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Working Paper

Peacebuilding after war and violence - Neighbourhood matters

GIGA Working Papers, No. 324

Provided in Cooperation with:

GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies

Suggested Citation: Almohamad, Selman; Kirchschrager, Markus; Kurtenbach, Sabine (2020) : Peacebuilding after war and violence - Neighbourhood matters, GIGA Working Papers, No. 324, German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA), Hamburg

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/229849>

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GIGA Research Programme:
Peace and Security

**Peacebuilding after War and Violence –
Neighbourhood Matters**

Selman Almohamad, Markus Kirchschrager,
and Sabine Kurtenbach

No 324

December 2020

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Edited by the
German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA)
Leibniz-Institut für Globale und Regionale Studien

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Peacebuilding after War and Violence – Neighbourhood Matters

Abstract

Sustainable Development Goal 16 on “peace, justice, and strong institutions” is widely considered a central pillar of sustainable development. Based on a comprehensive concept of peace that goes beyond the mere absence of war, it might also be the most difficult to realise. Debates in Peace and Conflict Studies have followed other Social Science debates in exiting the “national container,” namely by focusing on the interaction between global and subnational or local dynamics. However, the regional dimension is no longer acknowledged as an important intervening variable in peace and conflict dynamics. This article thus develops the concept of “regional peace formation,” arguing that the neighbourhood matters either as an enabling or hindering factor for peacebuilding. Based on empirical evidence from Latin America, the Middle East, and sub-Saharan Africa, we show the usefulness of this concept in explaining regional differences.

Keywords: Latin America, Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, peacebuilding, conflict, regional organizations

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This GIGA Working Paper is the first in a series of "Trend Analyses" originating as part of the BMZ-funded research project "Context Matters."

Peacebuilding after War and Violence – Neighbourhood Matters

Selman Almohamad, Markus Kirchschrager, and Sabine Kurtenbach

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- 4 Implications for International Peacebuilding Support

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Introduction

In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the so-called Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 16 on “peace, justice, and strong institutions” is widely considered a central pillar of sustainable development. Based on a comprehensive concept of peace that goes beyond the mere absence of war, it might also be the most difficult to realise. Debates in Peace and Conflict Studies have followed other Social Science debates in exiting the “national container,” namely by focusing on the interaction between global and subnational

or local dynamics (Arjona, Bergsmo, and Kalmanovitz 2008; Autesserre 2017). While this represents an important shift, the regional dimension is no longer acknowledged as a key intervening variable in peace and conflict dynamics.¹ Nevertheless, empirical assessment via a regional lens provides interesting variation. Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) governments claim to be a “zone of peace” (CELAC 2014). The Middle East is home to three major wars – in Syria, Yemen, and Libya – and is thus currently the most conflict-prone region. Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia are somewhere in the middle. We argue that the regional dimension – that is, regional peace or conflict formations – is an important intervening variable in the prospects for peace. This is because states, regional organisations (ROs), and non-state armed actors (such as militias) engage across borders, and thus shape the dynamics of peacebuilding.

We proceed as follows: The first section gives a short overview on the current peacebuilding debates and the lack of a regional perspective. The second section then presents data on violence and conflict for the post-Cold War period 1990 to 2018 from a regional perspective. What are the patterns of conflict (incompatibilities, duration, manifestations, actors)? How do violent armed conflicts end (military victory, peace agreements, fading out)? Beyond this background, the third section moves on to present the theoretical concept of “regional peace formation” (RPF). Section 4 provides empirical evidence for the specific regional patterns in Latin America, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and sub-Saharan Africa. The last section concludes, and presents future avenues for research and policy-relevant findings on the challenges and opportunities for the promotion of peacebuilding.

1 The Missing Piece – The Regional Dimension

Peacebuilding is a complex undertaking shaped by a variety of factors. These include the ripeness of a conflict (Zartman 1989) as well as other properties of war and violence such as the power relations between the armed groups involved. Regional and international contexts such as norms or aid patterns also influence peace and conflict transformation. Since the end of the Cold War, the UN as well as international donors have increasingly supported peacebuilding as a transformative process under the former’s “Agenda for Peace” (Boutros-Ghali 1992; UN 2015a). SDG 16 aims at the supporting of peaceful, just, and inclusive societies with strong institutions (UN 2015b), including not just the termination of war but also a broader notion of violence prevention.

1 The regional dimension was acknowledged in the realist debate on geostrategic zones of influence and their contribution to stabilisation during the Cold War (Gaddis 1986) – a debate currently undergoing a revival. Others have analysed the role of regional integration as a tool of conflict transformation (Diez and Tocci 2017). The debate on the regional dimensions of war and violence has analysed “bad neighbourhoods,” transnational dimensions, or diffusion (Gleditsch 2007).

In the 1990s, Central America, Southern Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Balkans became testing grounds for the “liberal peace” paradigm based on the experiences of Western countries’ own trajectories. Main elements were negotiated forms of war termination, post-war democratisation and state-building (Paris 2004). However, empirical evidence that this “one size fits all” approach works in contexts with different historical and cultural backgrounds under the current global conditions is limited at best (Heathershaw 2013; Mac Ginty 2013; Richmond, Pogodda, and Ramovic 2016). Local conditions, as well as their interaction with external and global dynamics, shape the outcomes of peacebuilding (Lewis, Heathershaw, and Megoran 2018; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013; Richmond 2016). Faced with this complexity, the focus on (probably counterproductive) stabilisation in post-war contexts has experienced a revival on the ground lately (Karlsrud 2019). Peace research increasingly acknowledges the necessity to include regional experiences beyond the West (K. S. Gleditsch and Ward 2000; Goldsmith 2006; Lemke 2003) in both theoretical and practical approaches to peacebuilding. Although regional approaches to peace have been discussed (Call and de Coning 2017; Dietrich et al. 2011; Richmond, Pogodda, and Ramovic 2016), case studies dominate wherein an explicit cross-regional approach is rare.

Comparative Area Studies (CAS) is a promising methodological approach to this end, one combining area expertise with disciplinary approaches. This allows for the identifying not only of regional or even universal trends but also for the grasping of the variety of outcomes when global, regional, and local actors as well as structures interact (Acharya 2014; Ahram, Köllner, and Sil 2018; Hoffmann 2015). This perspective does not belittle the importance of universal norms and values, such as the importance of human rights. On the contrary, such an approach recognises and builds on the Global South’s multiple contributions to many of the norm-generating processes regarding violence and human rights after World War II (Sikkink 2014). These norms provide a shared frame of reference in a world increasingly interconnected via political, economic, and social globalisation.

A mapping of the regional experiences with conflict, violence, and peacebuilding between 1990 and 2018 provides evidence that this avenue of research is promising (see Figures 1–6 below). Based on available data sets, the following figures show variation in armed conflict² per year. This comes from the UCDP for the years between 1990 and 2018,³ wherein regional differences become evident.

2 The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) defines armed conflict as “a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in a calendar year.” From: <https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/ucdp-prio/ucdp-prio-acd-181.pdf> (Gleditsch et al. 2002).

