

however. For example, the work of Gerard Prunier presents an excellent political analysis of the Great Lakes crisis,¹⁴ as does recent writing on the Balkan conflicts. This literature will be helpful in formulating an approach to studying the politics of RPAs, which we begin to do in the next section.

B. A Framework for Exploring the Political and Security Context of RPAs

This section outlines a framework for approaching a contextual understanding of security problems in RPAs. This framework is based on two sets of variables, the second nested within the first. The first set comprises 'background' variables characterizing the RPA, which occur independently of the refugee flows, but subsequently affect and are affected by them. Four types of variables are identified:

- 1) The domestic economic and political base;
- 2) Regional geopolitics and national security concerns;
- 3) Relief operations, and relations (past and present) between the host government and UNHCR and other relief organizations;
- 4) The interests of and roles played by donors, regional powers, and international organizations in the region.

The second set of variables refers to the particular economic, sociopolitical and security changes that occur in the RPA as a direct result of the refugee influx.

I. The Political and Historical Background

The following are some of the main political and economic variables and relationships that structure a RPA prior to the influx. In any particular case, some variables will take precedence over others, but all should be explored for the insights they offer for the understanding of the overall context of security problems. These background conditions are likely to affect both the overall safety of the region, and the kinds of policies host governments are likely to implement that in turn affect safety.

1) *The domestic economic and political base.*

- *The economic development and physical infrastructure of the RPA relative to the rest of the host country (and perhaps also to the sending country).*

The economic interests of the host government and other actors such as multinational corporations, including development plans and programs, can affect refugee policies and the security of refugees. A case in point is the Thai-Burmese border. The Thai government, influenced and lobbied by Thai companies with natural gas pipeline and logging interests in the region, wants to maintain congenial relations with the Burmese regime in order to pursue its economic interests. These interests potentially influence the Thai government's policy decisions about refugees, and in turn the security of the RPA itself.

- *Relations between refugees and host population, and the history of refugee movements in both directions across the border.*

¹⁴ For a summary of his book, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (New York, Columbia Univ. Press, 1997), see G. Prunier, "The Great Lakes Crisis," *Current History*, Vol. 96(610) May 1997.