The early warning of forced migration: State or human security?

Susanne Schmeidl

The protection of territory and people against threats, attacks, and unwanted intrusion is one of the oldest human instincts. Although hospitality to guests (even the granting of refuge to those persecuted) is valued in many cultures, there is often also a natural distrust of those we do not know and whose culture is different from ours. These somewhat conflicting concerns between state and human security have led to the rise of intelligence services trying to anticipate threats against state integrity on the one hand, and of early warning systems trying to anticipate threats to the integrity and livelihood of human beings on the other. Despite the different goals of both ideal types of forecasting mechanisms, their methodology – collecting and analysing information, scenario-building, and recommending options to decision makers for preventive action and intervention – is similar. This has led to a cross-fertilization of approaches, with some “hard” early warning systems tending toward the ideal type of intelligence that emphasizes the protection of states (e.g. against the influx of refugees) more than human security.

Forced displacement is a good example of the dual purpose early warning systems can serve when attempting to forecast humanitarian disasters that might affect more than one country, and thus one security concern, simultaneously (those sending and those receiving refugees). In the purest sense, refugee early warning should be aimed at avoiding human suffering. However, it often appears to be, at least partly, also applied to alleviate or even prevent the pressures and destabilizing
potential stemming from large-scale refugee movements, and/or to secure the speedy and “safe” return of the refugees and displaced persons (of which Kosovo and to some degree Afghanistan are the most recent examples).

The defensive application poses a dilemma to humanitarian concerns if early warning models are used to understand where refugees might go in order to block exit/entry. However, if the focus is on early preventive efforts that would avoid the need for migration, we may achieve a balance between human and state security – or at least find an area of fruitful coexistence between state and human security that could alleviate humanitarian disasters.

In light of this, the basic premise of this chapter is to show that early warning is the *sine qua non* of effective conflict prevention and can be mutually beneficial to state and humanitarian actors. It critically discusses the emergence of early warning, scrutinizing its aims and objectives. By reviewing existing methodologies of early warning, the chapter tries to show what can and cannot be achieved by early warning and why. It also focuses on the non-technical or more political obstacles to early warning, which ultimately may be the key reason for the failure of the prevention of humanitarian emergencies, rather than methodological flaws. The discussion of political obstacles has become more pressing owing to the 11 September 2001 attacks on the United States, as politicians begin to reconsider the “softer” approach to intelligence and state protection.

**Early warning – A brief historical sketch**

Humanitarian early warning (in contrast to intelligence) has its roots in climatological (the forecasting of floods, hurricanes, volcanoes, and earthquakes) and economic (the prediction of stock market crashes) forecasting. Whereas academics attempted to understand the causes of wars in the 1970s through indicator systems, early warning was first introduced into humanitarian affairs in the area of famine prediction. Models were strongly linked to hard sciences and an initial focus was to understand the formation of natural disasters in order to prepare relief assistance. The idea was not to prevent the actual disaster (because this was impossible) but to minimize damage and human suffering.

Following in the footsteps of famine early warning, refugee early warning emerged with a similar focus on victim assistance rather than disaster prevention. One could argue that the interest in refugee early warning came during a time when forced displacement (both international and internal), as well as the number of countries afflicted with this
phenomenon, began to grow in the late 1970s and early 1980s (see figures 7.1 and 7.2).

The first study came from within the UN system, by Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, Special Rapporteur of the UN Commission on Human Rights, in 1981. Utilizing a case-study approach, the initial goal of refugee early warning was more to understand the patterns of such disasters (direction of flow, size of population) than to prevent the disasters themselves. Although Aga Khan’s study focused primarily on human rights and the political context, he pointed to other fundamental problems and push factors in forced migration (for example, inadequate economic opportunities owing to the rate of population growth, global food insecurity and scarcity, growing inflation and unemployment, and ecological deterioration). Finally, he also added some possible pull factors to the explanations of refugee flight for the first time, something that thus far had been more common in the study of voluntary than of forced (refugee) migration. These factors included sophisticated information systems, travel networks, liberalization of immigration policies, and institutionalized aid such as refugee camps.
A more systematic development of refugee early warning, at least on a theoretical level, occurred outside the UN system at the Refugee Policy Group under the leadership of Lance Clark. Extending, and considerably systematizing, the work by Aga Khan, Clark tried to capture the complex causality of refugee flight (push–pull) by identifying underlying causes (root causes), differentiating them from proximate conditions and intervening factors and triggering events. This model (see figure 7.3) set a standard in early warning research and the classification of indicators.

Many scholars paralleled or extended Clark’s efforts. The problem, however, was that they merely elaborated Clark’s initial model, remained mainly at a theoretical and not empirical level, and never synthesized their work. The Japanese scholar Onishi is a rare exception: he developed an impressive and elaborate early warning model based on Aga Khan’s reference study. He tested his model with a combination of case studies and computer analysis. Onishi wanted to create computer outputs or “radar charts,” from which it would be possible to tell whether or not the country was in “future danger of generating displaced people.”

