

CONFLICT PREVENTION AND RESOLUTION FORUM.

MINUTES

January 11, 2000

Topic: *Why are Bureaucracies Resistant to Conflict Prevention?*

Speaker: J. Brian Atwood (Former Administrator of USAID, Citizens' Energy Corp.)

"Its important to create a culture of prevention," Mr. Atwood began, "in light of both the challenges and complexities that we will continue to be faced with, and the inordinate expenses and frustration associated with crisis management and putting it back together."

Moving from a culture of conflict management or "failing nation-state triage", to a culture of prevention, will require the concurrent and integrated development of several elements. The career rewards system—no less than what motivates federal employees to work—needs to be changed, and more of the expertise of field staff needs to be integrated in policy development.

After briefly discussing the debacle of Rwanda/Burundi, the former Yugoslavia, and Cote d'Ivoire, Mr. Atwood highlighted some of the areas in which the bureaucracies have done better: USAID is asking for reports identifying possible problems and emerging conflict situations – the OTI of USAID is working closely with the State Department on this initiative. The CIA Global Review of States is the best yet, and a useful tool for tracking state failure and conflicts. Also, FSI is teaching more about preventive efforts and Track 2 diplomacy these days. Junior officers are more open to this material than their older supervisors.

Atwood's 10 Commandments:

- 1) Obviously, the best analyses of the fault lines in a society have to go forward for the best allocation of resources. Unfortunately, the rewards system is programmed for crisis management, and staff have to take serious career risks to show that countries have underlying problems before 'the balloon goes down.' This needs to be changed.
- 2) Analysis is not encouraged, straight "just-the-facts, sir" reporting is. Reporting the facts is unidimensional. Analyzing the facts provides the second dimension.
- 3) Having the art of understanding what animates the relationships between actors in light of the facts and the analysis constitutes the third dimension, and a full understanding of the country. Different bureaus have different talents, and the mentality of withholding salient information from others is in no-one's interest.
- 4) Keep sufficient people on the ground gathering information and providing analyses. We cannot promote effective policy in the world when we are missing *so* much.
- 5) We would do well to create contact groups in post-conflict and crisis scenarios, but not for country groups in pre-crisis. [Here and there embassies have collaborated, but little is done in the HQ's of the leading countries.] We want a situation where if the balloon goes down, there is a plan; or in the best case, the crisis has been prevented.
- 6) Those who implement programs and those who make policy are disconnected. Thus, at the highest levels, policy makers and policy implementers need to be much closer together.

7) Top policy-makers have no time to generate preventive measures. A second tier of deputies/committees should be formed to see which countries need attention, what preventive measures are in use, discuss and approve analysis, and design preventive measures.

8) MPP process is still weak, and bucking solid (if gloomy or unpopular) analyses. MPP's should be better linked to resource requests, which should be *explicitly* linked to measures of prevention.

9) USAID missions still need to identify threats to their development projects.

10) There is a disconnect between, on one side macro-economics (trade issues, finance, the IMF); and on the other side, the political. This results in a sense of helplessness when, for example, the IMF precipitates a crisis in, say, Ecuador. (However: note the Economic Development Bureau at DOS.) There are opportunities to change this, cf. German request to consider conflict prevention at the G8 summit in Berlin, where the ministers asked to report back at Okinawa.

Q&A and Discussion:

Can funds be set aside for conflict prevention, so that money can be kept away from crisis management? (An 11th commandment?). How can *flexibility* be built into prevention-focussed financial systems?

Conflict prevention cannot be practiced unilaterally [by the USA], accepting this explicitly is only accepting the fact that nations are interdependent, and that foreign policies are also interdependent.

How can the “chicken little”/ “crying wolf” problem be avoided? Atwood stated that unnecessary alarmism would stop a career, not reward one. Just like Chicken Little's.

DOS lacks the methodology to include prevention measures in a MPP. The MPP process depends on observable and quantifiable occurrences. Conflict Prevention—especially successful prevention—leaves no trace, and is not easily quantifiable. It is very difficult to justify expenditures on programs that have “no results.”[narrowly defined] Atwood replied that solid analysis of the fault lines and needs in a given society should lead to a preventive outlook; and, that MPP's should have these factors embedded into them.

What is the role of leadership vis-a-vis prevention? How can top-down buy-in and support be encouraged? Is this a President-by-President conundrum, or are there institutions that can support and encourage the President, Vice-President, Secretary of State, etc. to participate?

There is little percolation of what has been learned at the operational level down to the level of operational development guidelines (especially in government). Atwood commented that government training fails to disseminate the tools available for use, and concomitantly that imposing new performance requirements without training was nonsensical. It was also suggested that an archive of case studies be made for reference and training.

Another contentious theme emerged in discussion: sometimes conflict prevention in a country is a threat to the government concerned; sometimes prevention props up regimes whose political structures are in the long term going to be very costly to maintain, embarrassing, or difficult to justify. What guidelines can be brought to bear here?

How can the academic, diplomatic, and NGO communities cooperate? They each have skills that the other lacks. Various suggestions: State to release more non-secret data to academic and NGO specialists, DOS to sponsor more academic country visits, NGO's like Search for Common Ground to continue to bring different professionals together in an inclusive environment, such as fora. However, one should not underestimate the

cultural differences between and within these communities: the NGO community is very dispersed, and has various agendas, which tend to be functionally specific—not place and time specific, which is a characteristic of conflict prevention planning and implementation.

Apparently, DOD's coming 5-year plan has allocations for "contingencies" but not specifically for peace-keeping. This implies that that peace-keeping is not being planned for, and that there is a lack of co-ordination with DOS and other bureaucracies. [Or a disconnect between forecasting and reality]. It was suggested that military resources can [should?] be part of conflict prevention and early warning, early response, peace keeping, and observation.

The White House should be the target of the effort to institutionalize conflict prevention, in three aspects:

- 1) Rebuild the working relationship with the Hill
- 2) Clarify roles and missions: are we in the lead, or is the international community? This is a problem with the Hill.
- 3) Everything is interconnected, and the public needs to be educated about this fact.