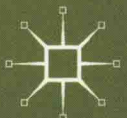


RESPONDING TO CONFLICT IN AFRICA

THE UNITED NATIONS AND
REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

EDITED BY
JANE BOULDEN



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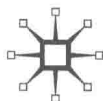
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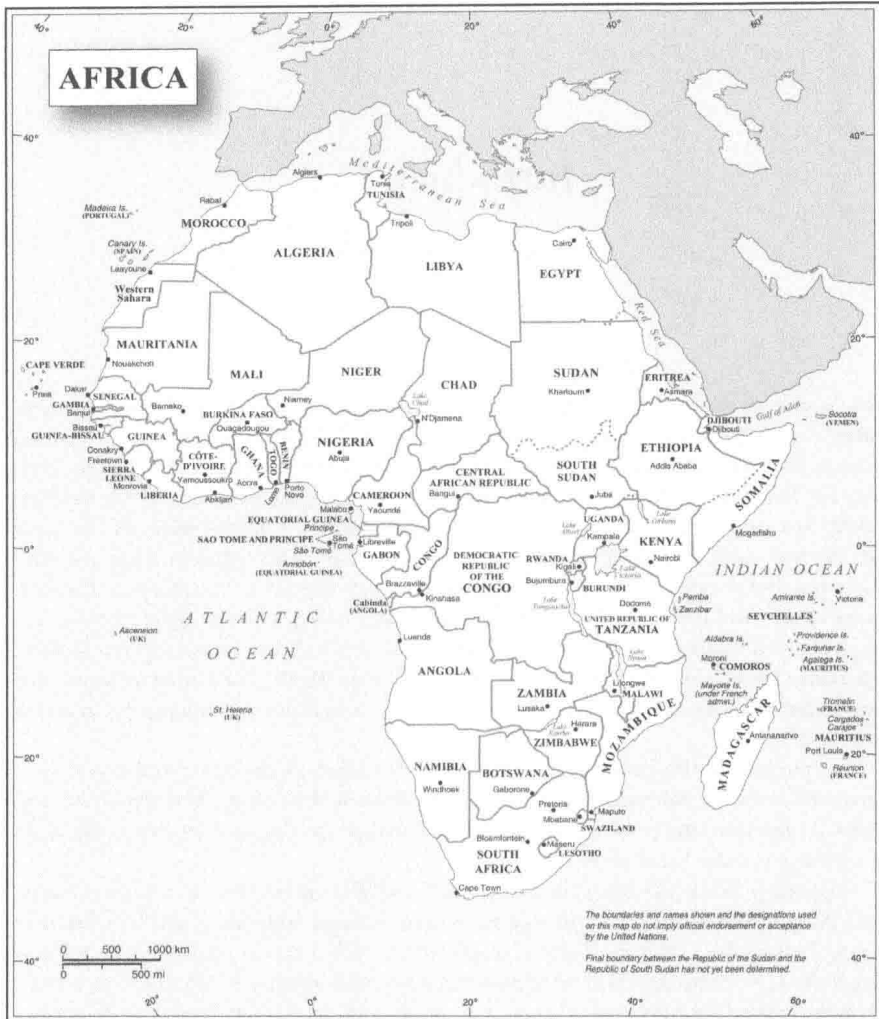
Introduction

Jane Boulden

This is effectively the second edition of *Dealing with Conflict in Africa: The United Nations and Regional Organizations*, published in 2003. The word “effectively” is used because the subject in question has undergone a remarkable change in the ten years since the first publication. What began as a revised and updated version of the original quickly became quite a different book. That said, readers will find some of the same authors and some chapters that carry cases forward the earlier edition. They will also find a number of new case studies, reflecting the wide range of new activity in this area. As an author and editor, this is both good news and bad news. The good news is that the depth and scope of the new activity along with the addition of another ten years of experience provide an opportunity for greater analytical depth. The bad news is that this means that conflict in Africa continues to persist as a significant challenge for actors at every level.

The purpose of this book, as with the first, is to examine the issues and experiences associated with the increased level of activity between the United Nations (UN) and regional organizations in carrying out international peace and security tasks and to do so with a particular focus on Africa.

