An Essay Review

Early Warning and Conflict Resolution

Edited by Michiko Kurda and Kumar Rupesinghe

New York: St. Martin's Press. Inc., 1992; xxv-238.

By Absalom M. Adam

The Present State of Early Warning System of Refugees. The Gulf War, the famine of Somalia, the ethnic clashes in the former Yugoslavia, the civil war in Haiti, and the most recent mass killing in Rwanda, to mention only a few cases of man-made or natural disasters, have been followed by massive involuntary migration. In some of these cases, the international community received early warnings. But no system to network these warnings exists. The early warning system for refugees, when it was initially proposed by Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, aimed to forecast involuntary migration in the hope that, by anticipating such disasters, the international community may act in advance to diminish the human misery and loss of life. Yet the United Nations does not have such a system. The lack of a United Nations response to the mass killing in Rwanda, to take a recent example, further undermined this hope. It has been criticized by the United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who called it a scandal and a failure. The mass killing was followed by forced migration to neighbouring countries, and has produced the biggest refugee camp in the world in Burundi. This example illustrates the acute need for such a system.

The importance of the book under review, then, is that it at least addresses these issues, even though it lacks a historical discussion of how the idea of the early warning system originated and evolved. I believe, it is the historical dimension of the early warning system and refugees which is important for an understanding of the changes in the United Nations' policy.

Dr. Absalom M. Adam, a former Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at CRS, York University, is now a Research Associate at the Philosophy Department, Geneva University, Switzerland.

This book is the first of three volumes, the other two being *Ethnicity and Conflict in a Post-Communist World,* and *Internal Conflict and Governance,* all published by St. Martin's Press. The books are based on papers submitted by 50 scholars from around the globe to the International Peace Research Association XIII General Conference in Gröningen, the Netherlands, from 3–7 July 1990. According to the editors, the choice to devote one volume to issues pertaining to the early warning system is a response to increasing confusion about that concept, and reflects the need for a pluralist methodology aimed at resolving international conflicts in a peaceful manner.

The editors, Kumar Ruspesinghe and Michiko Kurda, wrote the introduction and the final paper. In the introduction, Ruspesinghe tells us that the importance of the early warning system rests on its aim to resolve conflicts peacefully in a new stage of human civilization after the end of the Cold War. Kurda, in the final chapter entitled "Early Warning Capacity of the United Nations System: Prospects for the Future," describes the capacity of the United Nations to network the early warning system. He refers to the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit's (JIU) report to which I will turn later.

In Chapter 1, "Early Warning: Conceptual and Practical Issues," Leon Gordenker observes the increase in forced migration in the 1970s which prompted studies on the early warning system. He refers to some important studies undertaken between 1986 to 1990, one of which was Professor Onishi's "Global Early Warning System for Displaced Persons: Interlinkages of Environment, Development, Peace and Human Rights" (1987). Gordenker aims to clear the confusion and attempts to clarify the meaning of the early warning system. To this end, he analyzes forecasting and how to act upon forecasts of forced migration. Gordenker assumes that the interest in the early warning system is primarily a humanitarian one and not aimed at further controlling or sealing borders. The discussion of the early warning system, he suggests, should not focus merely upon forecasting, but also upon the issue of who receives the information and what is done with it. None of these questions, answers, and suggestions, however, is new. The last suggestion, for example, was given by the Joint Inspection Unit's report (JIU/REP/90/2 Geneva 1990), of which the author is aware. The clarification he offers could also be traced to Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan's report E/CN.4/1503 of 31 December 1981, to which Gordenker does not refer. This report is considered below.

In Chapter 2, entitled "Human Rights Monitoring: Lessons Learnt From the Case of the Isaaqs in Somalia," Greg Beyer focuses on the Isaaqs in Somalia as a case of human rights monitoring that illustrates the failure of the early warning system. The abuse of the Isaaqs' human rights, which led to forced migration, was reported to the international community through representatives of United Nations agencies who witnessed it. Yet no alert notice was given, and no preventive measures were taken. Here the concept of human rights monitoring should have been traced back to its original advocate, Prince Aga Khan who, in his 1981 report, recommended it as a way to forecast forced migration.

