

unimpressive and the rhetoric of regionalism remains far ahead of its actual accomplishments in this field. The present structural and operational weaknesses of regional organizations - while not immutable - are unlikely to change dramatically in the near future. As the UN itself has discovered since the Cold War, the transition from being a rule-making institution to one devoted to more operational activities in the fields of security and humanitarian affairs involves a degree of preparation, organization and professionalism far superior than in previous times. Regional bodies will have to confront this situation as well as they move towards greater involvement in these issues.

As a major promoter of security-related regionalism since 1992, the UN has played an important role in trying to enhance the role of regional bodies. In August 1994 it held the first ever summit between regional organizations and the UN. Moreover, the *Supplement to the Agenda for Peace* has also made an important contribution to furthering the understanding of the regional option while at the same time injecting some needed pragmatism in the debate. There are signs, however, that UN members are losing interest in this issue. One of the results of the *Supplement* had been the establishment of a UN working group on the follow up of the document. The group was later sub-divided into four sub-working groups which were to study different aspects of preventive diplomacy and peacemaking, coordination (role of regional organizations), post-conflict peace-building, and sanctions. This process is now stalled as it seems G77/NAM (non-aligned movement) countries are showing little enthusiasm for more prolonged discussions on peace and security issues at the UN. They perceive that the UN development agenda has been neglected compared to UN efforts in the peace and security field.<sup>19</sup>

Regional organizations and groupings carry potential which needs to be exploited more effectively, particularly since the UN is barely able to sustain its present commitments to conflict prevention and peace support operations. Obviously more active and effective involvement from regional actors and institutions in the prevention, management, and resolution of regional conflict would constitute a much needed complement to UN efforts. However, if there is an inescapable bottom line on this issue it is that the primary responsibility for ensuring the effectiveness of regional bodies lies with their membership.

The following are a few suggestions to move the present debate forward:

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<sup>19</sup> This is not an entirely inaccurate perception when one considers the evolution of UN budgetary outlays between 1990 and 1994. The peacekeeping budget of the UN increased more than tenfold during this period whereas the general budget, which deals with social and economic programs as well as general UN administrative expenses, essentially stagnated as a result of the zero-growth policy insisted upon by industrialised countries.