3 We choose this period due to the changing patterns of war and armed conflict after the end of the Cold War, and on the basis of the fact that specific data (one-sided violence, non-state violence) has only been collected since 1990 (Gleditsch et al. 2002; Pettersson and Öberg 2020; Sundberg, Eck, and Kreutz 2012). We subdivided

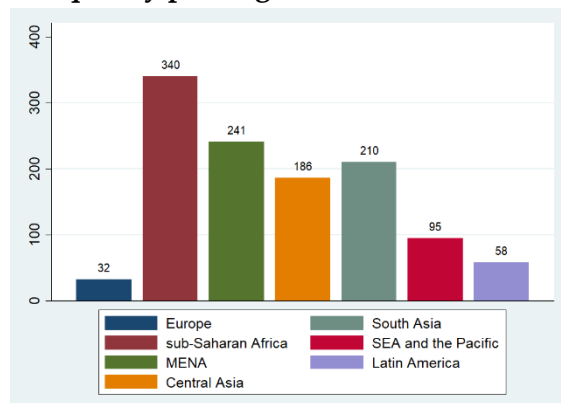
- Most armed conflicts happened in sub-Saharan Africa, while Europe saw a low number of armed conflicts – Northern Ireland aside, mostly in the Balkans and the countries of the former Soviet Union. However within the different regions, single countries seem to drive regional trends. Most of South Asia's armed conflicts happened in India, while Latin American trends after 1990 were shaped by Colombia.
- The debate on collective violence focuses on two types of conflicts or incompatibilities: control of territory and government. Challenged territorial control has historically triggered conflict and violence across the globe. The most prominent theories on state formation and war analyse this link (Tilly 1985; Toft 2014). Even in a world of sovereign states where borders are internationally guaranteed, this issue remains a topic of conflict – as evidenced by secessionist movements in Spain and Ukraine, for example. Government conflicts, on the other hand, are about political order and the legitimacy thereof. They involve various manifestations of violence, with actors typically looking to overthrow the government, enforce participation, change the rules of the game, or secure power via repression (Cederman, Hug, and Krebs 2010; Davenport 2007).

The regional distribution of conflict issues or incompatibilities is also interesting. Latin America only experienced armed conflicts on the topic of government – closely related to the quest for democratic governance – up until the 1990s. Territorial conflicts dominated in Europe, South Asia, and in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Here a series of secessionist movements – the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia and the USSR, or separatist movements in Tamil Nadu / Sri Lanka and Aceh / Indonesia – were important drivers of armed conflict.

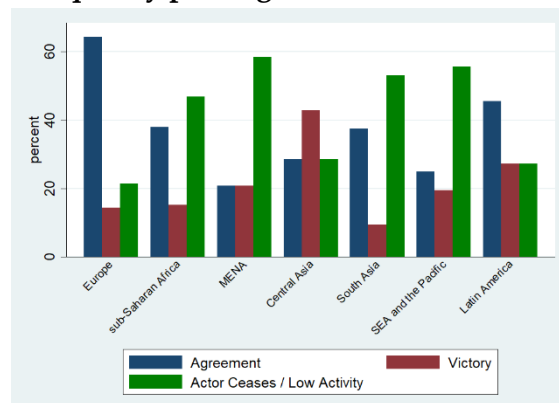
- The data confirms that interstate armed conflicts are rare, and most are rather intra-state or internationalized intra-state ones. Here, Southeast Asia and the Pacific as well as Latin America stand out with mere internal armed conflicts. Proportionally, Central Asia and Europe show the high levels of conflict internationalisation.
- Regarding conflict termination, the regional patterns are less obvious. Europe and Latin America reveal high numbers of peace agreements; Central Asia is the only region where military victories dominate – a form of war termination that seemed to become less important after 1990 from a global perspective (Kreutz 2010). The high number of actors ceasing hostilities or low number of war terminations is rather a mirror of changing armed-conflict intensity – because many of these armed conflicts returned after a year.
- Interestingly, focus on one-sided and non-state forms of armed violence seems to bring a slightly different result. While sub-Saharan Africa was most affected in this regard, no clear patterns arise for the other regions. This might also be related to variation in the availability of data and funding. During the last few decades, many data projects focused on sub-Saharan Africa and only included other world regions later on.

Asia into Central Asia, Southeast Asia (SEA), and South Asia due to their different historical and cultural contexts. We do not include East Asia, as the UCDP data only codes one armed conflict in that region between 1990 and 2018. MENA is related to the Middle East and North Africa.

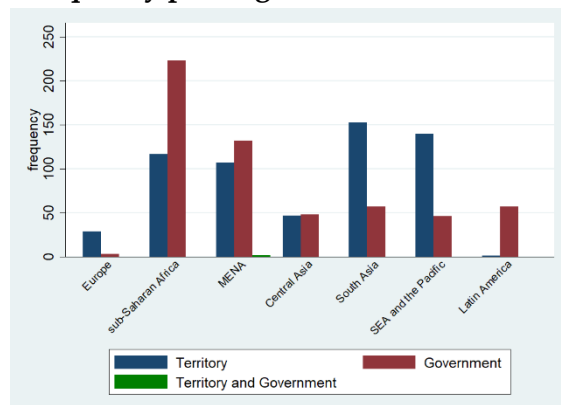
**Figure 1. Armed Conflicts 1990–2018
(Frequency per Region)⁴**



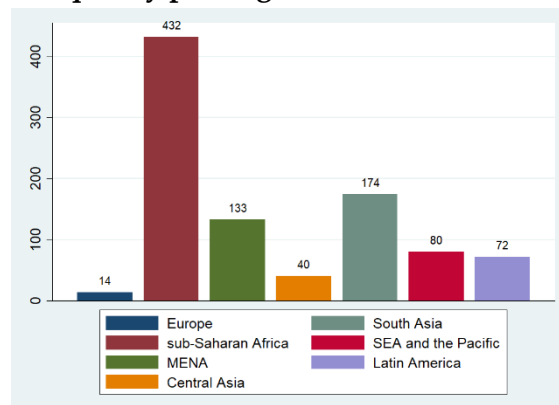
**Figure 4. Conflict Termination 1990–2018
(Frequency per Region)**



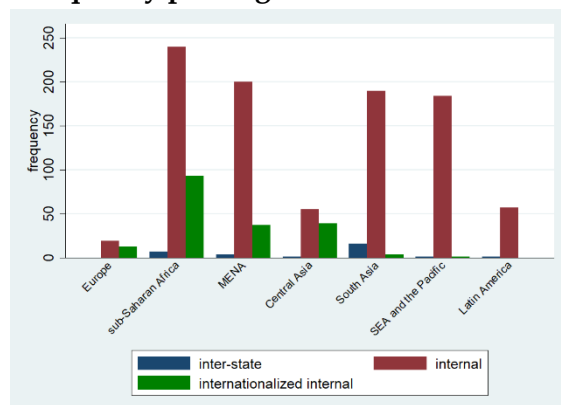
**Figure 2. Conflict Incompatibilities
(Frequency per Region)**



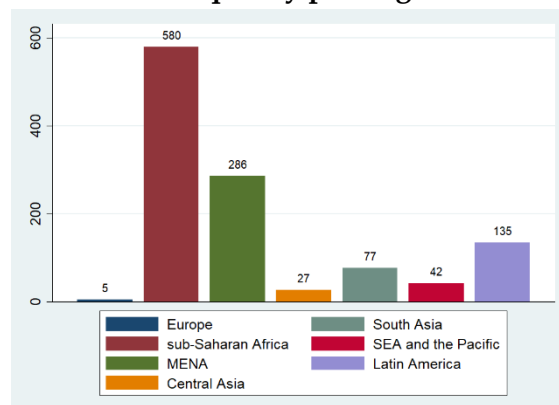
**Figure 5. One-Sided Violence 1990–2018
(Frequency per Region)**



**Figure 3. Type of Conflict 1990–2018
(Frequency per Region)**



**Figure 6. Non-State Armed Conflict
1990–2018 (Frequency per Region)**



4 Sources for all graphs are Gleditsch et al. 2002; Sundberg, Ek, and Kreutz 2012; Pettersson and Öberg 2020.

2 Regional Peace Formation: Peacebuilding from a Regional Angle

Due to the variation along regional patterns, the regional dimension should be integrated into our conception of peacebuilding and the ensuing programmes for pursuing it. However, understanding the role of regional politics in preparing for the transition from war and violence to more peaceful settings necessitates a fresh look at how regional dynamics contribute to the initiation and escalation of violence taking place within a defined state. To this end, shifting the analytical focus to the regional level requires the adoption of new epistemological tools that take regionalism as the point of reference for fathoming how some regions play constructive roles in ending violent intra-state conflicts while others render peacebuilding endeavours difficult to achieve.