Using many variables in his case studies, he highlighted four areas: (1)
destruction of the environment (ecological imbalance), (2) failures in development (mass poverty, socio-economic disparities), (3) failures in peace and security (absence of the rule of law), and (4) violation of human rights (absence of respect for human life and cultural rights).

Yet the complexity of the model, the multitude of variables, and the fact that he lacked a proper dependent variable made his model less useful to policy makers. In addition, Onishi’s work has never been very accessible outside of Japan.

It was not until 1995 that Schmeidl’s dissertation lifted the early warning of forced migration to a truly quantitative level, merging knowledge from several bodies of literature (refugees, migration, political instability, human rights violations, and wars). Building upon Clark’s original model, she empirically tested root, proximate, and facilitating factors of forced migration and found support for several propositions, such as the association between forced exodus and genocides, internal conflict, and international military interventions into conflicts. Human rights violations seem to push people out only when they are on a physical rather than an institutional level (actual persecution as against an aura of terror). In addition, poverty was found not to be a traditional root cause but more the catalyst in a difficult political environment.

Little has been done since in this area, as refugee early warning slowly began to shift to an understanding of the root causes of forced displacement and conflict prevention. This can be largely attributed to three interconnected factors. First, research revealed that the growth of the world refugee population was linked not simply to the rise of war-mongering states but also to an increasing duration of displacement owing to protracted conflicts and a lack permanent solutions. Whereas in
1970 only 4 refugee populations had been in place for over a decade, there were 13 by 1980, 31 by 1990, and almost 50 by 2000. The 1970s and 1980s featured a total of 56 and 57 countries with refugee migration, respectively, and the 1990s had 97 countries with populations in exile. This trend is paralleled by forced internal displacement, with 15 countries in the 1970s, 30 in the 1980s, and 69 in the 1990s.

Second, permanent solutions began to fail, as is reflected in slowing repatriation and resettlement figures. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), annual repatriations in the early 1970s constituted a quarter of the world refugee population. By the late 1970s they had dropped to only 3.5 per cent and throughout the 1980s they remained below 2.5 per cent. Although the number of repatriations rose once again to about 30–35 per cent in the 1990s, these can be attributed mainly to refugees from Afghanistan, Ethiopia, and Mozambique.

A clear shift from the humanitarian years in the 1970s (when 2 million Indo-Chinese refugees were accepted into the United States, Canada, and Australia, and roughly 75,000 “boat people” or Vietnamese refugees into Europe) became apparent in the 1980s, when resettlement became an exception and states began to tighten their immigration and asylum laws.

Third, the end of the Cold War did not lead to an easing of the world refugee crisis; the numbers forcibly displaced declined only temporarily in 1994 for four years. These trends led Newland to conclude that we are experiencing a “failure or break-down” of the classic refugee and humanitarian regime. They may have also influenced politicians, analysts, and practitioners to realize that the knowledge of “how many refugees would go where when” was a matter of late warning, since the conflict had already escalated. Thus, aiming at the prevention of the crisis rather than finding a cure for it encouraged studies in the early warning of genocides/politicides, ethnic discrimination and ethnic conflict, inter- and intra-state war, environmental conflict, and state failure.

The components of an early warning model of forced migration

Based on Lance Clark’s work, traditional early warning models distinguish in one way or another between root or underlying causes of conflicts, proximate causes, which are closer in time to forced exodus (or conflict), and intervening factors that either accelerate or decelerate forced migration. Figure 7.4 provides a summary of the most important indicator categories with a set of examples. The list should be seen as an illustration and by no means exhaustive. The only difference from
Clark’s model is the emphasis now put on actors and major stakeholders in early warning models, especially spoilers that might benefit from war. This comes from an understanding that individuals may manipulate necessary but not sufficient causes for conflict and forced displacement for their own good. The importance of actors can be seen in the framing of the proximate causes and intervening factors depicted in figure 7.4.

Root causes

Root causes are underlying events and conditions that have existed for many years, such as religious conflicts, long-standing border disputes, difficulty in state-building, or ecological degradation. These factors are hard to change and by themselves do not lead to forced migration. They are thus necessary but not sufficient causes of forced exodus and in many ways are consistent with theories of underlying grievances that can lead to conflict. Their power lies in the interaction with other more proximate factors, and in the fact that they can be instrumentalized by political entrepreneurs to mobilize support for power struggles or to foster exclusionary politics.

Even though there are many other important root causes, such as existing ethnic grievances, historical events (such as the partition between India and Pakistan in 1947), or a history of past conflicts, empirical research has mainly focused on the role of economic and population factors. Underdevelopment or poverty is probably the most cited root cause of forced migration, and has even found some support in empirical studies. Nevertheless, evidence of a direct causal relation between poverty and forced displacement seems to be inconclusive. Although refugees do come from poor countries, not every poor country experiences forced displacement.

