

The degree to which each organization or body is transparent in its operations and accountable to member states will also affect how effective the organization will be. Its credibility with member states and, therefore, the support they give it, will depend on its ability to function openly and to govern itself accountably.

Formal institutions or looser arrangements?

In recent years, ad hoc peace processes have often substituted for formal action through regional bodies. In many cases, this has taken the form of action through "Contact Groups", "friends of the Secretary General" or "elder statesmen" groupings. The main advantage of such approaches is that they can potentially provide states interested in peacemaking with a framework for coordination when institutional approaches are insufficient or deadlocked.¹¹ In other cases regional and sub-regional bodies not formally endowed with peace and security mandates have played a leading role. Given that such non-institutionalized processes have often led to conflict resolution successes in the past (e.g. Namibia, Central America, Cambodia) we should encourage flexibility and effectiveness of approach rather than insist on confining problems to pre-packaged institutional solutions.

In doing so, however, we also have to be aware of the limitations and drawbacks of such approaches. First, at the regional level there is a danger of a reassertion of zones of influence and a corresponding loss of international oversight. The international community has to ensure that regional peacekeeping interventions comply with UN Charter principles and other fundamentals of international law. In particular, it needs to pay attention to humanitarian needs, human rights and respect of the principle of minimum effective force when resort to force is unavoidable. Second, in complex cases of conflict management, the existence of a multiplicity of interested groupings can cause confusing "background noise". The role played by the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in Bosnia, for instance, exemplifies how such coalitions can turn into influential lobby groups. Third, although ad hoc groupings have played an effective peacemaking role in some recent conflicts, the burden of implementing peace accords overwhelmingly rests on the shoulders of international institutions, chief among them the UN and its specialized agencies.

The 'proximity to conflict' issue

Theoretically, the greatest strength of regional organizations lies in their interest in

¹¹The "elder statesman" approach, which for a host of reasons has been particularly popular in Africa, can also be considered an ad hoc peacemaking technique. However, experience has demonstrated that while such an approach is sometimes useful in initiating a mediation process, preventing a specific situation from worsening or brokering temporary ceasefires, it seldom leads to comprehensive and durable peace agreements.