REGIONAL SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS IN THE THIRD WORLD

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National security involves protection of both the physical integrity and the autonomy of nations. The term regional security is commonly used to refer to two different concerns: national security pursued in a framework of regional cooperation, and security of the region in terms of physical safety and freedom from external coercion. Most of the regional security arrangements that have been established or attempted in the developing world have been primarily concerned with the first of these.

An arrangement that buys physical safety at the price of autonomy can scarcely be said to preserve security. This logic provides grounds for excluding from the category of regional security arrangements those arrangements that are the creation of one of the superpowers or that are imposed on the countries of a region by a strong power from within or outside the region. Rather, the kind of regional security arrangements with which the ICDSI is concerned are those initiated and freely entered by the nations of a region for their mutual protection and benefit. Normally, such arrangements are also efforts to enhance the region's autonomy, even though the region may fall within the traditional sphere of influence of a major external power.

One further distinction needs to be made. A regional security arrangement is not necessarily a regional security organization. In fact, some of the most promising arrangements (though not necessarily the most successful) have taken place outside the framework of a security organization, either as ad hoc efforts such as the Contadora process and the 1978 negotiations on restraint in conventional armament in Latin America, or within the context of organizations such as ASEAN and the Gulf Cooperation Council which are formally dedicated to other objectives.

The formation and functioning of regional security arrangements must respond, in each instance, to the specific characteristics of the region and the problems facing it. Nonetheless, there are some generalizations to be made about the prerequisites for a workable arrangement.

First, there must be a shared perception of threat, and a sense that the level of threat is beyond the defensive capacity of the single state acting alone. The perceived danger may not be a looming military challenge but rather a longer-term strategic, political or even economic one. The source of threat may be external, from other powers operating in the region. It

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may also arise from a form of internal instability widely shared or feared among the participating countries. The spill-over effects of instability caused by ethnic contention, religious fanaticism or ideologically inspired struggles for power that are centered in one country may undermine the security of neighboring countries. Whatever the nature of the danger, regional security arrangements assume that it threatens losses greater than the gains to be had from pursuing intra-regional conflicts at the risk of weakening the region as a whole.

Second, the states involved in a regional security arrangement must evince a general desire for peaceful relations among themselves and for greater regional autonomy. They must have a common perception of shared national interests and a degree of consensus on the basic analysis of the region's problems.

Regional security arrangements are given impetus by forms of affinity among the participating states that give them a sense of solidarity and common purpose. This may be based on historical experience, ethnic or linguistic affinity, economic interdependence, or some other such factor.

No matter how conducive conditions within a region are, the effective functioning of a regional security arrangement also requires a favorable constellation of external power relationships. The overt hostility of a dominant power can undermine all attempts at collective action to restore or maintain peace, as experience in Central America and Southern Africa has shown. This is a real and growing problem, particularly as the nuclear stalemate between the superpowers has tended to shift the arena of East-West competition to the Third World. The mutual interpenetration by the superpowers of each other's traditional spheres of influence has raised the stakes in many regional conflicts to the point where external involvement may obstruct any impulse toward accommodation within the region.

The existence of armed conflict within or bordering on a region is an obvious threat to the security of countries in the vicinity, threatening to draw them directly into hostilities. Such conflicts are also a threat to the cohesion of regional security arrangements, since the various countries of the region are bound to have divergent attitudes toward the conflict. This is demonstrated by the strains the Kampuchean war puts on ASEAN, as well as by the challenge the Afghan war poses to the newly formed South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. Regional security organizations have a strong self-interest in collective efforts to contribute to the resolution of prolonged conflicts in their neighborhoods.

Since the ICDSI met jointly with the Brandt Commission in Rome in January, 1984, the United Nations University has initiated a study on the relationship between security and development in the Third World. This study should be completed in 1986. The study includes, at the request of this Commission, four regional case studies dealing with Africa (the OAU membership), Southeast Asia (the ASEAN countries), Latin America

(regional arms control initiatives) and the Gulf (the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council).

Reports of three of these case studies were circulated and discussed at the ICDSI meeting in January 1986. The Gulf case study is still in preparation. The ongoing UNU study of which these papers are a part does not deal with regional security in isolation, but with the complex interaction between security and development concerns. Nonetheless, this introduction draws heavily on the implications of these case studies, though it draws its own conclusions which inevitably differ somewhat from those of the authors of the case studies.

Dr. Augustine Mahiga's paper on security and development in Africa demonstrates that there is not always strength in diversity. The members of the OAU have some important things in common. Most have come to independence very recently after a debilitating period of colonialism. Most are very poor countries struggling with simultaneous efforts of nation-building and economic development in an extremely unfavorable international environment. Most are internally diverse as a result of the heritage of arbitrarily drawn boundaries. They are united in their opposition to South Africa and in their formal dedication to a distant and diverse dream of African unity.

However, the basic conditions of affinity, shared analysis of problems and common perception of threat are not in place. Nor is there strong leadership within the OAU to rally the members around a shared vision of an autonomous African future.

