

### Preventive Diplomacy

Preventive diplomacy, as defined by the United Nations, is action taken to prevent disputes from arising between parties, to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts, and to limit the spread of the latter when they occur.

It is hard to determine the success rate of the world community when it comes to preventive diplomacy, because the successes tend to be invisible; that is why they are successes—nothing happened! It is much easier to list the failures, the “what ifs,” to use the advantage of hindsight to criticize.

In his report *An Agenda for Peace*, the Secretary-General identified four aspects of preventive diplomacy. A key element is *early warning* of potential disputes and flash points. Early warning is achieved by receipt of information through both technical and human means. States and organizations vary greatly in their capacity to acquire and analyse information and hence their capacity to use the information in support of preventive diplomacy. International organizations, for example, the UN, will always depend in large measure on the co-operation of member or like-minded states for the acquisition of information. This must be done with the appropriate mix of discretion, confidentiality, objectivity and transparency in the face of concerns related to sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence.

Early warning provides general information on a potential crisis. What is needed is more specific information and that process is often referred to as *fact-finding*. This can be done on a formal or informal basis by an individual, usually designated as a Special Representative/ Envoy, or a group. (On certain occasions the Secretary-General of the UN has taken on this role himself.) As with early warning, it requires the co-operation of the state where the mission is being carried out. Fact-finding is much akin to early warning, the distinction being that it

depends very much on the actual deployment on the ground of eminent and qualified experts who can conduct inquiries directly with those concerned and make informed recommendations on concrete steps to be taken. This type of personal diplomacy can be very effective, but it requires the right individuals whose competency and integrity are without question. This method also requires the political will to initiate the inquiry on the one hand and, as mentioned, the co-operation of the state where the inquiries are being made on the other. Fact-finding is also assisted by the willingness of third-party states to make information available on request or, indeed, to volunteer information they think might be valuable to appropriate organizations. As with information provided through other exercises in transparency, the information flowing from fact-finding needs to be analysed and processed properly before it is of use to conflict managers.

In his report *An Agenda for Peace*, the Secretary-General described the concept, or process, of *preventive deployment*, by which he meant dispatch of UN peacekeepers, at the request of a state or states, before a crisis had matured. Many states saw this type of action as potentially destabilizing but, while they were still considering the concept in the General Assembly, the Security Council was dealing with a real situation on the ground in the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia. At the request of that government, a UN preventive deployment has taken place in order to ease tension and suspicion in the region, in particular by monitoring and reporting any developments on that country's borders with Albania and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia that could undermine confidence and stability and threaten its territory. This first ever preventive deployment in the history of United Nations peacekeeping, utilizing a reinforced infantry battalion, military observers and civilian police monitors, forms the Macedonia Command of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), which is also deployed in Bosnia-Herzegovina and

