

Panel 1: Regional challenges

The world's attention has been transfixed by the remarkable political changes in the Middle East and North Africa in recent months. Meanwhile, other regions have not remained still—on the contrary. Even as numerous violent conflicts continue, there continue to be risks of new flashpoints and old disputes escalating into major conflict. The focus of this panel discussion is to assess the potential violent conflicts in each world region that have not yet broken out, but pose significant dangers in the year ahead, as well as the particular preventive strategies that could head these off.

- Within each geographic region, which countries or nascent conflicts are at greatest risk of breaking out into large-scale violence over the next year?
- What would be the likely consequences if one or more new conflicts were to erupt in the region?
- What are the particular challenges to effective conflict prevention in the region?
- What should the U.S. government do now to reduce the risk of new conflict outbreak in the region?

Break-Out Sessions:

1. Making the Case for Prevention: How can Congress be Persuaded to support Prevention Initiatives?

Multiple U.S. administrations have declared their commitment to preventing violent conflicts. Even the most determined executive branch official, however, cannot realize this aspiration without support from Congress. Our system of government grants Congress powers and responsibilities that are important for implementing a strong preventive approach, yet Congress is too frequently overlooked by discussions of conflict prevention. This breakout session will examine specific questions related to Congress' unique role and potential strategies for persuading Congress to support conflict prevention efforts.

- What are the most important ways Congress could strengthen US efforts to prevent violent conflict?
- What are the major impediments to greater Congressional support for conflict prevention?
- What arguments—political, economic, strategic, moral, and personal—are most effective in trying to persuade Congress to strengthen its support for conflict prevention efforts?
- In a period of shrinking budgets, how can arguments about the cost effectiveness of conflict prevention be made most effectively?

2. Women and Conflict: Why is Gender Analysis a Critical Tool for Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Systems?

Whether they are combatants, survivors, or peace-builders, women must play an active role in the transition from war to peaceful development. This is essential for reasons of equality, effectiveness, and efficiency. International peace and security is indivisible from women's peace and security, and that ending the spiral of sexual violence is integral to ending and preventing further conflict. Protection of women is half of the problem, the other half is to make sure that women are firmly engaged in the critical efforts to end wars and to begin the difficult process of building peace, both at the formal and informal levels.

- Why is gender analysis a critical tool for conflict prevention and early warning systems?
- Why is women's participation in peace talks and negotiations a viable means to prevent the recurrence of conflict?
- How do we prevent wartime sexual violence?

3. The conflict prevention toolbox: How can the Tools be used in a better Way, and how can Strategic Thinking for Prevention be Advanced?

The metaphor of a toolbox is among the most common in discussions of conflict prevention. Faced with skepticism that anything could be done to prevent conflicts before they erupt, scholars developed the idea of a toolbox filled with various measures that could be used to help avert violent conflicts. The time is ripe to revisit the conflict prevention toolbox to assess its utility and consider how its basic insights can be extended to support effective prevention strategies today.

- How useful is the toolbox metaphor for thinking about conflict prevention?
- How well do existing depictions of the conflict prevention toolbox capture the types of measures that are most relevant to preventing violent conflict? Are there important tools that are missing? Are there tools that are frequently included in the conflict prevention toolbox that should be removed?
- How can governments and other organizations active in trying to prevent conflicts use the generic categories in the toolbox to elucidate their specific capabilities, resources, and authorities that are most likely to contribute to the prevention of violent conflict?
- One of the key lessons from past experience is that effective conflict prevention nearly always requires the application of multiple tools in a coordinated fashion. How can the field as a whole begin to think more strategically about conflict prevention?

4. The Prevention of Electoral Violence

Following intense postelection violence in Kenya and Zimbabwe in 2008, and more recently in Côte D'Ivoire, policymakers and scholars are paying closer attention to the causes and triggers of electoral violence. While African states have received the most attention, electoral violence is a regular feature in other countries as well – including India, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines. Paradoxically, even though many countries routinely experience electoral violence – often in the same regions -- international, regional, and national institutions have been unable to implement successful strategies to prevent it. New research is beginning to highlight more precise criteria for a country's propensity to experience electoral violence. The context in which an election takes place is critical to increasing the opportunities for mitigating or preventing electoral violence. This break-out session will discuss the conditions surrounding electoral violence and strategies taken to reduce its recurrence.

- Under what political and economic conditions does electoral violence occur?
- What are the costs of electoral violence?
- What approaches have worked to resolve or prevent violent electoral conflicts? How have the international, regional, and national institutions responded to electoral violence?
- Do powersharing agreements – such as those reached in Kenya and Zimbabwe – successfully break the cycle of electoral violence?

Panel 2: Global Conflict Prevention Initiatives

Amidst continuing political and conceptual debates about conflict prevention, an increasing number of organizations are working actively to help prevent violent conflicts from erupting. Far too numerous to capture on a single panel, global conflict prevention initiatives range tremendously in strategy, shape and focus, and extend to virtually all corners of the globe. This panel will spotlight a few selected conflict prevention efforts in practice by the U.S. government, the UN, and a civil society organization. The aim is not only to learn about these specific efforts, but to consider how to maximize the collective impact of these and other prevention initiatives.

- What are the most important conflict prevention initiatives underway or on the horizon by the various institutions/sectors?
- What are the greatest challenges to the success of these initiatives? How can these be overcome?
- What are the unique strengths and weaknesses of the various institutions/sectors for preventing violent conflicts?
- What steps should be taken to enhance the synergy of global conflict prevention initiatives?