The cost of lack of cohesion has been high. The OAU has been unable, in recent year, to perform an effective peace-making or peace-keeping role in situations such as Chad and Uganda. Order has been restored only with the participation of external powers. In both Chad and Uganda, external involvement included the former colonial power, among others.

The agenda of the OAU has included the most contentious issues on the continent, leading for example to the threatened split of the organization over the Western Sahara issue and the actual withdrawal of Morocco. The members have in such instances been unable to agree to disagree and leave aside those issues on which no progress can be made collectively.

Explicit security agreements among the members of ASEAN are bilateral, yet it would be incorrect to characterize ASEAN as an organization that does not deal with security issues. A fundamental part of the consensus on which ASEAN is built is that the most serious threats to national security in the region were internal, and that the surest way to counter them was through economic development and national integration. Thus, economic, social and cultural co-operation among the member states was seen as serving security objectives more effectively than military co-operation could.

The consolidation of communist rule throughout Indochina after 1975 changed the preoccupations of ASEAN, though in competition with the communist states ASEAN's economic and social achievements were still recognized as its strongest advantage. ASEAN has achieved its greatest cohesion and its strongest collective action in the aftermath of the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea in 1978-- which was seen by ASEAN members as a clear and unequivocal threat to their security, especially after Vietnamese incursions into member-state Thailand. But the collective actions of ASEAN have taken place in the political rather than the military arena. The ASEAN diplomatic effort has been effective in denying the Vietnamese a political fait accompli in Kampuchea, though it is Chinese and American military might through co-operation with Thailand that keeps the Kampuchean resistance in the war. Nonetheless, ASEAN has continued to insist that foreign involvement in the region-- including the presence of foreign bases-- should be temporary. It persists in the effort to develop Southeast Asia as a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality.

While the Kampuchean conflict has strengthened the cohesion of ASEAN, Dr. Kusuma Snitwongse and Mr. Lim Joo-Jock point out in their paper that prolongation of the conflict may well endanger that cohesion eventually. Long-run perceptions of threat do vary sharply among the members of ASEAN. Indonesia and Malaysia traditionally have been more concerned about Chinese than Vietnamese intentions, and see Vietnam as a possible buffer against China.

The desire for closer cooperation with Vietnam may strain the fabric of ASEAN co-operation as long as the Kampuchean conflict goes on. Whether the other common interests of the ASEAN members are strong enough to overcome this remains to be seen. For while joint discussions on economic issues with the European Community, Japan, the United States and others have strengthened ASEAN's position, intra-regional economic co-operation has taken a back seat to political issues since 1978.

The role of ASEAN in subduing conflict among the members of the organization has been well demonstrated, from the early conflicts between Philippines and Malaysia over Sabah in the late 1960s to the trouble-free independence of Brunei in 1984. The latter might well have become a contentious issue with more than one member trying to assert sovereignty over the wealthy sultanate. But the habit of non-confrontation and consultation defused the issue of Brunei's independence within the region, and the new state was immediately welcomed into ASEAN.

If ASEAN illustrates the power of shared goals, analyses and perceptions of threat, Central America illustrates the converse lesson: in the absence of any of the above, regional security initiatives are unlikely to be effective-- though in Central America superpower engagement is so heavy that the chances of an independent regional initiative being allowed to flourish are as small in the future as they have proven to be in the past.

Dr. Sergio Gonzalez Galvez has given a picture of the great importance of arms transfers in increasing the forces of instability in the region, as well as an account of the painstaking process of trying to fashion a regional security arrangement to limit the introduction of new generations of conventional weapons into Latin America. The negotiations on conventional weapons that took place in 1978 were initiated by Mexico, and involved not only 21 countries of the region, but also, in separate consultations, all the major external suppliers of weapons to Latin America, including the two superpowers.

The Latin American negotiations were deliberately held outside of the framework of the Organization of American States, to avoid the participation of states from outside the region. Thus it was an exercise to increase both components of security-- safety and autonomy. Political changes within and outside of the region prevented the negotiations from proceeding toward a successful conclusion. Yet they established some important principles of negotiation, particularly the process of private consultations with all interested parties in the region to determine their views of their own interests and needs. This principle became the cornerstone of the Contadora process.

The member states of the Gulf Co-operation Council enjoy considerable affinity based on common characteristics. They are generally wealthy, sparsely populated, and are host to proportionately very large immigrant populations who live in uneasy coexistence with local elites. Beyond this affinity, cohesion among the Gulf states is enhanced by the presence of strong common regional enemies, Iran and Israel. Saudi Arabia, as the largest nation in the group, has provided strong unquestioned leadership.

