Preventive Diplomacy for the Twenty-First Century

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With the end of the cold war, diplomacy to prevent conflict promises to be an important element of foreign policy agendas. In this roundtable discussion, three well-known academic experts and the president of NIRA debate the fallout from the end of the cold war and the challenges of trying to prevent conflict both between and within nations in the twenty-first century.

Shioya: Preventive diplomacy began to attract attention after Boutros Boutros-Ghali, then UN Secretary-General, issued a report in 1992 entitled An Agenda for Peace. The report coincided with the eruption of domestic conflicts after the cold war. It is possible to speculate that these conflicts may well have been the flip side of the collapse of the cold war structure that greatly diminished the threat of all-out world war. If this is the case, it is apparent that preventive diplomacy will be an extremely important factor in the world of the twenty-first century.

The National Institute for Research Advancement (NIRA) has paid special attention to the importance of preventive diplomacy from an early date. In 1993, for example, we cosponsored a roundtable on conflict prevention and the UN’s agenda for peace, and since then, NIRA has continued to host preventive diplomacy study group sessions under the auspices of the Research Committee on Preventative Diplomacy.

Today we are going to hear the views of three distinguished scholars who participated in these sessions, and we will begin with the question “Why does the world need preventive diplomacy in the twenty-first Century?” We would like to start with Professor Yokota on the international and
domestic context of preventive diplomacy.

Yokota: As President Shioya stated, preventive diplomacy began to be widely discussed after the publication of *An Agenda for Peace*. This wasn’t the first time, however, because it had been discussed earlier at the regional level, mainly in Europe since the mid-1980s, under the auspices of, for example, the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which in 1994 became the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Many people were concerned then that the collapse of the cold war world would lead to chaos and perhaps even trigger a major war. However, the cold war structure collapsed sooner and faster than we had anticipated, and although we cannot say everything went smoothly, the former Socialist nations made the move to democracy and market economies in relative peace, with the Soviet Union splitting into 15 independent republics. One reason the transition was so smooth is because various activities to prevent conflict had been carried out at the CSCE level.

As we moved further into the 1990s, regional ethnic conflicts began to emerge around the world. By then the model for transition from the cold war structure in Europe was already available, and it was thought the model could be adopted and expanded to deal with conflicts in other parts of the world. Concern was especially strong over the situation in Asia and Africa, and some people thought the answer might be for the UN to take the lead in promoting preventive diplomacy. This is my understanding of how discussions of preventive diplomacy became prevalent in the international community.

The general flow of events demonstrates that the study of preventive diplomacy began in response to the Boutros-Ghali report, but I think in Japan Preventive Diplomacy, compiled on the basis of studies at NIRA, provided a basis for further discussion on the subject. The main issue then, and the one that has consumed most of the discussion’s efforts so far, was how to sort out the concept of preventive diplomacy. In that sense, the discussion was still at the preliminary level. Initially, case studies mainly looked at Asia, but more recently the focus has shifted toward Africa, where the approach of analyzing concrete regional examples to substantiate the theory of preventive diplomacy was adopted.

Shioya: Conflicts continue to arise in Kosovo, East Timor and elsewhere, and it was partly in response to these that preventive diplomacy was discussed at the Okinawa G8 Summit. What are your views regarding these conflicts, Professor Naya?

Naya: Let me add a couple of things to what Professor Yokota just said. First, the number of

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UN peacekeeping operations has rapidly increased since the end of the cold war. The general agreement is that if a conflict situation is ignored, the cost in the end will be too high, and this has provided motivation to deal with the problems behind the conflict in advance instead of after it has broken out. Second, however, there was an optimistic view initially that UN measures would work quite well, because the cold war had ended peacefully and joint measures taken during the Gulf War just afterwards were a success. The idea was to expand UN steps toward preventive diplomacy, perhaps even in Asia.

A look back on developments since then reveals that the most important change to our approach has probably been that we have had to rethink this rosy view. Since the introduction of a multinational force during the Gulf War, the number of cases that could only be dealt with by a deployment of forces has greatly increased from Haiti to Somalia, and from Bosnia to Kosovo. So this optimistic view that conflicts could be dealt with in advance through preventive measures was reduced to dust. Instead, it became very clear that measures requiring even such practical aspects as physically organizing personnel to carry out interventions were complicated and difficult issues, certainly far beyond a mere conceptual definition. Furthermore, the issue of how the international community should deal with countries that don’t quite make it as nation-states—the failed states—was pushed further into the background.