Weiner at one point argued that population pressure or growth can also be linked to forced displacement. Again, the empirical evidence is inconclusive, not finding any direct causal relation between population variables and forced exodus. It may be that the population variables have an impact on the size of refugee populations (small countries, by default, can send fewer refugees than big countries); yet population size is not necessarily the best proxy for identifying people at risk of persecution and, in turn, flight.

Proximate causes

Proximate causes interact (often in a complex manner) with root causes and jointly cause forced migration. Clark provided the example of a long-
Figure 7.4 Examples of indicators for the early warning of forced migration.
standing border conflict turning into warfare: the border dispute is at the root of the problem, but the inability (or unwillingness) to resolve the issue eventually causes warfare (and forced exodus). Proximate causes are also often linked to a government’s (or other actors’) unwillingness or inability to cope with root causes or unfavourable political, economic, or social conditions. In many ways, proximate causes parallel the arguments of resource mobilization theories of collective action: existing grievances (root causes) can lead to conflict only if there are enough resources available to fuel it (money, leadership, etc.),

Studies of forced migration have often focused on both inter- and intra-state wars as a proximate cause of refugee migration. Inter-state wars are more likely to result in internal displacement, because fighting can make border areas insecure, blocking exit. Intra-state war, on the other hand, especially if combined with military intervention from outsiders, is extremely likely to lead to refugee migration. As noted above, in most other early warning models conflict becomes the dependent variable, making it more important to understand the nature of conflicts than the nature of forced displacement. So far, struggles continue to be over power-sharing and resource distribution, particularly along ethnic divisions. The impact of religious strife is also increasingly becoming a central dimension of internal conflict in some areas, such as Algeria, the Middle East, and Central and South Asia. In addition, places such as Angola, Sierra Leone, or Colombia have been linked to war economies or greed-based warfare (as opposed to grievances) fuelled through the rise of warlords within weak or failed states.

Linked to intra-state conflicts, but also to human rights violations, is the lack of institutional means to accommodate differences and grievances shared by parts of the populations. This is an issue of bad governance. With the rise of warlords in decentralized conflicts, non-state actors have often been as guilty as states, if not more so, of violating the rights of civilian populations. In addition, as long as states can control their borders, even more severe human rights violations may not lead to forced exodus. This shows the importance of intervening factors such as border controls when anticipating forced exodus from politically charged environments.

Facilitating factors

As Aga Khan’s study showed, the presence of certain political, economic, and social conditions does not necessarily cause refugee movements. Intervening factors either facilitate or prevent refugee flight, in addition to influencing the timing, size, and direction of forced displacement (maybe also ultimately whether displacement is within or across bor-
Therefore, it is necessary to examine the factors that influence people’s propensity to leave their home country and seek refuge in neighbouring countries. Clark defines these factors as being responsible for “the timing, numbers, and composition of any future flows,” and asks, “why did others stay?” rather than the conventional, “why did people leave?” It is these intervening factors that provide a link between early warning and the formulation of preventive action. One could even argue that, without the monitoring of intervening factors, any early warning, especially one of forced migration, is meaningless because the analysis of root and proximate causes does not sufficiently explain why people are leaving and staying or why conflict ultimately escalates. Clark identified five groups of intervening factors:

1. Alternatives (coping strategies) to international flight (e.g. possibility of resistance or internal displacement).
2. Obstacles to international flight (e.g. knowledge of flight route, geographic obstacles, proper transportation, health and food factors, security problems and controlled borders, the controlling of borders, denial of entry, and the restrictions of immigration laws). Obstacles, however, are not necessarily actual difficulties encountered, but could merely be perceived as such.
3. Expected reception in the asylum country (e.g. its economic situation, asylum policies, the existence of cross-border ethnic groups). For example, it could be argued that camps providing international assistance are a potential “pull factor” for refugees.
4. Patterns in decision-making (e.g. tribal leadership, the “bandwagon effect,” the demography of the refugees). This was largely the case among the Afghan refugees because mass movement happened when tribal leaders decided to leave.
5. Seasonal factors (e.g. weather patterns, agricultural cycles). This can be linked to either labour migration or the fact that in conflict situations warring parties tend to fight less during the cold winter months (see Afghanistan), potentially briefly halting mass migration.

An additional intervening factor or aspect of (forced) migration, not considered in Clark’s model, comes from Peterson’s observations regarding voluntary migration. He found that, once the first migrants have explored a route, the growth of the movement becomes “semi-automatic” and individual motives irrelevant. Therefore, the best predictor of large migration streams is small trickles in the years before. Improved transportation facilities and migration networks (such as family, friends, or social ties in the country of destination) also increase the size and likelihood of the migration stream by lowering the cost of migration. Another factor explaining the self-perpetuation of migration is that migrants often leave agricultural land behind that may be neglected...
and thus reinforces problems of economic development in the sending country. The migrant has no real advantage in returning home; indeed, his/her family might eventually emigrate as well. Finally, the fact that migrants often earn more money in countries of destination increases the relative deprivation felt by the population left behind and thus increases the likelihood of future out-migration. Massey picked up on this idea that migration will eventually become independent from the factors that initially caused it, arguing that the effect is visible only over a longer period of time and only once a migration stream has begun.

