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Regional Governance Architecture and Security Policy

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1 Introduction

In the recently published Human Security Report¹, we learn that despite popular fears and misperceptions the world is actually a safer place than it was a decade ago: conflicts between states, civil wars, battle deaths, coups and genocides have all declined. Although bloody conflict continues in parts of Africa, South Asia, the Middle East and Latin America, the overall incidence of warfare has decreased. In 1992 when the Yugoslav wars of secession began there were 51 state-based conflicts around the world. The figures dropped to 29 in 2003. The arms trade has also declined by a third in a similar period.

The report attributes these successes in part to what it calls the “explosion of international activism directed toward stopping wars, and preventing them from starting up again”. It echoes the findings of the United Nations High-level Panel on Threats, Challenge and Change: “Whether by reducing the demand for nuclear weapons, mediating inter-state conflict or ending civil wars, collective security institutions have made a critical contribution to the maintenance of international peace and security”.² The United Nations itself has led this upsurge in conflict management, prevention and post-conflict peace building by the international community. Regional organizations, the World Bank, donor states and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have both complemented the UN and played independent prevention and peace building roles of their own. Important in this regard is not only the way in which institutions have developed mechanisms to address contemporary security problems, they have also helped promote a normative shift against the use of violence. Institutions help to foster and embed new norms, making states more war averse.

The above is, of course, good news – even if the figures and their interpretation in this new report are likely to be contested by some. But the paradox is that most people, either in the developed or the developing world, do not feel more secure. Their insecurity is partly a consequence of globalization in the sense that our exposure to threats, even those that do not affect us directly, has grown exponentially in an age of global communications where information is freely

available. The most recent “global” threats of terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and the spread of virulent disease, together with the continuing spillover effects of “new” wars, to say nothing of less imminent but nonetheless worrying threats like resource and environmental depletion, capture the popular imagination in ways hitherto impossible. If excessive media coverage can be misleading, there is little room for complacency. Globalization also means that there is a real possibility of conflict touching us all in some way. Further, as the report warns: “The risk of new wars breaking out or old ones resuming is very real in the absence of a sustained commitment to conflict prevention and post conflict peace-building”. Clearly we need to build on these still modest achievements.

Much global security policy is rightly focused on the UN, and will remain so. Despite its widely acknowledged difficulties, epitomised by the rather limp resolutions for that emerged from the World Summit in September 2005³, the organization still enjoys a legitimacy and authority that is second to none. Importantly though, there has also been increasing acknowledgement by both the UN itself, and other actors, of the roles that regional institutions can play and services they have rendered. Though its forms, settings and achievements differ widely, regionalism has thus come to play a significant role in the prevailing security order.

How has this shift come about? In their still rather short history – almost exclusively post-Second World War, with the exception of Inter-American system – there has been considerable scepticism about the ability of regional institutions effectively to deliver collective goods, whether in the economic, political or security sphere. In particular, they are criticised for their partiality, dependence on or domination by strong powers, limited capacity and resources and low levels of effectiveness relative either to states or other multilateral instruments.

Their origins in the Cold War contributed to this negative image: regional institutions were seen as hostages of bipolarity or mere debating chambers, ineffective through lack of capacity and resources. NATO and the Warsaw Pact were major security providers, but as cold war creatures that marginalised the UN, hardly models for emulation or endorsement. The EU was also

¹ The Human Security Centre, *The Human Security Report 2005*, (Oxford, 2005).

² United Nations, *A More Secure World. Our Shared Responsibility*. Report on the High-level Panel on Threats Challenge and Change, (New York, 2004), p. 22.

³ “2005 World Summit Outcome”, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, United Nations, 25 October 2005.

born of the Cold War and its success in economic matters derived in no small part from the simultaneous security guarantee that NATO provided. Nonetheless distinct waves of institution building can be discerned in the period 1945-85, and while the record is a mixed one, by the end of the Cold War there was considerable experience upon which to build, and an evident and growing desire of states to continue to organise themselves in some way at the regional level.⁴ In a trend that was greatly enhanced in the years to follow, regional institutions came gradually to be seen as a desirable and necessary part of any global governance architecture.

First, it is increasingly recognised that a global approach to security requires multilateral action, involving a wide range of international institutions, both governmental and non-governmental, to help shape common rules and norms, and solve problems through cooperation.⁵ Second, regional institutions are seen to enjoy comparative advantages in certain areas, because of factors like geographical proximity and sensitivity to local issues; they may be willing to act and provide goods and services to regions that other institutions cannot, and here the case of the African Union is illustrative.

