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Systemic Disconnects: Why Regional Organizations Fail to Use Early Warning and Response Mechanisms

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To what extent does empirical evidence confirm or question the value of conflict early warning and response for effective practice by regional organizations? This article presents a brief overview of existing key EWR mechanisms and analyzes if, and under what conditions, these mechanisms might be a useful peace and security promotion tool for regional organizations. It looks at three regional and subregional organizations—the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States/Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group in West Africa, and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development in East Africa that have established such conflict EWR mechanisms. Until now, these tools have not been adequately implemented or fully used. The principal reason for this is not a lack of sufficient EWR data. Instead, regional organizations often fail to respond in time to prevent an emerging violent conflict because of weaknesses of the organization and political disagreements within the organization. *KEYWORDS: early warning and response, regional organizations, African Union, Economic Community of West African States, Inter-governmental Authority on Development, peacebuilding.*

AMONG THE MANY ASPECTS IN THE DEBATE ON BROADER CONCEPTS OF global governance, two largely unrelated desires can be identified: First, regional organizations are increasingly requested to provide security by engaging in the prevention of violent conflict and in peacebuilding.[1] Second, since the mid-1990s, conflict early warning and response (EWR) has been conceived as a means of preventing violent conflict in order to protect people's lives.[2] Partly on the insistence by and with the assistance of donor organizations, some regional organizations, especially in Africa, are now beginning to use EWR as a peace and security instrument to prevent crises. This comes at a time when the methodologies of EWR have improved. After a decade and a half of experience, we raise the question in this article whether both of these trends—to implement EWR and for regional organizations to use this tool to prevent conflict—have improved the security of the people. Our research questions are the following:

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the existing EWR mechanisms?
2. Have they been put to appropriate use in predicting and preventing violent conflict by regional organizations?
3. What is the experience of regional organizations in implementing EWR mechanisms?
4. Can regional organizations capitalize on the most recent progress in EWR research?

Our analysis enables us to present preliminary results on two separate fields of inquiry and offer conclusions on their value if combined as in the case of regional and subregional organizations in Africa.

Early Warning and Response Mechanisms: How Do They Work?

Our hypothesis is that the predictive capacities of conflict EWR mechanisms have greatly improved over the past two decades.[3] However, they still suffer from two deficiencies: First, the underlying theories (or, at least, hypotheses) about causal chains toward violence and the role of small events are not always spelled out in EWR models, which are either based on simplified rational choice models or on statistical findings from large-n analysis. The lack of focus on small events is additionally due to a disconnect between the local level (where the majority of violent conflicts take place and where monitoring systems vary a lot or have not systematically been established) and the center of attention of EWR models on global or macrodata. Furthermore, empirical evidence suggests that the link between warning and response remains weak. Response is often lacking, despite clear warning signals. The current conflict in Darfur, for example, was not acted on in a timely fashion, but not because of a lack of information on the emergence of the conflict. All the indications of a major conflict were known. Similarly, the dangers of violent conflicts and wars in the former Yugoslavia, in Rwanda, or in the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait were recognized before the killing started. As a preliminary conclusion we argue that the improvement of early warning is needed, but this alone will not result in closing the warning-response gap. Already in 1997 Alexander L. George and Jane E. Holl argued in their contribution to the Report of the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict that there exists a warning-response gap and that "the design and management of early warning systems should be intimately connected with the task of responding to warning."[4] This warning-response gap has not changed fundamentally since then. In this article, we analyze why this remains to be the case with regard to the three regional and subregional organizations. We argue that this is largely due to several structural deficiencies, among them the still existing disconnect between decisionmakers and the EWR that is

partly due to a "cognitive distance" with regard to the localities of the conflict.[5] Furthermore, even now decisionmakers are often unwilling or unable to act before the emergence of a crisis. In the concluding section, we detail several deficiencies and identify areas for improvement in the establishment and management of EWR as well as in the regional organizations that use EWR.

Conceptualizing Early Warning and Response

Early warning and response can be defined as "systematic data collection, analysis and/or formulation of recommendations, including risk assessment and information sharing," and early response normally "occurs in the latent stages of a perceived potential armed conflict with the aim at reduction, resolution or transformation."[6] EWR tries to estimate the magnitude and timing of risks of emerging threats; it analyzes the nature of these threats and communicates warning analyses to decisionmakers.[7] Early warning systems for the prevention of violent conflict are latecomers compared with their application in such fields as intelligence, military reconnaissance, or humanitarian emergencies. Early response mechanisms are even more recent efforts to close the gap between early warning and early action.

A crucial, yet so far underreflected, issue is the question of who is going to be warned and who is supposed to act on this warning. Is a "recognized authority" (e.g., a regional organization) ideally situated to be the primary addressee of such a warning? Little thought is given to warn those who are about to be attacked.[8] The underlying assumption of most early warning systems is that international actors will take over responsibility as protectors as soon as adequate information is being processed.[9] This assumption, however, has so far not been confirmed in practice. Accordingly, Casey Barrs proposed "to focus more effort on a warning capacity *within* the killing grounds."[10] Such an approach could assist in overcoming the gap between early warning and early response.

