

# THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

**F**oreign policy experts around the world have spent a good deal of time this past decade debating whether U.S. military forces should intervene in one civil/ethnic conflict or another. There is little agreement on whether to use U.S. military force, and it's highly unlikely there will be agreement on this matter. Some believe that stopping the violence once it erupts is a subject of the highest moral and practical concern, whereas others see these eruptions of violence as the inevitable product of historical hatreds beyond the influence of outsiders. But almost everyone agrees on the need to try to prevent these conflicts from erupting in the first place. Still, it is precisely in the realm of prevention that little or nothing has been done in the last ten years, either by governments or by international organizations. Everybody talks about prevention; almost no one does anything about it.

It is our aim and our hope that the Council's reconstituted Center for Preventive Action might help prevent violent conflicts from occurring. In the last five years, our Center for Preventive Action has been ably led by Senior Fellow Barnett Rubin. Its main objectives were to identify which preventive methods worked, which didn't, and why, and also to bring together people from nongovernmental organizations and governments to share information and experiences. Now, we intend to be much more operational, short of actually having the Council involved in negotiations.

The operating principle for our Center in its second phase is simple and practical: to harness the con-

tacts and influence of all the groups that might be able to persuade the parties to these conflicts to settle their disputes peacefully. We want to bring together the four principal outside actors in these ethnic and civil tragedies: governments, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and businesses. None can do the job alone. Government officials have to learn to work with international organizations; to use the power and standing of religious leaders, human rights groups, and relief organizations; and to leverage business incentives to have a chance at making prevention work. It's all well and good, and even necessary, to have the ethnic adversaries talk to each other across the table, to get to know each other better. But it's highly and tragically unlikely that anything short of tangible incentives—concrete carrots and sticks—will convince those with hatred in their hearts and a desire for power to

seek compromise. That's why all the outside groups with standing and influence in a particular region must be focused on the situation.

The means for developing the ideas and selling the prevention plans to the proper authorities will be Council task forces. We began using task forces five years ago to bring together experienced people with diverse perspectives to help solve current policy problems. It may be immodest to say, but it is nonetheless true, that no organization has more convening power than the Council. We can bring together just the right mix of people to take inventories of the outside groups that are involved in a particular country, to assess their influ-



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ence, and then to shape this information into a strategy for preventing conflict by offering tangible incentives to compromise. We expect members of the task forces to work on an issue for an average of six months. Once their strategy is in hand, their objective would be to convince the relevant governments and international organizations to assume responsibility for the strategy, to shape it along politically necessary lines, and to begin prevention efforts. We expect this will be done through direct contact between officials and task force members. But we also expect our task force members to write op-ed pieces and to testify before Congress.

Even as we move forward on this practical front, we need to make progress on broader structural issues to support preventive action. We must work with others in educating the public about the importance of prevention, about how incredibly inexpensive it is compared to actual military intervention, and about how it can contribute to a better world. We also have to work with others to put our own government in a better position to deal with these problems. I'm thinking here specifically of the famous "150" line in the federal budget, which deals with matters like economic aid and payments for peacekeeping operations. Prevention cannot be done without money; funds are needed to put police and military forces into an area before the shooting starts. We also need to help think through how to make the U.N. peacekeeping operations more viable. Prevention may well cause less dissension and division in the U.N. Security Council than actual military intervention. But political differences are not the only obstacles to the United Nations' ability to carry out a prevention mandate. The United Nations will need forces on call for policing operations before the shooting starts. It will need pledges of logistical support from countries to transport and supply troops.

No one involved in this project at the Council thinks prevention is anything but a very difficult enterprise. It is very hard to dissuade people who are determined to



*Speaker William S. Cohen, Secretary, U.S. Department of Defense, Leslie H. Gelb, and Martin S. Feldstein at the December 7, 1999, Meeting, "U.S. Defense Priorities: Engagement and Isolationism."*

kill each other. But the stakes are so high that we have to try. The very magnitude of the challenge has attracted one of the most able and qualified people to be the new director of the Center for Preventive Action. Fred Tipson brings with him a solid background in business and the communications industry, experience on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and long-standing ties with the Council. The advisory group overseeing Center operations will continue to be led by the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Jack Vessey, and we are already working in close partnership with Reynold Levy, president of the International Rescue Committee.

Over the last decade, I can't think of another issue that has occasioned more argument in the foreign policy arena than this question of humanitarian intervention. I have debated Charles Krauthammer in Washington, Richard Allen in Los Angeles, and John Mearsheimer in Chicago, and I moderated a debate here in New York between Fareed Zakaria and Tony Lewis. The feelings are raw because the answer really does matter. We believe we are now focusing on a better question—how to prevent conflict rather than whether or not to intervene after the killing begins.

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President