

Chapter 7 - Early Warning and Protection

Monitoring human rights violations as a strategic alert mechanism is important in the traditional strategic sense of early warning, so as to inform the international community as to the need for action ranging from diplomacy to mounting UN field operations. Human rights intelligence gathering is also important as a tactical alert mechanism during UN field operations, for example to inform a UN peace-keeping force as to the need to deploy to a village threatened with ethnic cleansing.

Once human rights information is gathered and synthesised, it must be analysed with a view to taking concrete action both to prevent human rights violations per se, and to help attain other field operation objectives, both tactical and strategic. Fortunately the last couple of decades have witnessed the increased capacity of both international and national NGOs to monitor human rights violations and set off the initial alarm bells. Unfortunately the in-house capacity of the UN to verify those NGO reports, or carry out independent UN monitoring, has not increased nearly as much. There has been even less growth in the ability of the UN to synthesize and analyse reports of human rights violations, although one should not ignore the strong capacity of some specialized UN agencies such as UNHCR or UNICEF to analyse abuses pertaining to their mandate.

In the broader sense however, UN human rights analysis has been starved of funds and personnel. In large part this is a reflection of the unwillingness of many UN member states to fund such intrusive human rights activity. Quite obviously, the less the UN independently corroborates alleged human rights violations, the less pressure there is for member states to take concrete action. Member states limiting UN monitoring and analysis serves to pre-empt situations where UN analysis would make it patently obvious that UN action was required.

Fortunately it is becoming increasingly apparent that this strategy of turning a blind eye to alleged human rights violations, does not always shield member states from having to eventually take action. It merely postpones inevitable UN intervention, and can present the UN with a much more complex emergency worsened by previous UN inaction. Preventive action, ranging from preventive diplomacy to preventive troop deployment, has become one of the main themes of UN discussion. Inter alia, fiscal responsibility calls for the use of relatively cheaper preventive actions rather than delaying until failed states and wartorn societies require massive injections of UN peace-keepers, humanitarian aid, and reconstruction assistance.

UN field operations can play a major role in gathering or verifying human rights information for UN strategic decisions. UN operations can also contribute to the assessment of that human