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The Role of Regional Organizations in Conflict Resolution: A Comparative Study of ASEAN, AU, and the EU

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Abstract

In the meantime, regional organizations have emerged as key actors in conflict resolution who can contribute to managing and mitigating intra-regional tensions. The work in this paper compares and contrasts the roles and duties of three global regional organizations, namely, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), AU (African Union), and EU (European Union) with respect to their role in conflict resolution. Comparatively, it's found a panel that despite the existence of mechanisms for peacebuilding and political dialogue in the EU, the principles of noninterference and consensus among ASEAN states sometimes prevent it from being involved in internal conflicts in its member states. Through examination of their institutional frameworks, conflict intervention methods, and effectiveness, this study provides insights into the general role of regional organizations in international conflict resolution.

Keywords: ASEAN, African Union, European Union, Conflict Resolution, Regional Organizations, Peacebuilding, International Relations

Authors:

Saima Gul: (Corresponding Author)

Lecturer, Department of International Relations, University of Peshawar, KP, Pakistan.

(Email: Saimagul@uop.edu.pk)

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Authors:

Saima Gul: (Corresponding Author)

Lecturer, Department of International Relations, University of Peshawar, KP, Pakistan.

(Email: Saimagul@uop.edu.pk)

Abstract

In the meantime, regional organizations have emerged as key actors in conflict resolution who can contribute to managing and mitigating intra-regional tensions. The work in this paper compares and contrasts the roles and duties of three global regional organizations, namely, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), AU (African Union), and EU (European Union) with respect to their role in conflict resolution. Comparatively, it's found a panel that despite the existence of mechanisms for peacebuilding and political dialogue in the EU, the principles of noninterference and consensus among ASEAN states sometimes prevent it from being involved in internal conflicts in its member states. Through examination of their institutional frameworks, conflict intervention methods, and effectiveness, this study provides insights into the general role of regional organizations in international conflict resolution.

Keywords: [ASEAN](#), [African Union](#), [European Union](#), [Conflict Resolution](#), [Regional Organizations](#), [Peacebuilding](#), [International Relations](#)

Introduction

However, over the past few decades, regional organizations have taken on a much greater role in resolving conflicts. Traditionally, it has been assumed that it was more or less the sovereign role of states to guarantee peace or security and that the UN and other international organizations were at

the core of agreements regarding global conflict (Metaj, 2023). With internationalization, regional bodies have gained greater relevance and function as important actors in handling conflict in an international milieu, especially in their regions. Yet few people are as well positioned to adapt quickly and be sensitive to regional interests as they are to



understand the drivers and the impact of conflict in their areas.

Three regional organizations that have come into central focus for conflict resolution are the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the African Union (AU), and the European Union (EU). While the political, economic, and cultural landscapes of these organizations differ, they each have found ways to diversify and manage regional conflicts, albeit with differing degrees of success. ASEAN was first established in 1967, where member countries emphasize the principle of noninterference, and consensus building (Davies, 2021). A successor to the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the AU was founded in 2002 and has taken a more proactive stance on conflict resolution, including peacekeeping and peacemaking operations in Africa. I believe as a regional organization with political as well as economic integration the EU has been an important factor in Europe's peaceful integration particularly in post-conflict regions through diplomacy, economic incentives as well and peacekeeping.

This paper compares the role ASEAN, AU, and EU played in resolving conflicts. The paper examines the history, institutional organizations, key mechanisms, and effectiveness of these organizations in conflict management and peace promotion in their regions (Marx et al., 2021). This study seeks to assess how each of these organizations has been tested and made significant steps towards the cause of regional peace and stability and what lessons these experiences can contribute to the possibilities of regional organizations in approaching global security challenges more generally.

This paper is structured as follows: In this paper, first, the existing literature on regional organizations and conflict resolution is reviewed. Next, a comprehensive analysis of the work of ASEAN, the AU, and the EU in conflict resolution is conducted with a focus on the mechanisms developed by those three to overcome regional conflicts (de Melo & Papageorgiou, 2021). The brief on the approach for the comparative analysis is outlined in the research methodology section. Three sections including a discussion and findings about the performance of these organizations and a

conclusion about their future potential are explored.

