Conclusion

Future collaborative efforts to prevent conflict

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In an increasingly globalized and inter-connected world, violent conflict is more protracted, highly volatile, and resistant to containment within national borders. In some instances, it combines perilously with social media, cyber networks, environmental deprivation, and disease. This project, “*Policy Dialogue on Conflict Prevention*”, highlights that conflict prevention is about making societies resilient to violent conflict, which is achieved by strengthening their local capacities for peace through reinforcing systems, structures, resources, attitudes, and skills at the local, national, regional, and global levels. Much attention is focused on reactive approaches to conflict – rebuilding and resolving – but prevention must hold the same level of importance. It remains insufficient to merely prevent a relapse of war; the international community must make a greater effort to respond to warning signs to pre-empt the eruption of deadly violence (Woocher).

This manuscript is the outcome of a pilot project that sought to foster exchange between Chinese and 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 document is intended to be an in-depth overview of three policy dialogues that took place over a period of two years. The overarching goal of the project was to encourage a sustained dialogue between Chinese and Swiss experts in this field; exploring avenues for enhanced sharing of knowledge and coordination. The scholars’ contributions were intended to open the debate and to offer a forward looking exercise that addresses fundamental questions such as: why conflicts should be prevented; whether “mainstream approaches” are still relevant; and how dominant Swiss and Chinese approaches to prevention both converge and diverge.

The UN has responded to the increase in conflict and insecurity throughout the world by acknowledging that peacebuilding needs

to take place before, during, and after the outbreak of conflict. This highlights a shift within the UN towards “Sustaining Peace”¹ – a “holistic approach” to the mutually reinforcing linkages between its three pillars² – that recognizes the primacy of politics, while also stressing an approach that strengthens the nexus between peace and security, sustainable development, and human rights policies. Together with the peace mandate of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in particular Goal 16, these transformative frameworks have reoriented the UN’s efforts to sustain peace to accomplish the spirit of the UN Charter. Most recently, the recommendations of the United Nations and World Bank report highlight a global focus on prevention and seek to improve understanding of how domestic development processes interact with security, diplomatic, humanitarian, justice, and human rights efforts to prevent conflict from becoming violent, reviewing systematically what has worked and not worked. Nevertheless, despite the many policies, reviews, and studies, the question of which issues deserve focus, the balance between long-term and short-term action, and the roles of internal and external actors, are still actively being debated. As with any international collective endeavor, continued inclusion of diverse perspectives is fundamental.

China’s increasing participation in UN peace operations, both in conflict-afflicted and in post-conflict states, has been notable. As China’s involvement in complex and fragile states deepens, dialogue and coordination with key international stakeholders working on prevention of violent conflict is imperative and comes at a crucial moment, as scholars, in particular, are presently considering how to address increasing violent conflict. This project, which brought together Chinese and Swiss scholars over a period of two years was able to provide learning on dominant models of violent conflict prevention, while assisting the scholars to build a stronger understanding of different models being implemented locally, nationally, regionally, and internationally. As such, these dialogues, which provided an open exchange of ideas around prevention, were important and timely.

This volume reviews the state of the conflict prevention field from various lenses and considers norms and political commitments, institutional capacities, and policy options. The international community, academics and practitioners alike, continues to enhance tools for conflict prevention and refine their application. There were four key areas of convergence that resonated throughout this volume and with participants of this project in general. First, although not necessarily obvious, there are similar national commitments to maintaining peace through multilateral means by both China and Switzerland. China

illustrates this commitment through its engagement with peacekeeping operations as the largest contributor of personnel, and the second largest financial contributor among the P5, while Switzerland continues to be central to UN mediation, human rights, and peacebuilding efforts. Second, development approaches must be inclusive. The UN–World Bank report questions our long-standing assumption that income growth alone leads to peace. While clearly stating that inclusion matters as much as growth of institutions in ensuring resilience against conflict, the report emphasizes that successful prevention is built on coalitions of various actors, and that policies for prevention need to address grievances around social and economic inclusion. Third, this volume recognizes that development of new, and strengthening of existing, international norms are necessary to guide and inform multilateral action directed towards prevention. Lastly, the authors of this volume acknowledge that focusing on preventive action at local, national, and international levels is conducive for long-term sustainable peace.

This successful project and innovative collection of work highlights the similarities in both states' approaches to addressing and improving efforts to achieve conflict prevention, pointing to the strong potential for future synergies and fruitful Swiss–Chinese collaboration and continued dialogue.

Notes

- 1 Security Council Resolution 2282 (27 Apr. 2016), UN Doc. S/RES/2282; General Assembly Resolution 70/262 (17 Apr. 2016), UN Doc. A/RES/70/262.
- 2 www.antoniouterres.gov.pt/vision-statement/.

Bibliography

Woocher, Laurence. "Preventing Violent Conflict: Assessing Progress, Meeting Challenges". *United States Institute of Peace Special Report* 231, 2009.