The Significance of Africa

Shioya: Japanese tend to think of Africa as being such a faraway continent, so I would like to ask Professor Katsumata the reason why our current stage of study has focused on Africa.

Katsumata: First are immediate concerns about researchers. Japanese Africanists in various fields conduct regional research throughout Africa and have often ended up getting involved in conflicts. For instance, a researcher studying primates in the African jungle has no other option but to return to Japan when a domestic conflict breaks out. Since 1990, conflict has broken out in many regions where Japanese Africanists are researching, which, like it or not, has made it impossible for them to continue studying. The situation was serious enough to draw the attention of not only specialists in regional African conflicts, but also other researchers. But the most important reason comes from considerations about how Japan can respond and contribute to global issues as we enter an era of globalization and global citizenship. What is important in examining the African situation is not to look at Africa as a peculiar area, but to consider how we can accept and deal with negative situations emerging across the world. If we should strike Africa from our preventive diplomacy target list, I fear that Japan would appear odd, and the world would wonder what the true nature of Japan’s contribution is to the international community.

Shioya: Conflicts seem to continue one after another in Africa: Somalia, Uganda, Angola, Zimbabwe, and so on. Why does Africa have so many conflicts?

Katsumata: The Department of Peace and Conflict Studies at Uppsala University in Sweden compiled information on global conflicts. According to this group, during the 10 years following the end of the cold war in 1988, in slightly more than 100 armed conflicts in which more than 25 people were killed as a direct result of war, a third occurred in Asia and another third in Africa, which seems to be

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2 The phrase “failed states” refers to countries such as Somalia, Rwanda, Congo (former Zaire), Sudan, and Angola, where the state continually fails to provide its people with food, safety, protection of property rights, public hygiene and other minimum governing functions, principally because of long-lasting civil wars.

3 NIREA conducted research on the theme of preventive diplomacy from June 1997 to March 1999. The research considered how diplomacy might, in the long run, focus on countries with potential internal conflicts, with Africa taken as a case study.
inflicted by as many armed conflicts as Asia is. Why is that? There was once an optimistic view that the end of the cold war would relieve Africa from proxy wars and that a market economy and parliamentary democracy or a multiparty system would develop. Africa, it was thought, would proceed along a path toward economic growth in a democratic political environment. However, these views were completely wiped out in the mid-90s. Many explanations are possible for the conflicts in Africa, but my own view is that in spite of political and economic liberalization, people still cannot feed themselves, and these are the kinds of problems that should have been settled in the 1990s but were left unsolved.

Shioga: Earlier, Professor Naya mentioned in relation to the phenomenon of conflict eruption that some countries have failed to become nation-states. Since the 1960s, when many African states became independent from European colonial rule, some of them have successfully established nation states, and others have deteriorated into bankruptcy.

Naya: I am not an African specialist, but I feel strongly that no other place in the world has a domestic situation so utterly exposed to the influence of international political economy. A chief problem is that many of these countries achieved independence in the 1960s before they could consolidate their own political, economic, and social systems. During the cold war they enjoyed ample aid and various types of support were made available, including the provision of basic human needs through technology transfers and infrastructure building. However, support and aid has failed to develop the basic structures of these countries even while they have cosmically altered the surface. Obviously it depends on each country, but a basic problem is that even though more than 70 percent of the population in African countries is engaged in agriculture, no improvement has been made in productivity.

Developed nations meanwhile began to suffer “aid fatigue,” and in the 1980s they requested structural adjustment for African countries under the leadership of organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to enable them to develop their own market economies. This hindered efforts toward the diversification of industry, however, and then came the end of the cold war. The introduction of democracy and the holding of elections under a multiparty system gave the appearance of political democratization, but in reality the frustration amassed by economic stagnation surfaced all at once and made it impossible to hold second elections.

Yokota: A report by UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold in 1960 used the expression “preventive diplomacy” for the first time, much earlier than Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali. The UN Emergency Force, the first PKO peacekeeping organization, was deployed during the Suez Crisis in 1956, and preventive diplomacy was defined as activities to prevent such regional conflict from developing into another world war. Dag Hammarskjold was assuming the possibility of nuclear war between the United States and the USSR.

