



**CENTER ON  
INTERNATIONAL  
COOPERATION**

Conference Summary:  
Policy Approaches to Regional Conflict  
Formations

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**ANDREA ARMSTRONG  
BARNETT R. RUBIN**

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# Executive Summary

## Policy Approaches to Regional Conflict Formations

### I. Introduction

On November 20, 2002, the Center on International Cooperation (CIC) at New York University convened a meeting of practitioners and regional experts to discuss how policy makers and practitioners can better cope with sets of interlinked conflicts, known as regional conflict formations. Regional conflict formations (RCFs) are sets of transnational conflicts that form mutually reinforcing linkages with each other throughout a region, making for more protracted and obdurate conflicts.

### II. Importance of Regional Analysis

Meeting participants emphasized that conflicts involve the interaction of local, national, regional, and global dynamics. A regional level of analysis, therefore, should complement, rather than displace other levels of analysis. A growing body of scholarly evidence supports the thesis that conflicts reinforce each other within regions. A study by James Murdoch and Todd Sandler confirms that not only are neighboring countries vulnerable to conflict within their region, but they often suffer the same magnitude of economic impact as those countries actively in conflict.<sup>1</sup> Practitioners describe people, goods, and arms moving back and forth across borders and among “internal” conflicts, prolonging regional conflict and preventing peaceful resolution.

### III. The RCF Framework

The RCF framework is both descriptive and strategic. It describes the complex interaction of factors that is characteristic of regional conflict formations, while also identifying potential points of leverage for regional conflict management.

RCFs usually involve regional security competition, sometimes contributing to the weakening of the state, as in Côte d’Ivoire, or even its collapse, as in Afghanistan. The weakened state becomes a platform for predatory networks that destabilize the region.

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<sup>1</sup> James C. Murdoch and Todd Sandler, “Economic Growth, Civil Wars and Spatial Spillovers,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no.1 (2002): 91-110.

In the absence of a state’s protection, cross-border networks based on social commonalities or interests form to provide physical and economic security. One expert described the Sri Lankan diaspora to illustrate how these networks can both contribute to and detract from peace processes. Often these networks include a variety of actors with different incentives. Narcotics trafficking networks include individual farmers, government officials, and armed groups. These networks are often more flexible in shifting their operations than the government agencies combating them. The availability and lootability of natural resources such as coltan or gold may affect actors’ interests. Some experts argued that easy access to natural resources in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) motivated Rwanda and Uganda to remain in the DRC after their initial objectives were met. Weakened states, such as Colombia, can become havens for arms trafficking, destabilizing neighboring countries. Experts described how criminals in Brazil, who are increasingly well-armed through regional arms trafficking, are shutting down main roads and even cities to negotiate specific privileges from the government. And, although it appears obvious that transborder armed groups are a key factor in the emergence of RCFs, their emergence has important implications for peace processes and negotiations. Transborder armed groups may prefer safety across a border to compromise or defeat.

### IV. How to Approach RCFs: Actors and Strategies

The first obstacle to developing a conflict management approach for RCFs is identifying an actor or group of actors who are responsible for leading the process. In order to devise a strategy, one participant argued, you need a strategist. Since regional conflict formations are often fought by networks of conflict actors, perhaps, as Necla Tschirgi has written, confronting RCFs requires a network of peace actors. Some participants strongly emphasized the credibility and legitimacy of the United Nations as necessary for

any successful peace process, even or especially when sub-regional organizations are involved.

Participants discussed three different approaches to RCFs: comprehensive, piecemeal and strategic. A comprehensive approach to RCFs would entail recognizing the economic, political, security, and social factors contributing to conflict and attempting to either transform or replace them within one organizational framework. A comprehensive approach may be an important end goal in managing regional conflict formations, but reaching that goal, some participants concluded, may mean beginning with bilateral agreements and piecemeal or strategic approaches.

A piecemeal approach entails taking regional dimensions into account while pursuing strategies focused on particular states. This could include coordination efforts between teams negotiating peace in neighboring countries or even developing parallel processes and procedures for managing individual conflicts within a larger RCF.

A strategic approach to regional conflict formations involves targeting particular geographic areas or networks that are key to the linkages among conflicts. Participants proposed four general areas of strategic action to prevent or manage RCFs: civil society; regional media; regional trade; and increasing state capacity.