In order to attain this epistemological opening, the model of “regional conflict formation” (RCF) will be introduced and elaborated on to demonstrate the formative impact of regional politics on the process of peacebuilding. Further, the model will be further honed to derive two basic analytical types of regional settings (i.e. convergent and divergent RCFs) whereby the different characteristics of each type could explain the variance in peacebuilding outcomes that we observe from one region to the other. Next, building on the RCF model paves the way for subsequently constructing the earlier-mentioned RPF concept, which refers to the emanation of possibilities for peacebuilding from within certain RCFs – that while, contrariwise, other conflict dynamics obstruct the emergence of peace formations in other world regions elsewhere.

2.1 Regional Conflict Formations⁵

The RCF model is an analytical framework that was developed by Barnett Rubin, Andrea Armstrong, and Gloria Ntegeye (2001) to study the regional networks that underlie the regional conflict system in the Great Lakes region of East Africa. RCFs are defined here as “sets of violent conflicts – each originating in a particular state or subregion – that form mutually reinforcing linkages with each other throughout a broader region, making for more protracted and obdurate conflicts” (Rubin et al. quoted in Ansorg 2011: 179–180). The model traces the transnational networks that exist between adjacent states and on which governments, non-governmental entities, and social groups can rely to exchange both material and ideational resources. Leenders (2007: 961) follows Rubin et al. in adumbrating the four basic transnational networks of the model: First, military networks which facilitate the flow of arms and mercenaries. Second, political networks which pertain to political elites’ cross-border relations. Third, economic networks which relate to cross-border trade in “conflict goods.” And, fourth and finally,

5 The distinction between “convergent” and “divergent” modes of the RCF model was addressed in a previous GIGA study <https://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/publication/bringing-regional-politics-to-the-study-of-security-sector-reform>. However, the current paper further advances the theoretical framework through highlighting the potential for “regional peace formations” and their impact on peacebuilding.

social connections perceived mainly as familial, diaspora, occupational, and shared-identity relations. This model is relevant because it helps include more actors than just international/local players in the analytical locus, and thus contributes to bridging the gap between the local and the international. More importantly, being attentive to the regional dimension could necessitate the revision of some of the concepts, such as local ownership, which are advocated by certain strands of the literature on peacebuilding (e.g. Leonardsson & Rudd 2015; Paffenholz 2015).

Some of the ways in which regional politics and the RCF model can contribute to our understanding of the success and failure of peacebuilding initiatives and post-war stability are the following: First, observing the regional dynamics reveals two distinct conflict formations which we will call “convergent” and “divergent” formations. A convergent conflict formation takes place when the war-making capabilities (military, economic, etc.) of regional states and non-state actors converge to contain and eventually defeat the conglomeration of other regional actors who benefit from the continuity of violence as well as all the regional networks and non-state groups which sustain them. On the other hand, no such coalescence of regional efforts occurs in divergent RCFs to curb the influence of the players who invest in violence and permeate the state which witnesses the outbreak of war or violence militarily, economically, culturally, and so on. In other words, in convergent conflict formations, regional rivalry seems to have a direction over time: This denotes the coordinated action of, for example, a regional block – which may include states, ROs, and non-state groups – to channel the violence in a way that leads longitudinally to the decay of the regional counter-block. Such behaviour capitalises on the ongoing intra-state conflict and aspires to extending it endemically in order to reap greater political, economic, and military gains – ones that usually transcend the state experiencing the war in question. In a different vein, in a divergent conflict formation the war-making capacities of the regional actors tend to be more chaotic and self-centred whereby no common strategy exists between the involved players, and thus the conflict appears to renew itself in accordance with the changing (usually short-term) interests of each actor across the unfolding of events.

Second, the distinction between convergent and divergent RCFs could acquire analytical relevance if we perceive the relationship between the RCF model (and the regional politics underpinning it) and the potential of peacebuilding schemes in constitutive terms. This means that RCFs do not explain the success and failure of peacebuilding programmes by subsuming peacebuilding deductively under a law (*à la* logical empiricists), or by delineating the causal dynamics and processes that affect it (*à la* scientific realists) (Wendt 1998: 104). Instead, the RCF model explains peacebuilding by constituting the “conditions of possibility” for it to be successful. It answers the question of how it is possible that peacebuilding works in a certain context, and what the regional structures and dynamics under which peacebuilding can flourish are (Ibid.: 105). Here, it is worth noting that this understanding of RCFs does not reify or naturalise the concept. On the contrary, RCFs are underpinned by complex regional actors,

interests, and dynamics – ones which interact causally in ways that make the RCF model mutate cross-regionally and cross-temporally.⁶

Third, the above articulation of the constitutive relationship between RCFs and peacebuilding enables us to recognise the entanglement of peacebuilding and regional politics, and to view their relationship as holistic. This challenges one of the main features of atomism – that is, “separability” – and thus guards against methodological individualism in the analysis (Wendt 2015: 60–61), and against the methodological nationalism of International Relations. Hence, this reasoning might be conducive to shifting the analytical focus of the scholarship from international–local, donor–recipient bifurcations towards a new understanding whereby peacebuilding in a certain country is approached as a constituent part of a holistic relationship with the region in which it is located.

Fourth and finally, given that RCFs are subject to change over time, and that they constitute conditions of possibility for peacebuilding programmes, searching for grand designs and/or requiring approaches to have generalisable, transhistorical, and global theoretical foundations could be overburdening and incompatible with the peculiarities of different regions (spatial) across time (temporal). After all, could it not be the case that peacebuilding is not feasible in certain regions at particular times? Do we even need to craft a peacebuilding paradigm which applies at all times and everywhere?

2.2 Regional Peace Formations

Why are some wars more protracted in certain regions than in others? Are there regional “pre-requisites” that should be investigated before designing peacebuilding programmes? Should international donors look for regional “pillars” of peace before considering a peacebuilding plan or intervention?

The answers to these sorts of questions will be misleading if they overlook the regional dimension, and the context-dependent manifestations of war and violence. To start with, RPFs refer to the region-specific actors, structures, dynamics, and interlinkages which converge to transform an intra-state violent conflict into a peace-prone setting through the dismantling and thwarting of the armed actors both inside and outside that state who gain from the prolongation of violence (as well as their regional supporters and beneficiaries). In principle, RPFs are more likely to emerge from within convergent RCFs than from within divergent RCFs. This is so because only in convergent RCFs is one likely to observe the regional will and capacity to negate the domestic and trans-border networks upon which the beneficiaries of violence depend.