Efficient EWR systems can tackle various threats to human security such as: (1) wars and armed conflict; (2) state failure; (3) genocide and politicide; (4) other gross human rights violations; and (5) humanitarian emergencies caused by natural disasters. In this article, we focus primarily on the related threats to the first three categories for which we use, mainly in accordance with the Political Instability Task Force (PITF), the umbrella term "political instability." These are also the types of conflict in which a prevention role is expected from regional organizations. EWR mechanisms in this sense are a part of an overall crisis prevention architecture and are "intended to detect rising tensions headed towards violent conflict."[11]

Categorizing EWR Systems

Despite growing scepticism in the policy and donor communities, research and publications on EWR have experienced an upsurge within the past few years.[12]

Review studies use different ways of categorizing the broad spectrum of EWR models. We find Monty G. Marshall's taxonomy most useful because it focuses on the aims of the models, making them more comparable. He classifies twenty-one early warning models into three types:

1. Conditional and causal models deal with empirical evidence for causal interference between independent variables and violent conflict or political instability;
2. Predictive models try to forecast the outbreak of violence in a time span of one to five years. They focus on selected variables and process indicators or event-based information;
3. General risk and capacity models are used to rank countries from weak to strong related to social problems, political conflict, and poor state performance.[13]

In our compilation (Table 1) we take up Marshall's categories, albeit with two specifications: (1) in order to keep the vast amount of general risk and assessment models under control, we divide them between those that aim at rankings or performance ratings and those that aim at targeted intervention;[14] and (2) we include in-depth investigative research and intelligence as an important additional category—a qualitative component that is regarded as highly valuable by practitioners as well as country and area specialists. In a review of EWR mechanisms, we list five major models: (1) five predictive models (mainly run by the PITF); (2) a dozen institutions that rank and rate states according to their risks and capacities; (3) about twenty efforts to integrate risk and capacity assessments into early response models; (4) several private companies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and government agencies that offer or use investigative case study research; and (5) intelligence for early warning.[15]

Selected EWR Models, Tools, and Mechanisms

What are the assumptions underlying the different early warning projects? Which methodologies are used? Within these five categories, we have singled out one prominent example each in order to illustrate how these models, tools, and mechanisms work.

Causal models: The greed model of rebellion. Different causal models are currently competing to explain ethnic rebellion, civil war, and state failure. These models use substantially informed and valid indicators for risk and capacity assessments and sometimes also utilize the focus of attention within investigative research and intelligence. However, the problem remains that the findings of causal models are contested. Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler's greed model of rebellion—a model that has been soundly criticized—may

Table 1 Early Warning and Response Regarding Violent Conflict and State Fragility (selected models, tools, and mechanisms)

Institution and Lead Researchers Classification	Name of the Model and URL Link
A. Conditional and Causal Factor Models (with predictive qualities and implications)	
World Bank Development Research Group and Oxford University—Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler; ACAD, IGO	Greed model of rebellion (opportunity structures); available at http://econ.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTRESEARCH/EXTPROGRAMS/EXTCONFLICT/0,,menuPK:477971~pagePK:64168176~piPK:64168140 ~theSitePK:477960,00.html.[a]
B. Predictive Models	
Political Instability Task Force (PITF), Center for Global Policy—Monty G. Marshall; ACAD, GOV	PITF global model and PITF African Instability model; available at http://globalpolicy.gmu.edu/pitf/pitfp5.htm.[b]
C. Risk and Capacity Assessments (rankings and performance ratings)	
The Fund for Peace and Foreign Policy; ACAD, NGO	Failed States Index, based on the Conflict Assessment System Tool (CAST); available at www.fundforpeace.org/web/ index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=99&Itemid=140.[c]
D. Risk and Capacity Assessments with Early Response Component (event analysis)	
Carleton University, Canadian Government—Gerald Cosette; ACAD, GOV	Country Indicators for Foreign Policy (CIFP); available at www.carleton.ca/cifp/.[d]
E. CrisisWatch Lists Based on Investigative Case Study Research or Intelligence	
International Crisis Group, Belgium; PRIV	CrisisWatch; available at www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=12000&l=1.

Source: Herbert Wulf and Tobias Debiel, "Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanisms: Tools for Enhancing the Effectiveness of Regional Organisations?" Crisis States Working Papers Series 2, no. 49, Appendix 1, 2009, pp. 31–35, available at www.crisisstates.com/download/wp/wpSeries2/WP49.2.pdf.

Notes: a. Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "On Economic Causes of Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers* 50, no. 4 (1998): 563–573; Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "The Challenge of Reducing the Global Incidence of Civil War," Copenhagen Consensus Challenge Paper (Oxford, UK: Centre for the Study of African Economies, 2004).

b. Jack A.Goldstone, Robert H. Bates, Ted Robert Gurr, Michael Lustik, Monty G. Marshall, Jay Ulfelder, and Mark Woodward, "A Global Forecasting Model of Political Instability," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC, September 2005.

c. Fund for Peace, *The Twelve Indicators of Cast*, 2008, available at www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=99&Itemid=140.

d. Country Indicators for Foreign Policy, *Indicator Descriptions*, 2008, available at www.carleton.ca/cifp/.

