

# Theory Development in Conflict Prevention and Conflict Management Workshop Proceedings

Central Asia-Caucasus Institute &  
Silk Road Studies Program Workshop,  
Uppsala, Sweden, April 8-9, 2005

Emma Björnehed



*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute  
Silk Road Studies Program*

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## Introduction

This workshop follows a conference on Conflict Prevention and Management in Northeast Asia that was organized by the Silk Road Studies Program in Beijing, November 2004. During this conference, it became clear that a discussion on the terminology and definitions of concepts used in research on conflict prevention and management was necessary. This became the foundation for organizing a workshop in Uppsala, aiming at discussing, and hopefully reaching a working consensus on certain concepts that are essential for the research. The workshop was to take a general approach to applied theories with the purpose of reviewing both the existing concepts and the undertaken research on the theoretical foundation of conflict management and prevention. Although general in its approach, the workshop should capitalize on the participants' expertise on Northeast Asia and thus incorporate an evaluative perspective on the relevance of existing theories to the region.

- The purpose of the workshop was to discuss and reach a working consensus regarding central concepts.
- The empirical focus was the region of Northeast Asia with regard to existing theories and their application.
- The results will be disseminated among future participants in conferences to provide a common theoretical basis.

## Session I and II

During the two first sessions the participants were discussing the definitions and concepts of conflict management and conflict prevention with the aim of finding a working consensus.

### *Purpose of the Two Sessions*

The aim of the first session was to engage in a discussion on the concepts of conflict, conflict prevention and conflict management in order to ascertain the understanding of the different concepts among the participants. Once the concepts and issues had been discussed, reaching a working consensus should be attempted in order to facilitate future academic co-operation and create a common frame of reference regarding these integral issues of the project's research.

### *Content of Discussion*

Within the framework of the discussion, the following concepts were debated in-depth: conflict, conflict prevention, conflict management and crisis. The discussion also touched upon related concepts such as preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution. Below follows an account of the main points relating to each concept and specific issue.

### *Conflict*

Early on in the discussion, it was established that states differ in their understanding of what a conflict is and when a conflict is occurring. This was illustrated by referring to the participants' differing perceptions of where on the conflict cycle the conflicts in their respective countries are located. Hence, different viewpoints and issues are important to them.

- Aim of session was to discuss concepts of conflict, conflict prevention and conflict management.

- Discussed also concepts of crisis, preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution.

In relations with other states, this leads to different, or at least perceivably different, definitions and understandings of conflict.

It was discussed whether the concept of conflict should be inclusive or exclusive in its definition. A debate focusing on how to define conflict through quantification factors (death tolls etc) was initiated. Yet the attempt to reach a precise figure or variable for determining the existence of a conflict was abandoned. From this discussion, it was agreed that the inclusion of the term perception is vital in order to allow for a more varied view on conflict. It was determined that this is necessary since the notion of being, or not being, in a state of conflict is fundamentally subjective. Party A may consider itself to be in a conflict with party B whereas party B does not consider itself to be in conflict with party A.

Concerning the concept of conflict, it was agreed that even though a more inclusive understanding of conflict was preferred, allowing for perceived conflict, there was a general consensus that conflict referred to open conflicts. This conclusion was reached after a discussion on the use of the term perceived difference, which would provide for a broad interpretation of the term conflict. Hence, by conflict was meant open conflict (as opposed to latent). However, an open conflict could, but does not necessarily imply a militarized conflict.

The discussion on the concept of conflict used a framework in shape of a continuum of war and peace, where the intermediate points on the continuum were different stages of conflict. In relation to this, the conflict curve described by Michael Lund (see fig. 1)