In Chapter 3, "Dangerous States and Endangered Peoples: Implications of Life Integrity Violations Analysis," Helen Fein extends the early warning system as a model not only of forecasting forced migration but also of forecasting genocide or political killing. Peoples' lives at risk are analyzed with indicators from 50 countries taken from *Amnesty International* reports. The paper tells the story of persons who managed and those who did not manage to escape mass murder. Fein offers a methodology to forecast the

threat of mass killing, and discusses warning signs, such as increased violations of human rights. The gassing of a part of the Kurdish population in 1987 and 1988, and the forced relocation of 500,000 Kurds by Iraq since 1988, during which more than 500 villages and towns were destroyed, are discussed as warning signs to which the international community was oblivious. This case is paradigmatic of the lack of international community's response. Fein's methodology is rich and deserves further attention as a model for forecasting based on available material, e.g., *Amnesty International* reports. Her thesis is that violations of human rights vary in degree, and that they can escalate to mass killing in the absence of international response.

Hugh Miall, in "Peaceful Settlements of Post-1945 Conflicts: A Comparative Study," considers who receives the information about conflicts and how they are to be resolved peacefully before they become violent. He suggests promoting early intervention to avoid such conflicts. Miall distinguishes between internal and international conflicts, and his statistics suggest that conflicts over interests such as territory or resources are easier to resolve than ethnic conflicts. The study indicates that, to resolve a conflict, it is necessary to agree upon procedures of mediation; Miall also permits intervention of a third party to assist peaceful resolution.

In Chapter 5, "Famine Early Warning and Local Knowledge: The Possibility for Pro-active Responses to Stress," Peter Walker discusses famine as a disaster. The weakness of the early warning system is due to the use of defective models. Traditional and non-traditional responses to famine are presented in case studies of Ethiopia, Sudan, and the Indian subcontinent, and some suggestions to improve the famine early warning system are offered. Surprisingly, Walker does not discuss refugees from famine, nor does he mention that the early warning system used by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has served as a model for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) conception of the early warning system.

Stephen Ryan, in "Early Warning: Conceptual and Practical Issues," discusses the role of the United Nations in the resolution of ethnic conflicts. That role comprises two different phases: the response to violent ethnic conflict, and the attempt to prevent it. The main items of Boutros Boutros-Ghali's January 1992 report, *An Agenda for Peace*, preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, and peacekeeping, are readdressed in this chapter. Ryan suggests that even if the United Nations protection of ethnic minorities and genocide prevention are lacking, there is still promise in Ghali's plan. One of the significant problems with this chapter is that it leaves untouched the question of how the early warning system is to be circumscribed within *An Agenda for Peace*. Ryan should have traced the concept and structure of the early warning system as it was transformed from its inception in Prince Aga Khan's report of 1981, to its modified version, merely as an intelligence system, in *An Agenda for Peace*.

"Political and Cultural Background of Conflicts and Global Governance," written by Kinhide Mushakoji, is not reviewed at this time.

It seems that the importance of the chapter written by Hans Thoolen, "Information Aspects of Early Warning," is beyond its own scope. I would argue that the shortcoming of this paper can be extended to the book as a whole. Thoolen asserts in his conclusion: "This paper does not do justice to conceptual work and case studies undertaken by the staff of ORCI [Office of Research, Communication and Information] ... It pays enough attention neither to earlier United Nations efforts by Sadruddin Aga Khan in 1981 nor to the proposals of the Group of Governmental Experts in 1986" (p. 176). Thoolen's paper gives an overview of the UNHCR role and reminds us that the UNHCR, and its present High Commissioner, Ms. Ogata, work within a mandate restricted to 1951 Convention refugees. The paper refers to the UNHCR and Ms. Ogata's deployment of preventive measures, and also directs attention to the fact that the early warning system fails since ORCI (see below) fails to coordinate different United Nations mechanisms.

Gangapersand Ramcharan, in "Early Warning in the United Nations Grand Strategy," argues that the role the United Nations plays in international and national conflicts is pivotal. The member states' constitutions should reflect the constituent principles of the United Nations. The early warning system and preventive measures should be part of the United Nations' grand strategy. Yet, such a suggestion is redundant since *An Agenda for Peace* makes it part and parcel of United Nations policy.

Chapter 10 by Jürgen Dedring, "Sociopolitical Indicators for Early Warning Purposes," is a compilation of theoretical (yet to be workable) concepts, such as sociopolitical indicators for early warning system purposes.

The "Selected Bibliography" at the end of the book includes the most important studies on the topic of the early warning system.

The book is at its strongest when it presents the varying approaches to different aspects of the early warning system, namely, the conceptual approaches based on actual cases of forced migration, and those based on suggestions of methodology for conflict resolution. Yet it fails to provide an explanation for the confusion over the meaning of the early warning system. A discussion of the conceptual changes of the early warning system could fill this gap. To this end, I propose to consider two significant essays which were mentioned only in passing. The first is written by Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan (only referred to in the selected bibliography), and the second by Professor Akira Onishi.

