

# REGIONAL AND GLOBAL AXES OF CONFLICT

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**Crisis States**  
**Research Centre**

The ways in which states are connected to each other through regional and broader international systems has had a profound impact on patterns of state resilience and state fragility in the developing world. The Crisis States Research Centre is studying how regional and global institutions and axes of conflict affect processes of state collapse and reconstruction. We present some initial findings on the role that regional organisations play in peace and security, recent research on international involvement in security sector reform, and an innovative study on the long-term impact of military interventions.

## REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS, PEACE AND SECURITY

Within policy and academic circles there are divergent views about the actual and potential contribution of regional organisations to peace and security. Despite the pessimism of some International Relations scholars, the UN believes that regional bodies have a major role to play in conflict prevention and resolution. In the post-Cold War period the UN has stepped up its co-operation with these bodies, which have become increasingly active in the area of peacemaking.

It is clear that regional organisations experience varying degrees of effectiveness in relation to peace and security. Some, like the European

Union, are highly effective whereas others are largely ineffectual. The reasons for this are not clear. The Centre is therefore conducting a comparative research project on Regional Organisations, Peace and Security. The project is studying ten regional organisations (see box) and seeks to answer the following question:

*What factors determine the effectiveness of regional organisations in relation to regional security and the prevention, management and resolution of violent conflict?*

So far our research suggests a number of general observations. First, state capacity and cohesion are critical factors. Since regional organisations are forums of states, the political, economic and administrative strength of member states has a major bearing on the

effectiveness and efficiency of the organisation. A regional body might be able to utilise and build on the strength of its members (eg the EU) but it will almost certainly inherit the political and institutional weaknesses of its members (eg SADC and IGAD).

Second, the prevalence, nature and intensity of intra- and inter-state conflict shape the regional organisation's ability to implement its

### The regional organisations being studied:

The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)

The South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC)

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

The European Union (EU)

The Organisation of Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

The Organisation of American States (OAS)

The Southern African Development Community (SADC)

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

The case of Central Asia

See map overleaf

Pakistani UN troops disembarking from a transport helicopter in the Democratic Republic of Congo