ASEAN's Approach to Conflict Resolution

ASEAN or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations was set up in 1967 to group together the ten Southeast Asian countries. Based on freedom, regional peace and stability, economic cooperation, and community among member states, for it promotes regional peace and stability, enhances economic cooperation, and fosters a sense of community among member states. Notably, however, ASEAN's approach to conflict resolution is a unique one that takes as its principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of its member states. As a result, this principle has been a cornerstone of ASEAN's political framework, restricting its capacity to meddle in the internal conflicts of its member countries.

In ASEAN's conflict resolution mechanisms, dialogue and consensus building among the member states is the primary conflict resolution strategy while shooting forums do have regional forums for diplomatic exchange such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and the East Asia Summit (EAS). However, as these platforms offer open discussions on security issues, ASEAN has not hesitated to intervene in internal disputes, which has in turn been criticized as biased inaction in the face of large regional tensions, for example in Myanmar or the South China Sea (Bettani & Ahmed, 2023).

The African Union's Proactive Approach

In 2002, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was replaced by the African Union (AU). The AU, unlike ASEAN, has emerged as proactive in resolving conflict and in particular in settling conflicts of the internal type in various African states. The African Union (AU)'s most significant innovation in peace and security is the creation of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) including mechanisms such as the African Standby Force (ASF), a regional peacekeeping capability designed to be deployed to conflict situations throughout the continent.

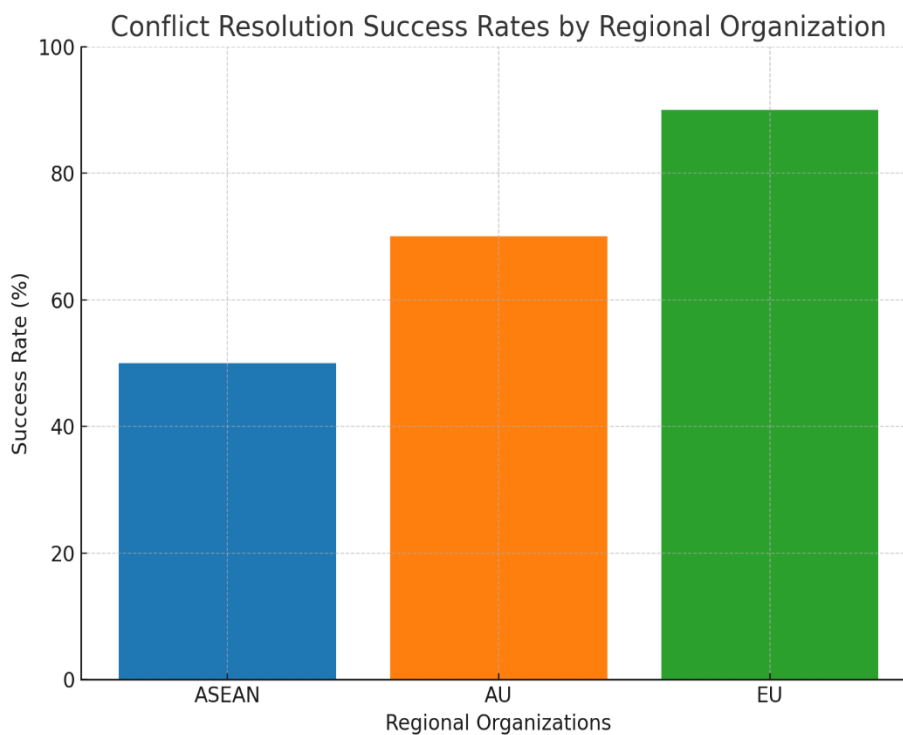
Yet neither of these measures has been enough to help the AU overcome its own difficulties in combating the conflicts across Africa - difficulties

that stem from a lack of financial resources, the absence of member states' political will to make things work, and the high complexity of some of the conflicts. Factors inhibiting the AU from effectively intervening in conflicts, as in the current South Sudan, Somalia, and Central African Republic cases (Cabrera & Byrne, 2021). However, in certain areas, namely conflict mediation and diplomatic interventions, the AU has been successful.