ACAD = academic; GOV = governmental; IGO = international governmental organization; NGO = nongovernmental organization; PRIV = private organization.

help to illustrate this argument. This model takes up the robust finding that civil war is strongly correlated with a low gross domestic product (GDP) per capita. At the same time, the model argues that "grievance" is not a decisive factor for the outbreak of violence, but it is the opportunity of organizing a military rebellion that matters. The absence of viable economic alternatives and the absence of formal education make it easy to recruit young men.[16] Possible sources of rebel income are external funding (e.g., through diasporas), extortion rackets, and the control of the extraction of minerals.[17] As a consequence, the availability of resources as a means of "fuelling war" measured by the extent of primary commodity exports became a major concern for crisis prevention and also for early warning. Collier and Hoeffler stress the predictive implications of their model repeatedly.[18] In particular, they argue that, where primary commodity exports make up more than 30 percent of the GDP, a country is three times more violence prone compared to a situation where primary commodity exports make up less than 10 percent of the GDP. This model is based in the World Bank and not only has influenced the Bank's policy, but also discussion in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee regarding conflict and state fragility. Also, it has had effects on the so-called Kimberley process, a joint government, industry, and civil society initiative to stem the flow of conflict diamonds, and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) that sets a global standard for transparency in oil, gas, and mining.

Predictive models of the Political Instability Task Force. The most advanced predictive models have been developed by the PITF (formerly known as the State Failure Task Force) that regularly advises the US government on issues of instability in developing countries. They are based on the empirical findings of a data set that attempts to explain events of political instability and that is mostly available on the Internet.[19] A major disclaimer, however, is that the conceptual and factual basis of the evaluation of their forecasting models is not fully disclosed and, thus, not reproducible for external observers.

The PITF profiled cases of instability within a short-term horizon from two years prior to the onset of instability. To its own surprise, the PITF team found that "relatively simple models, involving just a handful of variables and no complex interactions, accurately classify 80% or more of the instability onsets and stable countries in the historical data."[20] The PITF found out that hybrid regimes were substantially more prone to violence than full autocracies or full democracies. Among hybrid regimes, partial democracies with particularistic ethnically shaped political competition and religious or regional agendas (factionalism) were particularly vulnerable.

The PITF model thus brings politics back in with regard to early warning models. It is quite telling that these variables do not play a major role in most of the risk and capacity assessments used by international governmental and regional organizations since they touch on sensitive issues of sovereignty and

could have far-reaching political implications for early response.

Risk and capacity assessments (ranking and performance): The Failed States Index. One of the most influential performance ratings was first published in 2005 by *Foreign Policy* magazine and the US Fund for Peace: the so-called Failed States Index (FSI). This index ranks 177 countries worldwide according to their level of fragility. It uses twelve indicators (social, economic, and political), which focus on changes that might lead to an escalation of the situation. In contrast to other projects, the FSI is not based on existing data sets, but is created out of a monthly evaluation of media reports from more than 150 domestic and international sources.[21] The FSI does not claim to forecast state failure or violent conflict, but is designed to assess a state's vulnerability.

A number of similar ratings have been developed that are regularly picked up by the media and are often a resource for decisionmaking in multilateral institutions such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) or the subregional organization, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Marshall optimistically argues that the overall assessments of the different projects match or mostly match for 80 percent of the countries, leaving serious differences for only 20 percent.[22] At the same time, 20 percent is quite a substantial number if one assumes that it is fairly easy to identify through common sense those countries that are regarded as very stable or very unstable. It would thus be helpful if the different projects spelled out more clearly the conditions, time horizons, and criteria under which their validity could be put to the test.

Risk and capacity assessments with early response component: Carleton University's Country Indicators for Foreign Policy. Research institutions and government agencies have jointly developed some prominent risk and capacity assessments with an early response component. Among them are the Stability Assessment Framework, which was developed for Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs,[23] and the Spelten Model for Early Warning Indicators, used by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The two most advanced projects have been FAST (Frühanalyse von Spannungen und Tatsachenermittlung; Early Recognition and Analysis of Tensions), developed for the Swiss Development Agency (DEZA) and other donors,[24] and the Country Indicators for Foreign Policy Project (CIFP), which has its home base at the Norman Patterson School for International Affairs at Carleton University and serves to inform the Canadian government. FAST used quantitative event data analysis and the FAST tension barometer as well as more qualitative analysis provided by fact-finding missions, local information networks, and an international expert network. It never managed to effectively integrate the data pool with thematic reports and had to close down in 2008.[25]

The CIFP is based on a broad range of structural indicators that are clustered within six categories (rule of law, human rights, government transparency and accountability, government and market efficiency, democratic participation, and political stability and violence).[26] The focus of the project is

on governance and democratization, complemented by indicators in the socioeconomic and security dimension. Questions of identity and ethnicity as well as external factors, however, are mostly neglected. According to the project's assumption, violent conflict and state failure are most probable if a weak state apparatus is controlled by a repressive regime. Besides structural data, the CIFP also monitors and analyzes events that could worsen the situation. Using the "events monitoring methodology," each event is assessed in its intensity and its correlation with violent conflict. On this basis, the generation of negative, positive, and most likely scenarios is feasible.[27] These types of EWR models have clearly influenced the design of the Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the regional organization in the Horn of Africa (see below).

