Exploring
Subregional
CONFLICT
Opportunities for
Conflict Prevention

edited by

Chandra Lekha Sriram
and Zoe Nielsen

A Project of the International Peace Academy

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Foreword

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THIS COLLECTION OF SUBREGIONAL CASE STUDIES AND POLICY RECOMMENDA-
tions concludes the International Peace Academy's three-year research
and policy project titled From Promise to Practice: Strengthening UN
Capacities for the Prevention of Violent Conflict. The project sought to
identify opportunities to strengthen the conflict prevention capacity
within the United Nations system and beyond, with an emphasis on
structural prevention, in particular relating to development and capacity
building.

We at the IPA hope that readers of this book will learn as much from
the cases as we have. The book builds upon an earlier set of well-
received individual country case studies—*From Promise to Practice:
Strengthening UN Capacities for the Prevention of Violent Conflict*—
developed by the IPA. That book examines nine country cases in detail,
exploring the challenges faced by the UN and other actors in situations
ranging from those where the threat of violent conflict is still nascent to
those of postconflict peacebuilding. The studies illustrate the importance
of partnership—between the UN, relevant regional organizations, key
nongovernmental organizations with useful local networks, and experts
(academic and otherwise). They also clearly illustrate the importance of
carefully tailored context-specific strategies, rather than cookie-cutter
solutions. However, the cases also highlight the degree to which threats
within a given country cannot be viewed in isolation, demonstrating the
importance of adopting broader subregional approaches.

This current set of case studies constitutes an effort at understanding the causes of conflict and possible responses in four subregions. Although each of the subregions shares some common causes of conflict with the others, we also identify specific challenges within each. Viewing these challenges across borders, rather than solely within states, is important for preventive actors for several reasons. First, because of the history of state formation and decolonization, states within a subregion often share problems that may engender state weakness and conflict, such as corruption (including interlinked networks of graft), religious or ethnic tensions, and social and economic stratification. Second, conflicts cannot be treated in isolation, because they often spill (both in and out) across porous borders, with the movement of refugees, rebels, resources, and arms. Third, the UN is often unable to serve as the primary preventive actor and must often turn to regional and subregional organizations as the lead actors, or at the very least for their strong support. And last, but certainly not least, the UN system as a whole is increasingly attuned to the need for subregional strategies—an approach the IPA's Africa Program has been advocating for some years—and these studies offer some insights into how those strategies might be developed. For each subregion, the studies examine not only common causes of current or potential conflict, but also entry points that preventive actors might seek to utilize.

The IPA's research aims to inform decisionmaking at the policy level and to encourage the strengthening of institutional capacities to address preconflict, conflict, and postconflict situations addressed by the UN system, regional organizations and arrangements, and key governments, including those of the countries most affected and their neighbors.

This final research effort was designed as the ultimate building block of the broader project, which sought, through analysis and policy-oriented networking, to examine key issues in conflict prevention.

The research would not have been possible but for the generous funding of six governments. These donors, who have given generously not just of funds but also of insights and advice, are Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. We would also like to recognize the IPA's core donors, who have done so much to build our own capacity: the Ford, Rockefeller, and Hewlett Foundations, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, and individual members of the IPA's board.

Finally, I would like to record my appreciation to and deep admiration of Chandra Lekha Sriram (now of the University of St. Andrews),

who directed this program with flair, drive, and creativity, as well as her colleagues Karin Wermester (today working in Khartoum for the UN on conflict prevention in Sudan) and Zoe Nielsen (coeditor of this book and now working at the Liu Institute for Global Issues at the University of British Columbia). Working together, they have contributed significantly to evolving thinking on conflict prevention, which is no longer seen, thanks in part to them, as a cookie-cutter exercise. It has been for me not only a privilege but a great pleasure to be associated with their work.

Acknowledgments

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Introduction: Why Examine Subregional Sources and Dynamics of Conflict?

CHANDRA LEKHA SRIRAM & ZOE NIELSEN

IT IS WELL KNOWN THAT THERE ARE MYRIAD CAUSES OF CONFLICT AND THAT preventing violent conflict requires addressing root and proximate causes.[1] In addition, it is understood that different causes and types of conflict plague different countries and different regions. Similarly, the level of conflict also varies across regions, subregions, countries, and even districts. While research in recent years has generated findings on the range of possible causes of conflict generally, and case studies have applied many of these insights to particular countries, less work has been done on the ways in which the relative significance of different causes may vary in particular subregions of the world.[2] More elaboration on regional variances is clearly needed.[3]

Developing a greater understanding of these regional variances is significant for the elaboration of preventive policy responses in two senses. First, regional variances in the causes and nature of conflict can suggest a relative prioritization of tools and resources at the policymaking stage. Second, at the implementation stage, they can aid a greater understanding of the comparative advantages among the multiple preventive actors that are likely to be on the ground and thereby inform better strategic coordination.

