

# Conflict, Conflict Prevention, Conflict Management and Beyond: a conceptual exploration

Niklas L.P. Swanström  
Mikael S. Weissmann

CONCEPT PAPER  
Summer 2005



*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute  
Silk Road Studies Program*



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A Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center  
Johns Hopkins University-SAIS, 1619 Massachusetts Ave. NW,  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
Uppsala University, Box 514, 75120 Uppsala, Sweden  
[www.silkroadstudies.org](http://www.silkroadstudies.org)

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 Sweden  
 Ph.. +46-18-471-7155; Fax. +46-18-106397  
 E-mail: info@silkroadstudies.org

Editorial correspondence should be addressed to Svante E. Cornell, Research and Publications Director, at either of the addresses above.

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## Conflict, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Management and Beyond: a conceptual exploration<sup>1</sup>

This paper will provide an overview of the concepts *conflict*, *conflict prevention* and *conflict management*. It will also briefly discuss related concepts, including *conflict resolution*, *crisis management*, *preventive diplomacy*, and *a culture of prevention*. The aim of the paper is to set the stage for a discussion on how to come to terms with the lack of consensus and differences in interpretation of these concepts within the academic and policy community.<sup>2</sup>

On a general level, conflict prevention and conflict management are broad terms for methods and mechanisms used to avoid, minimize, and manage conflicts between different parties.<sup>3</sup> Conflict prevention is a set of instruments used to prevent or solve disputes before they have developed into active conflicts.<sup>4</sup> Conflict management is a theoretical concept focusing on the limitation, mitigation, and/or containment of a conflict without necessarily solving it.<sup>5</sup> Conflict resolution has traditionally referred to measures attempting to resolve the underlying

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<sup>1</sup> A draft version of this paper was written to provide a starting point for the discussions on the Silk Road Studies Program's workshop "Theory Development on Conflict Prevention and Conflict Management" organized in Uppsala April 8-9, 2005. The paper you now are reading is a somewhat altered version of the paper presented at the workshop. It should also be noted that this paper is based on, but extends beyond, Dr. Swanström's dissertation *Regional Cooperation and Conflict Management: Lessons from the Pacific Rim* (Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> The problem of a lacking consensus was identified at the Silk Road Studies Conference on Conflict Prevention and Management in Northeast Asia held in Beijing November 26 – 28, 2004. It was also one of the topics of discussion on the Uppsala workshop in April 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Russett, "Preventing Violent Conflict Through the Kantian Peace", in *Preventing Violent Conflicts: Past Record and Future Challenges*, ed. Peter Wallensteen, Report No 48 (Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, 1998); Michael Lund, *Preventing Violent Conflicts* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996); Niklas L.P. Swanström, *Regional Cooperation and Conflict Management: Lessons from the Pacific Rim* (Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, 2002); Niklas L.P. Swanström "Conflict Management in Northeast Asia", *Korean Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2003); Peter Wallensteen, ed., *Preventing Violent Conflicts: Past Record and Future Challenges*, Report No 48 (Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Sophia Clément, *Conflict Prevention in the Balkans: Case Studies of the Fyr Macedonia* (Alençon: Institute for Security Studies of WEU, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Fred Tanner, "Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution: Limits of Multilateralism", *International Review of the Red Cross*, September (2000).

incompatibilities of a conflict, including attempts to get the parties to mutually accept each others' existence.<sup>6</sup> It is important to note here that the traditional separation of conflict prevention, management and resolution not only treat them as different concepts, but also as separate processes. Such ideas are opposed in this paper, in which also the concepts are seen as being closely related and in many ways even inseparable. This will be elaborated upon in section two of this paper. Before that, however, the definition and dynamics of a conflict needs to be addressed.

Consequently, the first section of this paper will focus on the concept of conflict and conflict cycles. After presenting a working definition of conflict, a theoretical model of the conflict lifecycle will be provided. This section also presents an extended model of the conflict lifecycle which includes both the conflict intensity level and measures to prevent, limit and resolve the conflict. This model is thereafter used to elaborate upon different forms of conflict cycles, including addressing the problem with a conflict consisting of a large number of conflictual issues, or sub-conflicts. In the second section focus moves from the conflict as such to the concepts of conflict prevention and conflict management. This section includes, but is not limited to, an overview of research on conflict prevention and conflict management, including related concepts such as preventive diplomacy, culture of prevention, and crisis management. Thereafter, the section moves on to explore the overlapping and integrated aspects of conflict prevention and conflict management, thereby addressing the necessity of linking the two. To the extent overlapping with the two core concepts, conflict resolution and crisis management will also be addressed in this overview.

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Wallensteen, *Understanding conflict resolution: war, peace and the global system* (London: Sage, 2002).



## SECTION I:

### Definition of Conflict and the Life Cycle(s) of a Conflict

#### Conflict

##### *Definition of conflict*

The perception of threat, or actual occurrence of conflict, is necessary for the initiation of conflict prevention or management measures, and hence it is essential to address the concept of conflict before exploring how to prevent and manage such occurrences.

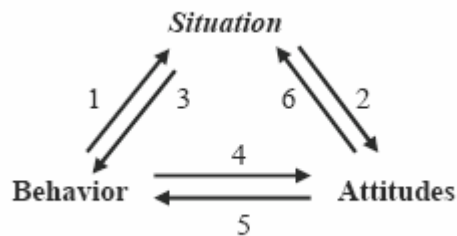
The first step is to understand what a conflict is made up by exactly. The starting point for this paper is the traditional definitions of conflicts (presented below), according to which a conflict is the result of opposing interests involving scarce resources, goal divergence and frustration. The paper then addresses more recent perceptions of the conflict concept. We suggest that conflicts should not be defined simply in terms of violence (behavior) or hostility (attitudes), but also include incompatibility or “differences in issue position” (*Positiondifferenzen*)<sup>7</sup> Such a definition is designed to include conflicts outside the traditional military sphere and is based on behavioral dimensions.

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<sup>7</sup> Ernst-Otto Czempel, *Internationale Politik; Ein Konfliktmodell* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1981), 198-203.