Investigative research and intelligence: The CrisisWatch List of the International Crisis Group. Research on EWR mechanisms has thus far not systematically evaluated the contribution made by investigative case study research and intelligence. This is partly due to the fact that most of the intelligence reports provided by commercial or governmental agencies are not accessible to the public or are geared to business risks rather than to human security threats. At the same time, it may also be due to the fact that early warning analysis and intelligence have frequently been viewed as separate fields. Intelligence information can be used or misused for narrow self-interest, but may also serve the public good of early warning.

In the field of EWR, the International Crisis Group (ICG), basing its work on investigative field research that is close to intelligence, can be regarded as a success story. CrisisWatch features an open source CrisisWatch database and works with reports, briefings, the *CrisisWatch* bulletin, and "crisis alerts" that cover about sixty-five conflict and potential conflict situations annually. Its target audience is policymakers, researchers, journalists, and practitioners and its website is widely used by them. Policy recommendations or scenario building accompanies most reports.[28] Provision of otherwise unobtainable information from field research and the translation of results into recommendations and even lobbying strategies make the ICG an important player in EWR. Its reports are often a source of information for decisionmakers.

Regional Organizations

Do decisionmakers in regional organizations receive the required information on conflicts and, if so, how do they react? We offer the following four hypotheses:

1. Early warning often seems alarmist and sometimes offensive to governments.

2. Cognitive biases[29] on the side of analysts and decisionmakers may hinder an appropriate reaction.
3. Regional organizations often fail to respond in time to prevent violent conflict not because of a lack of information on an emerging conflict, but due to several barriers or weaknesses of the organization; namely, (1) political differences and lack of common values within organizations, (2) hesitation to overrule the principle of noninterference into internal matters of the state, (3) lack of capacities to intervene, and (4) unclear and competitive missions and geographic reach of regional organizations.
4. Global and regional EWR initiatives tend to address policymakers at the top level and seem to make too little use of the strength and coping capacities at the local level. This inappropriate inclusion of the local level leads to overlooking the dynamics of violence at the local-national-transborder interface. Effective EWR mechanisms need to be based on strengthening local coping capacities against the outbreak of violence.

The Enhanced Role of Regional Organizations

Regional organizations have acquired new relevance during the past two decades, particularly regarding peace, security, development, and the prevention or mitigation of conflict. Since the end of the Cold War, the blockage within the UN has changed and, with the UN system increasingly overburdened, the "new regionalism"[30] seems to rely more and more on regional and subregional organizations. However, experience shows that the rationale that regional organizations should have an immediate interest in promoting peace in their regions is not always confirmed by empirical realities. Regional organizations disagree and often quarrel about the best approach to prevent violent conflict.

As a result of reforms, a number of regional and subregional organizations, especially in Africa and Europe, have engaged in intensified activities for the promotion of peace. In other regions, regional and subregional organizations play a much less pronounced role (e.g., in the Middle East and in Asia).

The role of regional organizations contains a built-in tension. Regionalization challenges the narrow concepts of national sovereignty since the organization is meant to take over certain state functions. At the same time, the member states anxiously guard their sovereignty and continue to create more and more elaborate regional organizations and expand their responsibilities.[31] In any case, early warning mechanisms are set up to enable regional organizations to monitor critical developments. The interesting question is: Do regional or subregional organizations depend on established EWR mechanisms to effectively act either as peace promoter or conflict preventer?

At present, it would be an exaggeration to describe the regional organiza-

tions' peace and security functions as an effective regional conflict management regime. Of course, the security dimensions, and thus the task for regional groupings, vary greatly in the different regions and security arrangements are not equally relevant for all regions. Below, we discuss EWR systems for three regional and subregional organizations where they have been implemented.

The African Union: Adoption of Interventionist Policies

When the African heads of state launched the African Union (AU) in 1999, they committed the organization to promote peace, security, and stability of the continent; to promote democracy and good governance, due process, the rule of law and human rights; and to engage in effective intervention under grave circumstances. At the same time, the vision of the AU is to uphold and defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its members.[32]

On the basis of its charter, the AU has engaged in several peace operations and has adopted an interventionist policy. It seems that a rudimentary African security architecture is emerging. At its top is the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC), the political decisionmaking body consisting of fifteen rotating members, which is an organ "for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts." It is intended to be "a collective security and early-warning arrangement to facilitate timely and efficient response to conflict and crisis situations in Africa."[33] Under the PSC, four pillars are being formed:

- An intelligence-gathering and analysis center, the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), which relates to subregional EWR systems;
- The Military Staff Committee under whose guidance five brigades of the African Standby Force (ASF) are established: Economic Community of West African States' Standby Brigade (ECOBRIG/WESBRIG); Southern African Development Community Standby Brigade (SADCBRIG); East African Standby Brigade (EASBRIG); the North African Brigade; and the Central African Brigade. The ASF consists of military, police, and civil capabilities;
- The Panel of the Wise, an external mediation and advisory body of five members, one from each region of the ASF;
- The African Peace Facility Fund, a special financial fund jointly financed by the African Union and the European Union (EU).[34]

The AU's policy of intervention represents a paradigm shift from the Organization of African Unity's concept of nonintervention. However, the AU is still hamstrung in its decisionmaking by a number of barriers, not the least of which are the political divergences over the criteria of when and where to intervene. The decision to intervene is not primarily a question of the availability of information on potential or urgent violent conflicts, the major purpose of

EWR systems, but of disagreement about the application of the relevant articles of the AU charter.