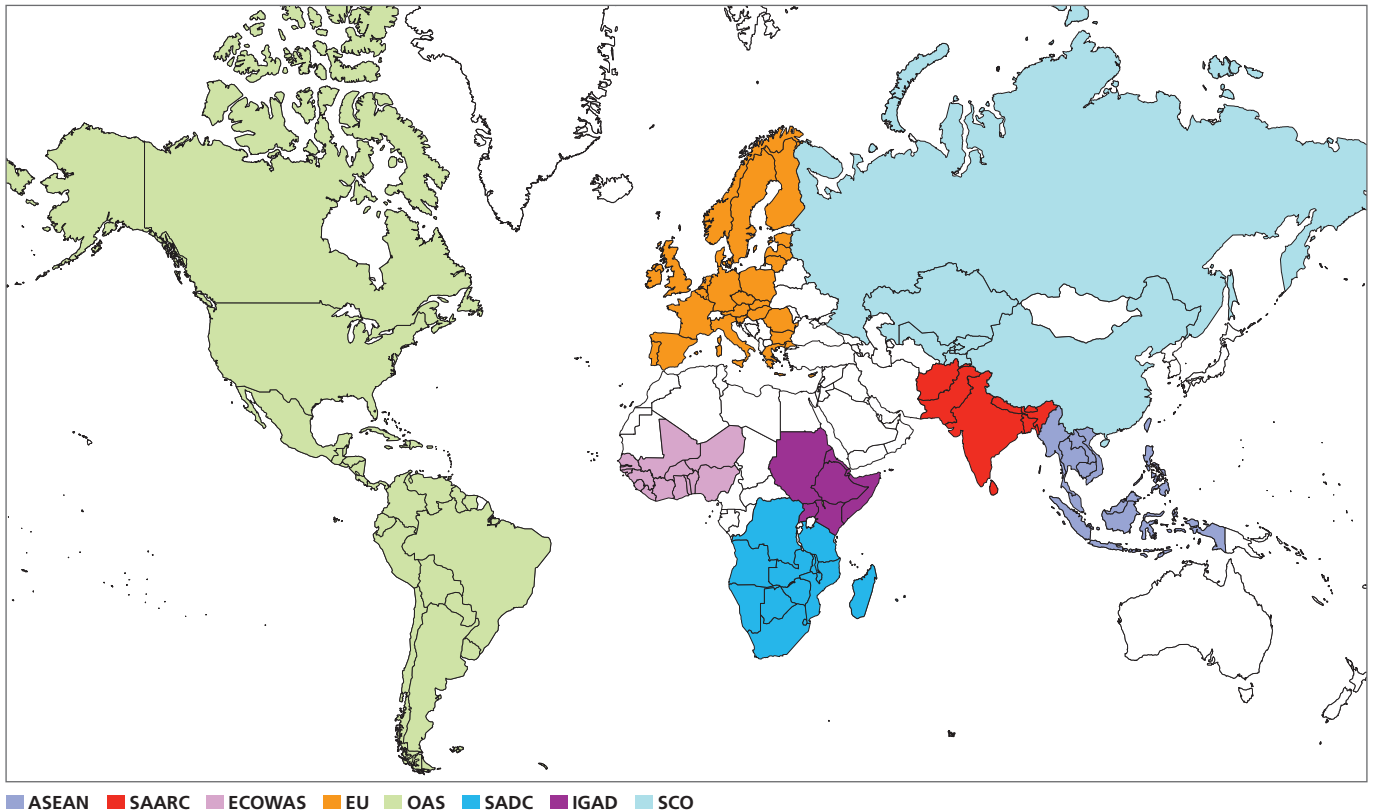


PANOS PICTURES: GIACOMO PIROZZI

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## Map showing eight regional organisations



peace and security agenda. Although the UN Charter views the regional organisation as a forum for conflict management and resolution, a high level of conflict between member states can prevent the organisation from playing a useful peacemaking role. This has been the case with SADC, IGAD and SAARC. Other organisations, like the OAS and ASEAN, have been more successful in managing disputes between member states.

Third, donors that promote regional co-operation and co-ordination tend to view these strategies as objectively and indisputably necessary and beneficial. In many regions, however, member states view regional co-operation and co-ordination in a highly subjective, nationalistic and parochial manner, leading to resistance to regionalism (eg Central Asia – see Box opposite).

Fourth, a high level of regional co-operation and co-ordination, particularly in the political and security realms, requires the pooling and partial loss of sovereignty. This is possible where states are confident and enjoy full sovereignty (eg the EU) but it is difficult and unlikely where developing countries are politically weak and are still struggling to attain full sovereignty.

Fifth, the UN and some of the donors suggest that close regional co-operation can lead to the forging of common values and policies. In reality, the opposite is often the case: the

presence of common political values is required to forge close co-operation and common policies. The degree of normative congruence among member states has a strong influence on their level of trust and cohesion, their ability

to develop common policies on security, their willingness to adhere to those policies and their ability to act with common purpose in crisis situations.

### UNWILLING PLAYMATES? THE REGIONALIST PROJECT IN CENTRAL ASIA

Over the last decade, the states of Central Asia – comprising Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – have engaged in numerous projects aimed at fostering regional cooperation. These projects have generally been unsuccessful. In the one and a half decades since the end of Soviet rule the states of this region have tended to develop as closed entities, with sealed borders and decaying inter-state transport infrastructure. In contrast to their interdependence in the Soviet era, they have tended to embrace isolation, which has been particularly damaging for the poorer and weaker countries such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The problems that these newly independent states have encountered in trying to entrench their own statehood pose major obstacles to regional cooperation.

Despite this, donor policy has looked on Central Asia as an integrated region in which economic and social cooperation is the natural answer to many problems. Consequently, donors such as the EU and UNDP have promoted regional agendas with regard to tackling problems such as drugs, terrorism and environmental degradation. However, our research indicates that the idea of regional co-operation has little resonance in Central Asia, and cooperation between two or more states on particular issues is likely to be more successful than a general drive towards regional integration or broader political co-operation. Promoting regionalism as a good in its own right is not likely to be productive when so many bilateral political problems remain unsolved. The most successful co-operative endeavours are likely to be those taking place on an ad hoc basis over issues of mutual concern, rather than those prompted by ideas of common values or a shared vision of the region.

Sixth, the relationship between the two most powerful states is a significant factor in many regions. Negative examples include South Africa and Zimbabwe in Southern Africa, and India and Pakistan in South Asia; a positive example would be France and Germany in Europe.

In addition to these observations, our research has identified a number of other factors as relevant in determining the effectiveness of regional organisations. These include the role of extra-regional actors (such as foreign powers and the UN); the regional economy and level of regional integration; the nature of domestic politics; and the ability of regional organisations to learn lessons from their experience.

## SECURITY SECTOR REFORM (SSR)

Over the past decade the donor community has come to appreciate the importance of helping to build professional and effective state security and justice institutions in post-war countries and new democracies. The British government has led the way among major donors and there is now active engagement from the UN and the OECD's Development Assistance Committee.

The Centre has focused on the cardinal issue of local ownership in relation to SSR. Donors extol the virtues of local ownership but in practice they often impose their values, models and projects on local actors. This is because in conditions following war, authoritarian rule and/or state collapse it is often difficult to identify credible local actors. In these circumstances local actors sometimes lack the expertise and confidence to formulate policy and they may be too divided

**New Rwandese and Burundian arrivals from Cibitoke transit centre arrive at the Mugano camp and receive tokens that will allow them to be registered the next day.**



## EXPLAINING FAILURES IN REGIONAL SECURITY: THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

What explains the limited success of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in relation to peacemaking and the establishment of a common security regime? Despite high hopes, in the decade following the end of the Cold War and apartheid the SADC region remained wracked by a high level of conflict that included civil wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola, state repression in Zimbabwe, and violence in a number of other countries. SADC was largely ineffectual in these situations, distinguished less by its peacemaking efforts than by its fractious internal quarrels.