A further intervening factor is the nature of stakeholders in (refugee-producing) conflicts. Although incorporated in Clark’s fourth category of “decision-making,” it is even more crucial to know exactly “who is who” in conflicts in order to gauge who might use forced expulsion as a clear political strategy. The ethnic cleansing practised in the former Yugoslavia is a key example here. As already discussed under proximate factors, the mindset of stakeholders (toward either conflict or peace) alone does not suffice in an analysis; a consideration of the resources at hand to execute specific goals and strategies is also needed. For example, although Milosevic clearly planned the forced expulsion of Kosovo Albanians, the NATO bombing may have prompted a speedy execution of the plan.

Last but not least, early warning usually also includes the concept of an event that triggers the actual refugee exodus but does not cause it by itself, making it less useful for early warning modelling because it cannot be manipulated and is very hard to predict. Clark argues that triggering events can involve a change in push factors (e.g. a new population group becomes affected, a problem spreads to a new geographic region, or the intensity and level of a problem increase significantly) or intervening factors (e.g. exhaustion of coping behaviour, seasonal factors, changes in the viability of flight, or expected reception). This makes the constant monitoring of intervening factors a key task of early warning systems.

The methodology of refugee early warning

Most early warning systems use similar models that structure indicators along root, proximate, and facilitating factors (sometimes also called accelerators/decelerators). An agreement on the steps of early warning has also developed:
• collection of information (specific indicators);
• analysis of information (attaching meaning to indicators, setting it into context, recognition of crisis development);
• formulation of best/worst-case scenarios;
• formulation of response options;
• communication of the above to decision makers.
Although initially much debate in early warning centred on the collection of information, the information revolution and the Internet shifted attention to the type of analysis or the best methodology. It is here where most disagreements have occurred and to some degree still exist. Early warning models that emerged from the study of the occurrence of wars and worked within the “hard” science paradigm have attempted to use quantitative and empirical models that, as accurately as possible, could predict the occurrence of conflict or forced migration. A major problem of these approaches is their retrospective nature, which clashes with the political necessity for prospective analysis. David Singer’s study on interstate wars (later on he added intra-state conflict as well) was one of the first and best-known quantitative studies to use the label of early warning. Ted Gurr’s research on ethnic conflicts is among the best-known empirical studies on internal struggle and minorities at risk. Susanne Schmeidl was the first to study forced migration within this tradition, and has since been followed by Zottarelli and by Davenport, Moore, and Poe. The following approaches have been tested:

- **Threshold models** attempt to identify a specific threshold of human rights violations or other types of violence that will lead to forced migration (or conflict). Although this method has an appeal in being rather simplistic, it often cannot truly capture the complexity of most conflict settings. In addition, in order to set a threshold, a lot of other previous information and qualitative analysis is necessary.

- **Sequential models** make the argument that conflicts follow a specific sequence of events until they escalate and cause people to flee. Thus, research attempts to identify a set of accelerating factors that need to be monitored step by step. Again, the appeal here is the simplistic focus on a selected set of indicators, but in reality it might be more difficult to fine-tune such models by properly weighing the importance of each factor.

- **Pattern-recognition models** are still at the stage of exploration because they rely on complex computer systems that learn all possible constellations of factors that have led to conflict in the past. Once the computation achieves a certain level of knowledge it can identify countries at risk by “fitting” them to a specific conflict pattern. Despite many attempts, no comprehensive model has yet been fully developed. However, the related method of cluster analysis, which attempts to cluster similar conflict constellations, has shown some promise in the analysis of the Middle East crises.

Aside from the method of pattern recognition, both threshold and sequential models rely in the early stages of their analysis (generally for the selection of indicators) on case-study analysis, already showing a tendency toward mixed methods. This has made deductive models not only into the most common method for quantitative early warning, but
also into the one that is contrasted mostly against case-study analysis. Typically, using multiple regression models, deductive models test hypotheses by making causal inferences based on correlations among indicators. An added strength of these models is the ability for "conjectural causation, i.e., outcomes depending on combinations of multiple factors." and a generalizability of findings based on the theory of probabilities.

A major criticism of quantitative models is not only their lack of detail and precision in predicting, but also their lack of flexibility across cases and time. One major problem is obviously the assumption of quantitative models that everything remains constant, which rarely is the case in the real world. Nevertheless, we also should not underestimate the importance of "conditional probabilities" when making predictions.

The focus on predicting over anticipating outcomes already shows the different language (and emphasis) used by quantitative compared with qualitative models. Thus it remains uncontested that case studies, albeit with little ability to generate generalizable findings, still have the major advantage of contextual and temporal sensitivity. They provide in-depth information about conflict formation, key actors, issues, and events that need to be taken into account when attempting to anticipate conflict. They are furthermore flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstance and indicators. Schmeidl and Jenkins illustrated the importance of contextual sensitivity by suggesting that "processes may have quite different meanings depending on their political context;" for example, "non-violent protest in an authoritarian context might lead to state repression and thus refugee flight, while in a democratic or more open regime it might lead to political reform and thus constitutes an alternative to flight."

