

The above definition covers only "early warning" of armed conflicts. It could be broadened to include any political threats (not just threats of armed conflict) and, even further, to natural disasters. This paper, however, is concerned only with the potential for armed conflict.

What constitutes "early"? The practical answer follows from the definition is: in time to make an effort at conflict prevention. If there is not sufficient time to take potentially preventive action, then the term "late warning" is appropriate. If the conflict is already rapidly escalating, the term "warning" may not even be applicable at all. For conflict prevention and preparedness, early warning should be done as far in advance as possible. However, it is harder to make accurate predictions over the long range and unless the threat is real states are unlikely to respond to an early warning. Thus early warning can be measured on the scale of time (how early the warning) and intensity of the warning (how strong the warning). A balance point has to be reached in practice, which will depend largely on the nature of the threat. A desirable early warning period for most conflicts would be one to six months.

In spite of the logical link between early warning and preventive action, it is not necessary that a conflict be successfully prevented for early warning to have been achieved. Early warning can take place even if preventive action was not taken. It is only important that the warning be made early enough that prevention action *can be attempted*.

Early warning can best be illustrated in relation to a generalized conflict, with its escalation, crisis peak(s) and descending phases as shown in Figure 1. Usually, the Secretary-general intervenes in a conflict only after it has escalated, and a large number of lives have been lost. In current thinking (if not current efforts) more emphasis is being placed on preventive action and early warning has taken on new importance. Early warning is an activity which is done in advance of the steep incline of conflict curve.

Even if early warning fails to produce a response and the conflict escalates, the effort at early information gathering should help the Secretary-General (and his staff) be more effective in handling with the conflict in the later stages, also illustrated in Figure 1. In relation to the three stages of conflict, six roles for the Secretary-General are identified: early warning, preventive diplomacy/deployment, crisis management, conflict resolution, peace-building and peace enforcement. To identify a threat, someone in the Secretariat must notify the Secretary-General. Before the conflict begins or escalates, the UN could and should exercise its powers of prevention, through diplomacy or preventive deployment. If escalation is probable, the Secretary-General or another UN body has a duty to issue an early warning to a larger body. In the second stage of conflict, as fighting is occurring, the UN takes on the crisis/conflict management role. When parties are ready to reach a negotiated settlement, then the UN works