

Presentation for the 2011 Annual Security Review Conference

Working Session II:

Early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management, conflict resolution and post-conflict rehabilitation: lessons learned and way ahead

**JANUSZ BUGAJSKI**

**Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington D.C.**

---

Political and economic trends indicate that the next decade will witness a series of diverse challenges to national, regional, and global stability, requiring diverse responses by the major multinational institutions. By focusing attention on probable and potential future conflicts and crises in the OSCE area, a creative debate can be pursued on how these can be foreseen, prevented, reduced, managed, or resolved, and how the OSCE can engage in post-conflict rehabilitation. With these objectives in focus, this presentation is divided into three parts: definitions, scenarios, and responses.

### **Defining Conflict and Crisis**

It is important to define and classify conflict and crisis, as this is key for devising any credible and effective multinational response. Conflict is commonly of three basic varieties: intra-state, inter-state, and trans-state, and its differing formats and permutations will continue to challenge governments and multi-national institutions over the coming decade. Let me outline some of its components.

***Intra-State Conflicts:*** These include civil conflicts precipitated by deepening political cleavages, economic distress, and growing inequalities, which in worst case scenarios can lead to the erosion of government legitimacy, a breakdown of law and order, and escalating ungovernability. State weakness can spawn the creation of armed criminal gangs and armed vigilante groups, provoke inter-ethnic conflicts, anti-immigrant pogroms, separatist movements, and significant refugee outflows. Such developments will also stimulate the growth of organized crime and smuggling operations transcending national borders.

***Inter-State Conflicts:*** These may include conflicts over the status of disputed territories and the treatment of ethnic kindred in which intra-state conflicts can pull neighboring powers into the fray. They can also involve energy conflicts and other resource disputes stemming from the short and long-term impact of climate change. For example, the melting of the northern polar ice enables greater access to the region's abundant oil and gas reserves, whose location could be a source of territorial disputes between Arctic littoral states leading to the region's militarization.

***Trans-State Conflicts:*** These could include international terrorism, economic sabotage, and cyber attacks that precipitate state paralysis, undermine national security, or provoke international conflicts with sponsoring states. International terrorism remains a threat to civilian life, but its impact is most telling in mass phobia, in uses of terrorist stereotyping which can exacerbate Islamophobia, and in assertive government responses,

including attacks on suspected sponsoring governments or insurgent movements. Global energy supplies may also be increasingly exposed to disruption through acts of sabotage. Cyber attacks are becoming more frequent, organized, and costly in the damage inflicted on government operations, business, and national infrastructure while all countries increasingly rely on vital communications and transit routes for trade, investment, and energy security. Cyber attacks can be conducted by individuals, global networks, or government agencies and may provoke retaliation and international conflict.

***Natural Crises:*** Crises can be instigated by all three conflict types, but they can also be precipitated by natural disasters such as drastic climate change, floods, droughts, food and water shortages, epidemics, earthquakes, volcano eruptions, or rising sea levels. The impact could range from immediate humanitarian crises to an increasingly conflictive scramble for scarce and shrinking resources. Analysts predict that by 2015 almost half of the world's population will have less than the minimal amount of water necessary to maintain acceptable living standards. Water could become a major catalyst for conflict. Droughts also have a significant impact on economic development. Problems related to drought and desertification are expected to exacerbate in parts of Eurasia, while poor harvests will have an impact on food prices, consumption, and social turmoil that can be translated into political, ethnic, religious, and other forms of conflict.

## **Scenarios of Conflict and Crisis in the OSCE Area**

***West Balkan Crisis Cascade:*** Without the credible prospect of EU inclusion much of the progress achieved in the Western Balkans over the past decade can begin to unravel. Even with EU accession numerous problems will persist, but the risks of exclusion are more severe and the region's domestic problems can become interconnected. In Albania, disputed elections threaten to transform political polarization into outright civil conflict and state instability. Public frustration in Kosova has spawned an opposition movement with a program that combines anti-corruption, full sovereignty, and pan-Albanianism. Social unrest will be exacerbated if Kosova is permanently blocked from entering the major international institutions.