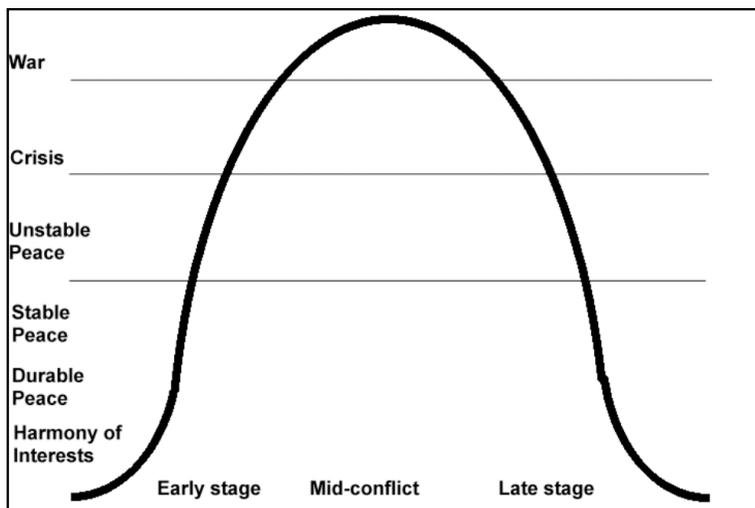
- Working consensus reached regarding the concept on “Conflict”.

- The perception of a conflict needs to be included when discussing the concept of conflict.

- Recognizing that different parties can themselves perceive to be at different stages in a conflict.

was discussed in great detail and it was agreed that, even though a sound theoretical instrument, the curve does not accurately reflect reality. Specifically, the conflict curve does not acknowledge that a conflict is not made up by a single issue, but rather by a multitude of issues that each can exist on different points on the curve simultaneously. Also, the life cycle of a conflict is misrepresented in the traditional conflict curve since a conflict rarely follows the curve in a linear and deterministic fashion. Rather it fluctuates and is flexible with regard to the different stages on the conflict curve.

- A conflict consists of several issues, not just one.



*Fig. 1*

The status (in the conflict prevention, management or resolution phase for example) of each of these issues can be different with regard to the phases of conflict at any moment in time.

The life cycle of a conflict is not linear (as depicted in the conflict curve) but fluctuates between phases.

Specifically, by conflict is meant open conflict. On a continuum of increased severity, this would mean after an issue is latent but before it becomes militarized (violent).

### *Crisis*

In talking about different important concepts relevant to the research, "crisis" was agreed to be a term that needed clarification. Foremost, this was necessary in order to make a clear separation between conflict and crisis.

The discussion originated in a debate over whether or not the situation on the Korean peninsula could be regarded a crisis. Judging from the terminology used by South Korean policy-makers, the situation is labeled a crisis. The importance of the underlying understanding of a term was noted in the discussion. It was acknowledged that the interpretation of a term and its application to describe a certain situation has direct implications on the measures or policy suggestions put forward to approach the situation. Since there is a significant difference between the tools used in, for example, crisis management and conflict management this issue or terminology is important.

The defining characteristics of "crisis" were discussed and originally three factors were considered essential to a definition: large stakes, surprise and short decision time. After further discussion, it was established that the surprise element to a crisis was included in the factor of short decision time, since having a short time in which to make a decision entails a sense of urgency. It also signals a lack of information that follows in a crisis as there is limited time in which to gather information.

- Working consensus reached regarding the concept on "Crisis":

- Definition involves two main factors: large stakes and short decision time

- On the conflict curve, a crisis occur in the short time span before a conflict

- Perception plays a central part as to when a situation is labeled a crisis.

Just as the concept of conflict, perception was pointed out as a vital factor – here in separating a conflict and a crisis. It follows that party A can experience a crisis, whereas party B sees the same situation as a conflict. In relation to the conflict curve, a crisis was considered to exist in the short time span before the eruption of a conflict (from latent to open/manifest).

### *Conflict Prevention*

Early in the discussion on conflict prevention, attention was brought to the fact that the concept of conflict prevention should be treated like a double-edged sword: the very attempt to deal with a situation can make it worse (risking breaking something that was not broken while trying to fix it). It was pointed out that when a situation or relationship is working well, there is no need to point to the issues of difference or incompatibility since this could create a new conflict or escalate an existing one (let sleeping dogs lie). In relation to the potential dangers with conflict prevention measures, the example of surgical strikes was brought up. Surgical strikes have been brought up in forums discussing the Korean Peninsula and could, if used, trigger a conventional war even though it reduces the risk of a nuclear conflict. The issue of surgical strikes brings attention to the confrontational and offensive aspect of conflict prevention and the question of whether this aspect should be included in the definition of the concept.

Along similar lines it was mentioned that conflict avoidance (prevention) through measures such as cease fires could lead to an increase of the conflicting parties' capability to escalate the conflict.