The early warning system, which forecasts violations of human rights resulting in involuntary migration, was proposed by Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan—a former High Commissioner for Refugees. Invited by the Commission on Human Rights—in his

capacity as a Special Rapporteur—he produced a report in 1981, entitled "Question of the violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in any part of the world with particular reference to colonial and other dependent countries and territories: Study on human rights and massive exoduses" (E/CN.4/1503). This report deserves attention not only because its diagnosis reflects a crucial facet of forced migration, i.e., people are forced to migrate when there is an increase of violation of human rights, but also because the report's prognosis in its recommendations set the agenda for United Nations policy. It was slightly elaborated and became the core of the present Secretary-General's *An Agenda for Peace*. I will confine my attention to one of the important recommendations of this report, which calls for the introduction of an early warning system based on global information gathering and data collection concerning potential mass exodus situations; such information and data would be communicated expeditiously to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and competent intergovernmental organs for the purpose of timely action, if required. (Article 7)

A system of this kind, which took into consideration short- and long-term preventive measures, was not new to the UN. FAO had an early warning system aimed at forecasting natural or human-caused disasters which result in famine. Sometimes in advance, at times belatedly, this system has been operative and preventive measures, such as humanitarian assistance, have been taken. The new feature of the proposed system was its application to the problem of forced migration; an explanation of how violations of human rights end in involuntary migration was also part of the proposal.

An extended study on the early warning system, which followed this report and addressed comprehensive operative and theoretical considerations for human and/or natural disasters, was undertaken by Professor Akira Onishi of Soka University. This study (yet to be challenged), "The global early warning system for displaced persons," presented field work which illustrated a proposed model for forecasting involuntary migration. In its 1986 version, the study focused upon thirteen countries in Asia to investigate the risks of large-scale population displacement.

The methodology of research, suggesting an economic model for forecasting large involuntary migrations, was based on four main indicators: (i) the destruction of the environment, e.g., natural disasters, such as flood and drought, water pollution, air pollution; (ii) failures in development, e.g., poor economic growth, stagnant per capita income, unequal income distribution, increased international per capita income disparities, higher domestic prices in terms of the consumer price index; (iii) absence of peace and security, e.g., political conflicts and violence, absence of rules of law, a growing ratio of military expenditure to GDP, insurgency, internal war; and (iv) violation of human rights. These categories take us one step beyond Prince Aga Khan's report of 1981 to a model which can be organized and operated by a research unit, such as the Centre of Science of Soka University. This approach can perhaps deflect us away from the difficulty inherent in the ORCI approach. In its 1987 version, Onishi's report extends its application to a universal concept of the early warning system; in the present (1994) version, it mainly needs information which may test its possible forecasts.

The book is at its strongest when it presents the varying approaches to different aspects of the early warning system, namely, the conceptual approaches based on actual cases of forced migration, and those based on suggestions of methodology for conflict resolution.

Of the several studies produced between 1986 and 1990, the most interesting one came from the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit (1990). It focused on the function of the early warning system in the United Nations and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). In this study, "refugees" are defined as people "who involuntarily leave their home for whatever reason". The report accepts Onishi's categories that may indicate involuntary migration. The report also follows in the footsteps of Aga Khan's report and hence proposes preventive measures to be taken by the UNHCR. In the JIU's report, the definition of "refugees" is broader than the 1951 Convention definition, and the preventive measures go far beyond the scope of the UNHCR mandate. The report proposes a network of United Nations systems in which early warning components will be coordinated. The coordinator office, which was to be ORCI, was to analyze and network the collected information and forward an early warning alert to the Secretary-General. This office, however, ceased to exist in 1992. It was suggested that it be replaced by an intelligence mechanism which would assist the Secretary-General as part and parcel of the new agenda for peace. Still, this remains the Achilles heel of the system. The system lacks a successful co-ordinator, and effective intelligence mechanisms are in their infancy. A model for forecasting involuntary migration can be employed by NGOs, which would receive information from the various United Nations agencies and other sources. This is an alternative which has not yet received enough attention. ■

Bibliography

Onishi, Akira. 1987. "Global Early Warning System for Displaced Persons: Interlinkages of Environment, Development, Peace and Human Rights." *Technological Forecasting and Global Change*, 31, 269–99.

——, 1994. "Global Model Simulation: A New Frontier of Economics and System Science." Manuscript.

United Nations Joint Inspection Unit. 1990. "The Co-ordination of Activities Related to Early Warning of Possible Refugee Flows," UN Doc. JIU/REP/90/2. Geneva. ⊐