There are a number of reasons for thinking that regionalism is becoming more important in world politics and to the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate why this is so through exploring the roles that regionalism has come to play in the contemporary security architecture. How has its relationship with the UN evolved? Has it kept pace with new security demands and trends? In the following section I argue that a major factor in the current phase of more robust regionalism is the growing international recognition and support it has received. I then examine the current range of its activities, before going on to consider how the newest security threats have been integrated into regional security agendas and with which consequences. Finally, I conclude by offering some general observations about the limitations and possibilities of regional institutions as part of the global security architecture.

2 Recognition and support

An understanding of the contemporary importance of security regionalism needs to start with

an appreciation of its relationship with the United Nations. The recognition that most states would wish to conduct their economic, political and security affairs within defined regional and geographical contexts, was reflected in the UN Charter which, in Chapter VIII, Article 52 offers regional arrangements a formal role in contributing to international peace and security in the post-war world. The constraints of the Cold War period, already noted, resulted in a stalling of UN initiatives vis a vis regional institutions and hard questions being asked about the role and remit of regional organizations. But the Cold War world is no longer with us, and interest in the role of regional institutions has grown, alongside the increase in their activities.

Notable is the way in which the UN itself has increasingly, and with much less equivocation than in the past called for the greater participation of regional actors across a range of security issues. And the voices opposing such partnerships or delegation of tasks, once quite strident, have become increasingly muted.⁶ This is partly in response to the growth of regional activity and the desire of regions to do things "their way" (see below), but also an acknowledgement of their comparative advantage in certain areas. It is also a recognition of the limitations of the United Nations itself.

This growth of interest in, and support for regional actors of the UN is easy to track. The strengthening of regional actors has been endorsed by all UN Secretary Generals since the end of the Cold War. It was an important element in Boutros Boutros-Ghali's Agenda for Peace, a post-Cold War milestone for the institution, in addressing simultaneously peace-keeping, peacemaking and preventive diplomacy.⁷ Later, in "An Agenda for Democratisation" he spoke of the new regionalism, not as "resurgent spheres of influence" but as a complement to "healthy internationalism". Under Boutros-Ghali a further precedent was set when he convened a meeting with the heads of 11 regional organizations to discuss ways to further enhance cooperation and consultation. At that meeting (the first of what have become more regular two-yearly gatherings) the decentralization of tasks under a UN mandate was called for with the key to cooperation identified as the "smooth and

⁴ See further, Louise Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell, *Regionalism in World Politics*, Oxford 1995.

⁵ Mary Kaldor, "What is Human Security?", in David Held et al, *Debating Globalization*, (London, 2005) pp. 182-3.

⁶ See for example, Murrack Goulding, *Peacemonger*, (London, 2002), p. 218.

⁷ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *Agenda for Peace* (New York, 1992), see Section VII "Cooperation with regional arrangements and organizations".

constant exchange of information on emerging crises at a sufficiently early stage".⁸

The decade of the 1990s presented enormous challenges, revealing both the limits of UN peace operations, and the potential for a conflict of interests over the role of regional actors. Early post-Cold War successes gave way to a string of failures, of which Somalia is just one example, and action by regional organizations outside the remit of Chapter VIII - by the Economic Community of West African States in Liberia or by NATO in the former Yugoslavia. In 2000 a UN panel chaired by Lakhdar Brahimi responded to some of these issues by undertaking a comprehensive review of the all aspects of peace keeping operations.⁹ Yet the so-called Brahimi Report was surprisingly silent on the role of regional actors outside the European theatre, despite their evident and increasing importance, contributing to the impression of a North-South divide on issues of international security.

The ground however was prepared for the more ambitious High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, formed in September 2003, which made explicit an expanded the UN commitment to strengthening existing security arrangements to reduce global threats. Importantly, the High Level Panel acknowledged that the Security Council had "failed to make the most of the potential advantages" of working with regional institutions, and that the UN had much to learn from those organizations who had taken the lead in setting normative standards to guide preventive efforts. Enhancing the role of regional institutions emerged as one of the four pillars of any future security architecture, and a way of closing the North-South divide as regards security provision.¹⁰

Most recently at the 2005 United Nations World Summit, the contribution of regional organizations under Chapter VIII was again underlined, with stress on the importance of forging predictable arrangements and relationships, and here the emphasis is on consultation and cooperation rather than the ad hoc arrangements that characterised the 1990s. Importantly the

summit again reiterated the special needs of Africa and African Union.¹¹

The result of the above has been a far greater acceptance of, and engagement with regional institutions by the wider international community. In particular the role of southern institutions and South-South cooperation has been emphasised, where the emphasis was previously on successful northern organizations like NATO and the EU. And the involvement of regional organizations in complex peacemaking tasks is not merely a question of burden dumping, but one of burden sharing and achieving a realistic division – but not duplication – of labour. There is, of course, a resource issue here: the capacity and willingness to act of any single institution is necessarily limited: "African solutions" clearly cannot resolve all "African problems".

