

David Hamburg's Foreward to

Sustainable Peace: The Role of the UN and Regional Organizations in Preventing Conflict



By Connie Peck

This book seeks an integrative agenda for preventing deadly conflict by fostering a dynamic interplay between theory and practice. It delineates effective preventive diplomacy to keep disputes from turning into violent conflict and backs this up with a long-term approach to tackle the structural causes of conflict and the development of institutions to promote just solutions to underlying problems. It illuminates the fact that the most secure states are those which provide the greatest human security to their populations.

Following the lead of the Brundtland Commission, which linked environmental responsibility with economic development in an integrative concept of sustainable development, Peck links good governance with conflict prevention on a path to sustainable peace. Taken together, sustainable development and sustainable peace provide a comprehensive agenda for the international community in the decades ahead.

Prevention is best thought of not only as avoiding undesirable circumstances, but also as creating preferred alternatives. In the long run, we will be most successful in preventing ethnic, religious, and interstate wars by focusing on ways to avert direct confrontation between hostile groups and by promoting democracy, economic development, and the creation of civil institutions that protect human rights. This book clarifies the issues and international institutions pertinent to this great mission.

Among other assets, this work gives useful insights into the United Nations' potential for preventing deadly conflict. The UN is not a world government. It is an intergovernmental organization of sovereign states that works by seeking common ground among them to cooperate in their long term self-interests. The UN Charter was written by experienced, thoughtful statesmen—largely from established democracies—who had been deeply influenced by two terrible world wars with a grotesquely distorted peace between them. Mindful of painfully missed opportunities, they carefully prepared a document that provided a bold vision of a better future and practical means of implementation.

The Charter set out ambitious objectives. Prominent among these were: achieving international security through the peaceful resolution of disputes, the rule of law, sanctions, and military action if necessary to suppress aggression; freeing colonial peoples, based on equal rights and self-determination; economic and social development; promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, regardless of race, sex, language, or religion; and fostering cooperation among diverse nations to attain common approaches to global problems. Now, with the cold war over and the world being drawn together by technological and economic forces, we need creative thinking to explore ways in which the UN might become more effective in these great tasks. This book is an excellent case in point.

Peck thoughtfully examines preventive diplomacy—the application of peacemaking methods prior to the outbreak of armed hostilities between disputing parties. Article 33 of the UN Charter states: “The parties to any dispute, the continuance of which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, shall first of all, seek a solution by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of their choice.”

The UN must find effective ways to strengthen and institutionalize preventive diplomacy rather than reacting to crises that have spun out of control. It can best focus on early reconciliation of disputing

parties' interests, primarily through diplomatic ingenuity. Can the UN create paths to conflict resolution that are visible, attractive, and useful before conflicts become large and lethal? Can the UN find effective ways to bring the world's experience to bear on a particular conflict at an early stage in its development?

The growing demand for UN intervention, not only in conflict between nations but also in serious internal conflicts, naturally challenges the capacity of the organization to respond. These new challenges also raise questions about the relationship between the UN as a global organization and the various regional organizations that relate to it. A variety of regional arrangements and agencies exist, some more effective than others.

There are constructive possibilities for coordinating the efforts of regional bodies and the UN in conflict resolution. Regional organizations in Africa, Latin America, and Europe, such as the Organization of African Unity, the Organization of American States, the Council of Europe, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, all need to be explored from this perspective. For the most part, they have not had major responsibilities in conflict resolution, but they could become much more effective in due course.

Peck seeks paths that might be desirable and feasible for strengthening regional capability to deal with conflicts. On the one hand, regional entities have the advantage in principle of intimate knowledge of the players and sensitivity to historical and cultural factors that bear on the conflict.

On the other hand, they have the disadvantage that they tend to be emotionally engaged, tend to choose sides, and therefore have difficulty in establishing credible conflict-resolving functions. All this needs careful examination in terms of basic principles of conflict resolution and on a case-by-case basis in relation to the idiosyncrasies of particular organizations that have arisen over the years. In any event, strengthening the global-regional cooperative functions would have potential for a variety of purposes, and these are explored in this book.

Peck has worked creatively on the development of Regional Centers for Sustainable Peace—established under the auspices of either regional organizations or the UN. This would be one way to bring together the UN, regional organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and regional analytical centers. The proposed structure would integrate the most successful conflict prevention instruments, drawing widely on international experience and expertise, but ensuring that they are tailored to local needs and circumstances. The horizontal transfer of knowledge and experience within regions is a distinctive feature of this proposal, in which regional actors who have found solutions to their problems or developed successful models of good governance could assist their neighbors within the context of a regional effort aided, as necessary, by global support.

Regional centers would have two major foci. The first would be assistance in developing the structural processes for sustainable peace (good governance at all levels of society). The second would be maintaining peace through assistance in dispute resolution and the development of institutional structures that would allow groups to become more effective at resolving their own problems. Each center could provide an ongoing analysis of existing disputes to both the regional organization and the UN.

Difficult as it is to create new institutions, the stimulus of looming disaster is powerful; the voice of reason, though small, is surely persistent. Altogether, this book reflects an open-minded spirit of inquiry and innovation pertinent to great issues of the next century. It can have a stimulating effect on all those seriously concerned with preventing deadly conflict.

Connie Peck teaches diplomats negotiating and conflict resolution skills through the United Nations Institute for Training and Research.