THE REGIONAL DIMENSION OF GLOBAL SECURITY

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Contents

Summary

This essay provides an overview of the way in which regions and regional institutions have become increasingly important in debates about international security, making it possible to speak of a 'regional dimension of global security'. After discussing some of the regional sources of insecurity past and present, and introducing the debate about the so-called 'regionalization of security', it focuses on the origins and development of regional security institutions and their relationship with the United Nations as the principal provider of 'international peace and security'. It looks at a range of different areas in which regional organizations have been active in security provision and considers how successful they have been.

1. Introduction

A discussion of the 'regional dimension of global security' needs first to address what a regional dimension to global security might mean and whether in fact there is distinct regional dimension to global security issues, or whether security issues can be best catalogued as global problems.

Insecurity indeed has often been conceived of as a global problem requiring global solutions. It was certainly the case after World War I and World War II, for example, that security was conceived of in this way and that 'global' or universal institutions, like

the League of Nations or United Nations, would provide the best guarantee of peace following two destructive wars. In reality, however, a so called global approach to security has often overlain what are in fact a diverse collection of global, regional and local security issues. However, an understanding that regional security could be distinguished and thus posed a particular issue to be addressed in a distinctive way has gained widespread acceptance in the post-Cold War era as the influence of superpower competition in global security matters waned and different regional powers and actors gained more autonomy over their own affairs. It is in this period in particular that a plethora of region-specific problems and solutions have been identified.

This essay discusses the regional dimension of global security by examining first, in Section 2, the current debates about regionalization and regionalism within which the current regional security discussions are located. Section 3 then considers the growth and development of regional institutions and their relationship with global security provision before during and after the Cold War. Section 4 surveys some aspects of the contemporary regional security arena, looking at the role of institutions in peace operations and their relations with the UN. It also considers how institutions have fared in dealing with the 'latest' security threats of terrorism and the spread of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). A conclusion returns to the key questions and offers an overview of the contemporary significance of the regional dimension and future prospects.

2. The Regionalization of Security

A discussion of the regional dimension of global security takes as a starting point the widely observed increase in the process of regionalisation, the related practices and policies of regionalism and their extension to the security domain (Farrell, Hettne and Langenhove, 2005; Pugh and Sidhu, 2003). Though the terms regionalism and regionalization are now well established in the scholarly literature, their meanings and manifestations remain somewhat imprecise and require some explanation. Regionalization draws attention to the region, understood as a group of geographically contiguous or proximate states, regions or territories, as opposed to single states, non-state actors or the wider international system, as the focus of increased economic, social and political activity. If globalization focuses on activity at the global level, regionalization focuses on regional activity and the region becomes, in itself, a separate unit of analysis.

The twin processes of regionalization and globalization are both seen as having increased rapidly since the end of the Cold War, or even before, as the bipolarity of the international system started to weaken and regions and regional powers and actors became more autonomous. While the initial focus of both processes was largely economic these two terms now embrace a much wider range of issue areas including security, broadly interpreted. The relationship, both positive and negative, between globalization and regionalization is beyond the scope of this article (see Senarclens and Kazancigil, 2007), yet the claim that security has become 'regionalised', that security threats can both be located and dealt with at the regional level, and that there is an interdependent relationship between global and regional security, has gained widespread currency in different policy making circles as well as being the subject of scholarly

enquiry.

What does this claim mean? It identifies the region as firstly the source and secondly solution of many contemporary security problems. There are a number of contemporary threats that may be viewed as regional rather than global in nature, or at least suggest that the dominance of global security threats that characterised the Cold War has shifted to a more local level. This shift is captured in the literature on 'new wars' together with new security issues which point to particular regions and states or often sub-state or transnational groups and actors as the sources of conflict (Kaldor, 1999, Holsti, 1996); has been demonstrated statistically that while conflicts of most types have declined overall, conflicts within states, 'intra-state wars' are more frequent within than wars between states or 'inter-state wars' (Human Security Report, 2005). The ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia or Central Africa, for example, while having an important global component have drawn on distinctly regional and local sources.