By examining the causes of conflict in the Horn of Africa, Central Asia, West Africa, and Central America—four subregions that exhibit similarities and differences in terms of both the causes and the levels of conflict—we aim to contribute to a growing body of work that may lead to better preventive strategies in the future.

Causes of Conflict

Violent conflict arises for a host of reasons, including disputes over ideology, land, access to resources and power of the state, gross inequality, ethnicity and religion, and borders. Any list of causes is bound to be incomplete, but there is some consensus with regard to general types of sources that are common. These are sometimes categorized as fitting within four broad groupings: insecurity, inequality, private incentives, and perceptions.[4] These factors may well work in tandem and may interact in a variety of ways across space and time.

These categories are useful in describing the issues but do not contribute to an understanding of whether the risk of conflict is high, low, or somewhere in between. Although many would argue that conflict does not necessarily progress in a linear or even cyclic fashion, it can be helpful to talk about the causes of conflict in terms of root or structural causes, proximate causes, and triggers. This categorization recognizes that different causes will be of varying importance at different stages in the escalation or deescalation of conflict. It also facilitates the design of conflict prevention strategies that are responsive to the particular dynamics at play.

Root or *structural* causes, as the names suggest, are underlying sources of discontent. Many structural causes are linked to the relationship between the state and its citizens, the legitimacy of the government, and its ability to provide basic services. Perhaps paradoxically, both overly weak and overly strong governments are problematic. Structural causes of conflict can include inequality, discrimination, breakdown of the rule of law, and unequal access to means of production and services such as education and health care. Structural causes may also include relative or absolute poverty, although there is much debate about the role of each.[5]

While some level of inequality and discrimination is present in most societies, not all are experiencing violent conflict or are even likely to experience it in the near future. Similarly, poverty and weak or corrupt state institutions are seldom sufficient to provoke conflict. *Proximate* causes are generally necessary to move a society closer to conflict, be it widespread or isolated.

Proximate causes, which might vary from root causes by degree only, include the entrenching of discrimination (e.g., the introduction of quotas for entrance to universities, the loss of citizenship for specific groups), the manipulation of group identities for political purposes, systematic

corruption in governance or the electoral system, mismanagement of state resources (including natural resources), corrupt or abusive security forces, and widespread human rights violations.

Even where significant root and proximate causes are present in a country or subregion, we may not always see conflict. Often there must also be an event that is more difficult to predict and thus more difficult to prevent—a mobilizing or *triggering* event. Triggers may include a host of events, from the violent removal of a leader from office, to wide-scale election fraud and specific abuses by key institutions or leaders, to the destruction of important cultural or religious sites. A classic example of a trigger was the shooting down of the airplane carrying Rwandan president Juvenal Habyarimana, which helped to ignite genocidal violence in a population already primed for it by, inter alia, exhortations on "hate radio."[6]

As mentioned above, talking about the causes of conflict in terms of root or structural causes, proximate causes, and triggers aids the design of conflict prevention strategies. Clearly, longer-term "structural" prevention that includes assistance in development and governance might be appropriate to address root or even proximate causes but is unlikely to counter a trigger. Similarly, preventive diplomacy may be helpful in addressing a proximate cause or even a trigger but is less likely to address a root cause.[7]

The Regional Dimension

In many instances, there is a regional dimension to the causes of conflict. Conflict in a given region often has similar causes that can be linked to a host of historical, political, economic, and geographic factors. Conflicts can also become regionalized as they spill across borders.[8] Similarly, the regional perspective is important when it comes to conflict prevention. Regional and subregional organizations have a significant role to play in conflict prevention—increasingly the UN may partner with them, or they may take the lead or even the only role. It is also the case that the UN and bilateral donors are almost always divided into regional desks or divisions.

Any articulation here of the regional variances in the causes of conflict will necessarily be brief; the chapters in this book elaborate on the distinctions as well as recognize the similarities across regions. The aim is to draw upon existing knowledge and research regarding the crosscutting, generic causes of conflict and apply this to specific regional contexts. The goal is twofold: first, to attempt to draw out a relative prioritization of

those causes that are likely to require the most attention in a particular region; and second, to gain a greater understanding of how those causes are most likely to be manifested once filtered through the prism of historic, geostrategic, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic particularities. In so doing, we seek to better identify the type of conflict that is at risk in different regions and the likely most effective entry points for external actors seeking to prevent conflict.