Why study this issue? After the end of the Cold War and in the wake of the successful UN-sponsored military campaign to liberate Kuwait from Iraq, the UN Security Council asked the Secretary-General to provide it with a report outlining the ways in which the UN might deal with international peace and security issues in the new environment created by those two events. The result, *An Agenda for Peace*, put forward a number of proposals for new and resuscitated mechanisms for dealing with conflict. Among them was a suggestion that UN draw on the support of regional organizations as a way of spreading the burden of UN efforts to deal with conflict. The Secretary-General argued that greater cooperation with regional organizations could help lighten the burden of the Security Council as it sought to deal with the numerous conflicts now on its agenda, while also strengthening and democratizing UN efforts to deal with conflict.¹ Regional organizations were also perceived to offer certain advantages in carrying out regional conflict-management tasks. As they are of the region, regional organizations bring strong background knowledge and existing personal and professional contacts to the process, permitting an ease of access and an ability to exert pressure that may not be available to the UN. For that reason, their involvement may seem less intrusive and be more welcome than that of the UN. And, because they are the first to be affected by



Source: Map No 4045 Rev 7, United Nations, Department of Field Support, Cartographic Section, November 2011

the conflict in question, they are more likely to generate the political will necessary to take immediate measures to deal with the conflict.

The Secretary-General's proposal received general support but little in the way of thorough analysis before it was put into practice in various ways in both Europe and Africa, drawing regional organizations into largely undefined relationships with the UN in the midst of difficult and contentious efforts to deal with serious conflicts within their regions. Since then, the international community has acquired considerable and varied experience in regional-global cooperation in conflict-response environments. The wealth of activity in this area, in turn, has generated a wide range of research on

these issues. The resulting literature falls into various categories. Case study-centered work tends to be focused on the experiences of regional organizations, or the UN, or on conflict in Africa. This is a rich set of sources, many of which are referenced in the case study chapters. Another group examines the question of UN-regional cooperation in peacekeeping² but it is rare that it is based on a wide range of in-depth case studies.³ Similarly, there is an increasing body of work focused on regional organizations in Africa but as with the literature on UN-regional cooperation, this area of work tends to focus on specific issues or cases.⁴ This book is offered in an effort to fill that gap and to record and analyze the developments of the ten years since the earlier edition.

Why focus on Africa? First, because Africa is the region in which the assumptions and ideas associated with cooperative efforts between regional organizations and the UN have been most tested. Even while *An Agenda for Peace* was being written, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was engaging in its first intervention in Liberia. ECOWAS went on to be significantly involved in a number of regional conflicts and has become the most experienced regional conflict-response actor on the continent and arguably beyond. Other regional organizations in Africa have followed their lead and become involved in conflicts on a number of occasions and in a number of different ways. These developments have been joined by the arrival of the African Union (AU) with a new and expansive mandate for international peace and security activity. There is, therefore, some significant experience to draw on here. Since that experience involves more than one regional organization, differing relationships with the UN, and different types of conflicts, the African case studies have the potential to generate conclusions based on a comparative assessment. In addition, for those advocating a greater role for regional organizations in international peace and security, Africa is the region that has been held out as the one with the most to gain from such a development. The argument is that involving regional organizations in conflict management provides an opportunity for local actors to have greater input into the conflict-management process—an “African solutions for African problems” approach—and to strengthen themselves in the process. An examination of the actual experience of these joint endeavors, therefore, will provide an opportunity to test these assumptions.

Second, the nature of the UN's experience in Africa has had an enduring and significant impact on the way in which the UN has dealt with conflict generally in the post-Cold War period. The impact of the UN's withdrawal from Somalia, followed by its failure in Rwanda has been considerable. An awareness of the high price of failure has affected many aspects of UN operations since and has been one of the main reasons behind various efforts to rethink the way in which the UN deals with international peace and security. The impact of Somalia and Rwanda was also evident in the ways in which Western states have responded to conflict generally. Here, in contrast to the UN, we can trace a pattern of general retrenchment on the part of Western states.

The third reason for the focus on Africa is that the UN's efforts to deal with conflict in Africa continue to generate mixed results at best. Failures and as yet unfinished efforts far outweigh success stories. Africa continues to struggle with long-standing, intractable conflicts whose continuation is a testament to the international community's inability to deal adequately with these situations. By anybody's count, the African continent is the source of the majority of the world's ongoing conflict. The imperative to develop and strengthen the international community's ability to deal with conflict more appropriately and efficiently is justified on this basis alone.