According to Mitchell, the conflict structure consists of three parts: attitudes, behavior and situations that interact and create conflicts between actors.<sup>8</sup> Mitchell's conflict structure simplifies the complex reality in an understandable way (Model 1). The model was created for political and military conflicts, but is also applicable to the changes in perception of conflicts that the international community has experienced - economic, environmental and human security have become fundamental aspects of international and regional interaction. Mitchell's model is able to

#### Model 1: Mitchell's Conflict Model



1. The situation impacts the behavior (failure to reach targeted goals, especially important goals, creates frustration and increases the willingness to reach these goals).
2. The situation impacts attitudes (incompatible goals increase the suspicion and distrust between the actors).
3. Behavior impacts the situation (success can introduce new questions in the conflict as demands increase).
4. Behavior impacts the attitudes (destruction increases hatred, success can impact the group solidarity and the notion of "us").
5. Attitudes impact the behavior (expectations such as "our traditional enemies will attack again" will impact the defensive planning and preventive actions).
6. Attitudes impact the situation (the longer the conflict continues the more questions will be introduced).

incorporate this. However, this model is complicated by the fact that conflicts often occur in mixed-motive relationships where the involved parties both have cooperative and competitive goals and Mitchell's model seems to have neglected this pluralistic/multifaceted/more complex dimension to the relationship.<sup>9</sup> The competitive element creates conflict and the cooperative element creates incentives to negotiate an agreement.<sup>10</sup> There are, however, studies that confirm that conflicts tend to occur even when the involved parties have highly compatible goals.<sup>11</sup> This can be explained by including frustration, obstruction, and interference in the definition. The theoretical framework presented here has been adjusted to leave room for an interpretation of conflict which

<sup>8</sup> C.R. Mitchell, *The Structure of International Conflict* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 55.

<sup>9</sup> Kwok Leung and Dean Tjosvold, *Conflict Management in the Asia Pacific: Assumptions and Approaches in Diverse Cultures* (Singapore: John Wiley & Sons, 1998); Walton, R. and R. Mckersie, *A Behavioural Theory of Labour Negotiations* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965).

<sup>10</sup> M. Deutsch and M. Krauss, "Studies in interpersonal bargaining", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol 6 (1962).

<sup>11</sup> M. Deutsch, *The Resolution of Conflict* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).

includes tensions, misunderstandings, political and economic interests, and historical animosity.

A conflict has generally been defined as a situation in which two or more parties strive to acquire the same scarce resources at the same time.<sup>12</sup> Scholars generally agree that there needs to be more than one part to have a conflict, and that the time factor is important. What does cause concern is the term *scarce resource*. The central point in this argument is scarcity, but resources need also be included in the discussion. Peter Wallensteen has pointed out that resources are not only economic in nature,<sup>13</sup> and that the terminology might miss conflicts involving economic orientation, human security, environment, historical issues, etc. Such conflicts are not necessarily about resources, and when they are, these resources are, more importantly, not necessarily scarce. A conflict is, moreover, in many cases based on perceptions, rather than on attitudes or behavior as it has generally been defined.

When discussing the concept of conflict, perception should be included as a central concept since the conflicts and the opponent's intentions often are defined according to subjective perceptions. There could be an abundance of space for agreement in a conflict, but if the parties perceive the conflict as being impossible to resolve or the opponent to be untrustworthy this might not help in resolving the conflict. The normative disputes (often subjectively defined) are also left out of the rational definitions. These disputes involve religion, values and beliefs and do not always have a military outcome. In conclusion, we suggest the following definition of conflict: *perceived differences in issue positions between two or more parties at the same moment in time.*

### **The Life Cycle(s) of a Conflict**

A conflict is not a static situation, but a dynamic one – the intensity level changes over a conflicts' life cycle. An understanding of the conflict cycle is essential for an understanding of how, where and when to apply different strategies and measures of conflict prevention and management. Over time, numerous suggestions and models of conflict patterns have

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<sup>12</sup> Peter Wallensteen, *Från krig till fred - Om konfliktlösning i det globala systemet* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1994), 14-15; Peter Wallensteen, *Understanding Conflict Resolution War, Peace and The Global System* (London: Sage Publishing, 2002), 16.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Wallensteen, *Understanding Conflict Resolution War, Peace and The Global System* (London: Sage Publishing, 2002), 16-17.

been put forward. Among these models and suggestions, a number of patterns stand out. Conflicts tend to be described as cyclical in regard to their intensity levels, i.e. escalating from (relative) stability and peace into crisis and war, thereafter deescalating into relative peace. Most scholars also agree that these cycles are reoccurring. This proposition is strongly supported by empirical research on conflict patterns. Here, it should also be noted that many scholars add stable, sometimes called durable, peace as an additional phase in which the conflict is considered resolved – i.e. the reoccurring pattern of the conflict has been stopped. Also, most models divide both the escalation and de-escalation of the conflict cycle into phases. It can also be noted that in many cases the conflict model has taken the form of a U, or an upside-down U.

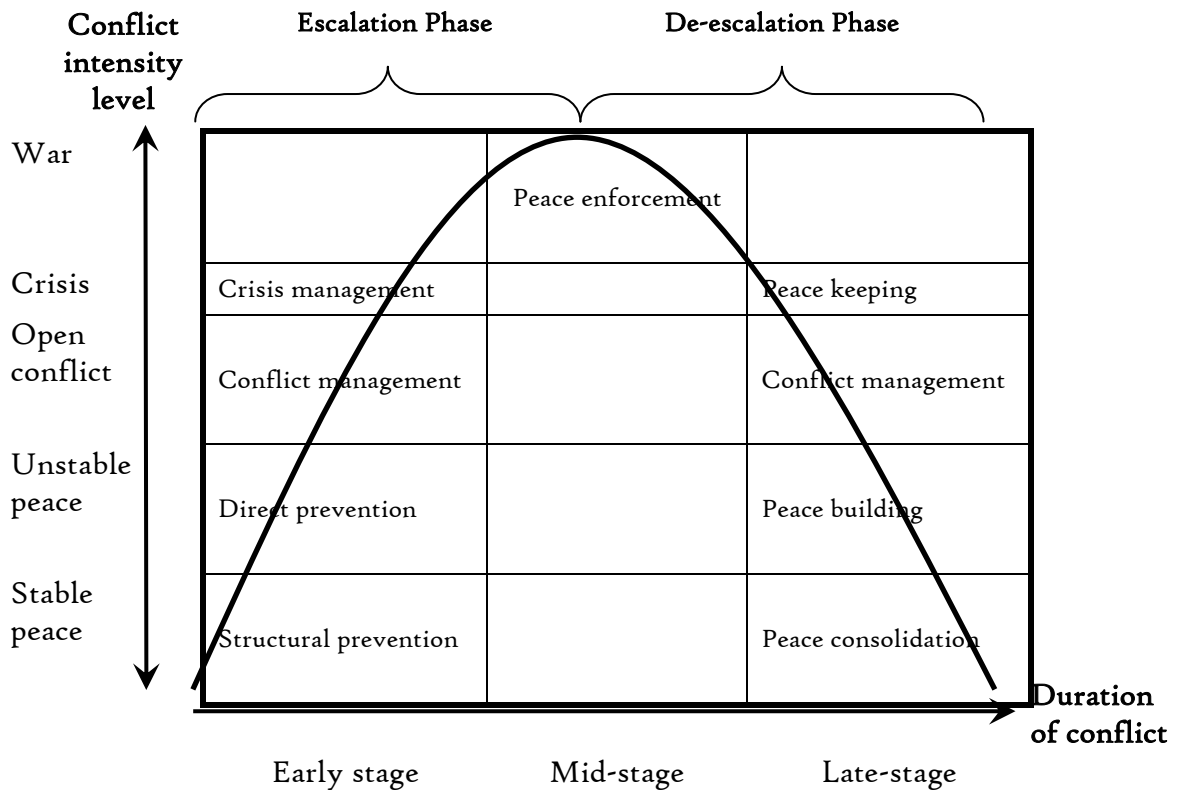
The division into phases, and the cyclical perception of conflict, has also become the starting point for research on conflict prevention, management and resolution. In principle, conflict prevention, conflict management and conflict resolution are regarded as applicable in different phases of a conflict. In sum, conflict prevention measures are designed for the early phases, before a conflict has become manifest (open). Management measures are applied in later phases when a conflict is manifest, but before violence has occurred. Conflict resolution could, on the other hand, be applied in the de-escalation phase after a violent conflict has occurred.<sup>14</sup> As illustrated below, the division into phases is a much simplified description of reality. Also, there are disagreements both within the academic and the policy community, as well as between the two as to how these measures should be understood and applied.