6 Being space–time-specific is one of the traits that distinguishes social kinds from natural kinds (Wendt 1999: 69). Social kinds are understood here as the objects of social-scientific inquiry, such as: the physical objects which have a social function, like items of exchange; social structures, such as the family; institutions such as banks; and, more abstract constructs such as languages. For more details, see Currie (1988: 207).

Analytically, RPFs consist of the following social “kinds” or ontologies:

- **Actors:** (1) States. Regional states play a constitutive and fundamental role in conflict transformation by possessing a multitude of relevant tools. For example, cross-regional elite connections may prove influential in forming alliances and mobilising de-escalation measures. Further, the states of a region usually share economic, social, cultural, and security interests upon which common strategies can be drawn. However, the stance and impact of strong/large regional states might be indispensable for forging coalitions, creating or activating defence pacts, and for collaborating with and invigorating ROs for the achievement of region-wide solutions to intransigent intra-state violent conflicts. Additionally, this state-based rationale could also be applied to the specific type of regime in power that controls the institutions of the state. (2) ROs. RPFs are characterised by proactive and engaging ROs which have the institutional capital of being historically embedded within their regions in ways that allow them to impose authority and to monitor events (for example ceasefire and anti-smuggling agreements), as well as to activate mechanisms that range from mediation to the deployment of armed forces. Again, the influence of ROs correlates with the extent to which they have been historically adopted and recognised by the regional – and mainly the big – states as institutions for peace and regional cooperation. (3) Militias, paramilitaries, and non-state armed groups. The motives for armed groups’ formation (such as greed and grievance) are to be expected in both convergent and divergent RCFs. However, the agency and autonomy of armed groups dwindle in RPFs which demonstrate efficiency in pursuing goal-oriented strategies for disarming and demobilising non-state armed groups. Examples include cutting off their sources of financing and strangling the usual trans-border logistical routes which sustain them. Alternatively, regional states which aim at defeating a regional block benefitting from conflict may harness their mobilisation capabilities so as to form their own militias that then fight along their formal armed forces.
- **Conflict dynamics:** The seemingly static positioning of the regional actors might be put to the test, and hence they become engaged, due to the manner in which the conflict unfolds. With the passage of time, intra-state violence could threaten the entire regional security architecture. In this context, previously uninvolved states sense the potential jeopardy to their domestic stability should the conflict spill over to affect their status and interests. Also, for mature and embedded regional institutions, the threshold of inaction is fragile and thus their engagement is posited to occur at the early stages of a given conflict’s escalation. Further, what is distinctive about RPFs is their resilience in responding to emerging escalations, due to established institutional cultures of addressing similar threats and working collectively with regional stakeholders to design concrete and concerted plans to counteract them.

The following sections will show the importance of such a regional perspective for three world regions, highlighting important differences regarding respective conflict and peace formations. Latin America is important for its end of war and armed conflict but high levels of social and criminal violence. The Middle East is currently the main international “war theatre.” Sub-Saharan Africa is a region with a very interesting regional peace architecture meanwhile.

3 Regional Patterns of Peace

3.1 Latin America – a zone of peace?

Latin American governments declared the region a “zone of peace” at the summit of the Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños (CELAC) in Havana on 27 January 2014 (CELAC 2014). With the peace agreement between the Colombian government and Latin America’s oldest guerrilla group, FARC-EP (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo), hopes were high that the cycle of armed conflict that started in the 1960s had come to an end. Unfortunately, realities on the ground do not match these hopes.

Latin America has a long history of violence, but also high levels of variation within the region. Classic interstate wars were prominent in the decades after independence, but rare by the time the twentieth century came around (Holsti 1996; Kacowicz 1998; Mares 2001). Intra-state wars and armed conflict now dominated instead. These were fought over the control of government, and against authoritarian regimes or dictatorships – being accompanied by high levels of state repression. By the 1990s most of the region’s civil wars had come to an end either through negotiations (Central America, partially in Colombia) or military victory (Peru) (Arnson 1999; Call 2002). The aforementioned negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP (2012–2016) ended the oldest and longest civil war in the region with a comprehensive peace agreement.

Under a peace concept limited to the absence of war or armed conflict, as the data provided by the UCDP represents, Latin America would thus indeed be a zone of peace. However there have always been other forms of violence in the region, ones that have become more prominent in the twenty-first century. Interpersonal, social, and criminal violence make Latin America the most violent region in the world (Arias and Goldstein 2010; UNDP 2013). According to the Geneva Declaration,⁷ one-third of global lethal violence is committed in the Americas. Homicide rates are among the highest worldwide in some countries, and above the level classified as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO 2002; UNODC 2014) in most of the region. While the academic debate analyses these types of violence separately, they are in fact

7 <http://www.genevadeclaration.org/publications-resources/gd-publications/lethal-violence-in-the-americas.html>.

interrelated and overlap on the ground. What are the main factors (structures, actors, dynamics, interlinkages, etc.) shaping peace formation in Latin America then?

3.1.1 *Structures, conflicts, and actors*

As in other contexts, the ability of the state to prevent or contain violence is important. Most Latin American states did not accomplish a state monopoly on force. Historically, state presence and control was established in and around urban centres while rural areas were controlled by regional elites. Control of long and mostly difficult-to-access borders gained importance when natural resources such as oil or minerals rose in prominence, and in relation to increased cross-border mobility. In the context of war and violence (e.g. Central America in the 1980s or between Colombia and Venezuela since the early years of the new century), migration has increased significantly. Nevertheless, borders remain porous.

Conflicts are a given in every society, but they need to be managed constructively. There are two recurring conflict topics in Latin America that are closely related to the dominant development model based on resource extraction: political participation and the distribution of economic resources.⁸ During the twentieth century, intra-state wars were mostly fought over a lack of political participation and representation. Parts of the emerging middle classes (e.g. students) and marginalised *campesinos* (small and subsistence farmers) formed the core of the rank and file within the armed opposition (Wickham-Crowley 1992). The armed forces, its allied militias, death squads, and paramilitary groups offered clientele networks and some upward mobility. Between the late 1970s and the mid-1990s democratisation opened up space for increased political participation. New actors from civil society such as human rights groups, social movements, and indigenous organisations initiated and promoted diverse agendas of individual and collective human rights (Eckstein and Garretón Merino 2001; Mouly and Hernández Delgado 2019).

The spectrum of political parties increased with the end of military dictatorships and the negotiated settlement of internal conflicts. Democratisation increased the possibilities for political participation via elections, and depending on the specific legislation in the respective countries via other mechanisms such as referenda, consultations, and the like too. The underlying idea – or at least hope – is that people vote for parties and candidates representing their interests, thus delegating conflict resolution to the political system. Once in power, governments could introduce politics addressing the aforementioned issues of inequality and marginalisation (Przeworski 2011, 2016).

However, the “output” of most democratic regimes in Latin America with regard to these issues has been highly deficient. The political systems have been unable, or the governing elites

8 Grouping according to these two topics does not imply that there is a simple causal chain from inequality or the lack of participation to violence. Nevertheless, at the structural level these issues shape contentious politics across the region.

unwilling, to genuinely transform deeply ingrained social conflict beyond the mantra of economic growth and often election-related distributive policies (UNDP 2010). Even where governments have been able to reduce extreme poverty or to move larger segments of the population out of hardship their policies have depended on the resource boom and remained fragile. A recent report emphasises the link between inequality and the access to rights, claiming that: “The characteristics and mechanisms of reproduction and persistence of the inequality matrix are traceable to the main areas of social development and the exercising of rights” (CEPAL 2018: 62).