As with the first edition, the book's focus is on the context and nature of UN-regional organization interaction in Africa. To that end, the book examines three interrelated aspects of the issue: what has been said and done at the institutional level on these issues at the UN, what has been said and done by African regional organizations, and what has happened in practice in African conflict situations that have involved both regional organizations and the UN. While the case study authors were directed to ensure that they covered these three elements, they were not bound to a specific format. There are four case studies that are covered in both editions. The chapters in this edition of the book tell the whole story of the case but provide more detail and analysis on what has occurred since the last book was published. Readers interested in those cases are encouraged to read the chapters from both editions together. Whether revised and updated from the earlier edition or new in this volume, in order to trace the three themes of analysis the case studies provide a rich and deep accounting of the conflicts themselves. In addition to the UN-regional story, therefore, the case studies represent a stand-alone contribution to the case study literature associated with conflict in Africa.

The idea of the book is to engage in a comparison of the theory and the rhetoric with the practice, the actual experience on the ground. Such an assessment will help address a number of related questions that fall roughly into three categories. What can we learn, first about the role of regional organizations in conflict situations, second about the role of the UN, and third, on the basis of the first two, what do we learn about the nature of the relationship between regional organizations and the UN based on the African experience?

By way of establishing the broader theoretical and practical context in which the case studies are situated, the first section of the book deals with overall themes and institutions. My own chapter lays out what has been occurring at the institutional level at the UN by providing an overview of the Security Council debate on Africa and on the idea of greater cooperation with regional organizations. The purpose here is to document as well as analyze the UN approach, with a view to establishing the rhetorical markers against which actions taken can be measured. Chapters 2 and 3 examine the institutional developments and experiences of African regional organizations. The AU was newly created when the first edition went to press. Chapter 2's exclusive focus on its role is an indication of the extent to which the changed organization and mandate has made the AU a critical player in a very short period of time. In chapter 4, Andrea Charron examines the ways in which institutions, both UN and regional, have made new use of sanctions as a tool in their response to conflict, giving new insights into the ways in which regional organizations are taking the lead on some normative issues.

The second section of the book contains nine case studies. The case study choice was derived from a list of all African conflict situations from which those with both UN and regional organization involvement were chosen. The basic requirement for inclusion in the book was that both the UN and regional organizations were involved in the response to the conflict in a reasonably significant way. This generated a spectrum of cases ranging from the obvious choices (Darfur and Côte d'Ivoire, for example) to the less obvious choices, such as Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR). Within that group, the extent of regional and UN involvement varies across cases ranging from major operations over lengthy periods of time to more distant and sporadic involvement.

Similarly, regional actions vary from ad hoc regional efforts, as in Burundi, to sustained intensive institutional involvement as in the West African cases. The arrival of the AU on the scene means that in a number of cases, there are at least two regional actors on the scene, adding a new level of complexity, and sometimes complication, to the regional–global equation.

A valid concern is the extent to which these case studies will provide a solid enough foundation for useful comparison. Though often treated otherwise, African conflicts are widely varied, the international community's response to them also varies, and regional organizations within Africa differ considerably in their *raison d'être* and their capabilities. As with any investigative enterprise, there are inherent difficulties here. The case studies do not fit into tidy packages that present themselves for direct comparison. Regions and conflicts do not exist in isolation; they overlap and interconnect. Regional organizations differ considerably in their mandates, capabilities, and area of application. Indeed, an agreed definition of what constitutes a regional organization remains elusive.⁵ In part, this is a function of the difficulties inherent in defining what constitutes a region, a problem amply demonstrated by the African situation. The AU involves all African states except Morocco and for all intents and purposes it is a "regional" organization. The literature in this field often refers to other regional institutional entities in Africa as subregional organizations, although this term is primarily a geographical distinction based on the existence of a continental organization in the form of the AU rather than a term that indicates any major functional distinction between regional and subregional organizations.

The framers of the UN Charter quite deliberately chose to avoid defining regional organizations in the Charter because of fears that such a definition would restrict inclusion and would lend itself to politically motivated interpretations as to what organizations qualified as such for the purposes of the Charter.⁶ Instead, the Charter refers simply to regional agencies or arrangements without defining the terms any further. Such terminology seems much better suited to the African experience than the term regional organization, as its comprehensiveness leaves open the possibility of ad hoc regional arrangements while still including more established institutional arrangements such as ECOWAS and the AU. Nonetheless, the Security Council and the Secretariat have moved to the use of "regional organization" as a blanket term for the wide range of regional actors now working on issues of international peace and security. This book follows that format. Any effort to define regional organization runs up against issues relating to the purpose, the degree of institutionalization, and the nature of decision making in these organizations. While such factors are important determinants in analyzing the role of regional organizations, they are not critical in determining whether or not a given organization warrants examination for the purposes of this study. As the focus in this book is on the roles and relationships of regional entities, a functionally oriented approach is taken. Regional organizations are considered to be multistate geographically synchronous institutional entities that have played or are playing a role in conflict situations in Africa.

