

Ulf Henricsson
Swedish National Defence College

2003-06-10

Keynote speech at ASRC working group D

Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management – one view from the field

Conflict prevention and crisis management is the headline of my speech. Maybe it could also be *Post-conflict Rehabilitation*, but the purpose of post-conflict rehabilitation is to prevent future conflicts and crises; so for me the difference is an academic question with little impact on the concrete work in the field.

A professor who had studied most of the conflicts in the past twenty years told me there are two activities much more important than others if you want success in conflict prevention in a crisis area.

- Demobilize the military
- Demobilize the politicians

I once went to a war - an ethnic and religious conflict, which was the media's but also the political picture of that conflict. What I found was this (picture 1.) – where Mary Kaldor describes the flow of resources in new and old wars. And these structures cannot exist without support from the very top. I think we too often put too much emphasis on ethnic and religious aspects – they are indeed present and often the official reason for the conflict. Every conflict is different from the other, but the basic reasons for them are often the same, social and economic injustice – and

the human being's struggle for power, property and money. I think it is necessary to focus more on these basic reasons.

If we make a wrong analysis of a crisis we will use the wrong instruments to prevent it.

Everybody easily accepts the necessity of the first bullet mentioned but there is a big reluctance to take on the second one. But politicians normally create a conflict –and the military is a part of their toolbox. Clausewitz already had this knowledge. Do not expect “quick fix” solutions - if there are any at all - if you just start with the first bullet point.

At an OSCE Code of Conduct seminar last fall, I got a question from a young officer: “Was it necessary for 300,000 people in our country to die before the IC did the right thing to stop the war” I had to answer: “Yes”. It required almost 300,000 dead to get the IC to use the right instrument. And at that time the instrument was an overwhelming military force. Some years earlier it would have been possible to stop the armed conflict with just a credible threat to use the big stick. An example how costly the lack of conflict prevention can be.

To be successful in negotiation you need a big stick and a lot of patience, but if you have too much patience and no stick you can wait forever.

The OSCE have no big stick but a lot of patience and I think it should be that way and that means the OSCE have to work long-term. If that is not successful, cooperation with someone with a big stick is necessary.

Some years later I was back in the same area working for the OSCE on Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBM) in order to prevent further conflicts in the area. We focused on Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), the OSCE Code of Conduct (CoC) and on restructuring the Armed Forces in order to decrease the defense expenditures.

The first time we implemented a CoC seminar and handed out the CoC documents, the most important signal to me was a question from one of the participants; “Why haven’t we seen these documents before”. A major around the age of 40 put that question!

I asked later for his opinion about a training program for high-ranking officers, because if behavior according to the CoC is not supported from the top it is too optimistic to think the CoC will be observed on lower levels. His answer was frank: “ No idea, remove them, they are stuck in the old system!

The defense expenditures were far too high and blocked economic growth - but the resistance to reductions was great. And obviously the economic structures shown in Kaldor’s picture were still partly present. There was a discussion about whether we had the mandate to work on force restructuring or not. And the politicians and generals also told us that we exaggerated the defense expenditures. They told me that the cost for

- Conscripts
- Barracks
- Food
- Fuel

and a lot of other things was free! The phrase “there is nothing like a free lunch” was not popular. At that time we had just a lot of patience and no stick, so we got stuck.

Building a network inside the IC (Picture 2) gave us the stick. Together with the IC military component we got a strong mandate. It was just a question of using the “right” mandate at the right moment. The network comprised, among others, people from IMF and WB and that gave us information that together with our own information was powerful. Our own was a result from the CSBM “ exchange of military information”. In this way we got a fairly good stick. And what about the carrot? With most

of the old political structures still in place you will have a problem with the carrot, regardless whether the politicians want an individual carrot, which is good for them, or one which is good for their country. For the IC, the second alternative is the only acceptable one but the second carrot is not that effective on the political scene, that is why the stick is necessary.

We made a thorough analysis of the defense budget together with IMF and other parts of the IC. That analysis was supported by an audit. It gave us a good estimate of what was really spent in the defense sector and those figures could be compared with the size of the official budget. This had not been possible with formal cooperation inside the IC because the process to achieve this the official way was too slow and filled with too much prestige. But building a network also takes time and success is completely dependent on personal confidence. You cannot just change people now and then in a network and think that it will still work. The normal six-month tour is far too short to achieve that kind of confidence. In top positions you must have at least two-year stints. I started my job with seven months' experience of the armed conflict and had a good understanding of the background of the conflict– and still I found it very difficult to tackle the task. It took me one year to gain speed.

Through the network we got the tools, now – how to use them and achieve a real reduction in defense expenditures? In my view the IC is often far too “diplomatic” – at least in the mission area we must learn to be more frank and pushy. At a seminar I asked the delegations from the parties which of these two spirals they preferred (picture 3). Guess which one they chose? And as they wanted an improved economy they in fact agreed to lower defense expenditure.

Then I showed this picture (picture 4), which most of the auditorium thought was a flag, but it showed the total economy - 1/3 white, 1/3 grey

and 1/3 black - and it was based on credible facts. There were no great objections to that description but the head of the intelligence service from one of the parties came up to me afterwards and thought the black part was far too small. So the knowledge was obviously there.

The real breakthrough came at a later seminar when we sat down with the parties and analyzed the real costs for a soldier, who according to the parties was free. We did that through asking a lot of questions. What do you want from your soldier – should he be/have

- A salary?
- A uniform?
- A weapon?
- Accommodation?
- Food?
- Trained?
- PFP-compatible?

Suddenly this soldier was not free! The strength at that time, 33,000 soldiers was not affordable but only approximately 10,000. Nobody could argue against the figures. The pressure on the politicians was increased when the figures were presented in the media. Some people think it is not polite that IC “leaks” to the media. I think that it can be done in order to achieve results. If a country’s economy is totally dependent on support from the IC, then the IC has the right to push for results – and the people living in the area support that.

In my view the resistance to reforms was not just caused by bad will but was also a result of lack of knowledge of issues like DCAF, Code of Conduct and the economy. Education and training programs are consequently an important part in conflict prevention.

At that time it was time for me to leave after two years and at the same time another key person in the network also left. The result was that the process came to a standstill for at least half a year. The OSCE need a better-planned succession with overlapping between key persons. Conflict prevention is too important to be blocked by bad personnel planning. Fortunately the “institutional memory” lasted long enough so the work could restart.

Summary

- I think the OSCE strength in conflict prevention is the long-term work. Acute crisis management should be run by an organization with a big stick.
- The OSCE toolbox is good for long-term conflict prevention. But you must focus on just some of them at a time. On which one, is changing, depending on the situation in the area and over time.
- The success of long-term conflict prevention is all dependent on education and training.
- The work on conflict prevention is more effective if it is run in close cooperation with relevant organizations in the IC. That work should build more on networks and less should be run from the top. Sometimes I believe we need CSBMs even inside the IC.
- We must dare to be more frank and make demands - because if you have too much patience you can wait forever.
- It takes time for the individual to build up enough knowledge and confidence in the mission area and longer secondments – at least two years - should be the norm.

Finally - after two years in one mission I could see some improvements. Back 18 months later I realized real changes had taken place. We must realize that there is no “quick fix” in the conflict

prevention branch and it takes time - not years - but generations to go from

- War to stable peace

- Dictatorship to democracy

- Plan economy to market guided economy

But still we must work for a better world – and we are slowly making progress.