The year 2019 saw high levels of social mobilisation and protest across the region. The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project’s (ACLED) recently released data (27 February 2020) on political violence and protest in LAC documents:

- 19,400 political violence events (battles, explosions, remote violence, violence against civilians, and mob violence);
- over 19,500 demonstration events (over four-fifths peaceful); and,
- over 19,000 reported fatalities, mostly of civilians.

Mexico and Brazil stand at the heart of these types of violence.

There are at least two links between the structural conflicts and current types of violence being witnessed in Latin America. First, criminal and social violence find fertile ground in the traditional development patterns based on the extraction of natural resources. This model reproduces social marginalisation, as well as perpetuates a lack of viable livelihoods and of decent work. Second, agents of structural change – such as human rights defenders and representatives of indigenous, social, and ecological movements – have become the main target of contemporary political violence.

3.1.2 The regional dimension of peace formation

Latin America is home to a variety of actors and institutions promoting peace. Regarding interstate conflict, the Organization of American States founded in 1948 provides a series of conflict-resolution mechanisms via the Pact of Bogotá. However these mechanisms are rarely used, as governments prefer ad hoc measures established to confront specific crises. The Contadora Group mediating in the 1980s to prevent a regional war in Central America is one example here, the Lima Group founded to tackle Venezuela’s current crisis another.

The Catholic Church has been another important actor in peacebuilding. In the context of civil war in Central America, the Catholic Bishops’ conferences in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador established commissions of national reconciliation facilitating encounters for negotiation. Only when these initiatives were confronted with deadlock and increased violence, such as in El Salvador at the end of 1989, did the UN enter the scene. The comprehensive peace agreements in El Salvador, Guatemala, and currently in Colombia have promised real change but fallen short of implementation beyond the demobilisation and disarmament of former guerrilla groups. The transformation of the conflict on the grounds of political participation is

the basis for the current minimalist “negative peace” of no war recurrence. But other types of violence undermine this success. Since the signing of the peace agreement in Colombia in November 2016, according to the non-governmental organisation INDEPAZ (2020) some 971 human rights defenders have been murdered. The UN monitoring mission (UNSC 2020) verified the assassination of 190 former FARC members up until the end of 2019 meanwhile.

A major problem for peacebuilding is the lack of a common understanding of what “peace” even means. While governments mostly have a minimalist concept of the absence of war, members of marginalised groups may seek broad transformation. International actors provide comprehensive templates, but due to a lack of funding and necessities in other world regions mostly limit their work to war termination and certain formal reforms. Follow up is rare, and profound change cannot be promoted without the government’s cooperation as part of intervening in the internal affairs of a given country. Therefore, a variety of international state and non-state actors cooperate with those willing to promote change but many times without the power to implement concrete measures. A pathway to peace beyond the absence of war (a very specific type of organised armed violence) in the region needs to address and transform the structural violence of inequality and racism. This process is currently blocked by prevailing power relations, leading to the criminalisation of social protest and contestation as well as to high levels of targeted political violence.

3.1.3 *Stuck in transition*

While every country and subregion has its specific characteristics, regarding conflict and peace formations there are at least three common features to be found across the Latin American region:

- The dominance of traditional/oligarchic elites and their armed allies or non-state actors, and not just in rural areas or border regions (Pearce 2018). This undermines reform, and fosters violence against those advocating for structural change and full citizenship. The region is among the most dangerous for human rights defenders (Amnesty International 2020), trade unionists (International Trade Union Confederation 2018), and journalists (UNESCO 2016). This is a worrisome trend, as these groups are important agents of change in the SDG implementation process.
- The reproduction of repressive and violent responses to protest and opposition (“hard fist, zero tolerance”), and the militarisation of public-security policies (Krause 2014; PNUD 2013). The same governments are unable or unwilling to protect the lives of their citizens. These general trends show significant variation within the region, however. Today, Mexico, the northern triangle in Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras), Colombia, and Brazil are the most violent countries of the region.
- The fluidity of borders, where political as well as criminal non-state armed actors can move from one country to another without difficulty. Transnational crime organisations operate across the region, collaborating with state and non-state local actors serving as producers

of illegal drugs, providing security, or laundering money (Cruz 2010; Manwaring 2007; UNODC 2012). As a consequence, armed actors and organised crime can shift their business easily across borders when under attack.

While Latin American governments have signed many plans and agreements for regional cooperation, peacebuilding, and violence prevention they seem stuck in path-dependent responses to increasing social conflict. Before COVID-19 hit the region there was a wave of protest demanding change. From a peace perspective, Chile – a showcase of democratic consolidation and low levels of direct physical violence – is a highly interesting case. Protests began with a comparatively small increase in the tariffs of public transport (30 centavos) but police violence led to a rapid escalation. Protesters soon coined the slogan “It’s not about 30 centavos, it’s about 30 years” demanding profound change three decades after the start of the democratisation process. The Pinochet dictatorship and its right-wing supporters made reform of the underlying neoliberal and highly exclusive economic model close to impossible for reform-oriented centre-left governments. Therefore, the political system and all its actors face decreasing levels of legitimacy and trust. This is a dangerous mix for the future. A similar problem of fragility can be observed at the regional level, where cooperation is not based on shared values but on shared political priorities. The conflict in Venezuela and the regional incapacity to develop political solutions has shown how hollow the claim of a zone of peace is. For the first time in decades, some governments openly advocate for military intervention in a neighbouring state.

3.2 Peace in the Middle East – a chimera?

The Middle East today represents a region where domestic turmoil, sectarianism, irredentism, state rivalry and failure, humanitarian crises, the proliferation of non-state armed groups, and terrorism have all become characterising features. Also, the Arab uprisings sweeping the MENA since 2010 have exposed state legitimacy to unprecedented levels of contestation (Hof 2016), with spill-over violent conflicts that make the region today host to more than 38 million refugees and migrants (ESCWA 2019). Indeed, the magnitude of physical and intended violence (Galtung 1969: 169–173) in the MENA renders luxurious the perception of peace existing beyond the mere absence of war.

Further, although armed conflicts in the region might have been closer to the type of “new” wars in terms of the actors involved and the methods of warfare since the turn of the millennium (Kaldor 2013: 2–3), depicting them as revolving primarily around identity politics, in contradistinction with the twentieth century’s ideological/geopolitical drivers, is over-simplistic. Doing so may also lead to misguided policy prescriptions, such as breaking up fragile states along ethno-sectarian lines or even discerning the patterns of conflicts in the region as occurring only because of religious imperatives – hence “Orientalising” the Middle East once more (Del Sarto et al. 2019: 3). What is needed, contrariwise, is a nuanced look at the dynamics

of conflict formation and transformation in the Middle East (and North Africa), and whether potential peace formations could emerge and be capitalised on for designing effective peace-building initiatives.