The AU's military capacities are not very strong. The ASF is still in its early stages. The AU wants to have up to five regional brigades, with a strength of at least 3,000 troops each, originally planned to operate as an African rapid-reaction force by June 2010 and capable of deployment anywhere on the continent. Notwithstanding positive developments, the ASF faces significant obstacles of implementation. This is particularly illustrated by the varied pace in the respective regions. The AU was, or is, engaged in four military peacekeeping or peacebuilding missions: Burundi, Darfur, Somalia, and Comoros. The first three operations made clear that the AU has some potential for peacekeeping, but it presently is not able to carry out multidimensional stabilization operations. It is too early to pass a definitive judgment on the AU's peacekeeping potential, but it is obvious that it has limitations.

The AU Continental Early Warning System, initiated in 2002, is intended—according to the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union—for "early responses to contain crisis situations so as to prevent them from developing into full-blown conflicts."[35] Only a few specialists have been employed so far. Thus, the early warning system is far from functioning. It consists of two components: (1) an observation and monitoring center ("the Situation Room") at the AU headquarters, which is responsible for data collection and analysis on the basis of appropriate early warning indicators; and (2) parallel observation and monitoring units at the subregional level, which are supposed to link up to the Situation Room. The main instruments of the CEWS are reports, compiled on the basis of open source information that identifies potentially dangerous activity. These reports are meant to function as the basis for the Peace and Security Council decisions, particularly for the possible deployment of the ASF. This setup of the AU's early warning system places it into the type of risk assessment models with an early warning component (Type D, see Table 1).

The CEWS was planned to deliver standardized and timely early warning reports as well as effective policy options as of 2009. An evaluation of the CEWS in 2006 (published in 2008) made clear how much remains to be done, particularly linking up to the emerging regional EWR systems.[36] According to a study by the European Parliament, the CEWS is understaffed and underfunded and thus seriously constrained in its activity.[37] Considering that the subregional EWR mechanisms are still at the infant stage, the current early warning capacity of the AU is not potent.

ECOWAS/ECOMOG: A Model for Others?

The Economic Community of West African States is primarily tasked with the promotion of economic integration, but conflict management has become in-

creasingly relevant in recent years. ECOWAS states have ratified the 1999 Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security, which contains an elaborate conflict solution mechanism. The organization created a special body for crisis prevention and support of democracy and due process. The Mediation and Security Council, made up of nine members, is especially relevant. Article 10 of the protocol authorizes all forms of intervention. Article 25 permits the council to become active when violent conflict emerges, humanitarian threats evolve, the subregion is destabilized, and serious and massive human rights violations take place as well as in situations where a democratically elected government is overthrown or will be overthrown.[38]

The 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance is devoted to "sub-regional peace and security observation systems" and "early warning systems," leading to the establishment of an Observation and Monitoring Centre (OMC) at the ECOWAS Commission.[39] The Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) was the first African regional initiative on peacekeeping when its troops intervened to establish law and order after the crisis and failure of diplomatic negotiations in Liberia in 1990. Further missions in Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, and again in Liberia have established ECOMOG as a serious regional player. Since 2002, ECOWAS has (if only unsuccessfully) been active in peacekeeping in Côte d'Ivoire; this mission later gave way to the UN Mission in Côte d'Ivoire.

The type of EWR mechanisms described in Table 1 under the classification of predictive models (e.g., the PITF) are of relevance for ECOWAS. Despite its ambitious goals, ECOWAS has only limited operational resources at its disposal to implement its West Africa Early Warning Network (WARN). Its budget mainly goes toward financing the fixed costs of the secretary's office staff. There is a meager regional fund that finances projects in member states. Compared to other African regional organizations, ECOWAS has evolved into a front-runner for security and political integration. Even though the rationale of its interventions oscillates between collective security and partisan hegemony, the regional organization has constituted itself as a capable actor.

The ECOWAS mechanism establishes not only an OMC at the headquarters, but four observation and monitoring zones with monitoring units within the subregion (zonal bureaus) as well. The West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) has been engaged by ECOWAS to assist in data collection for the purpose of early warning. WANEP is a subregional civil society organization based in Ghana. Since 2002, when a memorandum of understanding was signed, WANEP has been officially charged to facilitate the ECOWAS Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN). WANEP collects data on human security issues (notably human rights and democracy), food shortages, unemployment, arms flows and civil-military relations, and droughts and

flooding. WANEP processes and analyzes the data and prepares reports for the OMC at the ECOWAS headquarters in Abuja.

An evaluation of the EWR system in August 2008 concluded "that the system is on the right course."[40] The ECOWAS system is an innovative approach insofar as it combines data collection by civil society and government officials. On this basis, it belongs to the type of EWR models described above as risk assessment and early warning as well as investigative research by civil society (Types D and E, see Table 1). In 2010, WANEP published its first reports, and, as of August 2010, "Daily Highlights Reports" are available for the period March to 8 May.[41] It seems a component of the AU CEWS is in an emergent state in the ECOWAS region.