Why Might Regional Variances Matter?

If variances across regions in the causes of conflict turn out to be significant and systematic, this will have real implications for preventive action. A gap in knowledge exists with regard to the variance in causes of conflict across subregions; the filling of this gap ought to assist in developing more context-sensitive preventive action. Such research will aid in preventive analysis between the general (macro-level toolkits of suggested preventive measures, for instance) and the particular (case- and context-specific preventive action). Similarly, while much work has been done on the development of "indicators" that are suggestive of these causes, linking particular causes to indicators is difficult. Moreover, there remains a need to decide which risks are common to many contexts and which are specific and to determine the relative importance of different risks in particular cases.

In addition, while research has increasingly generated a long list of causes of conflict and projects elaborating conflict indicators abound, it remains difficult to translate this type of analysis into appropriate preventive response. Under ideal circumstances, access to complete information regarding a particular case would allow policymakers to make informed decisions regarding which causes of conflict are more likely to have the potential to lead to violent conflict than others, how these are most likely to be manifested, and hence where and how they can focus their preventive action. However, more often than not, policy responses are formulated with incomplete information regarding the nature of the potential conflict at hand—what is at risk—and the context in which it is being fomented and in which violence could be triggered. In examining the variance in the causes of conflict across regions, this book seeks to discern the relative significance of different causes of conflict across regions—a prism through which policymakers can assess the risk and weight of different potential causes on the basis of historical, political, cultural, anthropological, linguistic, and social differences.

The most extensive work to date has focused on the causes of conflict in Africa, which is perhaps not surprising given the numerous intrastate and cross-border wars on the continent. Causes that have been identified range from root causes such as inequality, state collapse, economic decline, and historical legacies, to proximate causes such as unemployment, manipulation of ethnic identity, the availability of small arms, regional/interlocking conflicts, and the existence of a conflict cycle.[9] The extensive examinations of the causes of conflict in Africa have been premised on the assumption that there are unique causes of conflict in Africa that need to be addressed. While it is unlikely that there are causes that are entirely unique to Africa, it is equally likely to be the case that certain causes are particularly significant on the African continent as a result not least of the history of colonialism and the legacies of the Cold War. The Cold War and its end have had profound effects on regional conflicts, although not always in the same ways: in some instances the end of the Cold War removed constraints upon regional conflicts; in others it proved to be an impetus for peacemaking.[10]

Quantitative research demonstrates the variance in regional levels of conflict and key indicators of conflict.[11] Certainly, root causes such as horizontal inequality and more proximate ones such as the manipulation of ethnic identities will frequently be a key source of conflict in Central Asia or Central America, just as they are in parts of Africa. However, the historical legacies and their impacts may differ—states emerging from Soviet rule in parts of Central Asia and those emerging from authoritarian rule in Central America may face different risks of conflict than those that take place in Africa.[12] Conflict in Southeast Asia during the Cold War was often ideologically driven and has significantly abated, but what are likely to be the most significant causes today?[13] While the work on causes of conflict in Africa has been instructive, Africa is a vast continent and significant variance across subregions may be expected. This preliminary study will focus then on West Africa and the Horn of Africa. In West Africa, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has been increasingly active in responding to conflicts, as has the UN. In the Horn of Africa, the challenges and international attention levels are rather different, but the Intergovernmental Agency for Development (IGAD) and the African Union (AU) have sought to play some role in early warning and conflict prevention as well as mediation.[14]

The variations and differences in the sources of conflict may also be expected to have an impact on the nature of conflict experienced. All

intrastate wars are not alike—ethnic politics, horizontal inequality and poverty, greed, bad leaders, or a complex mixture of these and other factors may drive them. Moreover, those factors that initially led to the eruption of violence may not be those that perpetuate a particular conflict, or for that matter cause it to recur. Disaggregating the relative weight of different causes of conflict regionally, and how those causes are most likely to be manifested, is an important step toward understanding the type of conflict that is at risk of occurring.