# Conference Report

## Policy Approaches to Regional Conflict Formations

### I. Introduction

On November 20, 2002, the Center on International Cooperation (CIC) at New York University convened a meeting of practitioners and regional experts to discuss how policy can better cope with sets of interlinked conflicts, known as regional conflict formations. This meeting was the last in a series of consultations, which focused on the structures, dynamics, and processes of regional conflict formations (RCFs) in the Great Lakes region of Africa and Southern Central Asia.<sup>2</sup> “Regional conflict formations” are sets of transnational conflicts that form mutually reinforcing linkages with each other throughout a region, making for more protracted and obdurate conflicts.

### II. Background

Beginning in June 2001, CIC collaborated with non-governmental organizations in Kenya and Turkey to gather experts and practitioners from those regions and solicit their ideas on the economic, political, security, and social linkages among conflicts there. In November 2001, the Africa Peace Forum (APFO) and CIC focused on the interlinkages of the conflicts in the Great Lakes, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Uganda, Rwanda and, to some extent, Angola. Human rights workers from Rwanda emphasized the importance of good governance in preventing RCFs from emerging. Experts from Zimbabwe, the US, and Kenya stressed the global linkages of regional conflict networks, adding an important element to our evolving RCF framework. In June 2002, after a smaller planning meeting in March, CIC and the Turkish Foundation for Economic and Social Studies (TESEV) analyzed the seismic changes in South Central Asia following the terrorist attacks in

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<sup>2</sup> Some participants argued that the term, regional conflict formations, was subject to misinterpretation and confusing, and could prevent full appreciation of the analysis. While they did not agree on another name for these types of conflicts, they did suggest “network wars” and “transboundary conflicts” as possible alternatives. For more on “network wars,” see Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security* (London: Zed Books, 2001).

the US and subsequent US military intervention in Afghanistan. Civil society practitioners cautioned the US to hold its partners accountable for violations of human rights, especially in light of increased US military aid to repressive regimes in the region. Despite the ongoing military conflict, experts from the region foresaw increased opportunities for regional collaboration on the reconstruction of Afghanistan. They discussed how cooperation in trade and energy might eventually outweigh the incentives for drug trafficking and illicit trade. From these two meetings, a framework for understanding and managing regional conflict formations began to emerge.

This last meeting in New York sought to draw general conclusions about RCFs from the regions studied in this project, as well as from other regions of the world including Southeast Europe, West Africa, East Africa, and the Andean region of South America. Experts on each of these regions were invited to share their perspectives and compare experiences, with the aim of developing policy strategies for regional conflict formations in general. Policy practitioners from inter-governmental organizations and governments articulated the challenges of coping with regionalized conflicts and how they might integrate RCF analysis into their current work.

Discussion focused on the following questions:

- How can the RCF framework contribute to existing conflict management practices?
- Does analysis of conflicts in other regions of the world support the RCF framework?
- What are the general policy implications for those trying to prevent or manage regional conflict formations?

### III. Importance of Regional Analysis

Meeting participants agreed that adopting a regional view of conflict should not exclude other levels of conflict analysis. They emphasized that conflicts involve the interaction of local, national, regional, and global dynamics. As participants from both Central Africa and South Central Asia emphasized in previous meetings, many of the relevant networks are global. Illicit goods

consumed or produced in developed countries, such as narcotics and arms respectively, may travel via regional networks but depend upon global demand and supply. A regional level of analysis, therefore, should complement, rather than displace, other levels of analysis.

A growing body of scholarly evidence supports the thesis that conflicts reinforce each other within regions. In their 2002 annual review of world conflict, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute found that 11 out of 15 major armed conflicts “spilled over” into their neighboring states – thus belonging to what they called “regional conflict complexes.”<sup>3</sup> Another study, by James Murdoch and Todd Sandler, confirms that not only are neighboring countries vulnerable to conflict within their region, but they often suffer the same magnitude of economic impact as those countries actively in conflict.<sup>4</sup>

Practitioners describe people, goods, and arms moving across borders and among “internal” conflicts, prolonging regional conflict and preventing peaceful resolution. This is particularly well documented in the Great Lakes region of Africa, where observers note that progress in resolving one internal conflict has often contributed to escalating violence in a neighboring conflict. The Forces de la Défense de la Démocratie (FDD) of Burundi and armed groups opposing the Rwandan regime staged coordinated attacks against their respective home countries when it appeared that progress in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) peace process would deprive them of their cross-border bases. Easily looted goods, such as gold, become more profitable with each border crossed, developing into valuable sources of revenue for war economies. Uganda, with no gold of its own, has nevertheless begun exporting gold since its military involvement in the DRC. Arms trafficking continues virtually unhindered in Central

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<sup>3</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook 2002: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002): 22. The authors note that of the four remaining conflicts, three are in island states and thus face a “natural barrier” to spillover.