As important as recognition and acknowledgement, and the legitimacy it bestows, is the material support required to turn words to deeds. Here the United Nations, along with strong regional institutions and member states are an increasingly important component of capacity building. The move from rhetorical to real support has been realised in a number of ways, from the training of peacekeepers from regional organizations, to the coordination of command and control for joint operations. In 2004 the High Level Panel spoke explicitly of the expansion and formalization of this type of cooperation: the training of personnel, both civilian and military, and the exchange of personnel in peacekeeping operations. For the case of African regional organizations specifically, donor countries were asked to commit to a 10-year process of capacity building within the African Union framework. Further, member states were asked to agree to the provision of support from the UN to regional organizations. There was even a call to amend the rules for the UN peacekeeping budget to allow the UN the option to finance regional operations authorised by the Security Council.¹²

3 Activities

The changed climate of international opinion described above has gone hand in hand with the growth and expansion of the scope and activities of regional organizations since the end of the Cold War. The two processes are clearly highly

⁸ "An Agenda for Democratization", in Barry Boulden (ed) *Global Democracy, Key Debates*, (London, 2000); *Building Peace and Development* (New York, 1994).

⁹ United Nations, "Report of the Panel on United Nations Peacekeeping Operations", New York, 2000.

¹⁰ *A More Secure World*, pp 14, 35-6.

¹¹ United Nations, General Assembly, "2005 World Summit Outcome", pp. 23, 37.

¹² *A More Secure World*, p. 112.

interdependent with the recognition flowing from greater action, in turn helping to reinforce and build upon existing practice.

Although the post-Cold War period overall has seen major normative and institutional changes in regional organizations, one can distinguish two key phases. The first is the immediate post-Cold War decade and the second the post-11/9 phase. Clearly this division, like all such divisions, is somewhat artificial, in that there is much continuity, but the effects of 11/9 have necessarily impacted on regional security agendas, though in ways that are still uncertain.

In the immediate post-Cold War period we saw quite important changes in the international environment which favoured regionalism. The United Nations was "freed up" so to speak, but so were regions. The change was both qualitative and quantitative. In simple numerical terms there has been major growth and expansion of regional arrangements, both in terms of new organizations and new members, whether in Asia-Pacific region or Europe.¹³

Qualitative changes are harder to track but none the less impressive. Broadly speaking many institutions from ECOWAS to the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR) have expanded their range of activities and capacity, introducing often significant changes. African institutions, led by the reformed African Union, stand out particularly in the peacemaking and development spheres. Normative developments, for example with regard to the protection of democratically elected regimes or minorities, can be seen in the Americas, notably the OAS, and MERCOSUR, but also in the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe.

It is perhaps in the peacekeeping sphere that the most notable changes have taken place. Whether in Cambodia, East Timor, Haiti or the Congo, regional actors have shown themselves as both active and flexible in the respective peace processes. In 2004 a report by the International Peace Academy found that of the 15 current United Nations peacekeeping operations eight enjoyed 'robust' regional involvement, some with a number of different regional organizations involved.¹⁴ By the end of 2005 three

new PKOs had been established to respond to the crises in Haiti (MINUSTAH), Burundi (UNOB) and the Sudan (UNMS) respectively. Of these MINUSTAH, whose mandate commenced in April 2004 has the support of two relevant regional organizations, the OAS and CARICOM.

In the sphere of peacekeeping and peace building regional organizations have already left a significant mark. Like the United Nations however, their activities have been subject to criticism, for their selectivity, partiality, ineffectiveness or simple neglect.¹⁵ Yet achievements in this sphere cannot be dismissed. Regional institutions and actors have helped to tackle intractable conflicts where others have proved unwilling or unable to act – one recent example is the OAS involvement in the demobilisation of Colombia's paramilitary groups. With further recognition and resourcing, and the trend toward increased capacity, they are likely to continue to do so.