- Working consensus reached regarding the concept of “Conflict Prevention”:

- Measures implemented with the purpose of preventing the outbreak or escalation of conflict.

There was also the opinion that conflict prevention assumes that what is being prevented is perceived to be in the escalation phase. There was a discussion initiated from the wish to distinguish between two kinds of potential situations: one likely to evolve into violent conflict and one where the conflict is of a more stable character. This discussion led to the specification of conflict prevention in so called structural (or indirect) prevention and direct prevention.

Direct prevention was understood to be implemented to an existing conflict in order to prevent it from escalating. Structural prevention was taken to mean measures that are implemented before a conflict arises, when the implemented measures not are directed at the incompatibilities in a direct way. One question that was brought up with regard to structural prevention was how to know when to implement structural prevention, especially when considering the risks of actually doing more harm than good in attempting to prevent a conflict. Although there are risks of doing harm despite the good intentions behind conflict prevention, the risks of causing or escalating the conflict seem reduced when prevention measures are structural in nature. Since they do not target the issues of the conflict directly, there is less a risk that the conflict will erupt or escalate due to increased attention to the incompatibilities.

### *Conflict Management*

Early on in the discussion, it became clear that the participants interpreted the concept of conflict management in different ways. In South Korea, for example, it is common to use the term conflict management as an umbrella concept whereas in Sweden there is a tendency to use the term conflict

- The division of prevention measures into structural and direct prevention helps clarifying the term and makes the concept more adapt for implementation

- It was acknowledged that conflict prevention measures may inflame a previously latent conflict situation due to the emphasis on incompatibilities

- Working consensus reached regarding "Conflict Management"

prevention in this regard. Needless to say, this causes misunderstandings due to the significant discrepancy in the understanding (definition) of the concepts.

Conflict management was perceived to entail an aspect of “learning to live with” a conflict. It was seen as a way of reducing the incentive to escalate the conflict as well as a way of handling an already open conflict. It was noted that conflict management shared characteristics especially with direct conflict prevention in so far as it attempts to prevent the escalation of a conflict. Even though it can be argued that the concepts of conflict prevention and conflict management overlap to some extent, there was a general agreement that the solution was not to merge the two terms, but that both terms are needed since they entail different functions.

### *Miscellaneous Concepts*

#### *The Issue of Actors*

During the discussion, the issue of actors was brought up. In referring to conflict management and prevention and the practical measures of these concepts, it is important to be aware of whom the actor is using and/or engaging in these measures. The effectiveness, if not success, of certain measures of conflict prevention and management may vary depending on the kind of actor that implements them. A model for taking this aspect into account was developed by the participants:

#### *The Issues in a Conflict*

As stated above, the observation that a conflict more accurately is thought of as consisting of several issues (of which one can, but does not necessarily has to, be the core issue) led to a discussion of different

- Conflict management refers to measures taken in an open conflict with the aim of hindering escalation.

- Although treated as separate concepts in the discussions, the overlapping features of management and prevention were acknowledged.

- The type of actor involved in conflict management and prevention is important since it can influence the effectiveness of the measures.

- A conflict consists of several, rather than a single, issues.

and prevention measures. If consisting of several issues, a key question in managing a conflict will be what issues to deal with first: the issues where the parties are more likely to agree or those where the parties are the furthest removed from each other's positions. These different approaches impact what and when measures of conflict management and prevention are applied to a conflict. With regard to the choice of approach, the level of trust between the conflicting parties was deemed essential. The discussion also touched upon the question of how issues in a conflict should be classified.

- Different strategies of how to approach a conflict consisting of several issues were discussed.
- Issue of classification of different issues was also discussed.

	PARTIES IN CONFLICT	PARTIES IN CONFLICT
	<i>Interstate</i>	<i>Intra-state</i>
<i>Actors</i>		
<i>IGO</i>		
<i>State</i>		
<i>NGO</i>		

With regard to different issue of conflict and the conflict curve, suggestions were made on how to make the curve correspond better to actual patterns of conflict. Firstly, the curve can be seen as only depicting a single issue in a conflict, rather than the entire conflict. Secondly, rather than following a set pattern moving through the different stages of conflict, the line of the curve can be allowed to fluctuate. In this way, it would better correspond with the movement of the issue between the different stages of the conflict. This fluctuation need not be, nor appear to be, as linear as in the traditional conflict curve, but can fluctuate in an irregular fashion.