Clearly, the type of conflict being experienced will necessarily shape what type of preventive action will be efficacious. It is not enough for preventive or peacemaking actors to respond to the original "causes" once a conflict has begun, since conflicts develop their own logics and dynamics. Undoubtedly, averting or responding to the types of complex humanitarian emergencies and intrastate conflicts with regional spillovers currently seen in several subregions in Africa will require different strategies than addressing the types of ideologically driven conflicts (only occasionally compounded with ethnic divisiveness) seen in Central America from the late 1970s through the early 1990s. Furthermore, efforts to prevent strife in Central America now must speak less to ideological divisions and more to dissatisfaction that might provoke groups to turn to violence if basic needs cannot otherwise be met.[15] Also, the very existence and dynamics of conflict change the economic, political, military, and social structure of a country, and preventive actors must be prepared to address not only what they identify as the original causes of conflict, but also the demands that fueled the conflict and the grievances that endure long after peace has been formally reached. The challenges of peacebuilding, and of ensuring that conflict does not reemerge, are particularly thorny because they may entail engaging with and challenging key state and nonstate political actors.[16]

The Cases

The purpose of this book is to examine the expectation that countries within subregions share context-specific causes of conflict. While certain causes will also be common to more than one subregion, their manifestation in terms of types of economic or governance crises and types of conflict may well not be. This book does not purport to address the causes of conflict in all subregions—it is rather a preliminary study of likely commonalities across four subregions and of the implications

for those who would engage in preventive action. As such, then, the cases are few and are not meant to be completely representative of the possible global sample of cases. They are, however, regionally diverse, representing two conflict-prone regions in Africa, one in Asia, and one in Latin America.

Just as important for our purposes, the subregions differ significantly both in the range of independent variables—such as history of colonialism and state formation, civil-military relations, salience of ethnic tensions, resource issues, and the like—and in the nature of the conflict, whether full-scale internal conflict or low- to mid-level violence.[17] A feature shared by each of the subregions, however, is the subregional, as opposed to solely internal, nature of the conflict: in these regions there is spillover of, at various times, refugees, rebels, official armies, support for various factions, and small arms. The potential for conflict over specific resources, whether shared resources such as water or internal resources such as oil, also remains present.

For the sake of sharpening insights into regional variance in the causes and nature of conflict and enabling more targeted responses, the chapters are constrained in terms of time and space. The goal is therefore not to encompass the entire history of a continent for the past century or more, but rather to distill what the legacies of the histories of state formation were for a specific subregion during a specific time. For example, the examination of West Africa does not look at all of the nineteen states in the subregion but focuses largely on those that have experienced more significant conflict; while it addresses historical legacies, the emphasis is on conflicts that have emerged since the end of the Cold War.

The Horn of Africa

In Chapter 1, Edmond Keller examines the growing incidence of internal conflicts that have spilled across borders of the states of the Horn of Africa—Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti, and Eritrea. He first describes the nature of state and nation building in the subregion and the ways in which it contributed to internal conflict and to regional tensions in some countries. While the experience of each country was unique, they shared postcolonial experiences of attempting to create and consolidate nations that contained multiple ethnicities and whose boundaries often cut across kin groups. In many instances, the attempts at consolidation resulted in overly centralized governments, sometimes dominated by one

ethnic, regional, clan, or social group and often quite repressive. In such origins can be found the seeds of domestic conflict, as well as the potential for interstate conflict over disputed border areas. Keller also examines two instances in which tensions have escalated into full-scale interstate conflict in the subregion: the Ogaden War, between Somalia and Ethiopia, and the Ethiopia-Eritrea border dispute. In countries such as Ethiopia, shifting superpower alliances further exacerbated conflict.

Governments themselves have sought to manage internal conflicts through two distinct routes: either tightening central control and repression or attempting to engage in state-society trust building, particularly through mechanisms such as regional autonomy and power sharing. Where this has been insufficient, and particularly in interstate disputes, the UN or regional organizations have at times engaged. The AU was most active in helping to mediate and resolve the Ogaden dispute. IGAD has also been involved in attempting to stem internal conflicts, particularly through mediation in the Somali crisis, though without great results to date. The United Nations has not been extensively engaged in attempting to stem the conflicts in the region, save for a very few instances. The first was the humanitarian intervention in the collapsed state of Somalia, which ultimately withdrew without stabilizing a unified Somali state. The second was the negotiation of the end of the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict and the creation of a peacekeeping force, the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), to monitor the framework agreement the Organization of African Unity (OAU) helped to broker.

The countries of the Horn have frequently been unable to manage their own internal conflicts; in such instances there will be a greater need for external responses. The UN has not engaged frequently and has done so most seriously in the case of interstate disputes. However, the AU and IGAD have scored nominal successes through their work in mediation. Keller concludes with a call for these institutions to become more actively engaged in addressing both domestic and interstate disputes.

Central Asia

In Chapter 2, Gregory Gleason examines the historical, cultural, economic, and political features of conflict in the five Central Asian republics—Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan—and explores the opportunities for internally and externally driven efforts at conflict mitigation and resolution. Key sources of conflict have