

Be it economic or political, regionalism is (re)emerging as one of the most important trends in international relations<sup>1</sup>. In particular, the end of the Cold War has reawakened the original UN vision of regionalism whereby regional organizations and arrangements are expected to act as effective instruments in the management and settlement of regional disputes and conflicts. Indeed both the *Agenda for Peace* (1992) and the more recent *Supplement to the Agenda for Peace* (1995) contain elaborate comments on Chapter VIII of the UN Charter and the potential of regional organizations in matters related to peace and security.

For most of the postwar period regional organizations did not play a very effective role in intra-regional conflict management. Regional politics and lack of internal cohesion within these bodies all too often hampered or neutralised regional efforts, particularly when great power interests were at stake. By the mid-1980's the traditional regional organizations - the Organization of American States (OAS), the Arab League and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) - were generally considered to be little more than moribund institutions suffering from terminal paralysis. Of the three, the OAS was the only body which could legitimately claim to have played a significant and effective regional conflict management role, and its period of effectiveness lasted only a few short years during the 1950's and early 1960's. As for the Arab League and the OAU, they remained politically divided bodies throughout their respective postwar histories and proved to be poor conflict management fora. In short, the original vision of regionalism as a building-block to world order enshrined in the UN Charter did not come about.

With the seismic changes of the beginning of this decade in the structure of the international system, the 'contextual' background of international regionalism has changed considerably. The depolarization of international cooperation patterns and the lifting of superpower strategic overlay over entire regions has removed some of the external obstacles to more effective regional organization. In turn, this has generated a gradual movement towards the regionalization of security politics which will become an international determinant for years to come. In many - but not all - regions, political space has been created for genuinely regional discussions on peace and security issues where this was hitherto impossible. In terms of institutional development, the results have been quite remarkable. Witness the institutional development of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) - now Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) - in Europe; the political rebirth of the OAS in Latin America; the creation of an

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