IGAD: Conflict Prone, Divided, and Weak

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development has a mission to assist member states to achieve food security and environmental protection; promote and maintain peace, security, and humanitarian affairs; and facilitate economic cooperation and integration. IGAD has no special organ that is responsible for the facilitation of peace and security. It has formulated an extensive strategy for the implementation of the various programs.[42] Since the Horn of Africa is a region that is haunted by conflicts ranging from intrastate and interstate to cross-border community conflicts, a Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism was established in 2000. The rationale of CEWARN is to systematically anticipate violent conflicts and respond in a timely and effective manner. This, it is argued in the mission statement, is more effective and would also prove much cheaper in terms of both human and material resources than dealing with full-blown crises.

CEWARN is funded from regular member states' contributions and supported by development donors such as the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and US Agency for International Development (USAID). IGAD, like several other regional institutions, should take the lead on conflict management, but it is severely hampered by wars and conflict among its members. Considering the fact that within IGAD are found Somalia as a collapsed state, Sudan with its wars and defiance of international conflict-moderating action, Ethiopia and Eritrea in a state of no-peace-no-war, and Uganda with its northern conflict with the Lord's Resistance Army, the impossible conflict-mediating task of the regional organization becomes apparent.[43] Problems are exacerbated by the fact that both Kenya and Ethiopia aspire to regional leadership, which, for example, led to the decision to place the headquarters of the East African Brigade in Addis Ababa and the planning element in Nairobi.[44]

With the exception of the EWR system CEWARN, the security architecture of IGAD actually is not in an implementing stage. However, despite all these difficulties, IGAD has established its EWR system, which concentrates

on monitoring pastoral conflicts. The mandate of CEWARN is to "receive and share information concerning potentially violent conflicts as well as their outbreak and escalation in the IGAD region."[45] With the mandate to predict tensions and conflicts, CEWARN combines elements of the predictive model and the risk assessment models (Types B and D, see Table 1).

Because of a number of acute inter- and intrastate conflicts in the region, CEWARN initially adopted an incremental approach by focusing exclusively on two pastoralist conflicts. Its ultimate aim is to report on all violent conflicts in a broadly defined human security area and not just on national or state security. Operationally, CEWARN established a network of field monitors, country coordinators, national research institutes, and conflict EWR units at the national level. It began its work in two pilot areas on pastoral conflicts in the cross-border areas of Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Sudan as well as in the second cross-border areas of Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somalia. CEWARN uses a set of fifty-two sociopolitical indicators for two types of reports: (1) Violent Incident Reports with indicators on armed clashes, raids, protest demonstrations, and other crimes; and (2) indicators for reports on the presence and status of communal relations, civil society activities, economic activities, governance and media, natural disasters, safety and security, and social services.[46]

CEWARN also recognizes that there are several continuing operational gaps in implementation, including an inadequate information base and the lack of an effective response component. The capabilities and funding of CEWARN as well as those of IGAD are limited. The clearinghouse at the IGAD headquarters in Djibouti employs a small number of staff. It is intended to report on pastoral conflicts in all member states within the present planning period (2007–2011). IGAD still needs to decide if CEWARN operations should expand to cover other types of conflict.

Conclusion and Recommendations

We conclude that the suboptimal implementation of EWR and the still existing warning-response gap lead not only to waste of scarce resources, but also to unsatisfactory results in conflict prevention.

Effectiveness and Usefulness of EWR Mechanisms

The richness of the various models of EWR is impressive. At the same time, looking at the large number of the various data collections, conflict predictions, and assessments, there is considerable duplication and overlap of efforts. The methodologies of data collection, identification of relevant indicators, and prediction of conflict have greatly improved. The future of predictive models seems to lie in a combination of indicator- and event-based quantitative analysis and qualitative or configurative analysis that relies on structural analogies

and common patterns among cases. This might further increase the precision of early warning.

But what does this imply for practitioners? We have identified four shortcomings of EWR:

1. *The difficult cases and the small incidents*. Predictive models give precise forecasts regarding stable countries and fairly precise forecasts with regard to very unstable countries. But it is difficult to achieve truly accurate forecasts on moderately stable countries. The percentage of cases not predicted is quite substantial. Related to that point, Frederick Barton and Karin von Hippel rightly state that there is little knowledge about the impact of small events, which in some cases trigger the outbreak of major violence and in others do not.[47] In most models, the establishment of threshold criteria and "tipping points" is ad hoc and not based on sufficiently explained procedures.

2. *The causes of conflict*. The correlation of selected indicators with violent conflict does not reveal causal chains and, thus, is of only limited relevance for intervention strategies. Let us assume that a country with high infant mortality, a hybrid regime, and state discrimination is on the alert list. Would large-scale health programs, political dialogue, or a good governance program and the threat of sanctions be conducive to early response? Little is known about the underlying theory of such programs, but the assumptions have to be spelled out before effective preventive action can be taken.