The model of the life-cycle of conflicts presented here includes both the conflict process itself and possible prevention, management and resolution measures (Model #2). This conflict cycle is presented in the form of an upside-down U-curve, illustrating a conflict cycle in its most simplified form, i.e. the rise from stable peace to war and the de-escalation to stable peace. The model presented below is an ideal model of the conflict cycle, an analytical construction developed to simplify analysis. As will be noted in the coming section (see “Different conflict curves”), this model is simplified and is not always in line with the empirical reality.

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<sup>14</sup> The authors however argue that resolution can be applied in all phases as soon as the conflict is manifest.

**Model 2: The Conflict Cycle**



\* Model based on Michael Lund, 1996

The curve is divided into five levels of conflict intensity (stable peace, unstable peace, open conflict, crisis, and war) in a total of nine chronological phases. *Stable peace* is a situation where tension between the parties is low and there exists different forms of connections and cooperation between them, often including economic and environmental cooperation, as well as cooperation within other non-sensitive issue-areas. During a period of *unstable peace*, tension has increased. This is a situation where, albeit the existing negative peace, there are such high tensions between the parties that peace no longer seems guaranteed. An *open conflict* is when the conflict is defined and the parties have taken measures to deal with it, even if militarized options are not adopted. In the *crisis phase*, the risk of war is imminent and militarized options are the preferable or likely option. There may be sporadic violence between the parties at this stage, but there is no regular open violence. In the *war phase*, on the other hand, there is widespread and intense violence. In the de-escalation phase the pattern is reversed, moving from war to crisis, through open conflict and unstable peace to finally reach a situation of stable peace.

Just as the phases of the conflict cycle are important, the connection between conflict prevention and conflict- and crisis managing needs to be developed further. The easiest way to separate between the concepts is by focusing on the time factor. Starting with conflict prevention, it is by definition applied *before* the conflict has become open and violent, i.e. to prevent a conflict from emerging in the first place (or to prevent a conflict from re-escalating in a post-conflict phase). Conflict prevention measures are effective at the levels of stable- and unstable peace before a conflict has become manifest. Here, it is important to differentiate between structural- and direct preventive measures. The former are most applicable in the stable peace phase and consist of structural measures that often aim at specific groups or issues such as economic development, political participation or cultural autonomy. The benefits of applying structural measures at an early stage is simply that the acceptance of preventive measures tends to be higher at low levels of inter-party suspicion and hence more far-reaching and institutional measures can be implemented. If structural preventive measures are implemented at an early stage, including both the building of institutions and development of trust and (longer-term) cooperation, they decrease the perceived need to, and hence risk of, escalating a potential conflict issue into the level of unstable peace. The more pronounced a conflict becomes the more specific measures it requires. At the same time, structural measures are losing importance as a probable strategy.

In the unstable peace phase, the direct preventive measures are directed at issues with a shorter term goal in mind, i.e. to reduce tension and create trust between the actors. Simultaneously, the window of opportunity for longer-term initiatives, such as the building of institutions, fades away slowly and the conflict becomes more issue specific and more costly in financial and political terms. Direct preventive measures can, for example, be formal or informal workshops dealing with the possible conflict issues. They can also aim at creating openness in certain fields such as the military, reducing military spending, or achieving cooperation in rescue operations. Other examples include sanctions, coercive diplomacy, the dispatch of special envoys, and problem-solving workshops. It should be noted that the border between structural and direct prevention is unclear and that aspects of the two are often overlapping.

Conflict management and crisis management do, on the other hand, involve tactics that are enforced when violent conflict is deemed likely (conflict management) or imminent (crisis management), but before a situation escalates into war. Conflict management can be enforced, as soon as the conflict has been identified by the actors, as an effort to reduce tension and prevent further escalation. Direct measures, such as reduction of military forces, third party intervention, informal and formal communication or general CBMs, can be designed to handle the conflict and reverse destructive behavior into constructive. The measures are often bilateral as questions many times are sensitive and not seen as threatening at this stage. However, multilateral forums, such as the UN, are increasingly being used.

Crisis management is employed in the short time frame before a war is to erupt, when the conflict escalates rapidly and the time for management measures is limited. This period is characterized by a scarcity of time and other resources to address the conflict, as well as inadequate information. Crisis management entails more drastic measures than conflict management and aims at containing the outbreak of militarized conflicts with all available means. Examples of such measures include third party intervention by actors such as NATO or the UN. Some analysts also view preventive strikes as possible conflict- and crisis management measures. However, in this paper, conflict and crisis management measures do not include preventive strikes and similar extreme military measures.

During the stage of war, neither prevention nor management is possible. Military means are used as the primary tool, even if political, economic and social tools are used simultaneously to decrease the opponent's willingness and/or capability to fight. At this stage, the actors either have to fight things out until reaching a so-called hurting stalemate where both parties realize the need to end the conflict, or peace has to be enforced by external actors. At this stage there are of course many different measures that could be utilized, but few of these are peaceful. One example of a measure is to prevent military conflicts from spreading to other states or regions. It should be noted that there often is a great reluctance to allow external intervention before war tiredness and a hurting stalemate has been reached.

If the militarization of a conflict is temporarily controlled, either through a peace treaty or a cease fire, it may be possible to reverse the positions of the actors and make them adopt more constructive behavior. Initially, the focus is on separating the actors and preventing further mistakenly or deliberate escalation (peace keeping). This stage is comparable to the crisis stage in the escalation phase and often involves third party actors that assist with peacekeeping and/or monitoring. When the more imminent threats of re-escalation have been dealt with, further opportunities exist for less short-term and direct measures, and the conflicts move into the conflict management phase. There is still a risk for escalation, but no imminent threat of war. When the conflict has deescalated further, a phase of peace building follows, which gives room for more long-term measures. Finally, if the peace building efforts meet with success, the conflict moves to the peace consolidation phase where the aim is to make actors more cooperative and create an inclusive peace for all involved parties. In other words, the de-escalation phase shares many similarities with the escalation phase.