Going back even further, we see that the idea of preventing conflict existed from the establishment of the UN because...
its charter in 1945 stipulates how to prevent conflict between nations. However, the UN Charter focuses only on wars between nations and does not directly address the civil or internal conflicts we face today. In Japanese, the same English expression, preventive diplomacy, was translated earlier as boshi gaiko rather than yobo gaiko, which is used today. This has prevented us from analyzing preventive diplomacy in the historical context.

The premise of CSCE’s activities and later OSCE’s was the prevention of wars “amongst European nations,” so arguments were developed under different circumstances from the present-day conflicts in Africa. The concepts developed by CSCE, such as confidence building and early warning, assumed wars between nations and cannot be applied to current situations of conflict. We have reached the point where we really need to review these concepts more clearly.

Article 2 (7) of the UN Charter states: “The UN shall not interfere with the domestic affairs of member nations.” However, an important exception is provided. The principle of noninterference does not apply to enforcement measures taken under chapter VII of the charter. In other words, it is a clause allowing forced interference by the UN where the principle of noninterference in domestic matters ceases to apply.

This is how the UN has so far intervened in the domestic issues of member nations in a variety of formats. This may be done in two ways. The first is to get the consent of the country in question. The second is to invoke the exclusion clause in an action under chapter VII. Economic sanctions were imposed against South Africa in this way during the apartheid era.

The case of South Africa was strained because South Africa was not threatening peace in the classical sense of the term. The Security Council decided to apply economic sanctions against South Africa because apartheid was regarded as a “threat to peace,” given the possible use of force to stop such discrimination by some neighboring African countries. This has continued to be the method of UN activities since then. For example, UN intervention in Somalia was carried out by using this interpretation of a threat to peace.

**GLOBALIZING DOMESTIC CONFLICTS AND FAILED STATES**

Yokota: Civil wars, which used to be domestic matters, are now regarded as matters of international concern. Domestic conflicts have thus become issues to which the international community must pay attention, a reflection of the borderless and global world we live in today.

The flow of human history demonstrates that the creation of sovereign nation-states was possible only out of chaos and conflict. European countries went through this stage of history to emerge as separate independent nations and are now entering another new stage of a unified Europe. However, Africa has skipped over the process of nation state development and has been swamped by waves of globalization. This explains why what we call civil wars in Africa cannot be labeled in a strict sense as solely African problems.

Historically, Africa has always been disrupted by external forces, of which the conditionality attached to the lending countries by the IMF and the World Bank are only the most recent example. Regardless of the host country’s institutions or culture, many developing countries have been forced to adopt international standards of democratization, free-market policies and strict balanced budgets. It is in the midst of this situation, where these nations’ own systems of beliefs are being denied in the rush toward globalization, that these conflicts are occurring.

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4 The provision in question states: “Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter; but this principle shall not prejudice the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII.”
Katsumata: We use the term failed states on the basis of two prerequisites. First, Africa was affected quite early by globalization in the form of slave trade and colonization. Because of the flow of history and its relationship with other more powerful countries, African nations were not allowed to develop endogenously. We mentioned earlier that the 1960s was the decade in which many African nations won independence. What this means, however, is that colonies became independent and borders and territories were determined. It does not mean that a nation as such gained independence. A nation must be built step by step and efforts at nation-state building should have been started at that time—in this regard, Africa was handicapped from the outset.

Second, in the 1980s African nations were forced to adjust their economic structure, to eliminate external trade deficits and fiscal deficits, as a condition of debt alleviation. The number of public servants was reduced to decrease fiscal deficits, and this hindered domestic administrative capacity and contributed to the deterioration of public security and order. As African states responded to international demands, their abilities which they had somehow managed to maintain, to intervene directly in their own national administrative systems, rapidly weakened.

As Professor Yokota mentioned, although these conflicts appear to be domestic, the economic, social, and political factors contributing to the war have become global in nature. Therefore, unless we have a solid understanding of the peculiarities of each African incident, intervention based on successful events in South America or Asia will not automatically succeed. This has been proved already because some of the “democratically” elected governments have failed to achieve political stability and the prosperity of a market economy.

