G8online

20. Preventing Conflict
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Hello, I'm Kristiana Powell, with the Department of Political Science at the University of Toronto in Canada.

In this session, "Preventing Conflict," we explore the recent efforts of the G8 to move beyond responding to regional security crises in the world to preventing them in the first place. They are doing so in part by addressing the underlying causes of conflict and focusing on the security of individual humans as well as states.

Many doubt that the G8, or any other international institution, can predict conflict before it takes place, change the conditions that give rise to conflict in the first place and guarantee the security of individuals in very distant, different **sovereign** states. In a political version of the **false new consensus** model, these skeptics see the end of the cold war and the rise of rampant **globalization** as giving rise to "failed states." Conflict and civil war are constant in these states, and even their own or neighbouring national governments cannot produce security. In keeping with the **American leadership** or **liberal-institutionalist** models, others see conflict prevention as possible only where it is led by a determined United States, or the inclusive, multi-talented multicultural institutions of the United Nations.

Still others doubt that the powerful offensive military capabilities of the United States, or the classic interstate security conceptions wired into the **United Nations Security Council** (UNSC) when it was created in 1945 can produce effective conflict prevention and human security is today's very different world. In accordance with the **concert equality** model, they see the G8, led by its civilian powers of Germany, Japan, Italy and Canada, as having the particular resources required to produce the conditions of peace in the first place in even the most difficult places in the world.

In this lecture I argue that the G8 has made a promising beginning in confronting the critical challenge of conflict prevention, even if it is too early to know for certain whether it will deliver real results. Since it took up the challenge in 1999, it has pioneered new principles, outlined an ambitious agenda, moved to action in key areas and advanced the effort to cut off the causes of conflict through co-ordinated and inclusive international action. It can even claim its first successes in preventing an actual conflict, in the long dangerous dispute in Cyprus and in the new Balkans powderkeg. But it is clear that much more needs to be done, that the G8 can realistically do it, and that there is a strong need for it to do it now, if current conflicts grounded in terrorism in the Middle East and Afghanistan are to be ended and never erupt again. At the end of this lecture, I consider some of recommendations that may serve to strengthen and improve the G8's commitment to conflict prevention.

A. The G8's Conflict Prevention Performance
Preventing interstate conflicts has long been a central preoccupation of international institutions, as with the United Nations and its collective security formula and with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) with its reliance on nuclear deterrence. But preventing the conflicts created by the end of the cold war and the rise of rampant globalization were challenges that the traditional international institutions were poorly equipped to meet. These conflicts often arose within failed states such as the former Yugoslavia, Somalia or Afghanistan, where despite the formality of sovereignty the national government could not

guarantee the security of its own citizens against others using force inside the state. Indeed, because civil wars, secessionist movements and military interventions from neighbours were often raging, it was often the embattled, suspicious, doubtfully legitimate current government that was the greatest threat to the lives of individuals within its own state. Yet the traditional international institutions were designed to prevent or punish interstate conflict and were restricted by the notion that a state's right to sovereignty and non-interference in its domestic affairs is more important than the right and obligation of the international community to respond to internal conflict and widespread abuse of human rights. As a result, it was difficult for these institutions to cope with the conflicts of the current age.

The G8 was constructed to deal with precisely this kind of new security threat: as an international institution, it is designed to promote individual liberty and social advancement and intervene in the internal affairs of sovereign states for this purpose. It first took up the task in the mid 1990s after the United Nations failed tragically to prevent the genocide in the former Yugoslavia and the Great Lakes region of central Africa. Indeed, the UN may even have inadvertently helped cause the catastrophe. When Canada hosted the 1995 Halifax Summit, it focused on reforming the United Nations system and raised the question of how to strengthen the UN in order to prevent the new kinds of deadly conflict that had come to predominate since the end of the cold war.

However, this initiative was not followed up by the subsequent Summits that were hosted by G8 members that were also UNSC Permanent Five — France, the United States and Britain. These states have the power of veto. It was left to G8 hosts Germany in 1999, Japan in 2000 and Italy in 2001 to put conflict prevention permanently on the G8's agenda and establish ways of taking direct action to prevent conflict rather than working through the UN, which had proven resistant to reform.

Encouraged by its success in preventing genocide in Kosovo in the spring of 1999, a few months later at Cologne the G8 leaders called on their foreign ministers to hold the first ever stand-alone ministerial meeting on a specific theme, namely conflict prevention. The foreign ministers met later that year in Berlin. They called for a culture of prevention, set new principles and identified a wide-ranging agenda for action. The next year, at their regular pre-Summit meeting in Miyazaki, G8 foreign ministers agreed to take action in several key areas, specifically conflict diamonds, children in conflict, conflict and development, and civilian police. A close look at their record over the subsequent year confirms that most members complied with these innovative, action-oriented commitments to a high degree. At their next pre-Summit meeting in Rome in July 2001, the G8 foreign ministers assessed their own performance in conflict prevention and added new action items to their program, including a consideration of the role that multinational corporations can play in preventing or, indeed, exacerbating conflicts as well as the need to explore the link between gender and conflict prevention.