The later stages of peace building and peace reconciliation are often financially costly and require enormous political and economic commitment from the international community as well as the involved actors. This is not to mention the economic and social costs that affect the population at large, but especially the poorer sections of society. Thus, the conviction that resolution and other mechanisms applied to deal with conflicts have to be introduced after the conflict is militarized is humanitarian as well as financially unsound. In general, the measures used in the de-escalation phase are often much more financially and politically demanding than pro-active measures in the escalation phase. Furthermore, measures taken after a war often have to involve third parties, like the UN or stronger military actors that can guarantee security for all actors involved, which is not needed to the same extent in the escalation phase. This takes a lot of political compromises and intense negotiations in an environment that lacks trust. Without exception, trust is lacking after a militarized conflict and trust between the involved parties is tremendously difficult, although not impossible, to rebuild. In the real world, there are often no, or limited, trust until the peace consolidation phase has been initiated.

Finally, a few comments need to be made in regard to conflict resolution measures. Such measures may in fact be initiated in all levels of the



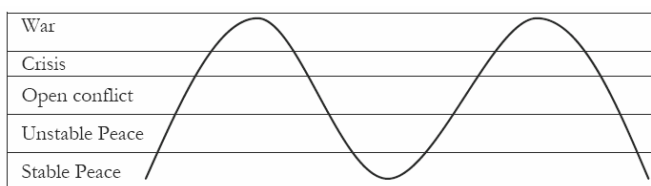
conflict curve, although some authors confine such actions to after the militarized phase. We disagree to this conclusion, as it is, of course, possible to resolve differences in issue positions without going to war. Indeed, the Cuban missile crisis, the dispute in Cyprus, the border conflicts between China and Kyrgyzstan are all examples of conflicts and crisis that were handled or resolved before war erupted.

## Different conflict curves

### *A development of the single conflict curve model*

As mentioned earlier, in reality the conflict cycle is re-occurring over time and passes through the different stages over and over again. In an ideal model of the conflict curve, a conflict moves through all stages in each cycle until the conflict is eventually resolved. In this case, the upside down U-curve will look like a wave of U-curves, reaching the level of war and then de-escalating to the level of stable peace, until the conflict is ultimately resolved (if ever) (model 3:a).<sup>15</sup>

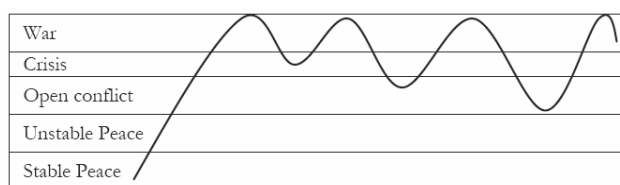
**Model 3:a**



However, it should be noted that in reality all waves of the conflict do not look the same. The conflict cycle in figure 3:a simply does not correspond to the patterns of real conflicts despite the fact that it has a more flexible curve. A re-escalation of a conflict can occur at any point

during the de-escalation phase and does not necessarily follow the standardized ideal curve. In fact, it is more likely that a conflict re-escalates the higher the intensity level

**Model 3:b**



(model 3: b). A conflict tends to “bounce” between the higher levels of

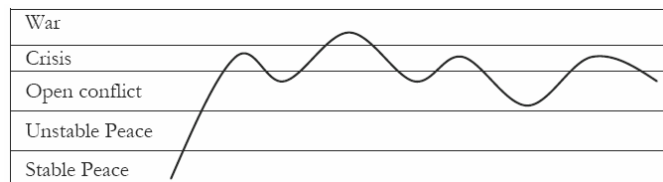
<sup>15</sup> An argument could be made that the ideal wave pattern would be one that re-escalates during the unstable peace phase, before becoming a stable peace. In this paper the authors nonetheless prefers using an ideal conflict curve which includes the stable peace level as this is suitable considering the definition of stable peace used here (see “The Life Cycle(s) of a Conflict”).

the conflict cycle and it tends to be difficult or even impossible, to reduce the conflict intensity and increase the long-term trust. These patterns are often seen in protracted conflicts, such as the Israel/Palestine conflict.

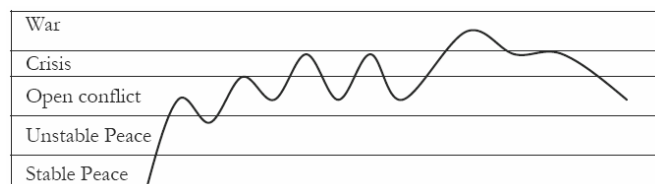
It is also important to note that not every escalation of a conflict reach the intensity level of war (model 3: c). The parties might not be able to find any means to ultimately resolve the conflict, or even move into the level of unstable peace. At the same time, however, the conflict's intensity level might never reach the war level. This pattern is especially noticeable in conflicts that are pro-longed and disregarded by the international community.

To add further complexity to the wave pattern, it should be noted that the same kind of pattern can, and is, occurring in the escalation phase of the conflict (model 3: d) where the conflict moves between the intensity levels of open conflict, crisis and unstable peace without reaching a level where more concrete and long-term solutions can be found and implemented. A conflict's life cycle is simply not properly represented by a simple line that follows one specific pattern, neither during the escalation phase, nor during the de-escalation phase.

**Model 3:c**



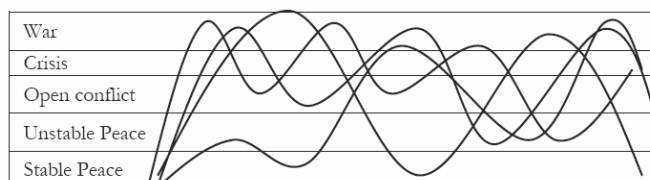
**Model 3:d**



## The multi-curve model

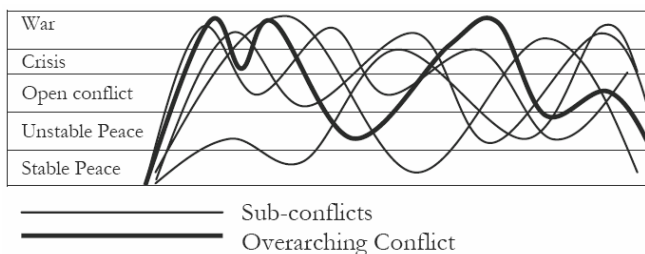
In reality, the wave pattern is far more complex than has been indicated so far. In fact, each conflict arguably includes a large number of sub-conflicts over a wide array of issues. Each of these sub-conflicts has its own conflict cycle (model 3: e) at any set point in time. The sub-conflicts will thus be at different points of their respective cycle. Consequently, the sub-conflicts will be in different conflict phases, phases that need not overlap with the current

**Model 3:e**



phase of the core conflict (Model 3:f). Consequently, at any point in time different types of measures for different sub-conflicts will be needed. These measures will not always be identical to the ones used in the core conflict. At the same point in time there might thus be a need for structural prevention, direct prevention, conflict management, as well as crisis management and resolution measures, or even peace building and peace consolidation. Each sub-conflict requires a unique kind of prevention, management or resolution measure, suitable to both

**Model 3:f**



its conflict intensity level and conflict phase, as well as to the characteristics of the particular sub-conflict. In short, at each point in time, different kinds of measures need to be applied to maximize the ability to handle a conflict. If overarching conflicts between two or more actors are to be managed or prevented, focus needs to be on further issues than solely the core issues. This is essential for the building of trust and confidence between the parties and vital for the successful prevention of further escalation, and/or the possibly resolution of the conflict in the longer term.