Naya: I feel that applying preventive diplomacy in Africa is a historical challenge for the international community. In a conflict between nations, once an agreement on a cease-fire or a truce is made, the rest can be sorted out by the parties involved. In a civil war, however, although it is possible to intervene to stop the fighting, the subsequent process of nation building occurs completely in the dark. How will the international community deal with this nation building, or who will be in charge and under what formal arrangements? These will be enormous challenges to the international community in the twenty-first century. Unless we can clear this hurdle, and similar situations arise outside Africa, in countries in Central Asia, for example, I am concerned that the definition of international community as an order maintained by nation-states may be jeopardized.

“Human Security” and Humanitarian Intervention

Shinya: Let’s extend the issues we have discussed so far and explore how we are to understand preventive diplomacy from what we might call the perspective of “human security.”

Katsumata: But I believe human security to
have basically two major significant facets in the context of international politics and economy, and I am trying to encourage the positive application of this concept. First, it has become difficult to grasp the diverse phenomena of the present time through the single perspective of national security. Simply put, we need to be more focused on the aspect of human rights. This does not mean that national security has lost its importance, but I look at human security as offering a complementary role so that a more realistic situation can be accommodated.

Second, the international community has historically concentrated its activities on ODA (Official Development Assistance) based on the idea that poor countries must be economically developed. However, development sometimes does not go well and turns into armed conflict, and after the conflict, development is again needed for reconstruction. Obviously, development is necessary because of the existing poverty, but in many areas, an endless cycle of poverty and conflict has emerged. To escape this cycle, we need a framework that enables us to view and judge poverty and conflict more comprehensively. This is where the expression human security comes from. In an armed conflict, the security of human rights must be ensured, and people’s daily lives must also be ensured from the point of view of social development. What is important in carrying out these activities is the method of evaluating the role of civil society. Historically, each state has been responsible for its own national security, but when we consider human security, we find many places where legitimate governments just don’t exist. In these situations, cooperation, for example between organizations in Japanese civil society (as a developed nation) and nonpolitical actors in the failed states, becomes important. Or we could consider relationships between an actor from Japanese civil society and the government of a diplomatically isolated nation. When we look at human security from the perspective of a diversity of actors, civil society can be one factor helping us to respond in a wide and flexible way.

Shioya: When the international community interferes in a regional conflict to secure human security and rights, isn’t it possible to end up with a contradictory result such as was seen in Kosovo in 1999? The NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) intervention resulted in serious infractions of human rights.

Yokota: Kosovo is an important event that has helped reveal many issues of human security. Ethnic Albanians in Kosovo are minorities within the Yugoslavian Federation, which is mainly populated by Serbs, and have been persecuted on racial, religious, linguistic, and cultural lines. Immediately before NATO’s bombing campaign, appalling persecutions were taking place under the name of ethnic cleansing. If we stick with classic international law, no matter how horrible the Albanians were treated, the situation in Kosovo was merely a Yugoslavian domestic issue. However, if we look at the situation from the perspective of human security, a completely different argument emerges. When a Kosovar resident’s security was not ensured, how was it possible to talk about national security? This argument prepared the ground for the involvement of NATO, a security organization. However, the medicine applied in Kosovo—military action through an air-bombing campaign—might do more harm than good. If military force is used in well-prescribed ways and in a safe manner, a potential crisis may be...
averted but the result of NATO’s attack has left us with serious doubts. On the other hand, had NATO not intervened in Kosovo, would the international community have pretended it had not seen the threat to the security of ethnic Albanians? If NATO had not attacked, who would have taken action to protect ethnic Albanians in Kosovo? I think serious debate is needed on this point.

**Naya:** We have now started to apply the concept of human security as an expression of our shared collective hopes that residents or people of a nation should be treated at least up to a certain standard based on contemporary norms. It is welcome that the awareness of these norms is increasing in the international community. The concept, however, contains inherently vague elements that are difficult to clearly define, and this may allow a dangerous arbitrariness to creep in. Moreover, balance with the existing order—which upholds that peace must be maintained by compliance with promises made between nations—must also be considered. In other words, if an attempt to protect human rights turns a situation into a major war or armed conflict, we must consider which would cost less and which would establish a better precedent for the future. We are facing a very difficult judgment.

