

**Early Warning of Armed Conflict by the  
UN Secretary-General: Article 99 Revisited**

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Abstract

The only independent political role that is explicitly given to the UN Secretary-General in the UN Charter is that of warning. (Under Article 99, he/she may warn the Security Council about any matter which may threaten the peace.) But is warning, especially early warning, by the UN Secretary-General likely, or even possible? By digging into the mines of UN history, I have sought to identify instances of early (and late) warning. For over 100 conflicts in which the Secretary-General intervened, only a very few (e.g., East Pakistan/Bangladesh 1971, Macedonia 1992) can be classified as early warning. There have been three explicit invocations of Article 99 in the Security Council (Congo 1960, Iran 1979 and Lebanon 1989) and about a dozen implied invocations, but most of these were late warnings or statements of support for warnings already provided by a member state. Given that there was no early warning in most cases (e.g., Korea 1950, Falklands/Malvinas 1982, Yugoslavia 1992, Rwanda 1994), one might rightfully ask why such warning is so infrequent and so difficult.

This paper summarizes the Secretary-General's constraints and opportunities for early warning in each of its three stages (information gathering, analysis and dissemination) and makes suggestions about how some obstacles can be overcome. For technical and political reasons, the UN Secretary-General is now in a better position to carry out early warning than ever before but certain improvements are called for, namely: better targeting of desired information, increased intelligence-sharing, tighter confidentiality systems, easier access for on-site observation, a stronger analytical capacity (including scenario building), quicker feedback at headquarters and a more proactive approach in issuing warnings and undertaking response measures. This may be a tall order, but the goal of early warning for conflict prevention is a worthy of all such efforts.