3.2.1 *Regional impediments to peace – a divergent RCF*

The Arab uprisings have played a role in the erosion of the regional order in the Middle East, but without presenting clear features of a new one in the making. Through this transformation, some regional powers like Iran have seized the opportunity to buttress expansionist policies in countries like Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, whereas other countries seem predisposed to defending the regional status quo – like Saudi Arabia in the context of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Aras and Yorulmazlar 2016). Also, the rift between *de jure* sovereignty and *de facto* statehood has grown – whereby central governments coexist and compete with other state aspirants (such as Islamic State) and rebel groups seizing territories outside the reach of the incumbent government – as in Syria (A. I. Ahram and Lust 2016: 22–23). As a result, alliance configurations in the region oscillate between two general patterns: (1) the escalation of enmities, such as between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and (2) the breakup of previous alliances, as exemplified by the recent GCC crisis and the ensuing Saudi/Emirati-led boycotting of Qatar (see below). It is worth mentioning that these patterns are not mutually exclusive; rather, they feed into each other – with consequences that transcend the Gulf region in spreading to countries like Iraq, Syria, and to Libya in North Africa. Further, these regional dynamics have had an effect on the strength and persistence of non-state armed groups, and also on the coherence and influence of ROs such as the League of Arab States (LAS) and the GCC.

Antagonism between Iran and Saudi Arabia is depicted by some scholars (for example Santana 2018) as constituting a “new Cold War” in the Middle East, because it replicated basic elements of the eponymous United States–USSR conflict. One such example is the ideational confrontation in which Iran posits itself as anti-Western and pro-revolutionary, whereas Saudi Arabia stands as the representative of Islam through its custodianship of the Two Holy Mosques (cf. Cerioli 2018: 299–300). Another is the security dilemma, wherein both countries have increased their defence expenditure in apprehension of the moves to be made by the other party in the region. A final example is the proxy wars which have embroiled the two countries in a multitude of conflicts throughout the region, from Bahrain to Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and beyond.

In Yemen, for instance, domestic protests against the regime of President Ali Abdullah Saleh broke out in 2011. Among the social factions which became more prominent were the Houthis, a group which adheres to the Zaydi branch of Shiism and dominates the north-western part of the country. The Houthis’ challenge to the Saleh regime emanated from local grievances as a result of historic marginalisation, underdevelopment, and a lack of political participation (Juneau 2016: 651–652), rather than from them being proxies of Iran – as Saudi officials

and policymakers portrayed it in preparation for the military campaign led by the Kingdom against Yemen (Greenfield and Daniels 2014; Salisbury 2015: 7–8).

Under the auspices of the GCC, President Saleh resigned in 2011; he was succeeded by his vice president, Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi. However between 2011 and 2014 the clout of the Houthis amplified, and they managed to seize the capital Sanaa and to orchestrate a coup against President Hadi, who fled to Riyadh in 2014. As a consequence Saudi Arabia launched two military campaigns to restore Hadi to the presidency, to be achieved by expelling the Houthis from the capital and curtailing their influence. The first commenced on 25 March 2015 under the name “Operation Decisive Storm,” the second on 21 April 2015 under that of “Operation Renewal of Hope” (Darwich 2020: 104). Yet despite the Saudi narrative that the Houthis represent an Iranian proxy situated on their immediate borders, the link between Iran and the Houthis was more one of rhetorical support and the smuggling of light weapons; Iranian involvement in the transfer of heavy weapons to the Houthis was hard to corroborate meanwhile (Kendall 2017: 6–11). Briefly, notwithstanding the real connections between Iran and the Houthis and the magnitude of them, the Saudis’ articulation of the Houthis’ rise in Yemen along the lines of Saudi-Iranian rivalry throughout the Middle East played a perspicuous role in the ensuing military and air campaigns against Yemen – resulting in the worst humanitarian crisis of the current age (UNOCHA 2018).

Another case in point vis-à-vis Saudi-Iranian rivalry over regional hegemony is the civil war in Syria. Several months after the uprising in Syria first emerged in 2011, and with the Bashar Al-Assad regime’s reluctance to heed the GCC’s demands for halting the “killing machine” (Aljazeera 2011), Saudi Arabia shifted to a more assertive strategy vis-à-vis the incumbent. The Kingdom perceived the insurgency as a permissive moment to intervene on the side of the rebels, and hence to remove an Iranian geostrategic ally from power. To this end, Saudi Arabia provided political, diplomatic, and financial support to the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (Berti and Guzansky 2014: 27–28) – as well as material and financial aid to militant groups such as the Army of Islam, comprised of 43 different rebel brigades and battalions (Sayigh 2013). Conversely, Iran has been practicing in Syria what it excels at: Filling the vacuum arising from a state’s fragility and territorial dwindling with non-state armed militias. Iran has depended in buttressing its ally in Damascus (i.e. Assad) on its multipronged Shiite transnational militias such as the Lebanese Hizbullah, the Afghan Fatemiyoun Division, the Pakistani Zeinabiyoun Brigade, and the Shiite Iraqi militias (Alfoneh 2018; Jones 2019: 4).

Although the dispute between Qatar and its GCC neighbours long predated the 2017 crisis (Ulrichsen 2017a), the rift within the Gulf region reached its zenith in that year when the monarchies of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt (“the Quartet”) imposed a political boycott and economic embargo on Qatar. The Quartet prepared a 13-point list of demands with which Qatar was asked to comply, which it did not. Among these demands were the scaling down of Qatar’s diplomatic ties with Iran; the immediate shutting

down of the under-construction Turkish military base in Qatar; and, the severing of ties with all the “terrorist” organisations that Qatar supports such as the Muslim Brotherhood, ISIS, and Hizbullah (Aljazeera 2017).

Consequently, the intra-GCC schism brought about a multitude of regional shifts that transcended the Gulf region. First, Turkish-Qatari relations became closer in security, economic, and diplomatic terms (Atlas 2019; Cengiz 2019: 156–158), and their interests converged in Iraq and Syria where they supported similar Islamist armed factions (Kinninmont 2019: 28). Also, in Libya, Turkey and Qatar supported the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) (Faleg 2016: 2).

Second, the strategic partnership between the UAE and Saudi Arabia was elevated. For example, they proceeded in their military campaign against Yemen, and supported the regional government of the Libyan National Army (LNA) led by General Khalifa Haftar against the GNA (Eaton et al. 2020: 33; Igrouane and Aljamra 2019). Also, the Horn of Africa was not spared from the two-block rivalry of Saudi Arabia/UAE on the one hand and Turkey/Qatar on the other. In Somalia, for instance, the massive Turkish humanitarian and developmental involvement, in addition to the extensive training of military personnel, were counterweighed by the Emirati establishment of the second-largest embassy in Mogadishu after Turkey’s. The UAE also opened the Sheikh Zayed Hospital to compete with the Erdoğan Hospital, further to the country already bankrolling various mercenary groups engaged in a number of clan-destine operations and training a controversial Somali military contingent (Arman 2018).

Third, the chasm of 2017 further exposed the paralysis of the GCC – which prioritises its members’ sovereignty over any supranational decision-making mechanism. This became more lucid given that the embargo on Qatar and the restriction on the movement of its citizens were imposed unilaterally by Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain without first deferring to the GCC Secretariat. Relatedly, when mediation initiatives took place between the GCC countries in dispute they were undertaken by the emir of Kuwait rather than the GCC secretary-general – thus bypassing the Council (Ulrichsen 2017b: 76–77). More generally, the less-than-successful record of the LAS has only been compounded in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. This is so because the regional polarisation after 2011 has split the LAS between members opting for a status quo-preservation approach to most of the uprisings and other members adopting supportive stances on the revolutions – in addition, for example, to the undecidedness of the LAS in regard to the regionally disputed Muslim Brotherhood phenomenon (Bröning 2014).