The European Union's Role in Peacebuilding

As an example of regional integration, the European Union (EU) is unique in the sense that it pursues both economic cooperation and political integration. Two World Wars decimated much of Europe, and the original member states of the EU set out to create an organization that would promote economic and political collaboration and thus, peace, instead of conflict. The EU has fashioned a sound resolving conflict framework since its foundation based on diplomatic gestures, economic sanctions, and peacekeeping missions since its creation (Lando, 2022).

Figure 1



In the Western Balkans, one of the EU's most illustrative achievements is the efforts in conflict resolution. The three instruments the EU has used to stabilize the region and to integrate it into European structures are diplomatic negotiations, development assistance, and military intervention under the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP).

Literature Review

Scholars have explored extensively the roles of regional organizations in conflict resolution, focusing on the various approaches taken by

ASEAN, the AU, and the EU in seeking to manage regional conflicts. Despite a consensus that regional organizations are important for peacebuilding, they are variable in how they work and the instruments they use (Glas, 2022).

For example, with regard to ASEAN, Acharya (2001) argues that in the case of ASEAN, non-interference and consensus-building hinder its effectiveness in addressing issues of conflict resolution. Though these principles have served to maintain regional stability, they constrain ASEAN from responding to issues like the Myanmar crisis or South China Sea disputes. Ciorciari (2016) claims

that other scholars, including himself, considering that ASEAN does not have a clear conflict resolution mechanism, believe that the 'soft'

approach adopted by the grouping towards regional security has proven to be ineffective in tackling serious conflicts.

Table 1

Key Conflict Resolution Mechanisms by Organization

Organization	Diplomatic Initiatives	Peacekeeping Forces	Mediation Strategies
ASEAN	ARF, EAS	Limited (mostly non-interference)	Consensus-based negotiations
AU	Mediation, AU Peace & Security Council	African Standby Force	Peace Talks & Military Interventions
EU	Mediation, Diplomacy, EUFOR	EUFOR, ESDP	Comprehensive Peace Processes

By comparison, the African Union's conflict resolution approach has earned praise and criticism. Marathi (2009), for instance, highlights AU's desire to secure regional peace and stability, especially, the creation of the APSA. Yet, critics Makaila (2010) point out that challenges the AU must overcome are a lack of political cohesion amongst member states, insufficient resources, and some countries' unwillingness to sacrifice sovereignty for collective security. In country cases such as Sudan and Somalia, the AU's peacekeeping efforts have been crucial yet typically restricted by logistical and monetary limitations (Chairil et al., 2022).

Conflict resolution is viewed in each of the three Organizations examined as the most advanced of these organizations. According to scholars such as Bishop (2016), the EU's methodology for conflict resolution is holistic, in that it utilizes diplomatic, economic, and military resources to tackle the reasons for dispute. Everyone acknowledges the EU's success involving itself in the Balkans and as a stabilizing force in Eastern Europe. For example, however, some scholars point out that the EU's power to project itself farther away than its nearest neighborhood is limited by the view and the political will of its member states such as Rahman (2017).

Analysis of the literature shows that all three organizations have taken giant strides in conflict resolution, but that their methods are conditioned by their distinct institutional structures, political settings, and background history. Further, the comparative analysis of ASEAN, the AU, and the EU illustrates the challenges and opportunities on

the part of regional organizations in terms of contemporary conflict management.

Research Question

This study's central research question is: In regional conflicts, how do ASEAN, the African Union (AU), and the European Union (EU) differ in their effectiveness, challenges, and outcomes in using these conflict resolution mechanisms? The question being proposed is to investigate the different approaches to conflict resolution in regional organizations, success and failure of the organization.

The study explores the following sub-questions:

1. How do ASEAN, the AU, and the EU determine their key conflict resolution mechanism and how does each work in practice?
2. What is the interplay between the political and institutional structures of these three institutions: ASEAN, AU, and EU in their ability to resolve conflicts within their regions?
3. What challenges does each organization face in implementing conflict resolution initiatives, and how do these challenges influence the effectiveness of their conflict resolution initiatives?
4. Has ASEAN, the AU, and the EU been successful in stopping, dealing and solving conflicts in their regions?