Interestingly enough, quantitative modellers were quick to realize their own limitations, including that of "late warning" (lagging behind with predictions), arguing that the main purpose and strength of their research was to rank countries on their "risk potential" and to provide key monitoring indicators. Thus, the argument to combine quantitative models and case-study analysis for the purposes of early warning came far from within the quantitative community. This has led to a development of comprehensive approaches that take both kinds of methodologies into account at different stages in the early warning system.

In light of the above, a comprehensive early warning methodology should include the following steps/aspects:

- At the onset of early warning analysis, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, an analytical framework with key indicators for the ongoing monitoring process needs to be developed. It is important to distinguish the longer-term factors (root causes) from
medium-term (proximate) factors and more immediate facilitating or triggering factors. Within these categories, importance needs to be given to a multitude of areas such as political, social/demographic, economic/ecological, and so on.

- Based on the base-line analysis, the monitoring process needs to be constant and ongoing. As Gupta once said, “it is extremely difficult to forecast, especially the future, but if you forecast, forecast often.”

This is often best accomplished by using a field monitoring system based on standardized protocols developed by event data systems such as Kansas Event Data System (KEDS) or the Protocol for Assessment of Nonviolent Direct Action (PANDA) which later developed into the IDEA (Integrated Data for Event Analysis) Framework.

- While monitoring events grouped around a certain set of standardized indicators, it is also extremely important to profile stakeholders in conflict – both actors for, or spoilers of, peace. It is equally crucial to know their attitude(s) to the conflict/peace process as well as their resources to accomplish their goals.

- Although “on the ground” information from field monitoring is indispensable, one should nevertheless combine this with analyses from field visits and expert panels.

Despite these advances in early warning methodology, there is one “bastion” that still remains unconquered, which is the ability to predict the exact timing of conflict or forced migration. This has been one of the reasons early warning methodology has chosen the language of anticipating rather than predicting an outcome. Schmeidl and Jenkins argued in 1998 that “this is an area where considerable attention needs to be invested.” It may be that we will never be able to predict the exact timing of forced exodus. Nevertheless, a group of researchers at Harvard University, in conjunction with a think-tank in Switzerland (the Swiss Peace Foundation), are currently attempting to improve our understanding of temporal proximity and a more accurate forecasting of conflict escalation or de-escalation using event data analysis.

Political obstacles to (refugee) early warning

Aside from the inability to predict the exact outbreak of conflict or forced migration, the previous discussion has shown that early warning methodology has progressed to the point that most practitioners are reasonably satisfied with the ability to anticipate conflicts and forced migration. The ultimate dilemma of the success of early warning seems to lie on the political front. As emphasized above, early warning is best practised as an ongoing process with constant monitoring of events. Thus, it func-
tions far better when considered long term, with the warning coming far in advance. It is easier to anticipate events than to predict the exact outbreak. Long-term anticipation is best combined with long-term operational preventive actions that ideally eliminate or change the structures that lead to and/or accelerate conflicts, or foster those that lower the chances of conflict escalation. Such thinking and warning, however, seem diametrically opposed to the environment in which political actors have to work. The following points illustrate the existing dilemmas:

- Electoral periods are on average about five years. This encourages short-term thinking and planning because politicians prefer to benefit from their own action, rather than providing this opportunity to others (in the worst case, political opponents).
- Long-term political action receives less public exposure because it is easier to use quick results to gauge the success of any politician or bureaucrat.  
- The decision to spend scarce resources is often difficult in an environment where one can choose from multiple conflicts and numerous more potential ones – who can justify preventive action when urgent humanitarian assistance is needed? In particular, small countries prefer to keep their resources for those cases where they could make a noticeable difference. Still, states too often miscalculate the costs and benefits of conflict prevention vs. conflict containment or management.
- Fear of failure or disapproval is also a big obstacle to acting on early warning: nothing is more embarrassing than to make a difficult situation worse (the problem of walking a “slippery slope”). Even more difficult might be to make a stand against an unfavourable political environment, or even a Prisoner’s Dilemma (e.g. Chechnya).
- Bureaucratic procedures, especially in bodies with many member states, can also severely hamper preventive action despite adequate early warning. The United Nations inactivity during the 1994 Rwanda genocide is the most widely used example here. Despite clear warning signals in numerous faxes sent by General Dallaire of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda in January and February of 1994, not only alerting the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations of planned mass killings of Tutsis but also suggesting action that might prevent the disaster, no action was taken. Aside from the political considerations of intervening in Rwanda, or not knowing how to react (despite clear recommendations by Dallaire), the UN system simply did not have a proper mechanism for linking early warning to early response.

