OAU mechanism for conflict management in Africa; and the emergence of an institutionalised security dialogue in Southeast Asia in the form of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum (ARF). These developments illustrate the importance presently bestowed by states and institutions on organising for better regional understanding and cooperation in security matters, particularly through the institutionalisation of conflict management functions within bodies which were not very well organised for this purpose. At the same time, the credibility of the UN and regional organizations has been tarnished considerably by major setbacks in such places as the Horn of Africa and Central Africa, and the Balkans. The international community is manifestly ill-equipped to manage and resolve intra-state conflicts; yet, as the Ecuador-Peru border war and the latest episode in the Spratly Islands between China and the Philippines reminded us recently, there remains a multiplicity of extant or potential inter-state conflicts and disputes.

The characteristics of present day internal strife - violent conflict of an ethnic, religious or sectarian warfare nature - remain especially alarming. And the number of such conflicts seems to be on the rise rather than diminishing.[2] Obviously, this challenges the traditional role of international and regional institutions which were originally designed to act as fora for the resolution of inter-state rather than internal conflicts. Today, they face a wide range of sub and trans-national security-related problems - ethnic and sectarian warfare, large scale environmental degradation leading to potentially disruptive migration patterns, "collapsed" states, the proliferation of complex humanitarian emergencies - which, in many cases, are overwhelming their capacity to react. Although there are indications that some institutions are slowly adapting to these new circumstances, many others have yet to devise effective ways of tackling such issues. But is institutional adaptation enough? Recent setbacks suffered by the UN and regional organizations in the conflict management field, it seems, have prompted a belated rediscovery of that cardinal rule of international cooperation: organization alone cannot be a substitute for political will. If we are looking at the factors which affect conflict management effectiveness, better organization to prevent, manage and resolve conflict is but one aspect - admittedly a crucial one - of a multi-variable equation which also includes the political will to act or to support multilateral action, and the often evolutionary response of parties or belligerents to third party intervention or mediation.

This paper seeks to demonstrate that if we are to make progress in the present debate on regional organization we must look beyond the quasi-theological discussions on the respective advantages of regional and global approaches to peace and security and take a more

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[2]   According to the UN Development Programme of 82 armed conflicts between 1989 and 1992 only three were between states. See the UNDP's *Human Development Report 1994*, New York/Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 47.