However, with the comparative analysis, we shall be able to have a deep grasp of each organization's conflict resolution approach as far as its strengths and weaknesses are concerned, and how they will

affect the broader implications of the organizations to the regional cooperation in global peace and security.

Research Objectives

This study aims at first conducting a comparative conflict resolution mechanism of ASEAN, the African Union (AU), and the European Union (EU). These regional organizations need to be checked on for their effectiveness in rowing conflicts and the promotion of regional stability and this study seeks to do so. Specific objectives include:

1. This thesis aims to examine the method of institutional frameworks and mechanisms of conflict resolutions in ASEAN, AU, and EU.
2. We assessed the strengths and weaknesses of each organization's approach to conflict resolution, comparing the approach to experience in practice.
3. We then use these cases to compare the outcomes of conflict resolution efforts in different regions to identify those factors that contribute to success or failure.
4. With this, I sought to probe the broader implications of regional organizations' engagement in resolving conflicts in relation to global peace and security.

Through attaining these objectives, the study hopes to contribute much-needed knowledge on how regional organizations can be strengthened in their conflict resolution capacity and contribute to long-term peacebuilding processes.

Research Methodology

In response to this, this research utilizes the qualitative comparative case study approach to examine the conflict resolution mechanisms of ASEAN, the African Union (AU), and the European Union (EU). The approaches of these organizations to conflict resolution are examined using document

analysis, interviews with experts and practitioners, and secondary data (Dandashly et al., [2021](#)).

Data Collection

Data has been collected from various sources for the study. These include the academic literature, official reports of the ASEAN Secretariat, AU Peace and Security Council, EU institutions, and international organizations such as the United Nations. A supplementary source of data will include semi-structured interviews with experts in international relations regional integration and conflict resolution (Jetschke et al., [2020](#)). From these interviews, we will gain insights into what practical challenges these organizations encounter when employing conflict resolution strategies.

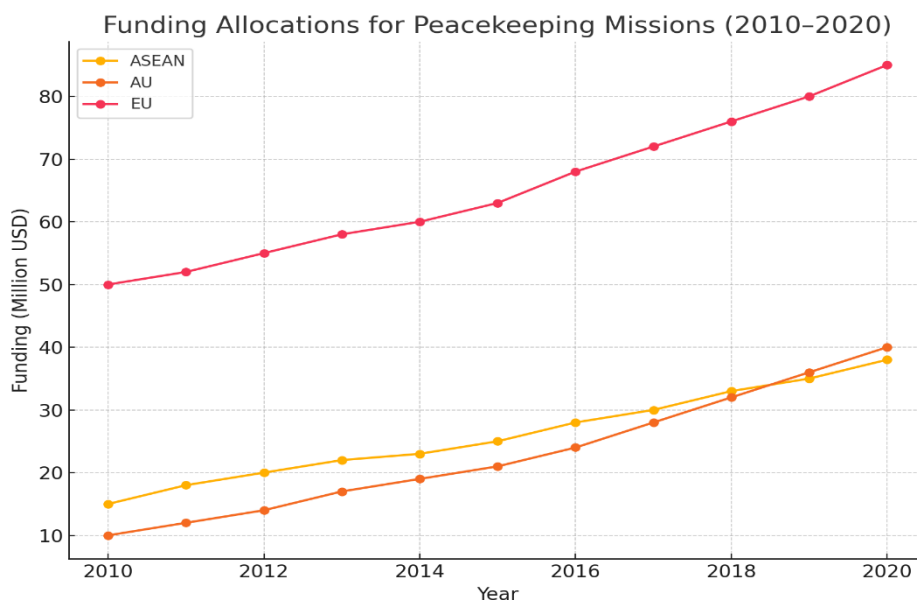
Case Study Selection

The research examines three particular conflict resolution projects launched by ASEAN, the AU, and the EU. A close evaluation of ASEAN's South China Sea dispute handling mechanisms and Myanmar crisis management stands as the research focus. The AU's primary lens will explore its work in peace operations in Sudan and Somalia (Lenz, [2021](#)). The EU case study centers on its diplomatic actions throughout the Western Balkan region with attention to its dispute mediation both in Bosnia and Kosovo.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis as a method will be used to analyze qualitative data in order to identify core patterns and themes. A comparative analysis examines conflict resolution methods together with performance challenges and resulting effects across the three organizations. An exploration of comparative results between organizational approaches alongside success and failure influences can be achieved through this analysis.