3. *The local space*. Since most of the models, as well as the risk and capacity assessments, rely on quantitative data available over long time frames, questions of civil society development, participation, or local governance and dispute resolution are not adequately incorporated and tested. There is a disconnect between the events at the local (micro) level and the highly aggregated data and information collection of most EWR systems at the global (macro) level. Regional and subregional organizations are potentially well positioned to bridge this gap and suggest the level at which action should take place if the challenges go beyond the capacities of local and national authorities. However, given the vastness of the regions, the central response to micro-level situations even at the subregional level as in West and East Africa (if the regional organizations would respond) would be an inappropriate substitute for local-level monitoring, warning, and response.[48] Consequently, functioning EWR mechanisms must be based on the "subsidiary" principle; that is, in a bottom-up approach, the lowest level should be the starting point, entrusting the next higher level only when the local authorities are not capable of handling the conflict.[49] Furthermore, "local space" has to move from the margins to the center of international attention. As Oliver Richmond points out, local actors and international actors as well as the state increasingly negotiate in local arenas and these kinds of hybrid encounters become crucial for the peacebuilding praxis. Instead of continuing the typical "studying up" with a focus on the state

and international actors, it thus might be advisable to follow his recommendation of "studying down" the local.[50] Translated to the EWR context, it would mean that the study of conflict patterns and dynamics would have to start with the specifics of each local arena and then put them in the wider context of the local-national-international interface that is decisive for adequate response mechanisms.

4. *The possibility for replication.* It needs to be emphasized that most of the models and mechanisms do not clearly spell out under what conditions they can be regarded as effective. The different projects should define more clearly the conditions, time horizons, and criteria under which their validity could be put to the test.

The rationale of most early warning systems is that international actors (the UN, regional organizations, coalitions of the willing, neighboring states, etc.) will react when information about potential of violent conflict becomes available. However, this assumption of the need for dissemination of information is not realistic. Otherwise, actions would have been taken in cases where information on emerging conflicts was readily available, as in the above-mentioned cases of Darfur, the former Yugoslavia, and Rwanda.

Regarding the addressee of early warning, the literature points out that those likely to be affected by conflict have to be warned. We want to stress that early warning systems have to define clearly whom they are going to alert, and who is expected to respond at the different levels of authority. In local environments, the people affected deserve to be partners and subjects instead of merely objects of prevention.

The future of EWR lies in the consolidation of advanced models, the intensified sharing of data collections (despite academic competition and political barriers), and the public provision of relevant information. Newly established or planned EWR systems could make use of existing systems instead of reinventing the wheel. This would enable the allocation of scarce resources to: (1) the event-based and actor-oriented analysis of escalation processes and the development of scenarios and alternative response strategies that take into account possible cognitive biases; and (2) the monitoring of the local space that has so far been mainly neglected by the larger research projects.

Hesitations to Engage in Early Response: Explaining the Warning-Response Gap

There are several reasons why EWR is not used effectively and why a warning-response gap is so apparent in many conflicts.

1. *Institutional rigidity and cognitive biases.* Conflict escalation processes and, in particular, the role of triggers and single events is still underresearched.

While structural indicators fit into relatively simple models, the escalation of a tense situation into violence "does not result from the linear summation of a neatly defined set of causes, but from interactions among multiple phenomena in a complex system with several levels of organisation."[51] Patrick Meier argues that most EWR mechanisms are based on "hierarchical structures" that cannot adequately cope with nonlinear developments.[52] As a remedy, it would mean that at certain stages EWR mechanisms must address not only a vaguely defined "international community," but find ways to inform different levels of potential actors all the way down to the local level. According to Lawrence Woocher, more accurate models and a change in communication and the structures of organizations will not suffice because they do not reflect the ways in which individuals and groups process information and make decisions in the shadow of risk and uncertainty.[53] Most EWR models are based on the prevalent "rational actor" model. This model, however, does not take into account that individuals and groups are prone to "mental errors caused by our simplified information processing strategies."[54] These arguments suggest that the effectiveness of EWR systems is affected not only by the quality of alerts, but also by institutional factors and cognitive biases. Such biases can skew the empirical evidence and, thus, the reliability of the early warning risk assessment or forecast. Some of these biases result from self-referential logics of national and international institutions that are far away from the places where violent conflict evolves—a constellation that can well be captured with the term "cognitive distance."

2. *The disconnect between early warning advisers and early action decisionmakers*. Even if an early warning system is accurate and timely, it does not automatically lead to timely action. Laurie Nathan convincingly argues that "above all, it must be useful to the senior officials who are responsible for making decisions on early action. The system will have scant value if its outputs are not tailored precisely to meet their needs."[55] The various decisionmakers who deal with governance and human rights abuses, reconstruction programs, mediation in conflicts, deployment of peacekeepers, planning and implementation of humanitarian and military programs, or preventive diplomacy—all of whom are engaged in peace and security missions—need tailormade information rather than general reports on the potential emergence of violent conflict. Specific information for each conflict is required.

3. *Political interest*. Probably the most important structural deficiency in the insufficient use of EWR by regional organizations is that governments do not want to or are unable to react. Governments are usually quite aware of acute or emerging major conflicts. Often they are the cause of this conflict. Sophisticated early warning indicators are not needed to warn about such conflicts. However, governments are usually not interested in the fact that their abuses of civil rights and the violation of human rights are documented or acted on. Thus, despite mandating secretariats of regional organizations, this

might only be lip service. In practice, certain governments make sure that the relevant regional bodies remain weak in early warning, thereby preventing early response. Furthermore, looking at the differences of the political systems among the member states of regional organizations and the lack of common values, it is no surprise that unified decisions on when and how to intervene to prevent a conflict can only seldom be agreed on in such organizations. Governments hesitate to overrule the principle of noninterference in internal matters of their neighboring states. Donor governments and organizations who support the establishment of EWR mechanisms in regional organizations usually emphasize the need for capacity building. While it is correct to assume that early warning capacities are not very strong, the more pressing problem is the lack of political consensus on possible action and response to warnings.