3.2.2 The current regional dynamics of the Middle East are not conducive to peacebuilding

Scrutinising the escalation of violence in the Middle East, as well as the patterns of rivalry and of alliance formation and transformation, reveals that envisioning peace should be region-sensitive and embedded within the regional structures of power; include state, sub-state, and supra-state actors; and, incorporate both formal and informal institutions of war-making and peacebuilding. Put differently: the regional context matters!

Contrary to Latin America, interstate conflicts play a major role in the Middle East. Saudi-Iranian rivalry reflects a seemingly rigid and deep-seated confrontation on both the material and ideational levels, whereas the intra-Gulf disputes might be more issue-based and less intractable in existential terms. Nevertheless RCFs hint at divergent modes of conflict existing here, whereby a feud between two states of the same subregion (like Saudi Arabia and Qatar, or the UAE and Qatar) extends to third countries, involves non-state actors, spreads through various transregional structures and networks, and draws other regional powers into the simmering competition.

Further, what contributes to the absence of RPFs in the Middle East is the nonexistence of influential ROs, due to intra-organisational fragmentation among member states. Hence, the gaps that arise from state weakness, fragility, or collapse are not filled by organisational plans and actions; instead, a plethora of non-state armed groups vie for the taking over of the spaces left vacant by the state – which, in turn, constitutes fertile ground for rival states to invest in conflict and violence escalation.

In sum, peacebuilding in the Middle East should be perceived through the prism of the region and with attention paid to the manner in which the RCFs can shift from divergence to convergence – thus creating space for RPFs to emerge. For international donors and peacebuilders like the UN and the European Union, peace in the region thus needs to be coupled with transforming the zero-sum modality of conflict into a setting where collective solutions are possible. In addition, ROs need to be strengthened in order to compensate for state weakness and to work as focal points for coordinating constructive momentum.⁹

3.3 Sub-Saharan Africa - concrete moves towards RPFs?

Sub-Saharan Africa arguably resembles the Middle East in terms of the spread of violence and conflict dynamics. The region had, by the end of the 1990s, witnessed the genocide in Rwanda (1994), the First Congo War (1996–1997), an ethnic war in Burundi (1993), in addition to numerous military coups. The majority of conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa between 1990 and 2018 remained internal ones, with internal-turned-internationalised armed conflicts, such as the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, occurring less frequently. At the same time, nearly 50 per cent of the armed conflicts were discontinued due to low activity and/or actors' ceasing hostilities. However sub-Saharan Africa differs from the Middle East in terms of its ability to forge RPFs, which draws on a multitude of regional and subregional organisations and institutions possessing an array of mechanisms for conflict prevention and transformation. This

9 Regarding the LAS, measures such as the founding of its Joint Defence Council (JDC), created by the 1950 Joint Defence and Economic Cooperation (JDEC) Treaty, can be considered (Langbehn 2018; TRT World 2019). Also, international donors could cooperate with the LAS to improve its mechanisms of decision-making and conflict resolution. Pertaining to the GCC, the international community should work initially to defuse the tension between the Gulf states and to end the Saudi-led boycott of Qatar.

section will address the development of peace structures in the regional context, and highlight the interconnection between the various subregional organisations and their regional counterparts in ways that enriched the sub-Saharan Africa experience in transforming conflicts and moving from regional and subregional conflict formations to regional peace/peace-prone formations.

3.3.1 *The African Union (AU) and the new peace architecture*

The new millennium ushered in the official establishment of the AU as the successor to the Organization of African Unity, symbolising an organisational and normative shift from non-intervention to non-indifference and being paralleled by the establishment of elaborate institutional linkages across the continent (Desmidt and Hauck 2017: 3). Relatedly, a conspicuous improvement in the newly emerging AU was its mandate (Article 4(h)) to “intervene in a member state pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely: war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity” (AU Constitutive Act 2000: 7).

Another remarkable achievement of the AU’s Constitutive Act was that it laid the legal foundation for the establishment, in 2002, of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA): “A set of institutions, legislation and procedures designed to address conflict prevention and promote peace and security on the African continent” (European Court of Auditors 2018: 4). The APSA is comprised of five organs, which were set forth in 2002 by the Protocol of the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the AU. These are: The Peace and Security Council (PSC), the main decision-making body that addresses the prevention, management, and resolution of conflicts; the Continental Early Warning System, having the task of anticipating potential conflicts; the Panel of the Wise, which focuses on conflict mediation and peace agreements’ brokering; the African Standby Force (ASF), a peacekeeping force with the mandate to intervene to prevent conflict and which can be also deployed pre-emptively; and, the African Union Peace Fund, financing the RO’s peace and security operations (Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union 2002; Gain 2018).

The APSA is also pillared by eight Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and two Regional Mechanisms (RMs). RECs are regional subgroupings which predate the AU and hold the initial mission of achieving regional economic and political integration within their respective subregions. These are the Southern African Development Community; Community of Sahel-Saharan States; Economic Community of Central African States; East African Community (EAC); Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa; Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD); Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); and, the Arab Maghreb Union. In 2008, the relation between the AU and the RECs was further regulated by the Memorandum of Understanding on Co-operation in the Area of Peace and Security; hereby the RECs were spurred to undertake roles of conflict prevention, peace-making, and peace-keeping within and between their member states, including having the right to deploy force

in peace-support missions (Adetula, Bereketeab, and Jaiyebo 2016: 16–19). In addition to the RECs, the two aforementioned RMs were constructed – being tasked with managing the standby brigade of the ASF in North and East Africa, namely the North Africa Regional Capability Unit and the East Africa Standby Force Coordination Mechanism (Desmidt and Hauck 2017: 6).

3.3.2 *The APSA's mechanisms for conflict prevention, transformation, and resolution, and the role of swing states*¹⁰

From diplomacy to military intervention, the APSA draws on a multitude of tools to ensure peace and security in sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, regionally powerful and influential states may contribute to or hinder the materialisation of the related designs of the APSA and the RECs in a given context. For example the IGAD mediated in peace talks between the south Sudanese secessionist rebellions and the Government of Sudan, which culminated in signing the comprehensive peace agreement between the Sudan People's Liberation Army and the Sudanese government of President Omar Al-Bashir in 2005. This agreement was brought about mainly as a result of Ethiopia's constructive role herein throughout the course of mediation on the basis of its influential ties with both of the warring parties, and the leadership characteristics of one of the IGAD leaders – namely, late Ethiopian prime minister Meles Zenawi (Verhoeven 2012).

A second example is the constitutional crisis in Gambia following the presidential elections of 2016, and the refusal of the incumbent, President Yahya Jammeh, to transfer power to president-elect Adama Barrow even after an orchestrated campaign by ECOWAS to mediate a solution to the constitutional deadlock. As a result, Nigeria led ECOWAS in issuing an order for military intervention as part of "Operation Restore Democracy." Consequently 7,000 troops, mainly from Nigeria and Senegal, were massed at the border in preparation for entering Gambia. Shortly after this coercive threat, negotiations took place and the sitting president yielded power to Barrow – who was officially inaugurated in the Gambian Embassy in Senegal (European Court of Auditors 2018: 7; Mashio and Nurettin 2019).

