Chapter 1
Peacekeeping in Perspective

1. Conflict Prevention and Peacekeeping

‘An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure’. Another classical adage also goes, ‘better safe than sorry’. The adage has been incorporated into the political agenda. Illustrative is the policy of prevention that has formed one of the pillars to guide the United Nations (UN) in the post-Cold War era, as listed in the ground-breaking report An Agenda for Peace issued in 1992 at the behest of the UN Security Council in its first summit meeting.1 Yet conflict prevention has found little comfort in the actual international scene.2 The upsurge of incidents involving the invocation of Chapter VII of the UN Charter,3 whilst generally seen as the reinvigoration of Security Council actions, is in fact evidence of the failure to prevent armed conflicts from reaching the level of intensity deemed to be a threat to international peace and security.

The policy of prevention and peacekeeping operations grew side by side in the Cold War era, aiming at keeping conflicts outside the sphere of bipolar world politics.4 While it underwent several phases of metamorphosis expanding not just in numbers but also in the nature and scope of its missions,5 the contemporary practice of peacekeeping is characterised more as post-conflict deployment upon

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3 1945 Charter of the United Nations, USTS No. 993 (hereinafter UN Charter).
5 The definition of peacekeeping has been the subject of controversy and the expansion of its missions since the 1990s has further muddied the issue, as explained below in Section 4. This study will not attempt to provide a comprehensive definition of peacekeeping, but rather uses the term to describe the functions that the Security Council can perform in directing provisional measures under Article 40 of the UN Charter such as calls for a cease-fire, the dispatch of a peace observation mission, the deployment of a peacekeeping force, and arms embargoes, which could be wider
the conclusion of a peace agreement.6 The majority of recent peacekeeping operations have also been undertaken under Chapter VII often with the authority to use force to carry out specific and detailed mandates.7 The recent practice thus indicates that the primacy focus of peacekeeping has been the maintenance of peace and security in the aftermath of an armed conflict rather than prevention at an earlier stage of the conflict. This chapter lays the foundation of this book by examining the tension between the desire for the robust operation of a collective security mechanism based on the UN Charter and the strong resistance of state sovereignty, which has underlain the development of doctrinal constraints without being subject to critical review upon peacekeeping in its preventive use.

2. Concept of Conflict Prevention

A. The Development of UN Policies on Conflict Prevention

Although the systematic analysis of conflict prevention began in response to the request made by the 1992 Summit Meeting of the Security Council, the idea had already been expressed by the term ‘preventive diplomacy’ in the early years of the UN’s history.8 The concept of preventive diplomacy has in fact been associated with the second UN Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld, for his leading role in organising and directing the UN Emergency Force (UNEF), the UN Observation Group in Lebanon (UNOGIL), and the UN Operation in the Congo (ONUC).9 The idea that it carried was different from and was framed more negatively than conflict prevention as understood nowadays, given that preventive diplomacy was used to refer to efforts by the UN to prevent local disputes in the third world from

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8 For a comprehensive study on the idea and practice of preventive diplomacy, see, Bertrand G. Ramcharan, Preventive Diplomacy at the UN (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).