

UDK 327

**PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY IN CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS: BASIC CONCEPTS**

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Abstract

Today's international environment is marred by growing instability and geopolitical uncertainty. Ongoing armed conflicts in many parts of the world are getting even more deadly with enormous human and material costs. At the time of writing, the world is witnessing Russia-Ukraine war, devastating Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the situation in Syria, just to name a few. Under such circumstances, the role of preventive diplomacy is again back to the fore and already creating intense academic and scholarly debates. Although extensive body of literature has emerged about preventive diplomacy over the last decades, its current resurgence requires revisiting this phenomenon. Thus, the aim of this article is twofold: first, to review preventive diplomacy's theoretical and conceptual basis; and second, to assess its impact on the prevention and resolution of current conflicts.

Overview

During his recent visit to Central Asia, the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has publicly recognized the contribution of Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the President of Uzbekistan, in creating a new environment in Central Asia, 'an environment of dialogue and cooperation'. While also referring to the tense relations among Central Asian states in near history, Mr.Guterres went on commending President Mirziyoyev for being "a bride-builder, an honest broker, a messenger for peace, but

also a leader committed to prosperity with justice, as the Sustainable Development Goals represent¹.” In essence, the head of the UN was paying a special tribute by showcasing the entirely changed Central Asia (largely due to Uzbekistan’s policies) to the world, at a time of deep global divisions and heightened great power rivalry.

Central Asia has been a region of special focus for the United Nation’s global efforts to prevent conflicts and promote preventive diplomacy. It has established the United Nation’s Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA), in Ashgabat (2007), with the mission ‘to liaise with the Governments of the region on issues relevant to preventive diplomacy; to provide monitoring and analysis; to maintain contact with regional organizations and facilitate coordination and information exchange’². The decision to set up a regional center for preventive diplomacy in Central Asia had been dictated by the region’s rising geopolitical significance as well as the existence of a wide array of acute problems, i.e. border issues, the usage of trans-boundary water resources, religious and ethnic issues, among others. It is even argued that ‘the idea of creating a UN structure for Central Asia was a defining moment for the region’³.

Theoretical Basis of Preventive Diplomacy

Preventing conflicts before they spiral out of control has always been one of the most challenging issues of international system. Despite the high hopes of creating peaceful and just global order after the end of the Cold War, which also led to a period of *conflict prevention renaissance*⁴ in international affairs, the world is again sliding back to confrontational mentality. Furthermore, ‘the cost of violent

¹ <https://media.un.org/unifeed/en/asset/d323/d3230427>

² <https://unrcca.unmissions.org/mandate>

³ Jenča Miroslav. The Concept of Preventive Diplomacy and Its Application by the United States in Central Asia.//Journal of Security and Human Rights. January, 2013.

⁴ Babbit F.Eileen. Preventive Diplomacy Intergovernmental Organizations: Learning from Practice.//International Negotiation, 17, 2012. –Pp.349-350.

conflicts, both in financial and human terms, and subsequent international post-conflict peacebuilding efforts remains staggering'⁵. In this context, the actual impact of international and regional institutions in preserving peace and security is called into question, so does the relevance of preventive diplomacy that they often preach. To understand these complexities, it is important to know what preventive diplomacy really is. What kind of theories and concepts best explain the nature of preventive diplomacy? Is there a growing interest in preventive efforts? What is the relevance of preventive diplomacy today? Can preventive diplomacy be able to avert conflicts as diverse and intricate as in our time?

Preventive diplomacy is not a new field. The term 'preventive diplomacy' was first coined in 1960 by then UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld. Initially, it was held to mean 'keeping regional conflicts localized as to avoid into the superpower arena and to prevent nuclear confrontation'⁶. As time passed, Hammarskjöld's idea of preventive diplomacy further gained a ground and became 'one of the central tools used by the United Nations in international conflict resolution'⁷. But, preventive diplomacy efforts faced daunting obstacles in the Cold War years as ideological approaches impeded finding genuine diplomatic solutions to emerging conflicts. However, as the primary goal of the preventive efforts in the Cold War years was to avert nuclear collisions among major powers, other potential sources of instability and armed conflicts had given lesser attention. The end of the Cold War gave new hopes for the preventive efforts. Accordingly, the search for the alternative methods of conflict prevention has gained a new momentum while gradually advancing the conceptual foundations of preventive diplomacy.

⁵Ackermann Alice. The Idea and Practice of Conflict Prevention.//Journal of Peace Research. Vol.40, No3, 2003. – Pp. 339-340.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Joel Djibom. An Analysis of Hammarskjöld's Theory of Preventive Diplomacy. Peace Operations Training Institute. -2006. –P.10.

The second major period for the development of preventive diplomacy came with the end of the Cold War. The easing of East-West tensions and the subsequent outpouring of optimism about the future of humankind gave birth to a kind of *'renaissance of preventive diplomacy'*, which, above all, aimed at finding negotiated settlements for potential conflicts. It was in 1992, then UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali has published his seminal work titled as "An Agenda for Peace", in which he presented his fresh considerations to global peace and security in a changing international context.

At that times, "An Agenda for Peace" was seen as a sweeping conceptual overhaul of all existing (traditional) threats to world peace and security as well as the unconventional ones', such as the environmental issues, terrorism and migration. This key document defined preventive diplomacy as an 'action to prevent disputes from arising between parties, to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of the latter when they occur'⁸. Moreover, the United Nations has explicitly called international organizations and democratic institutions for close cooperation in the work of preventing conflicts and in global peacekeeping activities, while urging national governments to respect the rule of law, transparent decision-making and good governance, as key elements of *'social peace'*⁹. As a relatively new term in preventive diplomacy, social peace largely referred to the significance of eradicating root causes of conflicts, such as alleviating poverty, addressing social disparities, creating economic opportunities.

Conclusion

The spirit of an era was such that it appealed for the increasing role of the regional governmental and non-governmental organizations, civil society and other social

⁸Boutros Boutros-Ghali. An Agenda for Peace. Preventive diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-keeping. United Nations. New-York, 1992.

⁹ IBID.

movements to come up with a concerted approach in resolving disputes between states before they relapse into armed conflicts. Across the board people had placed high hopes for the emergence of liberal international order that would put an end to the horrors of the recent history. Particularly, some prominent scholars of liberal institutionalism argued that in the post-Cold War period international organizations led by the United Nations will be at the center of emerging new world order maintaining global peace and stability. Growing international cooperation and peace will replace tense great power competition and cold considerations of realpolitik reminiscent of the past. It was a pivotal moment in human history.

However, as time passed, those high hopes about the triumph of liberal ideals and peaceful international system started to fade away as tensions and conflicts among states resurfaced and great power rivalries reemerged, reminiscent of the past Cold War period. International norms and mutual trust is eroding between states and the potential for inter-state conflicts is rising. Accordingly, the global demand for political dialogue and preventive diplomacy led by not only individual states but also by powerful regional and international institutions is consolidating.

Reference

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