The regionalization of security does not exclude the possibility that many or at least certain security problems are also global and thus best dealt with by multilateral institutions like the UN; however it also recognises that the regional sources of insecurity can be met with regional security provision, that the UN cannot act as a global security provider and that regional security provision may be better matched to a given's regions needs and interests. Some of these assumptions lie behind the both original and revised assumptions about regionalism in the UN Charter and subsequent documents like *An Agenda for Peace* (Boutros-Ghali, 1992). Hence regionalization, in its different forms, need not be viewed as necessarily a competitor or alternative to multilateralism but rather complementary, as different parts of global security architecture (Pugh and Sidhu, 2003). Regionalization may highlight the role of states or different actors within regions for whom greater regional empowerment an attractive means of enhancing their capacity and influence.

As regards the more practical manifestations of this regionalization we need to link this more abstract idea of the intensification of regional activity to more concrete practices and projects. This is where regionalism enters the picture. These processes of regionalization have given rise to sets of coordinated policies and projects, to formal and informal institutional frameworks in which collective action problems are addressed. Hence, a likely, though not necessary product of increased regionalization is increased institutionalisation or *regionalism*, understood as the growth and development of different forms and structures of regional governance. While regionalism is understood to have increased globally since World War II, different regions of the world differ sharply in their levels of institutionalisation: high in Europe, low in South Asia for example. However, most regions, with few exceptions, have seen sustained institutional growth which has, in turn, generated growing interest in the study of regionalism (Fawcett and Hurrell, 1995; Hettne, Inotai and Sunkel, 2000; Acharya and Johnston, 2007). In addition, though many regional institutions were established with a distinctly economic orientation (see further below) many regional institutions have further developed a distinctive security component, a product of functional expansion, but also reflecting regional needs and global priorities.

The *security* dimension of regional institutions may be understood in two different,

though related ways. First, it can be broadly interpreted as the attempt to promote peaceful and predictable relations among its members, to build security and community through cooperation (Adler and Barnett, 1998). This loose understanding of security could be said to apply to any regional organization. Second, and more narrowly, a regional security institution can be understood as an organization whose charter contains an explicit reference to security *provision* to meet a security threat, whether through the coordination of defence, security or foreign policy at some level. (This distinction may be understood by contrasting the early EC project with that of the later EU, with the latter having a far more explicit security agenda.) The focus here will be principally on the more measurable forms of security provision, less on security understood as community-building, though the two are often linked.

The following section turns to an examination of some of the principal institutional manifestations of regionalization in security affairs which in turn allows us to proceed to reach some conclusions about the place of regionalization within debates about global security.

3. Regional Security Institutions: an overview

If security has become regionalised as described above, and regionalism has become a well established feature of the landscape of international politics, what has been the role of regional institutions in the provision of international security, the most concrete manifestation and form of measurement, after all, of the regional dimension of global security? This section looks at the both history and development of regionalism in the security sphere, and its evolving and interdependent relationship between the UN and regional institutions providing insights into the relationship between regional and global security. It demonstrates that there has been increasing demand for regional security, reflected in the growth and development of institutions, but also that in terms of measuring provision and effectiveness their record is mixed, showing considerable variation from region to region, depending on both local conditions and interests of external powers. It also remains subject to some controversy: there is little consensus about the value of international institutions in security affairs on the one hand, and the comparative advantage of regional institutions over global actors like the UN on the other. Despite some obvious limitations however – some of which are shared with their global counterparts – regional institutions have become increasingly important in security provision worldwide, and their roles are recognized by multilateral institutions, states and non-state actors.