It is often easier to build confidence, and possibly even bring about cooperation, in sub-conflicts on less sensitive issues. Such confidence has a potential of creating positive spill-over effects on the development of

the overarching conflict by setting examples and providing an opportunity for new ways of interaction. Even if the possibility of affecting the overarching conflict is limited, there is still a potential for spill-over effects on other sub-conflicts, which over time enhances the chances for possible effects on the core conflict. To exemplify, if two actors find a formula for cooperation regarding cross-border rescue operations during sea emergencies, this might set an example for how to manage other types of cross-border natural disasters. Cooperation methods successfully used in different rescue operation can then serve as an example for other areas, which in turn might serve as examples for even more conflictual issues, and so on. Also, successful cooperation and exchange on some issues provides a certain level of confidence and increased trust. Confidence building through cooperation on less sensitive issues can for example be seen between South- and North Korea as well as between mainland China and Taiwan.<sup>16</sup> One concrete example is the ongoing cooperation between the Taiwan-based Strait Exchange Foundation (SEF) and the China-based Association of Relations across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS) that are negotiating people-to-people exchange aiming at preventing civil disputes between mainland China and Taiwan.<sup>17</sup> In sum, the dynamics of conflicts are most complex, and each conflict consists of a large number of issues, or sub-conflicts. This complexity must also be taken into account when addressing how to prevent, manage, and/or resolve a conflict. By trying to reduce the idea of what a complex phenomena a conflict is, ones ability to prevent, manage and resolve the conflict will inevitably be hampered. A holistic approach is needed both to understand conflicts, as well as to handle them. This will also be addressed throughout the next section on conflict prevention and conflict management, which both questions the (artificial) separation of the concepts and argues for the need of integrating them.

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<sup>16</sup> Arthur S. Ding, "Conflict Prevention and Management in Northeast Asia: A Perspective from Taipei"; Kyudok Hong, "Dilemmas of South Korea 's New Approaches to Conflict prevention"; and Chyungly Lee, "Conflict Prevention in Northeast Asia: Theoretical and Conceptual Reflections", in *Conflict Prevention and Conflict Management in Northeast Asia*, ed. Niklas L.P. Swanström (Uppsala & Washington: CACI & SRSP, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Chyungly Lee, "Conflict Prevention in Northeast Asia: Theoretical and Conceptual Reflections", in *Conflict Prevention and Conflict Management in Northeast Asia*, ed. Niklas L.P. Swanström (Uppsala & Washington: CACI & SRSP, 2005).

## SECTION 2:

### Conflict Prevention and Conflict Management

#### Conflict prevention

Conflict prevention means different things to different people and there is no single definition that is agreed upon. During the Cold War, many practitioners and academics viewed preventive action as synonymous with pre-emptive strikes.<sup>18</sup> After the Cold War, this has changed, and preventive measures have come to receive a new meaning and the emphasis has shifted to the peaceful prevention of disputes. With regard to the development of the concept of conflict prevention, Anders Bjurner has pointed out that conflict prevention is a fairly new sub-culture of security and foreign policy studies.<sup>19</sup> This is in a sense true, but one should note that it is a sub-culture with a long history. Indeed, the idea of prevention was central during the congress of Vienna in 1815 (A.D.) and in the writings of Sun Tzu (c. 403-221 B.C.).<sup>20</sup> Conflict prevention was never mentioned as a concept but in practice there was a practical concern to prevent conflicts and deter the reoccurrence of conflicts.

Conflict prevention is often divided into two categories: direct prevention and structural prevention. Direct conflict prevention refers to measures that are aimed at preventing short-term, often imminent, escalation of a potential conflict. Structural prevention focuses on more long term measures that address the underlying causes of a potential conflict along with potentially escalating and triggering factors. Economic development assistance or increased political participation are examples of structural prevention, while the dispatch of a mediator or the withdrawal of military forces are examples of direct prevention. The distinction between structural and direct prevention is important,

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<sup>18</sup> Peter Wallensteen, ed., *Preventing Violent Conflicts: Past Record and Future Challenges*, Report No. 58, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, Sweden, (Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> Anders Bjurner, "Security for the Next Century: Towards A Wider Concept of Prevention", in *Preventing Violent Conflicts: Past Record and Future Challenges*, Report No. 58, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, Sweden, ed. Peter Wallensteen (Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, 1998).

<sup>20</sup> For a more extensive overview of the history of conflict prevention see Alice Ackerman, "The Idea and Practice of Conflict Prevention", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol 40, no 3 (2003), 339-347; Karin Aggestam, "Conflict Prevention: Old Wine in New Bottle?", *International Peacekeeping*, Volume 10, No. 1 (2003).

especially in the policy field although many measures such as military disarmament can have both structural and direct effects.

The next concept that needs to be defined is conflict prevention. Despite the wide array of writings on conflict prevention, there is a lack of consensus regarding its definition.<sup>21</sup> Thus there is a wide range of definitions, ranging from more narrow ones focusing on limited ways of prevention such as Michael Lund's definition of preventive diplomacy, to broad ones such as David Carment and Albrecht Schnabel's definition of conflict prevention (see below).

Michael Lund defines preventive diplomacy as

“actions taken in vulnerable places and times to avoid the threat or use of armed force and related forms of coercion by states or groups to settle the political disputes that can arise from destabilizing effects of economic, social, political, and international change.”<sup>22</sup>

Boutros Boutros-Ghali has defined preventive diplomacy as “the use of diplomatic techniques to prevent disputes arising, prevent them from escalating into armed conflict ... and prevent the armed conflict from spreading.”<sup>23</sup> These definitions are limited to diplomatic measures and exclude non-diplomatic measures such as economic development or military measures.

It needs to be noted that preventive diplomacy is a problematic term. As has been noted above the term focuses on diplomatic efforts of conflict prevention during the early stages of a conflict, while conflict prevention defines a wider set of preventive measures of which diplomacy merely is

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<sup>21</sup> Alice Ackerman, “The Idea and Practice of Conflict Prevention”, *Journal of Peace Research*, vol 40, no 3 (2003), 339-347; Karin Aggestam, “Conflict Prevention: Old Wine in New Bottle?”, *International Peacekeeping*, Volume 10, No. 1 (2003); Fen Osler Hampson and David M. Malone, eds., *From Reaction to Conflict Prevention :Opportunities for the UN System* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002); Bruce W. Jentleson, ‘Preventive Diplomacy: A Conceptual and Analytic Framework’, in *Opportunities Missed, Opportunities Seized: Preventive Diplomacy in the Post-Cold War World*, ed. Bruce W. Jentleson (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000); Paul van Tongeren, Hans van de Veen and Juliette Verhoeven, eds., *Searching for Peace in Europe and Eurasia: An Overview of Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002); William I. Zartman, “Preventing Deadly Conflict”, *Security Dialogue* 32(2) (2001), 137-154.

