Introduction

Understanding conflict prevention in the shifting global context

Rachel F. Madenyika and Jason G. Tower

The Charter of the United Nations, adopted in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, is clear about the fundamental necessity for the international community to act in partnership to prevent violent conflict. The Charter is also clear that this must be a multi-dimensional endeavor, which requires that equal weight be given to peace and security, economic and social development, and human dignity.

As the ninth Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), António Guterres, took office, two trends became apparent. First, the international community increasingly focused on addressing prevention, with a growing realization of the relationships between human displacement, humanitarian need, inequality and exclusion, climate change, and an increase in potential and actual violent conflict. Second, given shifts in global power dynamics, the need was apparent for international policy issues to be addressed in a way that is inclusive of a wider variety of perspectives and approaches.

In particular, it has become clear that Chinese policy actors are increasingly interested in fostering their own discourse on issues of prevention and peacebuilding, rooted in Chinese experience, and engaging with peers from other contexts. China's position has evolved from one of "entering the world" to one of global leadership. In a relatively short time, China has signed agreements and launched initiatives covering a wide range of global governance issues, including monetary policies, currency exchange, trade, anti-corruption, and peace and security (Tower). Compared with China's involvement in global governance just a decade ago, the change is dramatic, and there is therefore a timely opportunity for dialogue with international peers on these central themes.

Against this background, the Quaker United Nation Office (QUNO) and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)¹, in collaboration

with PeaceNexus and in close partnership with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), jointly organized a series of dialogues that took place in Switzerland, China, and the United States. This pilot project sought to intensify the exchange between five Chinese and five Swiss researchers on ways of contributing to the ongoing United Nations' and international debate on peacebuilding in general, and the prevention of violent conflict in particular. The seminars strategically aimed to deepen the mutual understanding of the notion of prevention, and of existing and new instruments available to prevent violent conflicts from emerging, continuing, or relapsing, and to identify areas for cooperation. The researchers explored the rationale for conflict prevention and reviewed prevailing academic and practitioner discourses on fundamental questions, such as why conflicts should be prevented and whether "mainstream approaches" are still relevant. What mechanisms and tools exist to prevent conflict, and how effective is prevention today? What opportunities and challenges exist in preventive diplomacy efforts?

The project was designed to promote trust and relationship-building among the Chinese and Swiss scholars as they shared their insights and experience while exploring common ground. In designing the dialogue sessions, special care was taken to avoid any appearance of a contest or competition between points of view. The premise was that providing a protected space for these discussions would allow a more complete picture of preventive approaches to emerge and encourage forward thinking in this field. During this project, the scholars collaboratively developed a comprehensive list of thematic policy areas that each contributed to this joint publication. Interest in developing future conversations on the topic of mediation was deemed the strongest achievement of this dialogue, especially given that there are so few scholars working on international conflict mediation in China.

The innovations this project represents are important to the discourse on conflict prevention. There have been few dialogues between Chinese and Western scholars on conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Peace and conflict studies as a discipline in China is relatively new, and it is only recently that China started to develop this field. While in some quarters there is a notion that Chinese views are at odds with Western views and vice versa, the project by methodology and design proved otherwise. It promoted trust and relationship-building among the scholars as they shared insights and experience by exploring common ground.

Approaches to the idea of prevention are constantly developing, and the scholars provided considerable richness of perspectives, which fell easily into infinite areas of work. By providing a protected space for

these discussions, a more complete picture of preventive approaches emerged, particularly around the peace and development nexus. This project built a space where scholars could engage openly, take risks, and share perspectives on debates within each country. This was achieved by considering different traditions, barriers, blockages, and areas for cooperation. Throughout the project, scholars grappled with some of the key questions in the literature on the effectiveness of peacebuilding, and the role of multilateral organizations in conflict prevention and peacebuilding relevant to sequencing and institutional reform. Scholars further identified how approaches to addressing violent conflict might in some cases be managed, and in other cases be leveraged to build a stronger foundation for cooperation.

Towards a multi-dimensional response to complex crises

In recent years, the repeated occurrence of global peace and security crises has raised significant doubts about the capacity of the United Nations to prevent violence and maintain security. Since 2010, the number of major violent conflicts has tripled, while a growing number of lower intensity conflicts have experienced significant escalation (World Bank and United Nations). A combination of global challenges including climate change, illicit trafficking, and shifting global power structures has contributed to the growing level of crises and has made societies more vulnerable to conflict. Transformations in technology, demographics, labor, and trade have greatly enhanced global awareness of crises, bringing populations closer together and helping to reduce poverty, but have simultaneously brought new challenges that an aging global security architecture struggles to meet successfully (World Bank and United Nations). At the same time, the world's most fragile and marginalized communities enjoy few of the benefits of these changes and bear the greatest shares of the costs of conflict.