Viewed from the perspective of the early 21st century, the rise of the regional security institution, providing concrete evidence of the regional security dimension of global politics, over the past half century looks rather impressive. Before World War II, as discussed below, there were very few formal international institutions, regional or otherwise, and even fewer dealing explicitly with security matters: the main exception was the League of Nations. Indeed, outside the Americas, few institutions claimed the title 'regional' – the term was not widely used until after World War II – even if they displayed regional characteristics. Since then their numbers have grown steadily if unevenly. The use of the term regional institution or organization to describe a limited grouping of (usually) geographically proximate states established for the purposes of

dialogue and cooperation, has become widely accepted, as has the notion of a distinction between the functions of institutions with: to include 'multipurpose', economic or security organizations. By the early 21st century, of a growing array of inter-governmental regional organizations (Diehl, 2005), over 25 included an explicit commitment to security provision – in Europe, Africa, the Americas, Asia, and the Middle East/Islamic world (see Table 1). When one considers that much earlier institutional growth was identified and explained primarily with reference to economic integration rather than security provision this is particularly notable.

( ) now defunct institutions /name change	
Africa	OAU/AU, IGADD/IGAD, ECOWAS, SADCC/SADC, CEMAC
Europe	EC/EU, WEU, NATO, (Warsaw Pact) OSCE, CIS, CSTO
Asia	(SEATO), ASEAN, SAARC, ARF, SCO, CACO, ICO
Middle East	LAS, (CENTO), GCC, AMU, (ACC), ECO, ICO
Americas	OAS, CARICOM, OECS, MERCOSUR
Australasia	ANZUS, SPF/PIF

Table 1. Major Regional institutions with security provision 1945-2007

Equally impressive is the expanding range of their security activities over the period: from peacekeeping and dispute settlement to arms control, non-proliferation and other types of foreign policy coordination. Box 1 illustrates the diverse security roles of different regional organizations. Each of the functions described below is drawn from the charters of different regional institutions, though as discussed below, the reference to security activities in any given Charter does not necessarily provide evidence of effectiveness.

Confidence building measures
Defence of sovereignty and territorial integrity
Peacekeeping
Security and economic development
Peaceful settlement of disputes
Foreign policy coordination
Security cooperation
Resolution of border disputes
Disarmament and arms control
Preventive diplomacy
Promotion of freedom, security and justice
Safeguarding of national rights
Combating terrorism, drugs and weapons trafficking
Peace enforcement
Election monitoring
Institution building
Non-proliferation
Humanitarian intervention?
Human rights protection?

Box 1: Security activities of selected regional institutions

Further, while they have become more active in their own right, more and more regional institutions have also become involved in collaborative security ventures, typically with the UN for which ample provision exists with the Charter, but also with other regional/cross-regional institutions, and an array of non-governmental organizations (Pugh and Sidhu, 2003). This collaboration is particularly evident today in the area of peace operations, providing a cogent example of the regional dimension of global security, described in more detail below. Since the 1990s, while many peace operations have been conducted solo, a growing number and variety of major peacekeeping operations have counted on the participation of the UN and different regional organizations, or groups of states acting outside formal institutional frameworks. By way of illustration, at the end of 2005, some 15 regional organizations were involved in collaborative peacekeeping/peacemaking activities (CIC, 2006). And in October 2008 of the top twenty largest UN-mandated operations, six were led not by the UN itself, but regional organizations (CIC, 2009).

Outside the area of peace operations, regional institutions, often in cooperation with the UN, but also on an independent basis have devised their own strategies and policies to deal not only with traditional security threats, but also with more recent security challenges like terrorism, transnational crime, weapons of mass destruction, and environmental security. Some of these issues are also discussed in further detail below.

Finally, and as a result of the above, and an important aspect to the debate about the regional dimension of global security, these new roles of regional organizations, though still rather understudied from a comparative perspective, have become increasingly recognised by states, the UN and other actors (Haacke and Williams, 2009). Earlier and widely expressed scepticism about the values of such institutions has given way to acknowledgment of their potential. They are thus seen as part of an 'explosion of international activism', highlighted by the Human Security Report (2005), as responsible for decline in armed conflict overall. A few years earlier, former UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, also highlighted the increasingly important role played by multilateral institutions *and* regional security organizations. Though the years since 2005 have seen reverses, with growing pressures on peacekeeping organizations and talk of 'overstretch', global deployments of military personnel have been sustained overall as demonstrated in CIC report for 2009.