<sup>4</sup> James C. Murdoch and Todd Sandler, “Economic Growth, Civil Wars and Spatial Spillovers,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no.1 (2002): 91-110.

Africa, despite United Nations Security Council resolutions forbidding arms sales to Rwandan armed groups, including the ex-Forces Armées Rouandaises (FAR) and the Interahamwe militia.

An expert from Pakistan elaborated on the importance of regional analysis by illustrating the impact of local dynamics in the Pakistan/Afghanistan border area on the region and the world. The Pashtuns, a cross-border ethnic group that is concentrated in the border area, have developed ties and networks stretching from Dubai to Kabul. These social linkages facilitate licit and illicit economic trade, including the production and sale of narcotics, contributing to soaring drug addiction and HIV/AIDS infection rates throughout the region. Even though narcotics and arms trafficking continue to destabilize states in the region, these states largely refuse to address these issues bilaterally or regionally because of mistrust. A regional level of analysis, she argued, could contribute to states realizing their common, instead of competing, interests.

An approach focused on a particular state, which may address only the most visible part of a regional conflict formation, ignores a host of important regional issues that underlie “internal” conflicts. Several participants argued that the key regional issue in South America is the production and trafficking of narcotics, which are not only profitable but also easy for armed groups to transport. One expert described drug production in the region as a balloon, expanding in some areas as it retracts in others. Overall, she noted, drug production in the region has not increased over time – instead it has survived by shifting from one to another area of operation. Hence, a strategy based solely on eradicating drug production in one country, as in Colombia, will export the drug industry to neighboring weak states. Until Mexico and Brazil, seriously address narcotics trafficking, the conflict in Colombia will continue.

The regional level is also important, argued one participant, because it is distinctly a product of our times. The regional conflict formations concept began as an attempt to understand civil wars with regional dimensions in the post-Cold War era. Prior to 1991, US-Soviet rivalry prevented actors from participating in multiple conflicts. Moreover,

Cold War strategies of supporting weak and illegitimate leaders led directly to state collapse in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Somalia. Such state collapse is a crucial element of regional conflict formations. Several participants supported examining RCFs as a byproduct of globalization. Individual access to global markets and the reach and capacity of global actors have combined to support both legitimate networks of trade and economies of war. Armed groups are no longer technologically challenged by their lack of access to the capital city and have more options for mobilizing and maintaining resources to oppose the state.

The increasing prevalence of regional conflict formations does not presage the end of intra-state or inter-state war. As participants were quick to point out, some conflicts, especially those that have not escalated to armed conflicts, are still clearly internal, as in Kenya, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. Countries may share transboundary security concerns and face common challenges, as in the Andes, but this is not necessarily the same as being part of a regional conflict formation. More important, according to some participants, is developing an understanding of the processes and mechanics of RCFs to help identify when regional strategies are most appropriate.

#### **IV. The RCF Framework**

The “region” in RCF includes those geographical areas where the networks and linkages are concentrated and is therefore defined empirically. The regional conflict formation may or may not coincide with areas traditionally or bureaucratically defined as regions, such as West Africa or Central Asia. It may coincide with a region that has an organization or forum for state cooperation, but not necessarily so. The region can include parts of a state, but not the whole state as in the RCF in South Central Asia, which is linked to Kashmir but much less so to the rest of India.

RCFs are formed through political, economic, social, and security relationships involving state and non-state actors. The factors below are both descriptive and strategic. They describe the complex interaction of factors that is characteristic of RCFs, while also identifying potential points of

leverage for regional conflict management strategies.

#### **Regional security competition**

- Regional states compete in a weak or collapsed third state. Participants cited Pakistan’s pursuit of “strategic depth” vis-à-vis India through its actions in Afghanistan. Determined to avoid enemies on two fronts, Pakistan supported various Afghan contenders for power to consolidate its ability to act in Kashmir. Regional competition in the DRC prolonged the Great Lakes conflict, as, for instance, Rwandan- and Ugandan-supported militias battled for control of key trading routes near Kisangani. Another participant described how competition between anglophone and francophone countries in West Africa on the composition of peacekeeping forces and the location of peace negotiations was complicating efforts to resolve the conflict in Côte d’Ivoire.
- Regional states compete for access to extra-regional resources. Central Asian states are vying for US resources as key partners in the “war on terror,” further isolating states in the region from one another. According to one participant, states in Central Asia are more concerned with cornering the largest share of US and other international resources than in cooperating to reconstruct Afghanistan. Hence, there is little incentive for them to cooperate on regional anti-terrorism measures, such as coordinated border patrol and monitoring or information sharing, effectively undermining US goals in the region. Similarly, in South America, Mexico and Brazil, as well as smaller states, in general prioritize their bilateral relationships with the US over stronger regional cooperation.