The third and final example could be viewed as indicative of cases where smaller states draw on more influential ones to water down the plans of the AU and its APSA – consequently relying instead on different subregional institutions. In 2015, Burundi witnessed a deteriorating security and humanitarian situation with President Pierre Nkurunziza's decision to run for an unconstitutional third term in office. This instigated mass protests, armed-opposition attacks, targeted assassinations, and a fierce governmental response – not to mention a failed coup attempt (ICG 2019). The fallout was more than 430,000 Burundians fleeing their native

10 Swing states are also referred to as regional "hegemons." For an overview of the debate on defining and measuring regional hegemons and their qualities, see Ogunnubi and Okeke-Uzodike (2016).

country (UNHCR 2018). In response, the PSC was inclined to activate the aforementioned Article 4(h) of its Constitutive Act and to issue a peace-support operation to intervene in Burundi – a move rejected by the latter’s government. Further, Burundi allied itself with Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni – who capitalised on events to advocate the EAC’s genuine legitimacy to address the crisis, posited as preferable to the solution being imposed by the pan-African AU and its Assembly. This led to the AU Assembly revoking the decision of the PSC and approving an EAC-led mediation process through the dispatching of military and human rights observers instead (ISS 2016; Vanheukelom and Desmidt 2019: 16–18).

3.3.3 *Challenges ahead*

In 2016, 28 out of 67 conflicts (42 per cent) were addressed by the APSA (APSA Impact Report 2016: 9). Consequently, the report concludes that 78 per cent of interventions were successful or partly successful.¹¹ While policymakers, practitioners, and academics might debate the interpretation of this portrayal of the APSA’s efficiency, the message which interests us is that when compared to the institutions and organisations of the Middle East (mainly the LAS and the GCC) and their capacity to curb the tide of violence and wars sweeping the region, sub-Saharan Africa, and the AU more broadly, emerge as a conglomerate of various subregions which have managed to create and develop regional and subregional peace formations that are underpinned by a complex legal, political, organisational, institutional, and operational infrastructure that avails itself of a wide range of mechanisms such as mediation, sanctions, and military intervention. These RPFs prove indispensable for achieving the sub-Saharan African strategic objectives of conflict prevention, transformation, and resolution, as well as of peace-making and peacekeeping. Also, the rivalry between the swing states in the Middle East (mainly Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey) makes them pale in comparison with their African counterparts in regard to conflict de-escalation, peace-making, and peacebuilding.

However, this should not lead us to falsely assume that the sub-Saharan RPFs are flawless or that conflicts on the continent are gradually ebbing away (Dörrie 2016). Rather, miscellaneous challenges confront the AU and its various peace and security organs. For example AU headquarters face shortcomings in regard to logistical support and planning, which burdens the RO’s peacekeeping missions and reduces their effectiveness in the field (Williams 2011). Second, the slowness in decision-making at the PSC with regard to emerging conflicts or crises – which makes the APSA’s response late, and undermines the likeliness of conflict prevention (Toga 2016). Third, although the AU’s missions in places like Burundi, Darfur, and Somalia were praiseworthy, they, nevertheless, exposed the RO’s dearth of capacity in terms of funding, training, equipment, and deployment. This is partly ascribable to the lack of military assets, professional personnel, and combat-related skills (Paterson 2012).

11 The report outlines three criteria upon which to judge the successfulness (or lack thereof) of an APSA intervention: the swiftness of response; the achievement of the intended goals; and, whether it managed to de-escalate the conflict in question.

Fourth, the AU Commission (2009: 17) is also deficient in human resources, strong bureaucratic processes and information technology capacities, as well as in management systems. Fifth, with regard to conflict-management ability, the AU is witness to a lack of experts in security institutions for example in the police and justice sectors, and also in realms like the application of democratic norms and the rule of law (Joshua and Olanrewaju 2017: 8). Sixth, the non-prioritisation of human rights and the protection of civilians during the AU's peace operations, such as in Darfur and Mogadishu, are reflective of a deeper institutional flaw: The absence of accountability mechanisms (Arrieta 2011). Seventh and finally, the inability of the AU's Peace Fund to collect sufficient financial resources from the RO's various member states impairs its ability to disburse the necessary funds for dealing with emergency situations fully, and also renders it extremely dependent on external sources of capital (Vanheukelom and Desmidt 2019: 2).

In conclusion, the challenges that lie ahead for the AU and its various peace and security institutions demand long-term coordination between the different agencies involved, with the need to find more efficient avenues of self-reliance regarding funding particularly. Yet, what the study of sub-Saharan Africa shows is that the regional ability to found and consolidate RPFs could be a prerequisite for moving from violence and war to peace. Phrased differently, the absence of such peace formations in tandem with no will on the part of the regional swing states to cooperate in preserving peace and resolving conflict in the Middle East is what makes peace in the latter region chimerical. This leads again to the emphasis of a fundamental point: The regional context matters.

4 Implications for International Peacebuilding Support

International organisations and donors face a series of challenges in their policies of peacebuilding support that adopting a regional perspective might help overcome. Every armed conflict and war is unique, as is every peacebuilding process. However, there are regional patterns shaping conflict as well as peace formations at the intersection of global developments and local specificities. "Global" peacekeeping efforts by the UN, the EU, other multilateral institutions, or by transnational NGOs can only succeed in supporting peacebuilding if they account for local as well as regional contextual conditions. As such, they need to take into account trans-border military, political, economic, and social networks in the regions because they exert significant influence on conflict and peace dynamics – no matter if at the interstate or intra-state level. The presence or absence of regional powers or swing states, ROs, or of cross-border militias, paramilitaries, or criminal groups influences peacebuilding efforts in one way or the other.

Over the last few decades peacebuilders have made a significant effort to increase the analysis of contexts, especially at the local level. However, the regional one has been largely ig-

nored – with the exception of the outsourcing of peacebuilding to ROs, as in the “African solutions to African problems” approach. Regional peace and conflict formations need to be included beyond this cooperation, while multilateral institutions, donors, and other actors involved in the peacebuilding domain need to pay close attention. Peace and conflict assessments need to factor in these regional developments.

The current situation in the Middle East shows that local peace initiatives are not viable if regional and geopolitical power dynamics persist and fuel neighbourhood conflicts like in Syria or Yemen. The zone of peace in Latin America demonstrates that violence needs to be addressed beyond its collective, organised manifestation on the basis of political aims – that is, in the form of war. At the same time, the Latin American region shows that its peace architecture is unable to confront the related security problems and to develop innovative peacebuilding approaches. In most of Latin America vested interests prefer traditional repressive strategies, intensifying violence most of all for civil society and reform-oriented actors such as human rights defenders. The African continent, home to many ROs and to reasonably well-functioning peace mechanisms, serves as an example for the value added by regional integration – even in the face of persisting conflict. The better subregional organisations and regional integration work, the more chance for peacebuilding success there is.

All world regions have in common the existence of different transnational actors who pose a serious threat to both local and regional peace. In Latin America, it is criminal networks that are responsible for thousands of fatalities every year. In the Middle East, it is mainly transnational terrorist organisations like Al-Qaida or ISIS and the overarching “Cold War” between Saudi Arabia and Iran and their respective constituencies that have this effect. In sub-Saharan Africa, it is mostly militias and paramilitary groups which make strategic use of porous borders and a lack of state security in remote areas. However, all these actors can only prosper in cooperation with national elites and local allies. They need to be analysed, included, or marginalised in peacebuilding policies.

The regional level offers the possibility for meaningful donor coordination and joint multilateral action, but this should not lead to a minimalistic approach seeking only the end of war or a certain degree of stabilisation. All initiatives need a clear focus on long-term peacebuilding, as a process of social change required for the constructive transformation of conflict. Regional economic and social networks are central to sustainable development, and to transforming structural conditions – leading either to the violent escalation of conflict or to the fostering of more peaceful societies.

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