4 The new security environment: Terrorism/WMD

How have regional organizations responded to and been affected by the very latest security challenges? The agenda laid out above was a response to the changed post Cold War security environment and the evident limitations of individual states and multilateral institutions to deal with the different challenges it posed. Now however, before even the parameters of this new security agenda have been sorted out, regional institutions face new challenges in coping with the demands of the post 11/9 security order. The kinds of concerns already discussed remain as relevant as ever, but there has been a shift in both emphasis and approaches, creating a new hierarchy of issues to include and even prioritise the latest threats of global terrorism and the spread of weapons of mass destruction and bring them onto the agendas of regional organizations.

It is not difficult to see why terrorism and WMD have forced a re-examination of global and regional security issues. The fact, however, that the national security concerns of a single country, the United States, have been thrust to the very core of the debate about global security and insecurity presents opportunities and dangers.

¹³ See the UNU-CRIS data base at <http://www.cris.unu.edu>

¹⁴ International Peace Academy "The UN and Euro-Atlantic Organizations: Evolving Approaches to Peace Operations Beyond Europe", (New York, February 2004), p. 4.

¹⁵ See for example James Mayall (ed), *The New Interventionism 1991-1994* (Cambridge, 1996); and the collection of essays in Michael Pugh and WPS Sidhu, *The United Nations and Regional Security* (New York, 2003).

Over the issue of terrorism in particular, opportunities have arisen for deeper cooperation, because many of these concerns are shared by the broader community of states, and there is a widespread consensus to act and utilise the full range of national and multilateral instruments. The events of 11/9 and the subsequent Madrid and London bombings have thus acted as a catalyst for the consolidation or redesign of security policy. Securitization is now high on the agenda of leading regional institutions.

And it is evident that regions could play an important role in meeting these new threats. As Adam Roberts has pointed out, one of the most pernicious aspects of terrorism lies precisely in its capacity to become endemic in particular regions, cultures and societies, as the experience of the parts of the Middle East, Latin America, the Balkans or Ireland show. Thus understanding how and why terrorism may become habitual, and cause long-term damage, is important in providing a base for securing international action to deal with its consequences – and regions are particularly well placed to understand the damage.¹⁶

Regions are potentially well positioned to respond to and even prevent terrorism – particularly when it comes to developing early warning systems, coordinating information, border controls, policing, or monitoring financial flows. Since much important action in any campaign against terrorism consists of intelligence and police work it is clear that regional cooperation could be of huge importance, and indeed such cooperation has already progressed in certain areas (see below). There is a cost to the tightening of such controls however since they can also counterbalance regionalism's efforts for more open borders and markets, involving the unimpeded movement of labour and goods – and here the case of NAFTA is illustrative.

Dangers arising from this new securitization agenda stem from the way that first, not all states will converge over the re-prioritisation of security, and on the necessary measures and policies to be adopted; second, that in redirecting resources towards coping with these newer type of threats, other security agendas could become neglected, and third, the failure to respond to them adequately may lead to a further period of scepticism, introspection and neglect with possibly negative consequences for the fragile successes

of different multilateral and regional instruments. Though not strictly speaking a "regional" organization under the UN Charter, we have seen how even NATO, like the UN, has been marginalised by the preference of the United States to act unilaterally over issues of homeland security and avoid the more cumbersome procedures of collective decision making.

These latest threats also pose particular challenges of adaptation. Even were regional institutions to cope successfully with the new threats of terrorism and WMD, this will be a slow process. History teaches us that regional organizations take time to adjust to new tasks: learning is slow and there can be many false starts and reversals, particularly where the tasks to be undertaken are difficult and compromising of state sovereignty – as we have already seen with previous attempts at regionalism, whether in the economic, political, or security sphere. Also new agendas tend to create or reinforce hierarchies among security organizations, with often the stronger, Western-based organizations taking the lead, with others following at a different speeds.

Unsurprisingly, this newest security agenda has been prioritised by those institutions with the highest stakes in the campaign against terrorism, notably the OAS, EU, NATO. The OAS already has an advanced system in place in the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism (CICTE). In 2005 alone there have been eight national and Regional Seminars on Counter terrorist Legislation in different capitals in Latin America. Europe has also been more active since the events of Madrid, appointing a Counter Terrorism Coordinator in 2004, and in April 2005, NATO revealed a joint plan to improve awareness of terrorist threats. Most regional organizations have followed suit, issuing declarations of commitment to fight terrorism, with for example, a new protocol added to OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism in 2004. The responses of regional organizations are the more important because of the relative absence of clear UN directives. Though condemnatory, UN initiatives since 2001 have been ambiguous and even contradictory as the two relevant resolutions 1368 and 1373 demonstrate.