#### **Institutional weakness of one or more states**

- State collapse. A key aspect of a regional conflict formation is the inability of a state to control its territory, enforce the law, or provide for its citizens. Previously unconnected networks of actors, whether traders, armed groups, or religious groups, form cooperative relationships with the assistance of the local population, which has few alternative options

for survival. These actors may plan, implement or maintain the collapse of the state. This is particularly apt during the second decade of a state's collapse, as in Somalia, eastern DRC, or Afghanistan, where predator networks have assumed quasi-state control. The collapse of Yugoslavia destabilized the surrounding region. The Balkans have always been a route for drug trafficking, but the introduction of UN sanctions strengthened smuggling networks, including drug traffickers, while troop deployments in Macedonia then Kosovo shifted trafficking routes southward.

- **Predatory governance.** When a state preys upon its own people, individuals or groups will naturally seek other sources of protection, usually based on social commonalities including ethnic identity, religion, and history. Members of the Rwandan Patriotic Front, driven away by the Rwandan government in the 1960s and 1970s, received arms and training for their return through supporting current Ugandan leader Yoweri Museveni's drive to power in 1980. State repression in Uzbekistan is encouraging some to support networks of Islamic movements, like Hizb-ut-Tahrir, which advocates the establishment of an Islamic caliphate in Central Asia.

**Parallel economy, transnational informal economy, and transit trade.** Groups collaborate in the provision of goods and services without government supervision or regulation. These networks can supply basic goods that are diverted because of regional political tensions or simply fill gaps in the market, as when Afghans circumvent restrictions on Pakistan-India trade by using Dubai as a transit center. Participants emphasized that these networks are not inherently destructive or negative. Rather, they are usually positive or benign communities whose legitimate trading links can also be used by traffickers, organized crime, and armed groups. One participant pointed to the Karamajong region of Eastern Africa, including areas of Uganda, the Sudan, and Kenya, where traditional women milk traders are now carrying bullets inside their milk jugs for armed groups.

**Transborder social networks.** These networks, including diaspora groups, refugees, migrants, and

cross-border identity groups, can become resources for survival and well-being in times of conflict and predatory or inept governance. Their dispersion across a region often reflects a combination of factors: historical migration trends; colonial practices; violent conflict; or exclusion by governments. One practitioner cited the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora to illustrate the positive and negative impact of social networks. Highly organized, Sri Lankan Tamils in India and the West provided external support for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the armed opposition group, but they have now shifted their resources to support peace negotiations and, eventually, state reconstruction.

**Narcotics trafficking, human trafficking, organized crime.** Trafficking in illegal goods, such as narcotics or humans, can include a wide variety of actors: individual farmers, government officials (including politicians, border guards, and soldiers), and unofficial armed organizations. Their incentives for participating also vary widely. One participant explained that the drug trade may reflect the local lack of credit or extreme poverty, as in Afghanistan where individuals use opium, instead of currency, to purchase goods, and where futures contracts for raw opium constitute the main source of credit. Or trafficking may utilize old Soviet patronage networks, as is the case for Tajik women who are kidnapped, sold, and transferred to Russia and Southeast Europe. The drug trade formed a core source of support for al-Qaida, who profited from the harvest and transfer of opium to Europe via Central Asia. Narcotics trafficking is a key source of revenue for Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), a paramilitary group in Colombia, which applies a tax on both producers and traffickers of narcotics.<sup>5</sup> And because of the profits involved, traffickers are highly flexible in their operations. One practitioner related how Afghans were caught transporting heroin from Colombia to the US, whereas before they had only been involved in trafficking to Europe.

**Natural resources.** The availability and lootability of natural resources can encourage states or

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<sup>5</sup> Karen De Young, "US Indicts Three in Colombia Paramilitary," *Washington Post* September 25 (2002) A16.

groups to invade a particularly weak state. As in the case of Rwanda and Uganda, the profits to be gained from looting may entice them to stay in the country after their stated objective has been accomplished. While much has been written on the looting of coltan (used by telecommunications companies) from eastern DRC, the exploitation of the DRC's natural resources is far more varied, including gold, timber, cobalt, and diamonds. In South Central Asia, experts at this meeting doubted that US intervention in Afghanistan was related to the region's hydrocarbon resources, since the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan agreement to build a gas pipeline, in their opinion, is unlikely to be implemented. The gas located in Turkmenistan is neither easily lootable nor readily available and thus, remarked one participant, is simply too large-scale a project to succeed in the current political climate. It is also unlikely to be profitable unless the pipeline is linked to India, which is not likely given current tense relations between Pakistan and India.