Notwithstanding all these obstacles within the political or bureaucratic environment of early warning, the primary cause of failure to act on early warning has been cited as the problem of political will. This, however, is an easy criticism as long as we do not understand the underlying reasons
for the lack of political will. Apart from an obvious lack of knowledge, lack of resources, or lack of courage to act (or stand alone), there are clearly sober calculations based on state interests. Although the end of the Cold War did produce a shift in the deadlock between East and West – manifested in the UN Security Council – and opened up the possibility for new alliances between states for the protection of human rights and the prevention of conflicts, many lessons remain to be learned, particularly when it comes to humanitarian early warning and conflict prevention. We have to continue to reckon with certain realities in the world, one being that the United Nations has been, is, and will be an entity that represents the interests of states, particularly the strong ones. This may explain why none of the UN early warning systems has so far been successful (see table 7.1 for a chronology of highlights).

As I have shown in the history of refugee early warning, anticipating forced migration is a good demonstration of the somewhat conflicting interests between state and human security. On the one hand, early warning can attempt to understand the timing, direction, and size of refugee flows in order to prepare relief assistance but also in order to build entry or exit controls for refugees. The idea of “safe zones” or the “right to remain,” for example, should not necessarily be seen as a new form of refugee protection, but could also be scrutinized as tools preventing refugees from reaching safe haven abroad. Recent trends have clearly shown that Western states in particular tend to focus more on keeping forced migrations within their own country, or at least in the region they come from (first safe country concept) rather than opening their gates to provide safe haven. One could go so far as to argue that the increased applications of UN Chapter VII operations – initiated for the first time since the Korean war with the 1991 intervention in northern Iraq – fulfil the purpose of bringing “safety to people rather than people to safety, by force if necessary”:

- In Kosovo, the fear of massive migration flows into unstable neighbouring countries (Macedonia, Albania) and into Western Europe, NATO unity, and the wish to punish Milosevic were the key issues behind the international response. Many humanitarians saw the protection of Kosovo Albanians as secondary to the intervention, because there was no commitment to ground troops, which would have been necessary to protect civilians.
- The Chapter VII operation in northern Iraq was intended less to protect the Kurdish internally displaced persons than to react to the fears of Turkey (a NATO member) that a massive influx of Kurdish refugees could strengthen Kurdish secessionist forces.
- Operation Turquoise in Rwanda was linked more to France’s desire to strengthen its political influence in the region than to protect the Tutsi minority.
Table 7.1 Humanitarian early warning in the United Nations – Important developments

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Reference study by Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan for the UN Commission on Human Rights. Aga Khan’s study is followed by two others: one by an Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues in 1983, and one by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1986. These reports shift the focus from purely political causes of refugee migration to economic underdevelopment.</td>
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<td>1987</td>
<td>UN Secretary-General Pérez de Cuéllar creates ORCI (Office for Research and the Collection of Information) with the purpose of exploring the possibility of monitoring situations within countries and the potential utility of an early warning system for forced migration.</td>
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<td>1989</td>
<td>Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) in Geneva initiates a study of the UN capacity for the prevention of refugee movements.</td>
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<td>1991</td>
<td>Resolution of the General Assembly (46/182) leads to the creation of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) in order to strengthen the coordination of UN humanitarian emergency assistance. The idea of conflict prevention becomes a guiding principle in the United Nations.</td>
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<td>1991–1992</td>
<td>The UN Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) initiates a working group in order to discuss the basic question of early warning within the UN system.</td>
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<td>1992</td>
<td>An ad hoc working group with representatives from various UN organizations is initiated and holds monthly meetings. This group tries to strengthen early warning efforts within United Nations organizations – e.g. the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) – as well as encouraging the use and exchange of existing data. Although the meetings improve contact among the different organizations, it remains ad hoc and on a personal level. A main problem is that the working group lacks any kind of decision-making power.</td>
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<td>1992</td>
<td>A joint UNHCR and International Labour Organization (ILO) conference explores the idea of the linkage between economic imbalance and overall poverty in the “South” and forced migration. The Center for Comparative Social Research in Berlin, Germany, follows this up with another conference in 1994.</td>
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1992/1993 Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali dissolves ORCI and initiates UNDHA. DHA, with funds from Japan, develops the Humanitarian Early Warning System (HEWS) based on an indicator approach. HEWS produces short- and long-term analyses and tries to issue warnings in order to identify humanitarian disasters.

1995 The Secretary-General drafts a supplement to the Agenda for Peace for the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations. The importance of early warning for conflict prevention is highlighted again in paragraph 26 (A/50/60–S/1995/1).

1995 UNDHA and ReliefWeb create IRIN (Integrated Regional Information Network) in order to improve the information feed in the Great Lakes area of Africa. West Africa is added in 1997, and by 2000 IRIN covers all African states and begins to expand to Central and South Asia (http://www.reliefweb.int/IRIN).


1996 Parallel to UNDHA, UNHCR creates REFWORLD, a CD-ROM representing an authoritative resource comprising all earlier electronic efforts and supplementing these with a great number of new databases and sources of information.