**Katsumata:** In general, NATO’s intervention was thought to have been a humanitarian one that couldn’t have been helped. But humanitarianism is a very vague expression. It is important not to forget that humanitarian intervention may be able to put a conflict on hold for a while, but it will never be able to explain the reasons for the conflict itself. By analyzing why the conflict occurred there and why it has not yet ended, we may, for the first time, be able to understand the real significance of humanitarian intervention. I am also concerned about the consequences of humanitarian intervention going alone down the road. Humanitarian intervention nowadays allows for an element of international public opinion, which has resulted from the globalization of information and the economy and which is mobilized by the global force of the mass media. The result is that conflicts attracting the media’s attention can also attract a large amount of funds, and the ones not covered by the media or lacking in economic incentives are ignored; a double standard has emerged.

**Yokota:** One of the difficulties inherent in preventive diplomacy is the extreme diversity of the actors that is the result of a shift of focus from interstate relations to interhuman relations. The number of domestic conflicts, rather than straightforward interstate wars, has increased. They can occur at many different levels and the form they take has greatly diversified. This diversification of conflicts is a really serious problem and is very difficult to understand. Who are the actors of a given conflict? With whom should we be talking to contain the conflict? The initial negotiating parties may not be the same. At first they may appear to be a solid alliance acting together, but the next moment a splinter group appears that refuses to follow decisions made by the larger group. The use of chemical weapons and so on has made these situations much more complex. What are we to prevent, and how do we prevent it in these circumstances?

Because of the progress of scientific technology and economic development, humankind has the conditions in place to allow us to build the happiest society in history. But we have come to a very difficult turning point; we could easily drive ourselves to ruin. If we sit here and do nothing now, I fear that the trail may eventually lead toward destruction.

**Shioya:** After hearing your views, I now really understand that preventive diplomacy is an important and topical issue for the twenty-first century. Professor Naya, could you please elaborate some on the future of preventive diplomacy?

**Naya:** As I discussed earlier, since the mid-
1990s the kind of conflicts that cannot be dealt with by conventional or traditional peacekeeping organizations and that require forcible measures are increasing. In fact, some instances in which attempts to deal with such conflicts with slightly fortified versions of conventional PKO, such as the operations in Somalia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, have failed. I believe that basically the final legitimacy of preventive diplomacy rests with the United Nations. After that, preventive diplomacy activities should be pursued in cooperation with regional organizations in the conflict area by creating firm levels of legitimacy or social acceptance as widely as possible.

The use of military power or forced measures will invariably drag us into more conflicts that are not only difficult to settle, but that also hurt the confidence of the UN. If this happens at a critical moment, when the international community requires the neutral and intermediary function of the UN, this organization may not work very well. I think the neutral and intermediary role, which the UN and regional organizations have nurtured in the tradition of a PKO, is an asset we cannot afford to lose, but that alone is never enough. And once a conflict arises, some kinds of forcible measures are needed. Should that happen, a body other than the UN, such as a multilateral force, will need to apply these measures. The UN will approve or reject each measure, and in doing so it will provide directions to the international community.

If a measure is used in the wrong way, the world will lose confidence in the UN. Therefore, various measures suitable for intervening at various stages of a given conflict are needed, with the understanding that preventive diplomacy is simply one such measure. If we allow all kinds of measures to be applied at random, the significance of preventive diplomacy itself may be lost.

Shioya: Professor Yokota, what do you think is necessary for preventive diplomacy to exercise its full effect?

Yokota: We need a system that maintains a constant up-to-date grasp of situations in the world’s countries, especially in conflict areas. Information must be pooled with specialists constantly analyzing the data. The concept of early warning in conventional preventive diplomacy is similar to pulling a fire alarm while a fire is still in the smoking stage. However, no matter how slight the smoke there is already a fire that is burning. Real prevention must aim to prevent even a small fire from starting. Preventive medicine is the same. An early detection of cancer and a timely operation may be a form of prevention, but the disease has already occurred. True preventive medicine attempts to block the occurrence of diseases by carefully monitoring food intake and life style, and I think the same is required of preventive diplomacy. To achieve that, we need comprehensive preventive diplomacy, and therefore we must establish a more comprehensive information-collecting system.

Information should include very basic items such as hygiene conditions and agricultural crop levels. It is often held by NGO (non-governmental organization) personnel working in remote areas of Africa, but they think the information they have can be of no help to us, and it therefore fails to arrive at the tables of preventive diplomacy. We must first of all collect this information. The more we study African conflicts, the more we realize the importance of prevention before the smoke is seen. The problem of Africa in one word is poverty, so we need to know the conditions of poverty more precisely to resolve the specific conditions of poverty that are most likely to lead to conflict.

Shioya: Thank you very much.