Although the government in Belgrade has staked its political future on EU accession, Serbia is only likely to achieve candidate status before the general elections scheduled by the spring of 2012. This may be insufficient to diminish public anger with economic stagnation and corruption where nationalist demands gain ascendancy in support of Bosnia's and Kosova's partition. In Bosnia-Herzegovina the ultimate objective of leaders of the Serb entity would be secession by blocking the central government in Sarajevo. For Bosnian Serbs the possibility of EU membership is less convincing than the prospect of independence. The long-term goal of separation and eventual union with Serbia would inevitably encourage other regional secessions.

Stalled progress by the Macedonian Republic toward the EU will increase frustration and opportunities for political disputes to assume ethnic dimensions. Albanian parties may begin to compete over programs for federalization, autonomy, or even separation and union with Kosova or Albania. Economic prospects throughout the West Balkan region are likely to diminish and spur out-migration. Disillusionment with the EU and its effectiveness may be seriously questioned. Such scenarios will undermine reformist leaders and once more bring populist and nationalist elements to the forefront. They will

benefit from economic stagnation and public rage and can trumpet ethnicity and xenophobia as a solution to mounting domestic challenges.

***Ukrainian and Belarusian Implosions:*** Ukrainian political divisions and the status of Crimea are potential flashpoints that could trigger conflict. Rising reaction against democratic regression in Ukraine could also provoke mass protests, conflict, and even separatism. Instability in the Crimea fanned by Russian nationalists would not only impact on Ukrainian-Russian relations, but also potentially on Turkey, home to a large Crimean Tatar population, and other Black Sea littoral states. Moves toward Crimean secession could reverberate negatively on the Transnistrian dispute in Moldova. Instability in Crimea could also spread to the Ukrainian heartland and threaten the transportation of Russian gas to the EU. Meanwhile, Belarus faces escalating economic distress that could precipitate social unrest, power struggles, and political instability that results in more direct Russian intervention.

***Reignited South Caucasus Wars:*** The Russian authorities remain intent on dislodging the current government in Georgia and can foment rebellion, military munitities, ethnic divisions, and acts of sabotage and terrorism. A number of reasons can be used for a new intervention, including accusations that Georgia is a transit country for Islamic terrorists, that it sponsors separatism in the North Caucasus, or is preparing to restart the war with the occupied regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Nagorno-Karabakh also remains a constant point of dispute with no solution in sight regarding the region's final status, and it can reignite armed conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

***Central Asian Turmoil:*** The Central Asian region faces a number of looming challenges, including inter-ethnic conflicts in the Fergana valley that can embroil three states (Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan), the growth of militant Islam, and the spillover of guerrilla and terrorist attacks from Afghanistan, Pakistan, or western China. Conflicts over water also have the potential to escalate. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan hold 90 percent of the region's water resources, while Uzbekistan, the largest regional consumer of water, is located downstream. Growing environmental challenges and the scramble for other resources could also generate conflicts.

***European Union Revolts:*** The EU's financial crisis, growing economic disparities, and soaring youth unemployment have the potential to destabilize several poorer states. It could precipitate public revolts, where governments are unable to ensure a state's basic functions, such as policing, the rule of law, and essential social services. Public disobedience and failures in law enforcement will threaten the stability and governability of debt-stricken countries. Disenchantment with the political establishment and all parliamentary parties can bring leftist or rightist radicals to the forefront. Economic stagnation, decline, and even bankruptcy would precipitate pressures for systemic change, revenge attacks against officials, domestic terrorism, and anti-immigrant attacks. In some countries such as Spain it could also revive regionalist and separatist demands. Although the EU may not formally splinter, the long-term impact of economic stagnation, youth revolt, loss of confidence in Brussels, and opposition to the further erosion of national sovereignty can lead to the revival of militant ideologies and provoke internal and international conflicts.

***Russia's Fractures:*** Over the next decade, ethno-nationalism, intra-ethnic disputes, political extremism, and separatist demands are likely to escalate in the Russian Federation. They will be generated by economic decline, rising unemployment, state repression, youth frustration, unresolved territorial disputes, rising religious militancy, and state violations of human rights. The North Caucasus is already embroiled in civil war and can become Russia's internal Afghanistan. Moscow also faces growing restlessness in Siberia and the Far East. As history demonstrates, resentment against perceived economic exploitation by the capital encourages ethnogenesis and state formation. As Siberian-East Asian economic links develop, the region may opt for independence as a viable alternative. This would precipitate a crackdown by Moscow and potential conflict with China, with Beijing intent on protecting the region's growing Chinese population.

