

- In **Rwanda**, although the OAU had observers in country prior to the explosion there on April 6, 1994, it was the UN that tried, however imperfectly, to do something concrete both before that date and after. In **Burundi**, the OAU has been unable to effectively moderate a very complex and unstable situation because of a lack of cooperation from the belligerent parties.
- Given the competing and unyielding claims on the **Spratly Islands** by China, Taiwan and some ASEAN members, neither ASEAN nor its Regional Forum (ARF) have been able to deal effectively with this long-standing regional dispute. Indeed a widening China-ASEAN rift now appears to be developing on this issue.

## 2. *Some fundamental considerations:*

### *A complex institutional picture*

The end of the Cold War, and to some extent UN discourse on regional organizations, have contributed to a blurring of the traditional distinctions between multipurpose regional organizations, regional defense organizations and other types of regional or sub-regional arrangements. Yet they differ tremendously in their mandates, capability, track records, and approaches to problems. Structurally, they range from institutions with elaborate internal architecture, such as the OSCE or the OAS, to institutionalised regional dialogues on security such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Groupings such as the Commonwealth, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and *La Francophonie*, which lack a geographically cohesive base and are not endowed formally with peace and security functions, are often put under the general 'sub-global' political institutions category which formal regional bodies find themselves in.<sup>3</sup>

In thinking about regional organizations it should also be borne in mind that the political map is not uniformly covered with such arrangements and organizations. Sub-regional systems like Northeast Asia and South Asia are for all intent and purpose devoid of

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<sup>3</sup> The Commonwealth's peacemaking and peacekeeping track record is well-known. Recent Commonwealth documents specifically refer to 'conflict reducing and resolving activities' of the organization in accordance with Chapter VIII of the UN Charter. For their part, the OIC and *La Francophonie* are only now beginning to be utilised as political tribunes in matters related to peace and security. Since 1992 the OIC has been voicing increasing criticism of UN and Western policy in Bosnia in the face of perceived inaction to save the muslim populations, while in *La Francophonie's* case – and at the instigation of the Canadian government – the Rwanda and Burundi crises have prompted an internal debate on its political role.