IGAD, although also a region compromised by conflicts, has chosen a different approach. Due to the political and security situation, IGAD was not in a position to develop a functioning and effective region-wide EWR concept. As a compromise, IGAD presently restricts its fully developed indicator and report-based EWR to two pilot areas. This political compromise has both costs and benefits. Certainly, the declared intention of the EWR system of predicting violent conflict cannot be met. This would require a region-wide approach. Thus, numerous conflicts and tensions with a potential to turn into violent conflict remain unobserved and unreported by the official IGAD CEWARN system. However, the concentration on two local cross-border conflicts has the advantage of collecting the relevant information at the local level. Thus, the strong criticism against many EWR models, of largely ignoring the strength of the local space in mediating conflict, is less relevant in the case of IGAD's two pilot projects.

4. *Lacking capacities and inefficient allocation and use of resources*. The field of EWR is characterized by a striking duplication and overlap of data collection in numerous different models. In particular, we have witnessed an "inflation" of relatively closely related capacity and risk assessment models within the past few years, resulting in duplication and waste of resources. At the same time, there is a remarkable gap between the high ambitions and far-reaching goals of EWR projects and the status of their actual implementation. This gap is not least mirrored in the relatively poorly developed early warning systems in Africa.

Our summary of the key features of three regional organizations illustrates that they have chosen mixed models that, however, strongly relate to already existing models with proven academic and practical background. Given the vastness of the regions covered by the organizations and the enormous problems in the broadly defined area of peace and security, particularly human security, a large number of staff is needed at the local, national, subregional, and regional level to adequately collect data and report on emerging conflicts.

However, these staffs are not available in any of the existing systems. Capacities are still extremely limited.

Recommendations

Are there any recommendations for research and policymaking that follow from our analysis? We feel that the following aspects, guided by the assumption spelled out in the introduction, deserve particular attention: as we have shown, EWR research has been quite successful in gathering and assessing macrodata. At the same time, its models have so far only marginally included the impact of small events and assessments of the local level. More refined models will have to take these dimensions into account in order to come to valid and reliable predictions and address their potential impact. Since local spaces differ greatly from national ones, more creative methodological and praxeological approaches of integrating local knowledge will be required. Observation of day-to-day communication is required, including the use of stereotypes or even aggressive notions in local media.

At the same time, gathering local information has to be selective in order to not overburden EWR systems. It is essential to not rely on false assumptions in order to respond adequately to upcoming threats, as a study for the AU rightly suggests:

> The lack of information on within-country variation is not necessarily a limiting factor in macro-system monitoring activities as societal conflicts that occur in specific localities should be monitored by local authorities and managed by local agencies. It is only when disturbances span localities and involve coordination among local groups in larger activities that directly challenge state authorities or the state's conflict management capabilities that the larger system should be alerted and ready to assist.[56]

Furthermore, regional and subregional organizations thus far have not only fared poorly with regard to implementing EWR, but also have lacked a clear self-understanding on (1) how they relate to the national and local level; and (2) how they link up to global monitoring and response mechanisms. Developing concepts on the precise role of regional organizations in the nexus between the national and the global space could also avoid duplication with regard to EWR databases and lead to a cost-saving exchange of information. Without doubt, a variety of regional settings and solutions need to be adapted to these specific circumstances. At the same time, effective response is to a large extent about the question of which agency on which level should take over responsibility in a crisis. It may be doubtful whether responses can truly be harmonized. But a minimum goal could be to avoid both (1) coming to contradictory conclusions on responses to an emerging crisis; and (2) displaying a wait-and-see attitude by shifting responsibility ad hoc to other levels.

Regional actors might be particularly qualified to act as intermediaries. Within the framework of subsidiarity, they would seek to strengthen local and national capacities, but also be prepared to step in if the authorities at this level are obviously inadequate or prone to failure. If regional capacities do not suffice to handle such a situation or if political will to react is lacking, ringing the international alarm bell would be of crucial importance. Admittedly, those ideal models of a division of labor at the various levels of intervention never work in practice. At the same time, crisis situations necessitate adequately tailored fora at the interface of these different levels. Regional EWR models could have a cutting edge in pushing forward these requirements for communication and coordination and avoid the present ambitions of regional organizations in developing their own scenarios and recipes for action. 🌐

Notes

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4. Alexander L. George and Jane E. Holl, "The Warning-Response Problem and Missed Opportunities in Preventing Diplomacy," a Report to the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, New York, 1997, available at www.wilsoncenter.org/subsites/ccpdc/pubs/warn/frame.htm.

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20. Goldstone et al., "A Global Forecasting Model of Political Instability."

21. Pauline H. Baker, "Lessons Learnt from Iraq—Where Do We Go From Here?" Iraq Report No. 6 (Washington, DC: Fund for Peace, 2006), p. 20.

22. Marshall, "Fragility, Instability, and the Failure of States," p. 12.

23. Suzanne Verstegen, Luc van de Goor, and Jeroen de Zeeuw, *The Stability Assessment Framework: Designing Integrated Responses for Security, Governance, and Development* (The Hague: Clingendael Institute, 2005).

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