**Militarization and arms trafficking.** Weak states can become havens for arms trafficking throughout a region. One expert described how cattle-rustling, which has always been present in the Karamajong region of Africa, has now become deadly because of the flow of arms from Somalia into the Sudan, Uganda, and Kenya. He shared reports of links between al-Qaida and refugee camps in northern Kenya, which could lead to greater militarization in East Africa. Experts described how the proliferation of arms in South America from rebels and drug cartels in Colombia is destabilizing several governments. Criminals, increasingly well-armed, are shutting down main roads and even cities to negotiate specific privileges from the Brazilian government, according to one participant.

**Transborder armed groups.** It appears obvious that transborder armed groups are a key factor in the emergence of regional conflict formations. But this relatively recent phenomenon has important implications for peace processes and negotiations. Transborder armed groups now have a wider array of exit strategies and may prefer safety across a border to the process of compromise and negotiation for peace. One expert suggested that these groups often rely on support from the poorest of certain ethnic communities. This was certainly

the case, she argued, in the poverty-ridden northern areas of Pakistan where Pashtuns supported various militant Islamic armed groups.

Transborder armed groups do not necessarily need to have a regional agenda to be a regional threat. One expert described how the Ecuadorian government is "wary of confronting" the FARC when its fighters stray across the border, even though the FARC appears not to have designs upon Ecuadorian territory (they use it for rest and relaxation and for the transshipment of arms and chemical precursors required for the processing of cocaine).

Beyond these characteristics, participants emphasized the dynamic aspect of regional conflict formations. Regional conflict formations may link or tap into others. Reports indicate that al-Qaida profited from diamonds purchased in West Africa, even after the September 11th attacks, amid increased global attention to its financial affairs. Another participant shared reports of Afghan opium for sale in Nigeria after transiting through Burundi in Central Africa. RCFs and the interests that motivate them can also change over time as conflicts become tightly knit. As the regional conflict formation changes, one participant argued, the interests motivating conflict also change. He pointed to changes in the Great Lakes conflict since 1995, when refugee flows from Rwanda and Burundi appeared to be the primary cause of conflict in the DRC. It would have "stretched the imagination," he argued, to imagine the eventual involvement (and interests) of Chad or the Sudan.

## V. How to Approach RCFs: Actors and Strategies

The first obstacle to developing a conflict management approach for RCFs is identifying an actor or group of actors who are responsible for leading the process. In order to devise a strategy, one participant argued, you need a strategist. The recent shift to regional organizations taking the lead in peace processes is complicated by the involvement of neighboring states and armed groups in the regional conflict formation. As one participant emphasized, in West Africa many of the states that could address the conflicts in the region are themselves involved in perpetuating them.

Since regional conflict formations are often fought by networks of conflict actors, perhaps, as Necla Tschirgi has written, RCFs need a network of peace actors for successful conflict management. Noting the inadequacy of the existing international security architecture in managing regional conflicts, she proposes “creative mechanisms of collaboration” for peacebuilding.<sup>6</sup> Such a strategy relies on a variety of actors, including extra-regional states, intergovernmental organizations, local organizations, neighboring states, and peaceful non-state groups.

One expert cited the “rise of regional consciousness,” particularly in Africa, perhaps precipitated by the failure of international organizations and powerful states in Africa throughout the 1990s. He described increased activity and attention to regional and sub-regional organizations on the continent, as witnessed by the transformation of the Organization of African Unity to the African Union (AU) and the reinvigoration of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Participants at this meeting argued that extra-regional states and international organizations could provide the resources and pressure to balance conflict-promoting incentives. Some participants strongly emphasized the credibility and legitimacy of the United Nations as necessary for any successful peace process, even, or especially, when sub-regional organizations are involved. Others argued that it is impossible to prejudge exactly which actors are necessary for successful negotiations.

One expert stressed that extra-regional and regional peace network members must be visibly involved in the peace negotiation process. For Côte d’Ivoire, he argued that the United Nations must provide a clear mandate to ECOWAS and have a visible, on-the-ground presence. Equally important is the visible involvement of both the AU and Western states. Simply because the conflict is regional in impact does not allow extra-regional

states to abandon their responsibilities toward global peace and security.

