caroline et al. "Stabilizing the Peace after Civil War: An Investigation of Some Key Variables." International Organization. Vol. 55, 2011, pp.183-208.

23 UN Security Council Resolution 2282 (2016); UN General Assembly Resolution 70/262 (2016); UN, "Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace: Report of the Secretary-General." UN document. A/72/707-S/2018/43, 2018.

24 UN Security Council Resolution 2282 (2016); see also: "Pathways to Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict." p. 217.

25 Strengthening the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution, A/RES/68/303 (2014).

26 See: Day, Adam and Alexandra Pichler Fong. "Diplomacy and Good Offices in the Prevention of Conflict." A Thematic Paper for the World Bank/UN Study on Conflict Prevention. August 2017.

27 Our case studies also considered the factors that inhibit and militate against success. This component would be more prominent if the case sample included instances of failed preventive diplomacy.

28 This final category includes domestic actors (e.g. the National Peace Committee during the Nigerian elections in 2015) and external actors with direct influence (e.g.Tehran's influence over Hizbullah in the Lebanon case study).

29 This approach differs from other approaches to preventive diplomacy, which focuses more on the external intervention. However, as described in the Assessment Framework developed in this project, that approach unrealistically places the external intervention at the heart of the decision-making process, whereas our case studies demonstrate that this is hardly ever the case.

30 E.g.: Nathan, Laurie. "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: The Structural Causes of Crisis and Violence in Africa." Peace and Change. Vol. 25, No.2, 2000, pp.188–207.

31 Hudson, David and Adrian Leftwich. "From Political Economy to Political Analysis." DLP Research Paper. DLP. Vol. 25, 2014. We also drew from an unpublished literature review by Patrick Meehan for DFID's Stabilisation Unit, "What are the key factors that affect the security and sustaining of an initial deal to reduce levels of armed conflict?" (on file with authors).

32 Jentleson, Bruce. "Preventive Diplomacy: A Conceptual and Analytic Framework." Opportunities Missed, Opportunities Seized: Preventive Diplomacy in the Post-Cold War World, edited by Bruce Jentleson. Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict. 2000, pg.7.

33 Quoted in Jentleson, "Preventive Diplomacy." 2000, pg. 7.

34 Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict. Preventing Deadly Conflict. Final Report. Carnegie Corporation. 2007, pg. 39.

35 In UN reports on preventive diplomacy, these interventions are listed as fact-finding missions; visits by special envoys to sensitive regions; the exercise of the Secretary-General's good offices; and the establishment of groups of friends of the Secretary-General in different regions, composed of a few closely interested Member States. See, for example, United Nations. "Prevention of Armed Conflict. Report of the Secretary-General", UN document. A/55/985–S/2001/574, 2001, para 76.

36   E.g. the UN's deep investment and peacekeeping presence in Lebanon enabled UNSCOL to work with key conflict parties. Similarly, in the 2009 crisis in Sierra Leone, the presence of a peacekeeping operation that was delivering a wide range of services in-country was seen to help the UN play a role in brokering a positive outcome. In contrast, however, in DRC today, the presence of a massive peacekeeping operation, huge UN development and state-building projects, and enormous humanitarian relief together has not combined to offer the UN a direct entry point into the political negotiations.

37   The use of elder statesmen can be seen in Guinea, Burkina Faso and eastern DRC. See, Day, A and Pichler Fong, A. August 2017.

38   The use of regional offices is discussed in "Preventive Diplomacy: Delivering Results," Report of the Secretary-General, S/2011/552, 26 August 2011; see also, Day, A and Pichler Fong, A. August 2017.

39   This project consulted internal UN documents for this case study.

40   For a description of other cases, see, Day, A and Pichler Fong, A. August 2017.

41   E.g., Zartman, William and Saadia Touval. "International Mediation." Leashing the Dogs of War: Conflict Management in a Divided World, edited by Chester Crocker, Fen Hampson and Pamela Aall. US Institute for Peace. 2007, pp. 437-454.

42   The Assessment Framework produced in this project contains a detailed methodology for addressing this difficulty of causality in preventive diplomacy.

43   A paradigmatic example of this "quiet diplomacy" is Ralph Bunche's negotiation of Bahrain's independence from the UK, "a textbook example of settling a dispute by quiet diplomacy before it degenerated into conflict." Urquhart, Brian. Ralph Bunche: An American Odyssey. Norton, 1998.

44   S/RES/2014, 2011.

45   Internal UN assessment of Burkina Faso case. See also, www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-29948773.

46   Maclean, Ruth. "Troops enter the Gambia after Adama Barrow is inaugurated in Senegal." The Guardian. 19 January 2017, www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/19/new-gambian-leader-adama-barrow-sworn-in-at-ceremony-in-senegal.