In order to fully understand the nature and implications of regional organization and UN involvement, the case studies provide considerable background and discussion of the events and decisions made in the conflicts in question. The case studies reflect the nature of the conflicts they address in that they should not be read in isolation. The

chapters on Darfur and South Sudan should be read together and are fundamentally connected to the chapter on CAR and Chad. The Burundi and Democratic Republic of Congo chapters link to one another as do all of the West African cases. In dealing with conflict-related analyses, there are inevitably a number of major themes that play a role and there is no shortage of them here. The impact of colonialism and decolonization, attitudes about sovereignty and statehood, attitudes of Western states toward Africa, the role of ethnicity, and the internal political dynamics of the conflicts are all touched on in the case studies in various ways. This is not, however, a book about the sources of conflict in Africa or the desirability (or undesirability) of international intervention in those conflicts. The focus remains fixed on the involvement of the UN and regional organizations, their interaction (or lack thereof), their individual and joint impact on the conflict, and what this tells us about their relationship and the practice of regional and international conflict management in Africa. In combination, the chapters paint a picture of intensive and sustained activity at the institutional and regional levels. This is itself remarkable. It was only twenty years ago that *An Agenda for Peace* raised the idea as one of a list of possibilities for new ways in which the UN might operate as it moved into the post-Cold War period.

What Does UN-Regional Cooperation Look Like?

In 1997, the UN Secretary-General spoke of a “new consensus that the primary responsibility for the solution of Africa’s problems rests with Africans themselves.” He suggested that “in place of interventionism” that consensus “promises a mature relationship based on mutual support and trust.”⁷ We are not there yet.

The practice of regional and UN actors in dealing with conflict (not just in Africa) remains ad hoc and reactive. Although it has been discussed as an objective, there is no formal structuring of the relationship and no allocation of roles, beyond the basic framework outlined in Chapter VIII of the UN Charter. Some general patterns, however, are discernible in the chapters that follow.

One of the assumed advantages of regional actors is that they are of the region and thus bring particular knowledge and connections to the table that may facilitate the conflict-resolution process. On the other hand, since they are of the region, the idea that they are devoid of political agendas relating to the outcome of the conflict is questionable. Yet, one of the unaddressed and unanswered questions implicit in the idea of UN-regional cooperation is the extent to which a certain level of impartiality or at least political distance is assumed or hoped for on the part of regional actors responding to conflict in their region. An assumption of no political distance has a number of implications for the politics of the process especially given the wide latitude of action available to regional organizations in the early stages of the conflict. Alternatively, an assumption that regional organizations will act with at least some political distance raises the question as to whether and how those on the receiving end perceive the position of the regional organization. This relates, in particular, to the practice of re-hatting troops on the ground from regional to UN missions. To what extent does this nuance factor into the thinking of parties to the conflict?

Regional actors have become regular first responders when it comes to conflict in Africa. As established in the first edition of this book, regional actors will move to fill the vacuum when other international actors do not respond to conflict. They do this regardless of whether they have an institutional mandate to do so and regardless of whether they have UN Security Council approval for operations that involve the use of force. When no one else is willing to step forward, regional actors advocate for help, provide mediation, put troops on the ground, and generally keep the process moving. They can be, as Gilbert Khadiagala tells us, “organized, persistent and patient.” This means that regional organizations bear the brunt of the response burden militarily and politically.

As chapter 1 indicates, the idea of burden sharing was present in the early post–Cold War period when the idea of greater cooperation with regional organizations first gained traction. It continues to permeate the UN–regional relationship, as does the perception that burden sharing is really about burden shifting. This perception is compounded by the image of Western states prioritizing their commitments elsewhere and maintaining a risk adverse approach to conflict in Africa that took hold in the aftermath of the failed responses to Somalia and Rwanda in the early 1990s.

There are two compelling reasons why this matters. First, in relying on regional organizations to act as first responders, the UN may be contributing to prolonging the conflict. Given the lower levels of capacity available to African regional actors, they may be unable to impact the conflict in a decisive way, thus lengthening the time before some kind of agreement can be achieved and a UN response can be generated. This is not to imply that all conflicts should or could be resolved in the first instance by a military solution. However, it is possible that in some cases a stronger demonstration of or use of military capability might bring parties to the negotiating table sooner rather than later. If the Security Council’s pattern of waiting for some form of peace or ceasefire agreement before authorizing a response is an effort to avoid involvement in a militarily imposed end to the violence, it begs the question as to why regional actors are better placed, politically or militarily, to do so.