<sup>22</sup>Michael Lund, *Preventing Violent Conflicts* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996), 37.

<sup>23</sup> Boutros Boutros-Ghali, “Challenges of Preventive Diplomacy. The role of the United Nations and its Secretary-General”, in *Preventive diplomacy. Stopping wars before they start*, ed. Kevin M. Cahill (New York: BasicBooks and the Center for International Health and Cooperation, 1996), 18.

one aspect. However, some even argue that in order to be considered diplomacy, or even an effective tool, preventive diplomacy needs to be official. More recent publications on conflict prevention do not always make this division between preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention, but at the same time many keep the old separation. This sometimes creates a communication problem when actors believe that they understand each other, whereas they in fact are talking about different types of preventive measures. Many believe that they are limiting themselves to the official efforts, while others consider the same discussion as entailing additional non-official strategies.

Among the more inclusive definitions is David Carment and Albrecht Schnabel's definition of conflict prevention as "a medium and long-term proactive operational or structural strategy undertaken by a variety of actors, intended to identify and create the enabling conditions for a stable and more predictable international security environment."<sup>24</sup> Another broader definition is provided by Gabriel Munuera, who defines conflict prevention as the application of non-constraining measures that are primarily diplomatic in nature.<sup>25</sup> Non-constraining measures are those that are not coercive and depend on the goodwill of the parties involved.<sup>26</sup> Michael Lund has also suggested a wider definition:

"any structural or intercessory means to keep intrastate or interstate tension and disputes from escalating into significant violence and use of armed forces, to strengthen the capabilities of potential parties to violent conflict for resolving such disputes peacefully, and to progressively reduce the underlying problems that produce these issues and disputes"<sup>27</sup>.

This definition takes into consideration any measures that prevent violent conflicts and strengthen the capacity of concerned actors to act structurally to reduce the possibility of conflict.

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<sup>24</sup> David Carment and Albrecht Schnabel, "Introduction – Conflict Prevention: A concept in search of a policy", in *Conflict Prevention. Path to Peace or Grand Illusion?*, eds. David Carment and Albrecht Schnabel, (Tokyo: The United Nations University Press, 2003), 11.

<sup>25</sup> Gabriel Munuera, "Preventing Armed Conflict in Europe: Lessons learned from recent experience", *Chaillot Paper 15/16* (1994), 3 .

<sup>26</sup> Gabriel Munuera, "Preventing Armed Conflict in Europe: Lessons learned from recent experience", *Chaillot Paper 15/16* (1994), 3 .

<sup>27</sup> Michael Lund, "Preventing Violent Intrastate Conflicts: Learning lessons from experience", in *Searching for Peace in Europe and Eurasia: An Overview of Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities*, eds. Paul van Tongeren, Hans van de Veen & Juliette Verhoeven (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002), 117, note 6.

It is currently being discussed whether a more narrow definition is needed to make conflict prevention researchable<sup>28</sup>, or whether a broader definition is preferable since it allows for a broadening of the operational alternatives and an expansion outside the box.<sup>29</sup> The Swedish Foreign Ministry has, for example, emphasized the importance of a broad definition of conflict prevention. It promotes a definition that takes a holistic view on conflict prevention and human security and includes both individuals and states. The argument for the inclusion of both individuals and states is that a focus solely on political disputes would be too narrow of a definition to incorporate all possible threats to stability and peace. This broader definition is a reaction against earlier failures to see security threats. It could be said that the international community has been slow, or in some cases, inactive in its response to new security threats. It has also been slow to adapt to the non-conventional manner in which these threats materialize and the levels they are materializing on, i.e. trans-national and non-governmental levels.<sup>30</sup>

The broader approach acknowledges the importance of economic and social development, as well as security, military, and judicial measures. These aspects form an integral part of conflict prevention and have contributed to the growing effectiveness of prevention measures. The importance of conflict prevention has also been emphasized by the World Bank.<sup>31</sup> The World Bank views conflict prevention together with post-conflict reconstruction as critical to the bank's mission of poverty reduction, thereby acknowledging the vicious circles in many of the world's poorest states, where poverty causes conflict and conflict causes poverty.<sup>32</sup> This new more inclusive approach is increasingly accepted by policy-makers and has introduced new security threats onto the agenda.

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<sup>28</sup> Peter Wallensteen and Frida Möller, *Conflict Prevention: Methodology for Knowing the Unknown*, Uppsala Peace Research Papers No. 7, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, Sweden (Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, 2004).

<sup>29</sup> David Carment and Albrecht Schnabel, eds., *Conflict Prevention. Path to Peace or Grand Illusion?* (Tokyo: The United Nations University Press, 2003).

<sup>30</sup> Niklas L.P. Swanström, Mikael S. Weissmann and Emma Björnehed, "Introduction", in *Conflict Prevention and Conflict Management in Northeast Asia*, ed. Niklas L.P. Swanström (Uppsala & Washington: CACI & SRSP, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> The World Bank, *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy* (Washington, DC: World Bank; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>32</sup> The World Bank has noted that as much as eighty per cent of the world's 20 poorest countries have suffered from at least one major war in the past 15 years, and that post-war



Finally, the idea of a cultural of prevention needs to be mentioned as it is central to thinking about conflict prevention in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This idea indicates a regional or global understanding of the need and methods of prevention and is being promoted by the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan who has been trying to move his organization away from a culture of reaction to one of prevention.<sup>33</sup> Also the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has emphasized the need for a culture of prevention, both in development cooperation and foreign policy. In its DAC guidelines, the OECD urges the international community to apply a conflict prevention dimension to all its actions. According to the OECD, a culture of prevention could be accomplished if the international community was better able to “analyze the causes and dynamics of conflict and peace in order to understand how their actions will affect the “structural stability” of a society or country”.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, it urges the international community to be more aware of “the political aspects of any activity and understand how its aims, design, and implementation may interact with the political and economic dynamics in that society, including their effect on poverty”<sup>35</sup> The idea of a culture of prevention has also been discussed by prominent scholars and practitioners in a recent volume on conflict prevention which was published in memory of the late Swedish Foreign Minister Anna Lind.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the concept has been less than successful in practice, despite its rhetoric power in the international community.

## Conflict management

Fred Tanner has defined conflict management as the limitation, mitigation and/or containment of a conflict without necessarily solving it.<sup>37</sup> Peter Wallensteen and Niklas Swanström have added to this

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states have, on average, a 44 percent chance of relapsing in their first five years of peace. (World Bank, *Conflict and Development* (2005)

<<http://www.worldbank.com/conflictprevention.htm>> (August, 2005).

