



United States Mission to the OSCE

Annual Security Review Conference

Working Session IV: Making a Difference on the Ground: The OSCE's Role in Early Warning, Conflict Prevention, Crisis Management, Conflict Resolution, and Post-Conflict Rehabilitation

Delivered by U.S. OSCE Ambassador James S. Gilmore III
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Thank you, Madam Chairman.

As we approach the 10th anniversary of the 2011 OSCE Ministerial decision on the Elements of the Conflict Cycle, we should reflect on the OSCE's role in early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management, conflict resolution, and post-conflict rehabilitation. The recurrent and often predictable nature of the conflict cycle provides opportunities for the OSCE field missions to engage with civil society, government, and other actors to act as an early warning system for conflict, and to engage with all parties to help mediate or resolve the conflict, ameliorate the impact, and support communities in their recovery efforts. As we consider the nature of the conflict cycle and the ways in which the OSCE field missions can support conflict prevention and resolution, we should also consider what steps we need to take to update that mandate in light of the experience of the last 10 years.

Some elements of the 2011 decision were harbingers of action – but only in certain circumstances. The engagement of the Permanent Council and the FSC in 2014, and the hard negotiations on a mandate for the Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, and its ultimate deployment, reflect the commitment of the participating States to crisis response. Are we willing, however, to commit to allow OSCE fact finding missions on the ground in future situations of tension and conflict? Or is delay a prerequisite for some nations, so that they can create new facts on the ground, before international observers are allowed on the scene? As we look at the elements of the conflict cycle, there is no escaping that crisis response is OSCE's strength, but only when there is political will to allow it to happen. Early warning of conflict is a continuing gap; all the elements of conflict resolution are challenging.

The problem is not lack of seminars. The problem is not lack of staff. The problem is lack of political will. So as we re-look at the conflict cycle decision, our approaches must be relevant to the real-world security challenges facing this region, and our real-world experience. The conflict in Ukraine, the protracted conflicts in Georgia and Moldova, and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict represent immediate threats to security in the OSCE region.

We have seen first-hand the ways in which the OSCE field missions can tap into the resources of civil society, media, government, and other actors to disrupt the conflict cycle, prevent the further escalation of conflicts, and promote conflict resolution among affected

communities. The OSCE's network of field presences has contributed to building trust among divided communities and provided opportunities to build progress towards peace at all phases of the conflict cycle. This provides further justification and realistic reasons why the OSCE should continue to support and build up its field missions. But the field missions can only do so when they are free to carry out their mandates. All too often, OSCE field missions are prevented from doing their job by the actions of some participating States that seek to impede the OSCE's important work. Nowhere is this more visible than in Ukraine, where Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) monitors are routinely denied access to Russia-controlled territory, including border crossings, inspection stations, and other areas. The SMM's role in monitoring and reporting on the ground -- a mandate vested in this Mission by the participating States that are here today -- plays a critical element in conflict prevention, via daily reports that detail ceasefire violations and other significant developments. Can anyone here today say that the SMM does not help to prevent, or at least ameliorate this conflict. However, this constant interference with the SMM impedes our ability to fully understand the situation in the conflict zone. SMM monitors risk their lives to provide us accurate and objective reporting on the ground. They signed up knowing they would often be operating in difficult circumstances, but it is absolutely unacceptable for these monitors to be threatened, or harassed, and even fired upon by Russia-led forces. These brave men and women should be able to carry out their important work as safely and securely as possible.

One way that this organization can increase its contributions to all stages of the conflict cycle is by deploying new field missions and programs. This would help us understand the facts on the ground and shine a light on behavior that is inconsistent with OSCE commitments and the Helsinki Final Act. For instance, the United States has long called for the re-establishment of an OSCE field mission in Georgia, as well as a stronger presence throughout the south Caucasus with the mandates, tools, and access required to meet today's security challenges. We hope other participating States will support an OSCE footprint in the region, including with field presences along these lines.

We reiterate our call to develop a mechanism for this Organization to rapidly respond to emerging crises by deploying fact-finding teams for a limited time, with a mandate to provide objective reporting on the situation on the ground back to this international community. That idea is on the table in the Vienna Document modernization context as part of a response to unusual military activities. But the issue is broader and should be discussed as a central element in the context of updating the OSCE's conflict cycle toolbox.

We also join other participating States in inviting the Secretary General to report to the Permanent Council on the implementation of the 2011 decision on the conflict cycle and would welcome his suggestions for better implementing its mandate. We would like to find ways to work more closely with the Parliamentary Assembly. We also encourage participating States to brainstorm their own proposals. But at the end of the day, we must find ways to make this organization's crisis response more timely and effective. Can anyone doubt that all the reports that we are seeing day after day, region after region, underscore the danger in the OSCE region at this particular time, and the help that our field missions can do preserve the peace?

In terms of evolving capabilities, COVID-19 has forced us to adapt in order to continue the important work of this organization. We have collectively found a way to overcome the logistical challenges we face to ensure appropriate representation from all over the OSCE area, including in important forums such as the ASRC. We should apply these lessons by identifying opportunities to use technology to enable virtual participation in conflict cycle discussions from a broad range of stakeholders, to involve frequently under-represented voices. This includes ensuring that women are participating meaningfully in all stages of conflict cycle discussions, just as our speakers have said today, and that their perspectives are incorporated into the decision-making process.

We should recommit to prevent, respond to, and resolve conflicts in a timely way, and to find ways to enhance the capabilities that appear in nascent form in the 2011 decision. We know more now about what works in practice than we did then. Let us use that knowledge to update our conflict cycle toolbox and enhance its effectiveness.

You can be assured of the United States' support, Madam Chairman, for your efforts.

Thank you.