47   Interviews conducted for the case study on Malawi.

48   Interview conducted for the case study on Nigeria.

49   Day, A and Pichler Fong, A. August 2017.

50   "The Role of External Actors in the DRC Crisis." Africa Center for Strategic Studies. 12 January 2017, africacenter.org/spotlight/role-external-actors-drc-congo-crisis-sadc-au-icglr-un-eu/.

51   For example, it was cited as a positive practice that Special Envoy Said Djinnit conducted 45 missions to Conakry to meet with stakeholders during the Guinea crisis in 2009. For other examples, see, Day, A and Pichler Fong, A. August 2017.

52   E.g.: When SRSG Chambas was deployed to Burkina Faso during the crisis there, he could draw on existing expertise in UNOWA, and maintain more of a presence on the ground as well.

53   It should be noted, however, that the peer review process for this paper cautioned against placing too much emphasis on the persona of the mediator.

54   The positive impact of discretion was highlighted in the Malawi, Yemen, southern Sudan and Nigeria cases.

55   "Preventive Diplomacy: Delivering Results." Report of the Secretary-General, S/2011/552, 26 August 2011.

56   Babbitt, Eileen. "Preventive Diplomacy by Intergovernmental Organizations: Learning from Practice." International Negotiation. Vol. 17, No. 3, 2012, pp. 349 – 388 at pp. 351-2.

57   Lund, Michael. "Conflict Prevention: Theory in Pursuit of Policy and Practice." 2009. See also Chesterman, Simon. Secretary or General? 2007, pp.100; Gowan, Richard et al. "Back to Basics: the UN and crisis diplomacy in an age of strategy uncertainty." Center on International Cooperation. 2010.; Lund, Michael. Preventing Violent Conflicts: A Strategy for Preventive Diplomacy. United States Institute of Peace. 1996.

58   United Nations. "Prevention of Armed Conflict." 2001.; Nathan, L. "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse." 2000.

59   "Pathways to Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict." 2017.

60   The UN distinguishes between operational prevention (actions taken to prevent the proximate outbreak of conflict or limit its escalation); structural prevention (actions taken to target underlying causes of conflict such as socio-economic inequality, ethnic discrimination and lack of participatory politics); and systemic prevention (actions taken to address cross-border threats such as the spread of diseases and climate change). See: UN Security Council. "Can the Security Council Prevent Conflict?" Research Report No. 1, 2017; Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict. Preventing Deadly Conflict.; Annan, Kofi. "Toward a Culture of Prevention: Statements by the Secretary-General of the United Nations." Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, 1999.; Lund, Preventing Violent Conflicts.

61   See: Day, A and Pichler Fong, A. August 2017.

62   See, e.g.: Gowan et al. 2010. (arguing for a limited approach to preventive diplomacy because "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").

63   S/RES/2282, 2016.

64   On the importance of inclusion, see "Pathways to Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict." 2017;

see also "UN Guidance on Gender and Inclusive Mediating Strategies." 2004, available at peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/1.%20English%20-GIMS.pdf.

65   For example: United Nations. "Prevention of Armed Conflict." 2001, para 8.

66   See, e.g.: OECD. "States of Fragility Report: Understanding Violence." 2016.; see also, World Development Report 2011.

67   See: Whitfield, Teresa. "Working with Groups of Friends." United States Institute of Peace, 2010.

68   E.g.: The International Support Group for Lebanon (described in the Lebanon case study).

69   E.g.: The Peace and Security Cooperation Framework set up to maintain regional coherence on security threats in eastern Congo.

70   "Seizing the Moment: From Early Warning to Early Action." Crisis Group Special Report N°2, 22 June 2016.

71   But Security Council unanimity on Yemen was not a given. As one source recalled: "Saleh was smart. He had tried to play the Council members off each other – appealing to Russia, to China and then even to the regional blocks of states to protect his hold on power. But it didn't work because we kept the Russians and the Chinese briefed all along. There were no surprises. And they were smart. They came to understand that Yemen would not become another [case of Council overreach in] Libya." So Saleh's attempts to pit usual adversaries against each other ultimately failed.

72   "How Yemen's Post-2011 Transitional Phase Ended in War."19 May 2016.

73   For example, the Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA) was not involved directly in any of the conflict-prevention work mentioned in the Lebanon case study, despite much of it being in the socio-economic sphere. Similarly, the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) is based in Addis, with sub-regional offices in Niger, Rwanda, Cameroon and elsewhere. In none of the African cases researched was the ECA involved in the strategic planning, despite nearly every case involving a socio-economic aspect to the conflict.