<sup>33</sup> Kofi Annan, *Prevention of Armed Conflict*, Report of the Secretary-General, A/55/985-S/2001/574, June 7 (2001).

<sup>34</sup> OECD, *The DAC Guidelines: Helping Prevent Violent Conflict* (OECD, 2001), 31 <[www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org)> (April 28, 2003).

<sup>35</sup> OECD, *The DAC Guidelines: Helping Prevent Violent Conflict* (OECD, 2001), 31 <[www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org)> (April 28, 2003).

<sup>36</sup> Anders Mellbourn, ed., *Developing a Culture of Conflict Prevention*, Anna Lindh Programme on Conflict Prevention (Hedemore: Gidlund, 2004).

<sup>37</sup> Fred Tanner, “Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution: Limits of Multilateralism”, *International Review of the Red Cross*, September (2000).

definition and argue that conflict management should imply a change, from destructive to constructive, in the mode of interaction.<sup>38</sup> William I. Zartman has argued that conflict management refers to eliminating violent and violence-related actions and leaving the conflict to be dealt with on the political level.<sup>39</sup> Zartman's argument has been somewhat criticized as NGOs, academic institutions and half-formal (track-two) structures have emerged as important actors and now influence the conflict management process.

Wallensteen has also claimed that conflict management typically focuses on the armed aspects of a conflict.<sup>40</sup> Swanström, on the other hand, has argued that an armed conflict not necessarily is needed for conflict management to be applied.<sup>41</sup> Swanström's argument is that as soon a structural problem is defined or a direct conflict is manifest, without being militarized, it can and should be addressed by the active parties and the international community. As soon as a conflict has been militarized, the momentum has been lost and the political and economic cost to solve or manage the conflict escalates quickly. It is far easier to change the mode of interaction from destructive to constructive in an early rather than late phase. In this process confidence-building measures (CBMs) are crucial as they serve to strengthen the conflict management process by increasing trust between the actors. This is true both in the case of formal and informal conflict management. It should indeed be noted that the best result often are achieved by combining informal and formal conflict management. The importance of using both formal and informal mechanisms can for example be seen in the negotiations regarding the Korean Peninsula, negotiations which would not have taken place without the use of both formal and informal measures and mechanisms.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Peter Wallensteen, *Från krig till fred - Om konfliktlösning i det globala systemet* (Stockholm: Almqvist&Wiksell, 1994), 50; Niklas L.P. Swanström, *Regional Cooperation and Conflict Management: Lessons from the Pacific Rim* (Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, 2002).

<sup>39</sup> William I. Zartman, "Towards the Resolution of International Conflicts", in *Peacemaking in international conflict: methods & techniques*, eds. William I. Zartman and J. Lewis Rasmussen. (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), 11.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Wallensteen, *Understanding Conflict Resolution War, Peace and The Global System* (London: Sage Publishing, 2002), 53.

<sup>41</sup> Niklas L.P. Swanström, *Regional Cooperation and Conflict Management: Lessons from the Pacific Rim* (Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, 2002).

<sup>42</sup> Niklas L.P. Swanström and Mikael S. Weissmann, "Chinese Influence on the DPRK Negotiations", *Peace Review*, 16:2 June (2004), 219-224; Niklas L.P. Swanström and Mikael

### *Conflict management and conflict resolution*

The process of conflict management is the foundation for more effective conflict resolution. A distinction between conflict management and conflict resolution is, however, needed as a starting point as the concepts often are confused or integrated in an inappropriate manner. Conflict resolution refers to the resolution of the underlying incompatibilities in a conflict and mutual acceptance of each party's existence<sup>43</sup>, while conflict management refers to measures that limit, mitigate and/or contain a conflict without necessarily solving it.

William I. Zartman has pointed out that both the conflict resolution aspect (negotiation) and the conflict management aspect is needed to arrive at a positive result.<sup>44</sup> He argues that they are both ends of the same continuum. One end aims at resolving the current conflict so that business or peace can move on while the other aims at resolving the deeper underlying conflict over time.

Conflict resolution can be both formal and informal. It can either aim at resolving or terminating conflicts in an open and predictable process in accordance with legal principles<sup>45</sup> or focus on

“efforts to increase cooperation among the parties to a conflict and deepen their relationship by addressing the conditions that led to the dispute, fostering positive attitudes and allaying distrust through reconciliation initiatives, and building or strengthening the institutions and processes through which the parties interact”.<sup>46</sup>

The final aim of resolving the conflict is however shared by both perspectives regardless of process.

A number of scholars, especially from non-Western societies, have argued that conflict management is a successful tool for resolving conflicts over a longer time period, and that it creates the foundation for

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S. Weissmann, "Can China Untie the Gordian Knot in North Korea?", *Korean Journal of International Studies*, No. 1 (2004).

<sup>43</sup> Peter Wallensteen, *Understanding Conflict Resolution War, Peace and The Global System* (London: Sage Publishing, 2002).

<sup>44</sup> William I. Zartman, "Conflict Management: The Long and Short of It", *SAIS Review*, vol 20, no 1 (2000).

<sup>45</sup> Frederic Kirgis, *International Organizations in their Legal Setting*, 2<sup>nd</sup> (St. Paul: West Publishing, 1993); Afzalur Rahim, "Empirical Studies on Managing Conflict", *International Journal of Conflict Management*, vol 11 (2000).

<sup>46</sup> Michael Lund, *Preventing and Mitigating Violent Conflicts: A Revised Guide for Practitioners* (Washington, D.C., Creative Associates International, 1997), 3-4.

effective conflict resolution.<sup>47</sup> This is contrasted to a more Western argument that the importance of conflict management lies in its ability to solve short-term conflicts. Both of these views are entirely accurate, and compatible, and there might just be a cultural difference in our focus. Both of these views can, and should, be incorporated in a theoretical framework for conflict management and resolution, since they entail no inherent contradiction. They are in fact often applied in different stages of a conflict and address fundamentally different issues. Nevertheless, a number of Western scholars claim that the difference is one of long-term versus short-term perspectives and that it is a question of either resolving the underlying problem or the current problem.<sup>48</sup> Kwok Leung and Dean Tjosvold, and other scholars focusing on Asia, have taken the opposing view and argue that it is more about relationships and that blind justice could terminate long-term relationships.<sup>49</sup> However, in reality, the integration of two fundamentally opposing cultures of conflict management and resolution into one organization has resulted in apparent cases of stalemate.<sup>50</sup> When comparing two or more cultural settings, the difference in perception is an interesting factor when dealing with mechanisms for handling conflicts.

In sum, conflict management and conflict resolution are different concepts, but at the same time they are closely interrelated. They are two mechanisms at different sides of a continuum, used to deal with the same conflicts but at different stages of these conflicts (see “The Life Cycle(s) of a Conflict”).