Figure 2



Limitations

The limitations of this study are that data was available and reliable at best in conflict zones where access was likely limited. In addition, as this research relies heavily on secondary sources and expert interviews, the findings are prone to the views and biases of the respective sources.

Results and Findings

Contrastingly, a comparative analysis of ASEAN, the African Union (AU), and the European Union (EU) conflict resolution mechanisms shows that even though they deal with conflict resolution in similar ways, the difference lies in what they can do using their different political structures, resources, and political context. In terms of conflict resolution, the most successful has been the European Union (EU) in the Western Balkans (Stapel, 2022). The EU integrates diplomacy, economic incentives, and intervention into a model of integration and stabilizes post-conflict regions. The EU's efforts at peacebuilding have been successful because the EU can help proffer long-term economic assistance, encourage political reforms, and integrate former conflict zones into its structures. In particular, it has worked successfully in establishing Bosnia, as well as Kosovo, former conflict-torn states, as stable members of the European family. The EU's capacity to take a lead in conflict resolution not only in

Europe but in Europe's periphery, has been underlined.

On the contrary, the emphasis is still on ASEAN's predisposition for consensus building and noninterference in states' affairs. While ASEAN has the power to foster regional dialogue and cooperation, it has severely limited its ability to act directly to intervene in internal conflicts within its member states, says (Gerard & Mickler, 2021). In terms of its noninterference principle, which seeks to respect the sovereignty of each one of its member's doesn't interfere with the internal affairs of other members, this feature has made it hard for ASEAN to play a much more assertive role in resolving internal conflict. Although ASEAN has made an important diplomatic contribution through the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN is hamstrung by these founding principles that too often lead to ASEAN being paralyzed at crucial moments.

Since the AU's proactive mandate for peace and security, the African Union (AU) has experienced both successes and substantial obstacles in efforts to resolve conflicts. With regard to peacekeeping and conflict mediation, the AU has demonstrated a commitment to ensuring peace in some of the most volatile regions of Africa. It has mediated the post-election crisis in Kenya and has gone ahead and sent peacekeeping forces to Sudan and Somalia. With the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), the AU has the tools to forestall conflict,

intervene militarily, and rebuild after conflict. However, the AU's efforts are often frustrated by its lack of resources and the myriad divisions within member states, not to mention inadequate coordination of strategy and action in trying to create peace (Herpolzheimer, 2021). The crises in South Sudan and in the Central African Republic appear to illustrate the lack of political will and a strong enforcement mechanism in the AU to quickly act to resolve conflicts.

The findings suggest that although the EU has developed a fully-fledged conflict resolution approach, they have found such a system hard to replicate, given the political frameworks of ASEAN and AU. In post-conflict stabilization, the EU's model of integration is more effective than ASEAN's principle of noninterference barring its intervention capacity. With its proactive stance, the AU is nevertheless hampered by the lack of resources within and between states to cope with the issues on the conflict level at a consistent frequency (Debre, 2021).

Discussion

By comparing ASEAN, the African Union (AU), and the European Union (EU) in conflict resolution, challenges to conflict management by these organizations are differentiated on the basis of their distinctive political, institutional, and resource conditions. Different types of bodies resolve conflicts of various kinds, in a variety of ways, and to varying effects and success.

Of these three organizations, the European Union (EU) has been the most successful. Its approach – taking a holistic approach to conflict management, including diplomatic efforts, economic incentives, and peacekeeping – has been shown to be a strong stabilization and conflict management strategy. The EU's conflict resolution efforts have been the most efficient in that it can afford to offer immediate humanitarian aid and, in the far distance, economic development via membership prospects. For example, in the Western Balkans, the EU implemented political reforms and economic reconstruction and has provided peacekeeping forces such as the EUFOR mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, the EU has gotten rid of what we used to get from our former imperial experience, and now they are

building cooperative political frameworks where former conflict zones are, in one way or another, integrated into Europe's governance regime. By taking such a comprehensive approach, the EU has come to be seen as the world's premier post-conflict rebuilding and long-term peace-building organization.

