

One major feature of the new methodology is the offering of technical *assistance* to member states. The United Nations Centre for Human Rights, which has often been unpopular with certain member states because of its involvement in monitoring human rights abuses, has received considerable praise and support from these same states for the development of its advisory and technical assistance services--which offer governments assistance in drafting constitutions, legislation, or bills of rights or in bringing national laws into conformity with international standards.

Electoral assistance can be seen as another form of technical assistance and is now offered by the UN, the OAS, the OAU, the COE, the OSCE, as well as by a number of non-governmental organizations. The response to this service has been equally enthusiastic.

Several regional organizations have even moved a step further by offering assistance in building democratic institutions. The OAS Unit for the Promotion of Democracy, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the COE Programmes for Assistance to Central and Eastern Europe prepare and support key institutional actors in the reforms needed to create good governance.

Another variation can be seen in the work of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, who offers assistance to OSCE participating states in preventive diplomacy. Through discussions with all concerned, he seeks to understand the basis for minority grievances, and offers specific recommendations to governments for change to legislation, regulation or practice. His informal, quiet approach, which does not involve either "early warning" or formal mediation, overcomes the traditional opposition of governments to preventive diplomacy within states, since it avoids "internationalizing" the problem and bypasses governments' concern over recognizing and legitimizing leaders of disaffected minority movements. Since the government is never required to sit down at the table with the leaders of these groups, it does not have to formally recognize them. It is simply asked to listen to and consider seriously the suggestions of the High Commissioner.⁹

The Long-term Preventive Diplomacy Missions of the OSCE offer a similar kind of assistance. They are typically small (8-20 persons), deployed at the invitation of participating states, and provide an "on the ground" presence which assists the national government in devising and implementing means of reducing tensions within the country.

What all of these assistance programs share is the availability of advice and options which governments are free to choose or refuse--but which they have usually accepted. Indeed, this type of assistance has been embraced by states with a wide range of governance structures. It is attractive to governments precisely because it is *low-key, subject to their consent and builds "local capacity"*. Most importantly, this approach provides an acceptable basis for international organizations to become involved in conflict prevention *within* states. It ensures that when a government is ready to take even halting steps toward reform, there is international or regional support to help it move in that direction.