While the above paints a somewhat optimistic picture of the growth and development of regionalism, some important caveats should inform what follows. What do the above developments amount to in real terms and how can they be explained: by the deeply held interests of states and powerful regional actors or by a genuine desire to cooperate for common goals? In other words, is the new regional dimension of global security merely providing an opportunity for strong regional states to impose their own security agendas? While a 'new wave of regionalism in security affairs' can readily be identified (Lake and Morgan, 1997) it is harder to demonstrate that it has established deep or enduring roots or significantly altered the contours of world politics. Indeed the real significance of the current regional wave, like the previous waves discussed here, remains a matter of debate.

First, the evidence of its impact itself remains mixed. The number of institutions in existence tells us little about their remit and effectiveness. The lofty rhetoric found in their charters and mission statements is often unmatched in practice, and practice itself varies widely. Some well established regional organizations have registered important advances in the security domain in the area of peace enforcement or rebuilding war-torn states: whether in Africa, Southeast Asia, Latin America or Europe. There have been many reverses however, and the record of others – in the Middle East, South or Central Asia – for example, remains quite limited. There is no regular or easily identifiable pattern or process to the development of security regionalism. Just to give one example, which is discussed further below, Latin American, South Pacific, Southeast Asian and most recently African countries have successfully established and maintained a nuclear free zone throughout their regions. In South Asia, in contrast, the two major regional powers, India and Pakistan, have gone nuclear, while the commitment of the League of Arab States to remove all weapons of mass destruction (WMD) from the Middle East has failed, with Israel's nuclear capacity already well established and Iran moving ever closer to becoming a nuclear power.

Second, the very value of such institutions, whether international or regional, is subject to different interpretations (Higgott, 2006). At one end of the spectrum, scholars argue that institutions have helped to shape the way states think about security and community. Institutions promote dialogue and learning among states allowing them to rethink their security priorities and behaviour, and embark upon collaborative ventures. In some accounts common identities, which may be based upon regions, may, in themselves, play important roles in determining how states chose partners in cooperation and over which areas they choose to cooperate. In the middle ground are those who see institutions as serving useful purposes in situations of interdependence, allowing states to benefit from common rules and procedures. In this 'rational actor' model regional identity is incidental to cooperation. The region, therefore, is not in itself a valuable unit of analysis. At the other end of the spectrum are those who express scepticism as to whether institutions, of any type, promote security and international order. Institutions are transient and merely reflect the interests of dominant states or current power balances in the international system. The idea of the region is only important inasmuch as strong regional states, or alliances of states, may be instrumental in trying to achieve a more favourable balance of power for their members. Indeed a number of studies on the regional dimension of global security pay particular attention to the role of strong regional states.

Third, even the desirability of regionalism, in theory or practice, is contested. Though some argue that regional security might be the gateway to improved global security, that peace might be obtained 'in parts' to quote the title of an early work by US scholar Joseph Nye (1971), an equally strong body of opinion supports the view that regionalism should be considered at best complementary and secondary, at worst detrimental to global efforts to promote peace and security. Drawing on early idealist thinking about international organization, which promoted universal over particularistic values, there is still a wide consensus that the UN, or some universal body, should be the main security provider. In this account, the promotion of regional security contradicts the search for global security; regional organizations cannot be impartial and will be always susceptible to the ambitions of strong regional powers. This view has

also prevailed among practitioners within the UN itself (Goulding, 2002). In other words, if international security institutions have value, this should be sought and promoted at the global level, by a truly international not regional society. In proceeding to examine the progress and development of regional security institutions these views should be kept in mind.

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