#### *Early Warning Systems*

In the discussion on conflict prevention, the issue of early warning system was brought up. Some of the drawbacks of early warning systems were mentioned, such as the reliance on too many variables in the creation of the system, something that could contribute to unreliable results. It was also pointed out that the nature of the early warning systems has to be different depending upon if they are designed for national or international purposes, something which could prove problematic.

#### *Preventive Diplomacy*

The discussion also touched upon the concept of preventive diplomacy. Although frequently used and as being synonymous with conflict prevention, the participants understood preventive diplomacy as a broad and inefficient concept. Rather than being seen as a concept in its own right, it was perceived as a tool of conflict prevention. Its indicated relation to politics was also interpreted as coercive in nature.

- It was suggested that the conflict curve should be altered to more accurately depict the issues in a conflict and their position regarding stages of prevention, management or resolution.

- It was pointed out that reliance on too many variables can lead to inaccuracy.

- It was agreed that systems need to differ in design in order to be applicable to national and international conflicts.

- Preventive diplomacy was not seen as synonymous with conflict prevention but rather as one tool of such

### Session III

The implication of definitions and concepts for the Northeast Asian Region and;

Where to go from here? Guidelines for the next conference and research direction

#### *The Purpose of the Session*

The aim of this session was to put the concepts discussed in the previous section into the context of Northeast Asia. This is considered important since it is necessary to investigate if there is anything in the regional empirical context that requires amendments to the concepts. The underlying assumption is that allowing for the regional context to impact the understanding and meaning of the concepts will contribute to the development of a more specified theoretical base. Measures of conflict prevention and management that are developed from such definitions and theoretical framework will also be more apt for implementation in the region. Lastly, the participants will discuss the future research direction and plan for the topic and content of the next annual conference in 2005.

#### *Content of discussion*

It was pointed out that most research on conflict prevention has focused on intrastate conflicts. The participants agreed that this is a significant factor when applying the concepts of conflict prevention and conflict management to Northeast Asia, since many of the main conflicts in the region are interstate in nature. Consequently, when focusing on Northeast Asia, research should aim at emphasizing measures of conflict prevention and management that are specifically constructed to deal with interstate conflicts. Researchers need to examine the frames of reference with regard to the intrastate/interstate level

- The aim was to discuss the previously mentioned concepts with regard to Northeast Asia.

- A regional approach to conflict management and prevention was assumed to enhance the effectiveness and likelihood of implementation of measures.

- The session also discussed the direction of future research.

- It was stressed that the focus in Northeast Asia is on interstate conflict rather than intrastate

when examining and/or developing measures of conflict prevention and management.

In addition to the intrastate/interstate dimension, the geographical and a cultural aspect to the theory and practice of conflict management and prevention was acknowledged. In Northeast and Southeast Asia, sovereignty and non-intervention are firmly held principles. Foreign involvement in intrastate conflicts is an unthinkable scenario, a fact which affects the applicability of certain existing measures of conflict prevention and management. With regard to this issue, the discussion evolved around the question whether structural prevention would be a plausible conflict prevention measure that could be used in intrastate conflicts or other conflicts where sovereignty is particularly sensitive.

With regard to the division of prevention into structural and direct prevention, the Western and Asian approaches seemed to differ. A parallel was made to Western and Asian medicine where the Western tradition focuses on killing the germ (attacking the issues) and thus takes a direct preventative approach. Asian traditions, on the other hand, focus on strengthening the body, i.e. the emphasis is on the structural aspects (Confidence Building Measures, CBMs, habit of co-operation in other areas than the issues of conflict). In the continued comparison between Europe and Northeast Asia, it was pointed out that the security situation in the two regions is very different. Hence European measures of conflict prevention and management cannot be applied to the Northeast Asian context without alterations. However, it was stressed that some active measures of conflict management in Northeast Asia, such as the Six-party talks, are examples of a combination of what is perceived to be

- Therefore, emphasis should be on measures developed to deal specifically with interstate conflict.

- The geographical and cultural aspect to conflict management and prevention in the region was acknowledged

- The importance of the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention was discussed.

European and Asian measures of conflict management.