A network of peace actors could also address the competition among and within organizations for leading a peace process. In East-Central Africa, one expert pointed out, three sub-regional organizations are vying for leadership and the opportunity to prove themselves: the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA); the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD); and SADC. Central Asia has a multiplicity of moribund regional organizations due to competition among their members. The European Union is also not immune; one participant related how countries are competing within the EU to lead its conflict prevention and resolution efforts.

Of course, using flexible coalitions of interested parties will not eliminate all competition; like every strategy, it has its drawbacks. First, even informal conflict resolution networks need leaders. Who within this network will have the ability to make decisions, coordinate efforts, or even provide essential secretariat and repository services? Second, political will remains a problem. One practitioner with extensive experience in conflict management asked, “How do you motivate these positive peace networks into action?” Another participant wondered if conflict parties would take these networks seriously without US or EU involvement.

**Comprehensive Strategies.** In both the Nairobi and Istanbul meetings, participants discussed comprehensive approaches to regional conflict formations, while also recognizing they were the least likely to succeed in achieving peace in the immediate future. A comprehensive approach to RCFs would entail recognizing the economic, political, security and social elements contributing to conflict and attempting to either transform or replace them within one organizational framework. Experts from West and Central Africa both suggested that a comprehensive approach should also recognize the impact of “artificial” borders in the region. For example, the UN Security Council has proposed a regional conference on development and governance in Central Africa in order to address both the structural and escalatory elements of the conflict.

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<sup>6</sup> Necla Tschirgi, “Making the Case for a Regional Approach to Peacebuilding,” *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* 1, no.1 (2002).

The Stability Pact in Southeast Europe is another example of a comprehensive approach. It is focused on improving economic cooperation in the region, and according to several participants, provides an important continuing forum for regional conflict management. It recognizes that some of the structural causes of conflict require more time to produce positive results. As one expert stressed, changing a person's sense of identity and alleviating rising poverty take time. The Stability Pact also illustrates the difficulties of a comprehensive regional approach. Donors and inter-governmental organizations insist on regional cooperation programs but continue to fund states in the region bilaterally. One expert explained how regional cooperation has become a condition for eventual European Union (EU) accession, yet EU states continue to interact with the states in the region bilaterally. Instead of providing incentives for regional cooperation, the EU policy, according to one participant, is perceived as a strategy to postpone their membership in the Union.

As participants at this meeting discussed, a comprehensive strategy means negotiating consensus on a host of controversial issues. Even defining which states should participate becomes a political issue. Rwanda continues to resist UN efforts to jumpstart a regional conference on Central Africa, one expert explained, because it would prefer membership in East African organizations. Both the Central African conference and the Stability Pact highlight another problem facing comprehensive approaches. They may focus too much on the region, neglecting important contributions from extra-regional actors. A World Bank report, cited by a meeting participant, found that the only way to foster economic growth in Southeast Europe would be to embed it within the Western Europe economy. With the status of Southeast European borders still uncertain, foreign investment still hesitates. Hence, US and EU political will to settle the status of Kosovo, Serbia, and Montenegro becomes crucially important for the economic development of the region. In Central Africa, the proposed regional conference on development and governance may exclude issues that are not regional in origin, such as strategies to curb the supply of arms from extra-regional arms manufacturers.

A comprehensive approach may be an important end goal in managing regional conflict formations, but reaching that goal, some participants concluded, may mean beginning with bilateral agreements and piecemeal or strategic approaches.

**Piecemeal Strategies.** A piecemeal approach entails taking regional dimensions into account while pursuing strategies focused on individual states. This could include coordination efforts between teams negotiating peace in neighboring countries or parallel processes and procedures for managing individual conflicts within a larger RCF.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), a governmental agency, is attempting a piecemeal approach in South Central Asia. In addition to its development efforts in Afghanistan, it has substantially increased its assistance to Central Asia. USAID has awarded \$22.2 million dollars in new development grants primarily to provinces bordering Afghanistan in Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, with some funds supporting development in the Ferghana Valley area.<sup>7</sup> These provinces have been a key route for narcotics and arms trafficking, and, in targeting these areas, USAID is attempting to alter the balance of incentives for individuals living in these provinces.