1997 UNDHA is reorganized into the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) with the following main tasks:
(a) policy development and coordination functions in support of the Secretary-General, ensuring that all humanitarian issues, including those that fall between gaps in existing mandates of agencies such as protection and assistance for internally displaced persons, are addressed;
(b) advocacy of humanitarian issues with political organs, notably the Security Council; and
(c) coordination of humanitarian emergency response, by ensuring that an appropriate response mechanism is established, through Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) consultations, on the ground.

1997 The Executive Committee on Peace and Security (ECPS) is created as part of the reform agenda by the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. ECPS is tasked with improving information exchange and cooperation among departments (see A/51/829, Section A), but does not have any decision-making powers as originally envisioned.
### Table 7.1 (cont.)

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997 and 1999</td>
<td>The annual report of the Secretary-General specifically deals with crisis prevention (A/52/1 and A/54/1).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>ECPS creates an Inter-Agency/Interdepartmental Framework for Coordination. Ten departments, funds, and programmes currently participate in monthly meetings in order to identify crisis areas, plan the evaluation of countries, and discuss preventive methods. Even though this increases contact within the United Nations, it has no capacity for cumulative knowledge or strategic planning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>The president of the UN Security Council re-emphasizes the importance of prevention and credits early warning as a strategy to achieve this (S/PRST/1999/34).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998–1999</td>
<td>The Executive Office of the Secretary-General initiates the Early Warning and Preventive Measures (EWPM) project with support from the British government. EWPM develops an early warning methodology which can serve as a common analytical language for various UN departments and agencies.</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan highlights the importance of conflict prevention in several documents, including the Millennium Report (A/54/2000). He calls for a culture of prevention, which includes strengthening of early warning and conflict prevention within the United Nations (see also A/55/1).</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>UNOCHA, under new leadership, dissolves HEWS in order to refocus on key indicators, training of UN field personnel, and improving contact with the Office of the Secretary-General. The establishment of institutional information channels is geared to bridging the warning–response gap.</td>
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On the other hand, early warning can be employed to anticipate factors leading to forced displacement in an attempt to prevent them from occurring. For example, by removing push factors such as poor governance, human rights violations, and armed conflict, forced migration could be prevented. Whereas refugee scholars and practitioners have shifted in this direction for the sake of human security, politicians most likely did it for the sake of protecting their territories and borders. It seems it is here that early warners need to pay greater attention. Rather than lamenting state actors’ lack of human compassion, it might be more beneficial to begin a merging of interests between intelligence-oriented prediction and humanitarian early warning. The pièce de résistance may be to frame humanitarian concerns in the language of state security. Sadly, the 11 September 2001 attack on the United States may have dealt the necessary cards here.

Although September 11 was seen as a failure within intelligence systems, it was not necessarily a failure in early warning. Intelligence may have failed to follow up on clues about the movements of terrorists across borders, but early warning would never have bothered to look into this area in the first place because it relies on publicly available information.

Table 7.1 (cont.)

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<th>Year</th>
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| 2000   | The Brahimi Report evaluating the UN peace-keeping operations (A/55/305–S/2000/809) emphasizes the importance of early warning and conflict prevention. One of the main recommendations is the creation of a professional system in the Information and Strategic Analysis Secretariat (EISAS) in order to collect information, improve analysis, and develop long-term strategies. It is proposed that EISAS consolidate the various bodies that are currently responsible for policy and information analysis in the area of peace and security:  
  - Policy Analysis Unit and Situation Center of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO)  
  - Policy Planning Unit of the Department of Political Affairs (DPA)  
  - Policy Development Unit of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)  
  - Media Monitoring and Analysis Section of the Department of Public Information (DPI) |
| 2001   | Renewed efforts by the Inter-Agency Framework Team to come up with an indicator approach to early warning to be utilized by field personnel.             |
| 11 September 2001 | Impact on UN system is to prompt reconsideration of the utilization of early warning mechanisms.                                                |
without touching classified information and state secrets. Crucially, however, early warning would have focused not on trying accurately to predict an event such as September 11, but more on anticipating the possibility of such events far in advance in order to find long-term preventive mechanisms to decrease the likelihood of their occurring in the first place.

Even though it is not yet fully clear whether terrorism grows out of unaddressed grievances and conflicts, especially conflicts that seem forgotten by the world (e.g. Chechnya, or even Palestine), terrorist organizations do seem to flourish in situations of turmoil and chaos. Thus, rather than tracking the movement of the al-Qaida terrorist network run by Osama bin Laden, early warners focusing on Afghanistan had long been documenting the dangerous impact of sanctions and political isolation on the Taliban regime. By isolating, and to some degree ignoring, the Taliban in Afghanistan, we may have contributed to an increased radicalization of the movement, allowing it to be hijacked not only by Pakistan but also by Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaida terrorist network. Analysis clearly shows the changes in the Taliban movement to the point where they were neither willing nor able to curb terrorist activity within their own borders.