The external environment in which the GCC operates could hardly be described as conducive to effective regional action. The Council operates in one of the most strategically sensitive and politically super-heated regions of the world, with two major theatres of conflict drawing the neighboring states into turmoil. Yet the members of the GCC are probably-- and in my view correctly-- inclined to see the greatest threat to their security as coming from internal sources. In most of the member states, the immigrant population outnumbers the native population. While the great wealth of the region has so far masked the many social problems that arise from the combination of very rapid social and economic change with traditional moral values, several violent incidents in the region reveal deep undercurrents of discontent. The demands for greater political participation from the increasingly well-educated non-elites of the region could also present challenges to current leadership. The impact of the decline of oil wealth on political stability is another imponderable factor.

Faced with a security situation of such internal and external complexity, the Gulf states have, like ASEAN, formed an organization that began with strictly non-military forms of co-operation. In addition to the summit of the GCC, which meets regularly, there are active committees of the Council which involve Ministers of Education, Youth, Culture, and so forth.

These address the socio-economic problems of instability that are so important a part of the security equation in the Gulf.

The GCC has also moved into more conventional security co-operation, with consultations on internal security issues and national defense. So far, however, disagreements among the members-- notably between Kuwait on the one hand and Saudi Arabia and Oman on the other-- have prevented the signing of a comprehensive security agreement along the lines of the economic agreement signed in 1981. They have, however, formed a joint military force which first held military maneuvers in 1983.

The GCC members, individually and collectively, are very much a part of the security system of the West, though they have managed to avoid direct involvement in the East-West confrontation to date. The irony of operating under the wing of the United States, the arch-ally of the GCC's arch-enemy, Israel, is not lost on many critics of the Gulf regimes.

More generally, the wisdom of a long-range security policy based so heavily on alliance with the United States is questionable, leaving the Gulf states vulnerable to the constraints that American domestic opinion imposes on US policy toward the Gulf states. The US and the GCC agree on the dangers of Iranian-exported radicalism, but otherwise the threat perceptions of the two differ. The US is preoccupied with possible Soviet ambitions in the region, whereas the GCC members are more concerned about Israel and about internal instability. Meanwhile, the arsenal of sophisticated weaponry that is being accumulated in the region assures that any war that does break out there in the future will be a spectacularly destructive one.

What conclusions, if any, can one draw about regional security co-operation from these four disparate regions ? One apparently counter-intuitive inference is that organizations that are not set up to deal with security issues are the most effective security organizations. ASEAN and the Gulf Co-operation Council began cautiously, with the least controversial issues possible: the desire for greater mutual prosperity in the case of the former and in both cases the enhancement of co-operation on social and cultural matters. Each organization may be said to have had a not-very-well-hidden security agenda from the beginning-- especially the GCC. Yet they proceeded to build a habit of consultation and coordination through regular meetings on less volatile issues.

Starting to build regional security co-operation with non-security issues has a dual rationale. It builds a base of confidence on which security issues can be approached at the appropriate time. It also represents a valuable investment in its own right, in what might be called the "social architecture of peace"-- the joint projects and programmes of exchange that may knit participating societies more closely together in a community of values and purpose.

A second lesson for regional security co-operation is that overly stringent tests of cohesiveness should be avoided in the early stages of co-

operation. This may require the participants in a regional arrangement deliberately to omit the most contentious issues within the region from joint discussions until there is a reasonably certain expectation of progress. The parties directly concerned must agree not to use such a hiatus to exacerbate the problem at hand, and must allow them to be put on a back burner while the co-operating states work constructively on easier issues. Then with the gratification of minor successes experienced, they may gradually stretch their capacity to overcome their differences. The Gulf Co-operation Council, for example, has avoided dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict beyond blanket statements of support for the PLO. ASEAN largely ignored the simmering conflict between Malaysia and the Philippines over Sabah until both sides quietly dropped the matter as an active bone of contention. The OAU, by contrast, with its large and heterogeneous membership and its broad mandate, has had its agenda overloaded with the most difficult and sensitive issues, far beyond the powers of the organization to resolve or mediate.

The temptation for a nascent regional organization to seek the protection of an external power is a real one and may seem practical in the short run. But it places the members of the organization in a position of very considerable vulnerability. Alliance with a disproportionately powerful nation exposes the region to the vicissitudes of the domestic policy considerations of the ally, and to the consequences of shifts in the ally's perceptions of its foreign policy interests. The external power may have assessments of the risks and opportunities within the region that differ markedly from those of the states of the region themselves.

To court the involvement of a super-power, particularly, in regional conflicts is to risk losing control over their intensity, duration and terms of settlement. The involvement of one super-power, moreover, creates a strong incentive for opponents of its partners to enlist the adversary superpower in their own cause. A course of escalating violence and confrontation is thereby set in notion. The reduction of external involvement in the region should be a major priority for regional organizations; it might almost be seen as a condition for their independent and effective functioning.

Regional security arrangements can be important instruments for maintaining international peace and security provided that certain preconditions, internal and external, are met. But perhaps equally important, they represent a means of resistance to the encroachment of external, bi-polar strategic concerns in regions that have to deal with their own extremely difficult problems of conflicting interests in the context of the always contentious process of political, economic and social development.