The possibility for Northeast Asia to engage in structural prevention by way of interaction in regional organizations was also discussed. Specific reference was made to the coal and steel union – the predecessor of the European Union – that was established between Germany and France after the Second World War. It was being debated whether a similar measure could be applied in Northeast Asia with regard to oil and gas. Although not totally dismissed, some drawbacks to this idea were mentioned. These included the lack of raw material for exchange and trade as well as the lack of funds to divert to the needed infrastructure (in the case of Europe, funds were made available through external actors). It was also pointed out that the main issue in regional structural prevention is not the business sector, in which there are lots of co-operation schemes, but the failure to transfer this cooperation to the political level.

*Where to go from here? Guidelines for next conference and research direction*

Suggestions were made to organize a conference on how conflict prevention and conflict management measures have been implemented on the Korean peninsula and the Taiwan Strait and the result thereof. A discussion ensued on whether the concepts of conflict prevention or conflict management should be used when discussing the two conflicts. It was agreed that it would be beneficial to examine the two cases historically to see where and how conflict prevention failed in the past and also to look at present day efforts at conflict management. With the historical perspective, structures of conflict

- European measures may not be applicable to Northeast Asia due to the differing security situations.

- The Six-party talks were named as an example of a combination of European and Asian conflict management and prevention measures

- The possibility of creating an oil and gas union in Northeast Asia based on the coal and steel union in Europe was raised.

- Drawbacks to such a union were identified as: lack of raw material and shortage of funds.

prevention and management initiatives may be discerned. Also including both concepts in a historical perspective may provide valuable information on the relationship between attempted conflict prevention measures and if and how this affects conflict management methods. The conference should focus on identifying what opportunities were missed and help identify measures to avoid this in the future. The topic for the conference was decided to be "Comparing Different Approaches to Conflict Prevention and Conflict Management: Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait.

The workshop planned to succeed the conference should look more closely at the Taiwan Strait conflict and how different tools of conflict prevention and management apply to this particular conflict. The workshop, as opposed to the conference, would be more focused on suggesting concrete and practical measures that could be implemented.

It was also discussed how North Korea could be engaged in the research project and all participants agreed that this would be most valuable to the project. Efforts will be made by all involved parties to try to secure North Korean participation in future research undertakings.

- The main issue for management and prevention measures is their failure to manifest on a political level.
- The topic for the 2005 conference was decided.
- Its aim will be to examine historical and contemporary initiatives of conflict management and prevention.
- It should analyze lost opportunities in order to reduce the risk of missing future ones.
- The more practically oriented workshop following the conference will examine the Taiwan Strait.
- Efforts will be made to engage North Korean

## Appendix A

## Workshop Program

*Program for the Uppsala Workshop on  
Conflict Management and Conflict Prevention***Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> of April**

Arrival in Uppsala

**Friday 8<sup>th</sup> of April***First Session: Discussing the definitions and concepts  
of conflict management and conflict prevention.*

09.15-09.30	Welcoming remarks by Niklas Swanström
09.30-10.30	Round-table Discussion
10:30-11:00	Coffee Break
11:00-12.30	Continued discussion
12.30-14.00	Lunch

*Second Session: Finding a working consensus*

14:00-15.00	Round-table Discussion
15.00-15:30	Coffee Break
15:30-17:00	Continued discussion
19:00	Dinner

**Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> of April***Third Session: The implication on definitions and  
concepts for the Northeast Asian Region*

09.30-10.30	Round-table Discussion
10:30-11:00	Coffee Break
11:00-12.30	Where to go from here?: Guidelines for next conference

12.30-14.00	Lunch
18.00	Dinner

*Saturday afternoon and Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> of April*

Time for group or individual sightseeing and tours in  
Uppsala and Stockholm and nearby areas

## Appendix B

### *List of Participants*

Professor Seiichiro Takagi	(Tokyo)
Professor Kyudok Hong	(Seoul)
Professor Su Hao	(Beijing)
Professor Shuhfan Ding	(Taipei)
Associate Professor Daojiong Zha	(Beijing)
Ambassador Ingolf Kiesow	
(Stockholm)	
Associate Professor Niklas Swanström	(Uppsala)
Mikael Weissmann	(Uppsala)
Emma Björnehed	(Uppsala)

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