B. The G8's Future Contribution to Conflict Prevention

Looking ahead to G8 foreign ministers meeting at Whistler, British Columbia, from June 12 to 13 in the lead-up to the 2002 Kananaskis Summit, what should the G8 do to advance the cause of conflict prevention? The G8 might be too busy this year, dealing with the burning crisis in the Middle East and the war on terrorism, and may not have much time to take bold new initiatives on its agenda for conflict prevention and human security. However, if the G8 is to help solve the crisis in the Middle East and eradicate the al Qaeda network and those like it, it may need to prevent new breeding grounds of global terrorism from emerging, and thus address conflict prevention more ambitiously and creatively than ever before.

There are clearly several things the G8 could add to its current program of action. These recommendations should help the G8 move from good intentions to good practice in its commitment to conflict prevention. In this section, I look at recommendations about gender and corporate social responsibility. These fall into two categories: *innovative recommendations* and *rejuvenating recommendations*. Innovative recommendations compel the G8 to "do something new," create new initiatives or foster new ideas that will improve the G8's commitment to conflict prevention. Rejuvenating recommendations call on the G8 to "do something better" in order to deepen existing commitments to conflict prevention.

Conflict Prevention and Gender

The first area of recommendations related to the link between gender and conflict prevention. Two broad debates can be identified in the work of specialists concerned with this issue. On the one hand, some authors and organizations emphasize the contribution that women can make to both conflict and its prevention. Many believe that considering the opinions and capabilities of women will enhance the opportunities for preventing conflict and building a just and peaceful society. On the other hand, authors consider the impact of conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction initiatives on the conditions of women's lives, and consider gender relations more generally. Based on both these understandings of the relationship between gender and conflict prevention, I can make the following recommendations.

In terms of rejuvenating its current commitments, the G8 can continue to emphasize the importance of the systematic involvement of women in preventing and resolving conflicts and in post-conflict reconstruction, as well as women's full, equal participation in all phases of conflict prevention, resolution and reconstruction. G8 members need to design projects in consultation with local women in order to determine their needs and capabilities.

With respect to innovative recommendations, the G8 members must develop effective ways of considering the impact of their peace and security policies and programs on the lives of women. They must also consider the dynamics of gender relations. The G8 needs to understand how initiatives affect the well-being of women and girls of all ages and to what extent these initiatives address their needs and concerns.

Conflict Prevention and Corporate Social Responsibility

The second set of recommendations concerns **corporate social responsibility** and conflict prevention. There exists an ongoing debate over the role of multinational corporations operating in potential or actual conflict zones. On one side of the debate are some non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as Human Rights Watch, Global Witness and Partnership Africa Canada, which have launched active campaigns to expose the link between business operations and the exacerbation — or continuation — of conflict in unstable regions. Others argue that multinational corporations have played a positive role in mitigating violence and preventing conflict, and continue to do so. It is my opinion that firms operating in conflict zones can contribute to violence, intentionally or not. Accordingly, I make the following recommendations for the G8.

First, the G8 can devise a set of *legal regulations* for the conduct of corporations already operating in zones that have become violent throughout the duration of their investment period. These regulations can be derived from the voluntary principles for corporations operating in conflict zones devised by the United Kingdom and the United States. Second, the G8 can encourage its members to actively discourage initial investment in conflict zones by enacting legislation that requires signatories to outlaw violations by companies operating in signatory jurisdictions.

C. Conclusion

Conflict prevention has proven to be a sustained area of interest for the G8 over the past few years. However, it is important to note that significant challenges still remain. It will be interesting to see if much progress is made in these and other important areas of conflict prevention at this year's Summit in Kananaskis.

Further Readings

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Discussion Questions

1. Why have Canada, Germany, Japan and Italy among the G8 members been so enthusiastic about the G8 playing a major role in conflict prevention?

2. What other proposals, in addition to the ones offered above, could the G8 usefully and realistically adopt and deliver in order to advance the cause of conflict prevention and human security?

3. Why does the United Nations resist efforts to reform it? Does the G8 have a place in instituting or recommending reform in the United Nations, or in any multinational body?

4. One body of thought argues that corporate involvement in fragile nations supports and encourages conflict. Should multinational corporations co-operate and limit their activities in these war zones? How? How can the G8 ensure and encourage compliance?

Quiz

1. Which of the following countries is not a member of the United Nations Security Council?
   a. France
   b. United States
   c. Great Britain
   d. Canada

2. Which Summit focused on reforming the United Nations system and strengthening it to equip it better for conflict prevention?
   a. Halifax, 1995
   b. Birmingham, 1998
   c. Naples, 1994
   d. Lyon, 1996

3. Where was the G8 foreign ministers meeting held in the lead-up to the Kananaskis Summit?
   a. Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
   b. Kananaskis, Alberta, Canada
   c. Whistler, British Columbia, Canada
   d. Lake Louise, Alberta, Canada

4. Post–cold war conflicts typically arise in "failed-states." Which one of these nations does not fit this profile?
   a. Yugoslavia
   b. Somalia
   c. Afghanistan
   d. Nigeria