In light of the above, the inability accurately to predict the exact occurrence of a violent event, or being honest about the impossibility of doing so, may in the past have led to early warning being perceived as “soft” and “weak” in comparison with intelligence analysis. However, the failure of intelligence accurately to predict and prevent September 11 may have given early warning an added boost. Consideration is being given to whether the more long-term focus of this methodology and the stress on operational prevention of unknown events could ultimately be a more feasible approach, or whether at least early warning should also be given a chance alongside intelligence analysis. At a minimum it seems that more attention is now paid to early warning analysis, and that there is more political interest or will to tackle the root causes of conflict because it clearly does not stop at Western borders any longer. The intense international involvement in Afghanistan is proof of this. The only remaining question is whether international interest has enough stamina for long-term engagement in order really to prevent future conflict in the war-torn region.

Conclusion

The early warning of refugee migration was initially developed more as an anticipatory system that would assist the humanitarian aid community
to provide better refugee relief, but the end of the Cold War has clearly produced a shift in the direction of preventing the causes that lead to mass exodus. Because refugee migration is linked to human rights violations and armed conflict (among other factors), early warning models have developed in a more generic fashion, seeing refugee migration as one of the humanitarian disasters that need to be prevented. Although this has brought the issues into the mainstream and merged concerns, it may have halted some of the more refugee-specific analyses that were done in the past.

The potential to use early warning both to prevent humanitarian disaster but also to block the entry of people fleeing terror has led to a dilemma in the early warning of forced migration. Whereas nongovernmental organizations, humanitarian agencies, and academic institutions would very much like to contribute to an enhanced understanding of what causes people to leave their homes, there is no guarantee that such knowledge is utilized by states for humanitarian purposes. A solution to this dilemma may very well be a joint effort to push forward early warning models that track the factors that can lead to forced displacement, with the aim of focusing on early preventive efforts that would then avoid the need for migration in the first place, balancing human and state security alike. The 11 September 2001 attack on the United States may have put the necessary spin on the whole discussion of human vs. state security, and the role early warning could play in bridging the two concerns.

A last resort, however, might be a more targeted use of the mass media and the Internet in order both to pressurize policy makers into “early listening” and to educate the general public about the situation in other countries and the options for conflict prevention. Even if the intervention in Somalia eventually failed, it is a powerful example of what can be achieved with targeted pressure through the media. As long as policy makers are the only ones who know about impending conflicts, they can try to pretend they did not know (as in the case of Rwanda), because there is nothing more embarrassing than others knowing that one knew and did not react. Achieving adequate pressure, obviously linked to adequate response options, may be the ultimate challenge for early warning and the protection of human security. It may still be possible to realize humanitarian early warning goals if technical and institutional obstacles are minimized, thus providing policy makers with few excuses not to act.

Notes

1. “Early warning serves the common good and thus differs from traditional intelligence” (Howard Adelman and Astri Suhrke, The International Response to Conflict and Geno-


4. Internal displacement shows greater variations owing to the fluidity of the situation but also owing to problems in estimating this population.


10. Ibid., p. 275.

11. Ibid., p. 288.


14. Susanne Schmeidl, “Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose: Trends and Changes of

15. Nevertheless, as trends from Afghanistan (but also Ethiopia and Eritrea) in the past have indicated, repatriation into unresolved conflicts often is not permanent and can lead to renewed displacement.

16. Scrutinizing refugee figures, the decline needs to be seen in the light of the relatively short-term displacement from former Eastern bloc and Soviet successor states and a few (partial) settlements of protracted armed disputes (mainly Afghanistan, Ethiopia, and Mozambique), both leading to (temporary) large-scale repatriations (often in unstable environments).


20. For a more exhaustive list, see Alex P. Schmid, PIOOM’s Master List of Potential and “Good Prospect” Domestic Conflict (De)Escalation Indicators, Leiden: PIOOM, 1996.


30. Thus, Serbian warlords were responsible for much of the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in southern Sudan warlords are also increasingly involved in human rights violations and violence.

31. Clark, Early Warning of Refugee Flows, p. 16.

32. Ibid.


35. Ibid.
37. Singer and Wallace, *To Augur Well*.
45. Schmeidl and Jenkins, “The Early Warning of Humanitarian Disasters.”
46. Ibid., p. 477.
48. For an example of such an integrated approach, see the early warning unit at the Swiss Peace Foundation, called FAST (German abbreviation for Early Analysis of Tensions and Fact-finding); Heinz Krumerenacher and Susanne Schmeidl, *Identifying Armed Conflict. FAST: An Example of a Comprehensive Early-Warning Methodology*, Working Paper, Berne: Swiss Peace Foundation, 2001.


56. Adelman and Suhrke, The International Response to Conflict and Genocide; Astri Suhrke and Bruce Jones, “Preventive Diplomacy in Rwanda: Failure to Act or Failure of Actions?” in Jentleson, Opportunities Missed, Opportunities Seized, pp. 238–265.


Part II

Displacement, return, and resettlement