Our research identifies three major reasons for the lack of success. First, there is an absence of common values among member states, which inhibits the development of trust, institutional cohesion, common policies and unified responses to crises. Unlike the EU, SADC was not founded on common values. In the realm of domestic policy there is no consensus on the basic principles of political governance, while in terms of foreign policy there is a division between militarist and pacific camps. Second, states are reluctant to surrender sovereignty to a security regime that encompasses binding rules and decision-making. Many SADC states guard their sovereignty jealously since they attained it relatively recently and at great cost through liberation wars, and in some cases they are strongly challenged internally. Third, member states are economically and administratively weak. States that cannot effect proper coordination between their own departments struggle to meet the vastly more complicated challenge of co-ordination between countries, and are less likely to devote attention and resources to regional issues. These are all national problems that cannot be solved at the regional level. Somewhat paradoxically, the challenge of common security in Southern Africa is less a regional than a national challenge.

or disorganised to reach consensus on security policies and priorities.

The absence of local ownership also stems from the fact that external actors have vastly greater political and economic power and are much better organised and resourced than internal actors. This structural inequality is reinforced

by local dependence on external funding and gives rise to unbalanced relationships. Even the most well-meaning external actors exert leverage to promote and fund the models with which they are familiar. These models may be partly or wholly inappropriate in developing countries, and may be resented and resisted by local actors.

The structures, procedures, financing and evaluation criteria of donor organisations are poorly suited to SSR and to post-conflict peacebuilding in general. These organisations are geared towards short-term projects rather than long-term programmes; they are bureaucratic, hierarchical, overly centralised and averse to risk; and they prize rapid project delivery and measurable results. They consequently lack the flexibility, patience, creativity and responsiveness that are required in post-war societies, each of which has significantly different dynamics.

Donors often pursue quick-fix solutions and underestimate the daunting obstacles to SSR in developing countries. The obstacles include a chronic lack of skills and resources; a tendency to view security in an authoritarian, militarist and secretive fashion; resistance to reform from politicians and/or security officers; and the on-





PANOS PICTURES: SVEN TORFINN

AMIS soldiers (African Union Peacekeeping Mission in Sudan) march through an IDP camp in Darfur.

going politicisation of the security services. The higher the level of instability and violence in the national or regional arenas, moreover, the less likely it is that reforms with an anti-militarist orientation will be introduced.

Security sector reform can be immensely complex because of the number of policies that have to be transformed simultaneously. The management of such complex policy and organisational change would tax even the strongest of governments, and can be overwhelming to a new government that has no prior experience in running a state.

These findings are explored in a book by Laurie Nathan entitled *No Ownership, No Commitment: A Guide to Local Ownership of Security Sector Reform*, University of Birmingham, 2007, which includes country case studies on Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Liberia, Sierra Leone and South Africa. It is available at [www.crisisstates.com/download/others/SSR%20Reform.pdf](http://www.crisisstates.com/download/others/SSR%20Reform.pdf)

## CHALLENGING STANDARD METHODOLOGIES: A NEW MACRO-STUDY OF MILITARY INTERVENTIONS

Many contemporary macro-studies of violent phenomena use statistical tools to generate conclusions and policy recommendations. These tools must be treated with considerable caution, however. The way in which phenomena such as 'military intervention' are coded in the studies is often highly idiosyncratic, and differences in classification can produce radically different outcomes. Moreover, there is often a lack of transparency with regard to how these phenomena are coded and consequently it is difficult for policy makers to understand exactly what the studies are referring to.

Iraq: British troops at a checkpoint at Basra Bridge, situated 2km from the city, where fleeing civilians were checked for weapons.



PANOS PICTURES: ELIO COLAVOLPE

## 'The most interventionist countries are democracies'

The Crisis States Research Centre is undertaking its own macro-study of military interventions, combining the use of quantitative tools with reflection on the conceptual and methodological robustness of standard methodologies. In the existing literature on intervention, the ambiguities involved in defining multi-dimensional social science concepts is not adequately addressed. In order to deal with these problems our study aims to be transparent in its coding of military interventions, highlighting the extent to which policy conclusions can vary dramatically if we alter our definitions of key concepts. We also aim to identify key associations and correlations that remain robust even if we vary the definition of 'military intervention'.

Our research thus far has revealed that the most interventionist countries are democracies. The ranking of the most interventionist entities since 1945 is as follows: the United States, the United Nations, France, Israel, the United Kingdom and the former Soviet Union. Moreover, the study suggests that the countries that are most frequently the object of intervention are not 'rogue' states but 'weak' states. Countries statistically most likely to experience an intervention are either the poorest or those embroiled in internal conflict.

The study also reveals that over 50 per cent of interventions that aim to have some impact on the political system of the target country fail to obtain their objectives. Given this ratio, the fact that interventions continue to take place merits an explanation (and may have a lot to do with the internal political dynamics of the intervening state). These findings raise questions about the motives behind military interventionism as well as the probable outcomes.

In a further major project of the Centre, the reflective methodological approach developed here will be applied to the study of fragile states indices.



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