Recent research has allowed the international community to begin quantifying the costs of conflict. In 2016, the economic impact of violent conflict resulted in a global economic loss of 30 trillion USD, exceeding global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 14.76 trillion USD. In per capita terms, this translates into a loss of nearly 2,000 USD per person (Institute for Economics & Peace). The vast economic losses suffered globally because of conflict represent one of the most compelling arguments for long-term conflict prevention. According to the 2018 Global Peace Index, the average level of global peacefulness has declined for the fourth consecutive year. Thus, the international

community can no longer afford to under-invest in prevention and should make it a priority for action.

In 2015, amidst these crises, the UN system came together to achieve landmark outcomes including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change. Both received universal backing from the UN membership (Boutellis and Ó Súilleabháin). Aspirations to further strengthen the UN's coherence, effectiveness, and ability to respond are evident in the comprehensive examinations of its peace and security efforts. During the same year, three reviews on peacebuilding, peace operations, and the implementation of the women, peace, and security agenda were conducted. The reviews pointed to the urgent need to bring together different parts of the UN system around a long-term vision of peace, one that did not follow the common linear and sequenced approach to conflict response, but was rather a strategic commitment to a "culture of prevention" and to work within a "peace continuum" that encompasses "prevention, conflict resolution, peacekeeping, peacebuilding and long-term development" (Guterres, *Challenges and Opportunities*). A common theme that emerged from the three reviews marked a fundamental shift in the UN's understanding of peacebuilding, from a "post-conflict" exercise towards an emphasis on building peace as an ongoing undertaking. By formulating sustaining peace in the resolutions as "a goal and process ... aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict" (70/262 and 2282 respectively), the dual resolutions on peacebuilding and sustaining peace adopted unanimously by all nations in the General Assembly and Security Council set out to do just that. As a result, for the first time at the UN, "peacebuilding" and "prevention" have become close to synonymous under this new umbrella term – "Sustaining Peace". Under this new framework, prevention is central, particularly when it is considered as a function of sustainable development and inclusive governance.

The nature of the problem

Under existing dominant paradigms and through its symbiotic relationship to conflict, prevention at the UN continues to be conceived as a nationally owned and driven strategy for averting the outbreak of conflict and sustaining peace. The lack of conceptual clarity regarding the meaning of conflict prevention and what it entails makes it an unwieldy topic for rigorous study. However, some actors are beginning to understand conflict prevention differently, as seen in academia and at the policy level. In the 1990s, students of conflict prevention

such as Munuera and Lund (*Conflict Prevention*) saw conflict prevention as “primarily diplomatic measures and actions used in regions of high vulnerability to prevent the escalation of tensions into armed conflict” (Carayannis and Stein). Along the same lines, Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali’s preventive diplomacy understood the concept as “action taken to prevent disputes from arising between parties, and to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts” (Boutros-Ghali). On the other hand, authors such as Wallensteen referred to prevention as actions that can prevent conflict, without limiting the tools to diplomatic means. More recently, a UN–World Bank report questioned the long-standing assumption that income growth alone leads to peace, and introduced the business case for prevention: “the expected returns on prevention will be positive so long as the costs of prevention are less than the damages and/or losses due to violence” (World Bank and United Nations).

While the term “prevention” seems to be accepted at the policy level, neither policymakers nor scholars agree on timing, sequencing, or required necessary tools. The dichotomy of prevention is evident, as operational prevention – “pre-empting the eruption of violence” (Lund, “Preventing Violent Intrastate Conflicts”) – and long-term structural prevention efforts that tackle root causes of conflict are both necessary. First introduced in the final report of the Carnegie Commission launched in 1997, both operational and structural prevention are considered equally important approaches that may be applied dependent on the stage of a particular conflict. At one end of the spectrum are the operational preventive activities which rely on third-party interventions for the prevention of imminent conflict or escalation. On the other end of the spectrum are activities which focus on the deep-rooted causes of conflict and “aim to strengthen the institutions and social mechanisms of states and societies, helping them to become more resilient to the causes and triggers of conflict” (United Nations, *Conflict Prevention*). In the 2001 Report of the Secretary-General on Prevention of Armed Conflict, “an effective preventive strategy” is said to require “a comprehensive approach that encompasses both short-term and long-term political, diplomatic, humanitarian, human rights, developmental, institutional, and other measures taken by the international community, in cooperation with national and regional actors” (United Nations, *Prevention of Armed Conflict*). Consensus on the scope of conflict prevention is essential as conceptual parameters are critical for establishing and maintaining effective conflict prevention strategies.

Emerging ideas for peace

Two streams of literature have developed relevant to academic discourse on prevention in China. The first is at the nexus of Chinese foreign policy and security studies, and the second at the nexus of peace and development. While still nascent, these literatures in their own right are in dialogue with both Western, and in some cases, other global discourses on these issues. That said, as might be expected, they are also deeply rooted in China's own political traditions and influenced by pragmatic needs around China's rapidly shifting international role.