Second, if the question of burden sharing is, at its base, about allocating a finite pool of conflict response resources, the idea that regions should take on a heavier load in their own region could eventually lead to regional disengagement from the relationship. If a region is carrying the bulk of the conflict-response burden on its own, why bother with the global level? Why engage in a partnership activity when it only applies to the burden of implementation and does not translate into any degree of ownership of the political process? In combination with the willingness of the Council to accept a wide latitude of regional military action without a Security Council mandate, especially when the region is in the first-responder mode, this could create a push toward greater disengagement in the partnership arrangement.

Does It Work?

When it works, regional–UN cooperation works well and in a variety of ways. For example, one actor can hand tasks off to the other when more or different pressure is

needed on the parties to the conflict, when a task better suited to the other is required, or when one of the actors compromises its legitimacy in the process. However, the presence of multiple actors with multiple agendas sometimes undermines the prospects for progress and it certainly provides actors seeking to obstruct the process with multiple entry points to that objective. The existence of multiple actors also creates opportunities for forum shopping as a way to buy time or a better situation.

Whether at the regional or the UN level, it is the case that key actors in key positions can act as critical catalysts for both action and nonaction. These key actors fall into two categories: former colonial powers and hegemons, and Security Council members. The latter category includes the permanent members and also African nonpermanent members on the Council. There are a number of examples where African states on the Council had an impact on whether and how action was authorized. In 1990, a proposal to establish a peacekeeping force in response to the conflict in Liberia was rejected by the three sitting African states on the Council at the time. More recently, the tension between Nigeria and South Africa on the response to Cote d'Ivoire crisis contributed to a delay in Council decision making on a response to the crisis. Former colonial powers continue to play a role in a variety of ways in these situations such as the United Kingdom's rescue of the UN mission in Sierra Leone, and France's role in convincing Chad to accept UN forces and in the various stages of the Côte d'Ivoire crisis. Hegemonic powers from inside and outside the region can also have an impact on the course of events. The United States played an advocacy role in Darfur but was more hesitant in the early stages of the Liberian conflict. South Africa played an extremely positive role in Burundi, and Nigeria's role in the various West African crises is mixed. While the focus of this book is on regional–UN interaction, the impact of actors playing a role outside of those groupings, even while they play a role inside them means that not only are there multiple actors in this picture, but many of those actors are playing multiple roles.

Notes

1. The Secretary-General argued: "Regional organizations participating in complementary efforts with the United Nations in joint undertakings would encourage States outside the region to act supportively. And should the Security Council choose specifically to authorize a regional arrangement or organization to take the lead in addressing a crisis within its region, it could serve to lend the weight of the United Nations to the validity of the regional effort. Carried forward in the spirit of the Charter, and as envisioned in Chapter VIII, the approach outlined here could strengthen a general sense that democratization is being encouraged at all levels in the task of maintaining international peace and security, it being essential to continue to recognize that the primary responsibility will continue to reside in the Security Council." *An Agenda for Peace*, United Nations, June 1992, par. 65.
2. For a recent example, see Hikaru Yamashita, "Peacekeeping cooperation between the United Nations and regional organisations," *Review of International Studies* 38 (2012).
3. For an excellent study of UN peacekeeping operations in Africa, see Adekeye Adebajo, *UN Peacekeeping in Africa from the Suez Crisis to the Sudan Conflicts* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2011).

4. As examples, see Emmanuel Fanta, "The Capacity of African Regional Organisations in Peace and Security," ERD Workshop: Transforming Political Structures: Security Institutions and Regional Integration Mechanisms, Florence 16–17 April 2009; Suyash Paliwal, "The Primacy of Regional Organizations in International Peacekeeping: The African Example," *Virginia Journal of International Law* 51 (2010); Marten Zwanenburg, "Regional Organisations and the Maintenance of International Peace and Security: Three Recent Regional African Peace Operations," *Journal of Conflict & Security Law* 11 (2006); Rosemary Durward, "Security Council Authorization for Regional Peace Operations: A Critical Analysis," *International Peacekeeping* 13 (2006).
5. For background on this debate, as well as on the debate about regionalism generally, see Louise Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell, eds., *Regionalism in World Politics, Regional Organization and International Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) and David A. Lake and Patrick M. Morgan, eds., *Regional Orders, Building Security in a New World* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).
6. For more on the background to Chapter VIII in the United Nations Charter, see Ruth B. Russell, *A History of the United Nations Charter* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1958).
7. S/PV.3819, 26 September 1997, 5.