With regard to Weapons of Mass Destruction, a somewhat different problem arises. Here the debate is about multilateral versus unilateral or ad hoc responses, with regional frameworks having a less visible presence or role. Yet, just as regional institutions can play important anti-terrorist roles, so too can they provide effective

¹⁶ Adam Roberts, The "War on Terror" in Historical Perspective, *Survival* 47:2 (Summer 2005), 101-130.

responses to meeting the latest threats posed by the spread of Chemical, Biological and Nuclear Weapons (CBNW). Reinforcing the existing multilateral conventions already in place prohibiting such weapons, providing information collection and inspection facilities, and contributing to normative change at the regional level are important examples.

Most regional organizations publicise commitments to non-proliferation, the enforcement of existing treaty regimes, or the creation and maintenance of nuclear free zones (both ASEAN and Latin American countries support such regimes). The Arab League for example has endorsed efforts to remove all WMD from the Middle East. Once more the European Union leads the way having devised a strategy against the proliferation of WMD, part of its wider European Security Strategy, adopted at the European Council meeting in December 2003. In providing its own roadmap for action in the fight against proliferation of WMD, the EU strategy offers also a model for others: in strengthening the international system of non-proliferation, pursuing the universalisation of multilateral agreements, reinforcing strict implementation and compliance with these agreements, co-operating closely with the key partners, and providing assistance to third countries.¹⁷

5 Conclusion: Opportunities and challenges

If a regional security architecture exists it is still disjointed and unevenly distributed in terms of geography and tasks. While some regions have advanced institutions operating in certain areas, others have few or no institutions of real weight in the still highly sensitive security domain – the Middle East is a case in point. Relations with the United Nations, though improved, remain variable among depending on tasks, resources, and competing priorities. The same holds for relations between different regional institutions, though again there is a trend towards greater cooperation and information sharing both within and between regions. The experience of regionalism is above all highly differentiated, and it has become a cliché to suggest that one size may fit all.

This paper has attributed positive and progressive roles to regionalism and regional organizations, both as institutions in their own right, and

as part of an evolving global security architecture. Such an exercise runs risks, and invites criticism from academics and policy makers alike. Critics of regionalism find that regional institutions are merely embedded in the prevailing and highly unequal international system of states. Their ordering properties are determined only by the structure of that system and the relative weight of its constituent parts. Practitioners and policy makers of a sceptical mind point to the low levels of effectiveness, the duplication of effort, and the relatively reduced salience of “regionals” in a world in which strong states and multilateral institutions still call the tune. These arguments are not original, and have been part of the ongoing dialogue about regionalism since it emerged into the post- Second World War order.

Both from a United Nations perspective, and from that of the regional organizations themselves, it is possible to demonstrate comparative advantage in certain areas of security provision, especially peacekeeping and conflict prevention. The peacekeeping activities of ECOWAS are both testimony to the need for regional action, and the possibilities of learning by doing: the Sierra Leone experience built upon that gained in Liberia. In regard to conflict prevention in particular, it is widely acknowledged that regional actors can play unique and crucial roles because of their privileged position with regard to the local situation, though some conflicts remain stubbornly outside the remit of any such actor. They can also help overcome the widely observed mismatch between the state-centric nature of most international institutions and the non-state based nature of many contemporary threats, by working with and incorporating civil society organizations (CSOs) into their expanding range of activities.¹⁸

Getting regional actors to work together to deal with regional problems and with the United Nations, has obvious attractions to the liberal-minded, but presents many challenges. It is difficult for states to delegate upwards, and for the UN to delegate downwards, to the regional level. Indeed the record, though improving is still very mixed. If it is true that much of the business of security remains the affair of states, strong states in particular, other actors have increasingly entered into the picture providing important foundations to an emerging global structure. The

¹⁷ European Council, “European Security Strategy ‘A Secure Europe in a Better World’”, 12 December 2003.

¹⁸ See for example Catherine Barnes, “Weaving the Web: Civil-Society Roles in Working with Conflict and Building Peace” in Paul van Tongeren et al, *People Building Peace II*, (London, 2003), pp. 7-24.

goal of improving international peace and security, of building on the achievements noted at the start of this paper, can no longer be the responsibility of any single actor, but requires the participation of a variety of different actors – state and non-state, multilateral and regional. If an “explosion of international activism” helps to explain successes so far, an improved understanding of, and support for regional activism

can help to further advance the project for a more stable international order.

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