When considering Chinese foreign policy and security studies, Chinese scholars seek to explore challenges emerging around China's traditional foreign policy principles of peaceful coexistence, non-intervention in domestic affairs of states, and new needs relevant to involvement in security governance (Wang, *Creative Involvement*). Current debates center around the primacy of the state versus non-state actors in addressing security challenges; how to address Western and especially American dominance of international institutions; how to draw lessons from ancient Chinese models of global governance that might be applicable to the modern day (Yan); and how to address issues of growing institutional competition as China develops a role as a provider of global governance goods.

In the second area of debate on the peace and development nexus, the key focus centers on China's experiences over 40 years of reform, which have prioritized economic development as a means of maintaining and enhancing stability (Wang and Hu). Some Chinese scholars argue that Western approaches focus too much on resolving governance issues, and not enough on addressing development in the form of infrastructure, job creation, and market development (He). In some cases, scholars have argued for a "developmental peace" as a counter to "liberal peace". Critics of this perspective point out that not all forms of development will lead to peace and focus on some of the lessons that China has learned over the past decade in promoting large-scale development when it comes to promoting peace projects. Examples from Myanmar – where China supported large-scale dams adjacent to cease-fire lines – have drawn considerable attention from Chinese scholars arguing for a more nuanced view of the relationship between development and peace (Jiang).

So, how can the global community more effectively prevent violent conflict, as violent conflicts have become more complex and protracted? While acknowledging the challenges of definition, timing, sequencing, and choice of tools, proving when prevention works remains a

significant hurdle. It is therefore imperative to understand the normative and political impact of sustaining peace in diverse contexts.

To contribute towards strengthening such understanding, this book identifies tools that help navigate today's uncertainties and attempts to conceptualize tomorrow's practice of international peacebuilding and conflict prevention. The volume seeks to answer questions such as: Why should conflicts be prevented? Are "mainstream approaches" are still relevant? What mechanisms and tools exist to prevent conflict; how effective is prevention today? And, what opportunities and challenges exist in preventive diplomacy efforts?

The book makes the case for conflict prevention and provides insights for practitioners of peacebuilding and international relations such as policymakers, philanthropists, diplomats, development workers, researchers, and students.

Part I: the broader norms of prevention and building peace

The first section of this volume addresses prevention and resolution of violent conflict from a macro-political as well as micro-economic perspective. It asks three fundamental questions: (1) How do we sustain peace? (2) Why should we promote peace and prevent war? (3) How should we actually go about doing it? In his contribution, Björn Gehrman offers a consideration of the shortcomings of various approaches to international peacebuilding. He identifies three practical measures which function to sustain peace by eliminating the drivers of conflict: investments in economic development; alignment of political institutions; and how information is shared between conflicting parties. His chapter "How to sustain peace: a review of the scholarly debate" embraces the importance of these three measures as central to sustaining peace and suggests that the UN enhance its investment in research on the causes of war. In the following chapter, "Political violence prevention: definitions and implications", Stephanie C. Hofmann stresses that conflict prevention policies already exist in the peace and development nexus. She underscores that the reinvigoration of concepts alone is not enough to create a policy but that normative concepts, mechanisms, resources, and capacities need to be attached to such concepts. She provides an overview of these concepts in various contexts including the United Nations, World Bank, European Union, and African Union. Yin He, in the next chapter "A tale of two 'peaces': peacebuilding in the twenty-first century: liberal peace, developmental peace, and peacebuilding" stresses that liberal peace overemphasizes institution building, and places too little emphasis on development. In

his view, developmental peace more effectively helps address the economic drivers of conflict than efforts to build institutions. He further highlights that their coexistence can greatly benefit the peacebuilding of post-conflict states and explores means for building better coordination mechanisms between the two types of approaches. In the subsequent chapter, “How to curb conflict: policy lessons from the economic literature”, Dominic Rohner looks at peacebuilding through an economic lens. He concludes that while the literature in conflict economics has gained an overview on major causes and consequences of armed fighting, up until recently the study of how particular policies can reduce conflict risks has been neglected. He recommends further empirical policy research in this area. In his view, it is especially important to look at how different types of development interventions and different forms of economic support impact armed conflict.