#### *Conflict management and conflict prevention*

Conflict management and conflict prevention has, in a similar way, been argued to be different sides of the same coin. It has also been argued that conflict management is required in order to enable the initiation of preventive measures aiming at resolving the dispute. Zartman argues that the difference merely exists in theory and that both concepts are

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<sup>47</sup> Kwok Leung and Dean Tjosvold, *Conflict Management in the Asia Pacific: Assumptions and Approaches in Diverse Cultures*. (Singapore: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), 1-12.

<sup>48</sup> William I. Zartman and J. Lewis Rasmussen, eds., *Peacemaking in international conflict: methods & techniques* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997).

<sup>49</sup> Kwok Leung and Dean Tjosvold, *Conflict Management in the Asia Pacific: Assumptions and Approaches in Diverse Cultures*. (Singapore: John Wiley & Sons, 1998).

<sup>50</sup> Niklas L.P. Swanström, *Regional Cooperation and Conflict Management: Lessons from the Pacific Rim* (Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 2002).

intertwined in the practical implementation.<sup>51</sup> Preventive measures are designed to resolve, contain and manage conflicts so that they do not erupt into violent conflicts. This makes conflict management an important part of conflict prevention. It is important to point out that conflict management can be introduced at all levels of a conflict spiral and that it is widely used in crisis management and war situations. Referring back to the different conflict curves (Model 3:e-f) at any point in time a number of sub-conflicts (issues) in need of management measures can be expected.

At the operational level of conflict prevention, Michael Lund argues that preventive measures are especially effective at the level of unstable peace, which is a “situation where tension and suspicion among parties run high but violence is either absent or only sporadic”.<sup>52</sup> This is arguably not always the case since some preventive measures are best operationalized at an earlier stage, preferable during stable peace where there is a minimum of suspicion between potential adversaries. The reason for this is simply that the acceptance of preventive measures is higher when no suspicion disturbs the situation. If institutions, trust and cooperation is built at an early stage, it is less likely that the conflict reaches the stage of unstable peace.

It is clear that many states and regional organizations see little or no point in working with conflict prevention since there are no military conflicts. The old saying "why fix it when it is not broken" becomes a sad reality. This is the same as saying "why buy insurance if you are not sick". The simple answer is that when you need the insurance, it is too late to get it. It is not argued that all potential conflicts can be prevented, only that early prevention will decrease the amount of conflicts that will escalate to unstable peace or war, thereby preventing human suffering and saving economic capital. This argument has, over time, become more accepted among international organizations. They have gradually moved towards emphasizing the importance of pro-active and structural measures to prevent conflicts, especially in their development policies. This tendency can not least be seen in the emphasis on the development of a culture of prevention. However, in practice the implementation is

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<sup>51</sup> William I. Zartman, “Conflict Management: The Long and Short of It”, *SAIS Review*, vol 20, no 1 (2000).

<sup>52</sup> Michael Lund, *Preventing Violent Conflicts* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996), 39.

still problematic as it tends to be difficult to legitimize huge costs to prevent potential conflicts that have not yet reached a critical level. It is simply easier to successfully argue for spending more money once an open conflict has started, despite the waste of political and economic resources, not to mention the social and humanitarian suffering.

### **Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution – the need for an integrated approach?**

The separation of the three concepts, even when approached as different sides of the same coin or as a certain continuum, creates a problem with existing theory. In theory, it has been regarded necessary to make a distinction between the resolution, management and prevention of conflicts, as a way of simplifying reality to enable the construction of a theoretical model. However, this separation is not only artificial, but also incoherent as different scholars use their own definition of the respective concepts. A more coherent definition of prevention and management is thus needed, a definition that can be integrated with other mechanisms for handling conflicts.

In addition, a theory that differentiates between conflict prevention, conflict management and conflict resolution also risks being counterproductive when applied to a reality in which these concepts in fact are indistinguishable. In practice these measures can be seen as working side by side at different levels and within different issues in a larger conflict (also see “Different conflict curves”). It is thus possible, as argued earlier, to resolve certain issues in a conflict, while at the same time managing or preventing other issues from taking a violent form. This does not imply that the conflict has been resolved, or even that tension has been reduced since new issues can be brought into the conflict at any time.

Due to the complexity of the conflict cycle there is a dire need of a holistic approach to conflict prevention, management and resolution, and the tool box needs to be open for alternative thinking. Disseminating a conflict into several subgroups and core issues increases the possibility to act even in conflicts that seem difficult to act in. Prevention, management, and resolution measures need to be applied in a coordinated and integrated fashion that leaves nothing open to minimize lost opportunities to act.

The problems that the separation of these concepts entail need to be addressed in future research. Although we acknowledge that simplifications are needed to develop a working theory, we argue that an integrated approach would enhance theory development since it will allow for a theory with greater empirical relevance. As opposed to the existing theoretical frameworks, an integrated theoretical approach would have the potential to minimize conflicts, both in number and intensity. Policy-makers and military staff is often put off by the non-operationality of many of the models that are presented and regard the concepts as mere academic exercises. This can, in many cases, be traced back to a practical realization that the differences between the concepts are small and that they often go hand in hand. Arguably, this last point is, on its own, a good enough reason to explore the possibility of an integrated framework.

## Biographical note

### **Niklas L.P Swanström**

Dr. Niklas Swanström is Program Director of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, a joint transatlantic research and policy center affiliated with the Johns Hopkins University-SAIS and Uppsala University. He is Associate Professor at the Department of East European Studies at Uppsala University and Research Fellow at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, the Johns Hopkins University. He is editor of the *China Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, a publication on China and Eurasia. His main areas of expertise are: conflict prevention, conflict management and regional cooperation; Chinese foreign policy and security in Northeast Asia; narcotics trafficking and its effect on regional and national security; and negotiation.

Dr. Swanström is the author of four books: *Conflict Prevention and Conflict Management in Northeast Asia*, *Transnationell brottslighet: ett säkerhetshot? (Transnational Crime: A Security Threat?)*, *Regional Cooperation and Conflict Management: Lessons from the Pacific Rim*, and *Foreign Devils, Dictatorship or Institutional Control: China's foreign policy towards Southeast Asia*.

### **Mikael S. Weissmann**

Mikael Weissmann is Lecturer and Researcher at the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, a joint transatlantic research and policy center affiliated with the Johns Hopkins University-SAIS and Uppsala University. He is also holder of a Ph.D.-fellowship at the Swedish School of Advanced Asia Pacific Studies and is currently working towards his Ph.D. at the Department of Peace and Development Research (PADRIGU) at Gothenburg University, Sweden. Weissmann has been Visiting Fellow and Lecturer at the School of International Studies at Renmin University, Beijing, and Visiting Researcher and Lecturer at China Foreign Affairs University in Beijing. Previously, he was working at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

Weissmann is researching conflict management, security issues, regionalism, and negotiation in East Asia, with special emphasis on the impact of informal networks and informal mechanisms.