Unless special care is taken, the piecemeal approach may result in excluding positive contributions from non-state actors. States remain the primary drivers of peace negotiations, and processes and coordination efforts between two state-dominated processes could miss opportunities to engage positive networks throughout the region. Traders in South Central Asia have an interest in stable transport routes and the ability to contribute to the economic development of remote areas. Coordination of state-led efforts to prevent and manage conflict may not successfully engage these important resources.

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<sup>7</sup> United States Agency for International Development, "USAID Awards \$22.2 Million for New Community Action Investment Program in Central Asia," Press Release July 11 (2002).

**Strategic Approaches.** A strategic approach to regional conflict formations involves targeting particular geographic areas or networks that are key to the linkages among conflicts. One meeting participant pointed to the SADC Platform on Small Arms, which recognizes that arms are a threat to all member states, but in different ways. Hence, participants stressed that flexibility in addressing a strategic issue can be key in a sustainable approach.

In Nairobi, some participants supported programs targeting the Kivu provinces of eastern DRC because of the concentration of networks and activities there. Others proposed focusing efforts on Burundi because the social and ethnic ties in the region would amplify failure in the Burundi peace process, disproportionately and negatively impacting the entire region. In Istanbul, experts argued for focusing on trading networks throughout South Central Asia. They urged donors and states in the region to focus on rebuilding transportation infrastructure, improving road security and border coordination in order to spur grassroots economic development and support incentives for peace.

Participants at this meeting proposed several areas of focus for strategic approaches to regional conflict formations, more generally:

- **Focus on civil society.** Civil society needs to be defined broadly, argued one participant, to include indigenous groups, informal and formal organizations, and official NGOs. Often, she found, indigenous groups are much more flexible in adapting to a regional focus than grant- and donor-dependent NGOs. Civil society has played a strong role in Latin American peace processes and, if empowered and informed, could perhaps exert a regional influence. Another participant warned that often the gravity of internal problems deflects action at the regional level. Hence, policies to encourage a regional dialogue need to begin slowly, perhaps through regional meetings of similar groups of people.
- **Development of regional media.** According to several participants, people often lack information about events in their region. This increases the influence of rumors, especially in

unstable countries, and allows national strategies based on scapegoating or ethnic mobilization to succeed. Hence, independent media that focus on distributing regional events and information could prevent the emergence or linking of conflicts in the region. Another participant suggested that regional media could be an important resource for involving civil society groups, by providing them with the background and information to act effectively.

- **Focus on trade.** Encouraging licit regional trade carries automatic financial incentives for states, which do not receive customs duties from illicit trade. In South Central Asia, traders in the region are a strong lobby for normalizing relations and easing tensions, especially the Pashtuns in Pakistan and Afghanistan. This approach entails a delicate balance, since as one participant explained, opening the borders for trade, without the appropriate mechanisms, may result in an in-flow of illicit trade as well. And although threatening to authoritarian states, open borders allows for the free flow of ideas and people and perhaps, greater regional awareness.
- **Focus on state capacity.** RCFs, because they include a network of actors other than states, require a strong state to maintain peace once the conflict has subsided. By increasing the capacity of existing states to govern their territory, conflict mediators can also prevent the emergence of new conflict. Another participant suggested increased attention to rebuilding failing states to prevent their territory from becoming a staging ground for regional or even global attacks.

## VI. Conclusion

Participants agreed that the regional conflict formations framework provides a firm basis for strategically analyzing conflicts around the globe. To deepen our understanding of regional conflict formations, participants recommended examining “regional peace formations in bad neighborhoods,” examining the relationship between criminality and the emergence of regional conflicts; and in the regions already studied by the project, mapping existing networks of actors for use by policy officials.

## ANNEX I: Agenda

**Policy Approaches to Regional Conflict Formations**  
**UN Millennium Plaza Hotel**  
**New York, NY**  
**November 20, 2002**

### AGENDA

12:00 – 12:30	Lunch
12:30 – 2:30	Welcome <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Shepard Forman Director, Center on International Cooperation</li></ul> Conceptual Framework <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Barnett R. Rubin Director of Studies, CIC, and RCF Project Director</li></ul> Perspectives from Great Lakes region of Africa and Southern Central Asia <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Peter Kagwanja Rapporteur, RCF Nairobi Meeting</li><li>◆ Samina Ahmed Participant, RCF Istanbul Meeting</li></ul> Roundtable Discussion
2:30 – 2:45	Coffee and Tea Break
2:45 – 4:15	Perspectives and discussions from other regions, including West Africa, the Balkans, and the Andean region of South America
4:15 – 5:00	Coping with RCFs: Toward a Strategy