Part II: approaches to preventing conflict

Part II of this volume presents elements of the approaches to peacebuilding. David Lanz’s chapter on “The deep roots of Swiss conflict prevention” draws attention to how conflict prevention represents a fundamental interest for Switzerland, given its disposition as a small state with a federal structure and a heterogeneous society. Lanz argues that, therefore, conflict prevention does not automatically emerge, but is outcome of accommodation and negotiations between different groups within the country. The Swiss culture of conflict management thus differs fundamentally from the Chinese approach even if the two countries share a similar interest in the reduction of political violence. In her practice-oriented chapter, “Considerations for the design and preparation of national dialogue processes”, Katia Papagianni discusses the utility of national dialogues, a peace strategy that is used in conflict situations where political power within a country is widely dispersed among various groups, and where a new coalition government needs to be created. The chapter explains how national dialogue processes need to tackle the difficult decisions on what needs to be discussed and resolved, identifying key participants, designing the dialogue format, and above all being flexible and creative throughout the process. In the following chapter, “China and mediation: principles and practice”, Tiewa Liu maintains that China’s fundamental principles of non-intervention and non-use of force remain intact, but that China is currently working on integrating facilitative, evaluative, and transformative mediation approaches into its foreign policy. Mediation can be a successful tool in achieving stability in volatile

contexts where China has investments, and it can contribute to China's long-run national interests and international responsibilities.

Part III: opportunities for peace

In Part III, elements of the developmental approach to peace promotion are addressed. In her chapter titled “How to understand the peacebuilding potential of the Belt and Road Initiative”, Dongyan Li points out that the peacebuilding potential of the Belt and Road Initiative has not been fully leveraged by BRI partners, and that this is a critical growth area. From a UN peacebuilding perspective, and as BRI is an economic cooperation–led initiative, China can and should make a strong contribution to UN peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Albrecht Schnabel’s contribution “Security sector reform and conflict prevention” sums up that security sector reform (SSR) is vital for conflict prevention and is key for successful regional cooperation, business, and development. He puts emphasis on linking the Swiss interest in providing SSR support with Chinese interests in advancing peace through development of an effective state, including a strong security sector, as part of the Belt and Road Initiative. Guihong Zhang outlines that the main goal and design of Chinese major power diplomacy in the new era is the idea of a “community of shared future for mankind”, as proposed by President Xi Jinping. In his contribution to this volume, “‘A community of shared future for mankind’ and implications for conflict prevention”, Zhang states that this idea will undoubtedly have implications for world peace and security and needs to be integrated with existing international principles and norms or transformed into new ones.

In the concluding chapter, “Future collaborative efforts to prevent conflict”, Rachel F. Madenyika and Jason G. Tower draw together the main themes and purpose of the project and volume and present: (1) the importance and impact of dialogue for prevention; and (2) the need to explore instruments and tools that are compatible with peace narratives, such as mediation, providing an opportunity for collaboration and an appetite to learn, diversify, and understand approaches to peace.

About the organizations

Quaker United Nations Office, New York (QUNO)

Since 1947, QUNO, supported by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and the Friends World Committee for Consultation

(FWCC), has worked with diplomats, UN officials, and civil society to support a UN that prioritizes peace and prevents war. Grounded in the Quaker belief that there is that of the divine in every person, we seek a United Nations that addresses key drivers of violence including structures and systems that produce exclusion and injustice; that facilitates and supports change through peaceful means; and whose policies and practices reflect a diversity of voices, such that people around the world can safely and peacefully achieve their potential. QUNO uses Quaker House and its convening power to facilitate off-the-record meetings and bring perspectives from outside the UN system in order to promote peacebuilding and the prevention of violent conflict at a policy level in New York.

American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)

Founded in 1917, the American Friends Service Committee is a Quaker organization that promotes lasting peace with justice, as a practical expression of faith in action.

PeaceNexus Foundation

PeaceNexus is a Switzerland-based foundation established in May 2009. The PeaceNexus core mission is to provide peacebuilding-relevant actors – multilateral organizations, governments, non-profit organizations, and business actors – with expertise and advice on how they can make best use of their peacebuilding role and capacity to help stabilize and reconcile conflict-affected societies. PeaceNexus specializes in identifying relevant and cutting-edge expertise, making it available to actors for peacebuilding, and structuring, sequencing, and accompanying the advisory process. It played a key role in facilitating both the fourth round of dialogue in this project and the launch event for the publication.

Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

The Human Security Division of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs is responsible for the promotion of peace, human rights, and democracy. In the area of peace policy, it focuses on the prevention and resolution of violent conflict and efforts to ensure lasting peace.

Note

- 1 Since 2009, QUNO and AFSC have engaged leading global Chinese academics on issues related to coordinated approaches to peacebuilding and the prevention of violent conflict through multilateral platforms. Identifying that Chinese researchers had limited field-level engagement with a spectrum of peace operations, and especially with early warning, peacebuilding, and mediation, QUNO and AFSC worked to support Chinese academics' engagement and fieldwork, looking at the involvement of China and other key donor states in this space. This effort was catalytic, with Chinese participants publishing a wide range of policy and academic papers on a broad spectrum of peace operations and peacebuilding.

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