Other Russian regions are susceptible to separatist conflicts, including Tatarstan and Kaliningrad. Opposition to allowing Kaliningrad an enhanced status could trigger calls for autonomy or separation with an increasing number of residents favoring their territory becoming the fourth Baltic state. Conflicts in this region could also precipitate a wider crisis involving Lithuania and Poland, both NATO members, which remain attuned to a potential confrontation with Russia.

***Nuclear Threats:*** A growing threat stressed by the U.S. is of medium-range missile attacks with nuclear warheads by Iran against targets in Europe, as well as the detonation of a nuclear, chemical, or biological devices by terrorists or insurgent movements against state interests and civilian populations in the OSCE area. Such scenarios could precipitate a massive humanitarian crisis and calls for wholesale retaliation against state sponsors.

### ***Coping with the Unpredictable***

It is also important to imagine major natural disasters whose timing is difficult to predict but which will have profound crises consequences. These include earthquakes, floods, and volcanoes that could trigger mass casualties, extensive refugee outflows, infrastructure breakdowns, institutional collapse, clashes over scarce resources, and even state failure.

## **OSCE Responses**

It is important to underscore that the OSCE is not a mutual defense grouping or a military security organization. Hence, if the OSCE is to remain a credible player in confronting emerging conflicts and preventing their escalation, it needs to develop more effective crisis response capacities. Otherwise, it will be sidelined and its potential wasted.

The Organization is seriously hamstrung by the principle of absolute consensus. As a result, one party can launch a conflict or engineer a crisis and subsequently block OSCE involvement. Adjustments need to be made to OSCE decision-making in order to address this inbuilt impediment to OSCE action. For instance: a qualified consensus principle can be introduced; agreement by one party to a conflict may enable the OSCE to play a supportive and impartial role; or the Chair-in-Office can gain greater authority to dispatch fact-finding missions to crisis areas. If the European Union can adjust its consensus principles through qualified majority and blocking minority voting, in order

to operate more efficiently and effectively, so can the OSCE.

The OSCE can also become more productive by working directly with other international organizations and agencies in specific conflict scenarios or during crises cycles. In particular, it may complement the EU, NATO, or the CSTO through its experience in human rights monitoring and the development of democratic institutions. The following list contains suggestions for making the OSCE more relevant in a crisis-prone world.

### ***Early Warning***

- Conduct comprehensive conflict monitoring either through field missions or where this is not possible by contracting credible researchers and institutions with knowledge and experience. This will enable OSCE officials and agencies to gain impartial and in-depth analysis and stay abreast of developments. An Advisory Council could be formed under OSCE auspices with leading experts on particular disputes and conflicts.
- Issue regular progress or regress reports on conflict potentials to alert the international community and hold forward-looking roundtables to decide on OSCE early warning and early resolution responses.

### ***Conflict Prevention***

- Offer OSCE mediation services and other forms of involvement to governments dealing with cross-border disputes or internal regional disputes. Conflict prevention through OSCE mediation can be pursued when the parties entering conflict are looking for a legitimate and impartial agency to prevent escalation. This could involve trusted experts or an impartial Mediation Group under OSCE auspices.
- Establish or maintain OSCE missions in vulnerable states, to be expanded when necessary and if crises are accelerating. This would require an emergency standby budget for such contingencies that would prevent potentially damaging delays in the OSCE response.

### ***Crisis Management and Conflict Resolution***

- Establish an efficient and simple decision-making mechanism for immediate response during the outbreak of conflict, without waiting for the Permanent Council. The decision could be made collectively by the OSCE chairperson in office, the other two members of the troika, and the chairman of the Security Forum.
- Enhance OSCE mediation at institutional level when a conflict is escalating. Bring all sides in conflict into negotiating formats to defuse any escalation of rhetoric, avoid polarization, and prevent a dangerous spiral of violence. Channel conflict into specific problem segments for arbitration and compromise.
- Emplace OSCE field missions in conflicted regions as a visible presence underscores international involvement and OSCE institutional legitimacy.

### ***Post-Conflict Rehabilitation***

- Expand the array of OSCE-sponsored programs to promote social reconciliation and economic rehabilitation, including economic, cultural, political, environmental, and other forms of community cooperation to stimulate development and coexistence.
- Maintain an OSCE mission in affected areas with continuing monitoring of political positions, public moods, and socio-economic conditions. Post-conflict periods are also opportunities for eliciting early warning for potential future conflicts.