## ANNEX II: List of Participants

### Policy Approaches to Regional Conflict Formations New York, NY November 20, 2002

#### PARTICIPANT LIST

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**Samina Ahmed**

International Crisis Group (ICG)  
Pakistan-Afghanistan Office  
19-A, Street 22, F-8/2  
Islamabad, Pakistan  
Tel: 92-300-855-8628  
sahmed@crisisweb.org

**Andrea Armstrong**

Center on International Cooperation (CIC)  
418 Lafayette St., Suite 543  
NY, NY 10003  
Tel: 212-998-3680  
andrea.armstrong@nyu.edu

**Elizabeth Cousens**

Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum  
Social Science Research Council  
810 Seventh Avenue, 31st floor  
NY, NY 10019  
Tel: 212-377-2700 ext. 614  
cousens@ssrc.org

**Stewart Eldon**

Academic Council on the UN System  
Yale University  
Betts House, 393 Prospect Street  
New Haven, CT 06511  
Tel: 203-432 0896  
stewart.eldon@yale.edu

**Essoh Jean-Matthieu Essis**

Center on International Cooperation (CIC)  
418 Lafayette St., Suite 543  
NY, NY 10003  
Tel: 212-998-3680  
jeanessis@yahoo.com

**Shepard Forman**

Center on International Cooperation (CIC)  
418 Lafayette St., Suite 543  
NY, NY 10003  
Tel: 212-998-3680  
shepard.forman@nyu.edu

**Zuhra Halimova**

Director  
Open Society Institute, Tajikistan  
59 Tolstoy Street  
734003 Dushanbe Tajikistan  
Tel: w: (992-372) 21 19 58  
zuhra.halimova@osi.tajik.net

**Bruce Jones**

Center on International Cooperation (CIC)  
418 Lafayette St., Suite 543  
NY, NY 10003  
Tel: 212-998-3680  
bruce.jones@nyu.edu

**Peter Kagwanja**

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
309 Gregory Hall, 810 South Wright St.  
Urbana, Illinois 61801 USA,  
Tel: 217-367-6423  
kagwanja@students.uiuc.edu

**Chetan Kumar**

Interagency Liaison Specialist  
United Nations Development Program  
Bureau of Crisis Prevention & Recovery  
304 East 45th Street, FF-634  
NY, NY 10017  
Tel: 212-906-6462  
chetan.kumar@undp.org

**Ram Manikkalingam**  
Rockefeller Foundation  
420 Fifth Avenue  
NY, NY 10018  
Tel: 212-852-8214  
RManikkalingam@rockfound.org

**Thant Myint-U**  
United Nations  
Office for the Coordination of  
Humanitarian Affairs  
NY, NY 10017  
Tel: 212-963-1938  
myint-u@un.org

**Volker Pellet**  
Permanent Mission of Germany to the UN  
871 UN Plaza  
NY, NY 10017  
Tel: 212-940-0421  
volker.pellet@diplo.de

**Gay Rosenblum-Kumar**  
United Nations  
Department of Economic and Social Affairs  
Governance & Public Administration Branch  
1 UN Plaza, Room 936  
NY, NY 10017  
Tel: 212-963-8381  
rosenblum-kumar@un.org

**Barnett Rubin**  
Center on International Cooperation (CIC)  
418 Lafayette St., Suite 543  
NY, NY 10003  
Tel: 212-998-3680  
brr5@nyu.edu

**Jake Sherman**  
International Peace Academy  
777 United Nations Plaza, 4th Floor  
NY, NY 10017-3521  
Tel: 212-687-4300  
sherman@ipacademy.org

**Wegger Strommen**  
Permanent Mission of Norway to the UN  
825 Third Avenue, 39th Floor  
NY, NY 10022  
Tel: 212-421-0280  
wcs@mfa.no

**Razia Sultana**  
Center on International Cooperation (CIC)  
418 Lafayette St., Suite 543  
NY, NY 10003  
Tel: 212-998-3680  
razia.sultana@nyu.edu

**Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh**  
Harriman Institute  
Columbia University  
330 E.38th Street, Apt. 551  
NY, NY 10016  
Tel: 212-883 0449  
st58@columbia.edu

**Teresa Whitfield**  
Center on International Cooperation (CIC)  
418 Lafayette St., Suite 543  
NY, NY 10003  
Tel: 212-998-3680  
teresa.whitfield@nyu.edu

**Susan Woodward**  
The Graduate Center,  
City University of New York  
365 Fifth Avenue  
NY, NY 10016  
Tel: 212-817-8676  
swoodward@gc.cuny.edu