On the other, ASEAN's style of settling conflict is rooted in its founding principles of noninterference and consensus. While these principles help to ensure that regional cooperation and peace are maintained they also feed 'ASEAN's inability to successfully deal with internal conflict'. It is also this reluctance to intervene in the internal affairs of member states that is at the heart of criticism of ASEAN's inaction through critical ground such as the current crisis in Myanmar. Finally, ASEAN's conflict resolution mechanism like ARF offered a forum for dialogue without the ability or the power to enforce any resolution to such a major conflict. While this is the strength of such an approach, it has largely constrained ASEAN's ability to directly engage in preventing or settling conflicts, especially related to internal political unrest and crises. The organization often lacks the speed and decisiveness to respond because it prefers dialogue and diplomatic solutions to coercive outcomes.

ASEAN has mainly concentrated on the task of conflict resolution among ASEAN, whereas the African Union (AU) has been more proactive in conflict resolution in the continent teeming with conflict. The AU has set up a specific structure termed African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) which provides a structured framework for conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and mediation. The AU has been at the vanguard in peacekeeping in Somalia, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo and has, for example, pulled off success in mediating Kenya's post-election crisis. However, the AU's work has been hindered by several factors, including lack of funds, the will within the AU's member states to commit to this work, and poor coordination of peacekeeping. First, it is politically fragmented and lacks an adequate enforcement mechanism, making it unable to respond quickly or decisively to emerging conflict. The AU's promises to these frameworks are institutionalized but unevenly capable they are to realize them.

The above results suggest that there is a number of such important factors to which the successful resolution of the conflicts by the regional organizations is subject. Second, there is the institutional capacity to deliver on conflict resolution mechanisms. In contrast, multifaceted conflict strategies addressing both causes and consequences are more easily deployable by organizations with a strong institutional framework, as is the EU. Second, member states have to be politically cohesive and willing to also take action in collective security measures. With a lack of political unity between ASEAN and the AU, both have been unable to mount coordinated responses to conflicts. Finally, regional organizations deal with the intricate political features of those regions, grasping between the desire to intervene to the appropriate degree and respect for sovereignty. While this balance is not easy to attain, it is key to allowing conflict resolution efforts to be both effective and sustainable.

In the end, a comparison of ASEAN, AU, and the EU demonstrates that conflict resolution efforts must be grounded in regional politics as well as the capacities of the institutions involved. It thus faces the difficult issue of collective action that finds political will, institutional strength but also the ability to respect member state sovereignty are contradictory. To serve an effective role in the resolution of conflicts as well as in furtherance of the cause of peace, regional organizations must be quick, and nimble to cope with these dynamic developments.

Conclusion

The contribution of this study is a thorough comparative study of the regional organizations' role in conflict resolution, with a specific focus on three major regional institutions: This is about ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), the African Union (AU), and the European Union (EU). Each of the three organizations has its own institutional framework and political context to shape its respective mechanisms and strategies for responding to regional conflict, especially its historical experiences. The analysis shows that, of the three, all have helped promote regional peace and security, to varying degrees and with great

disparity in effectiveness, reflecting the accomplishments and constraints of their varied methodologies.

Of the three regional organizations, the European Union (EU) is the most successful in conflict resolution. Because of the integrated approach that encompasses diplomatic, economic, and military tools, the EU has been successful. The EU has found ways to mediate conflicts, stabilize post-conflict regions, and promote peacebuilding by means of trade agreements, economic sanctions, development assistance, and peacekeeping missions. One clear example of the successful EU tackling international security is its intervention in the Western Balkans during the 1990s and 2000s, when the EU, despite doing little to maintain international peace in this region until the end of the 1990s, has been facilitating political reforms, provided economic incentives and secured stability in the region by placing EUFOR in Bosnia and Herzegovina. EU's approach to conflict resolution is holistic and systemic seeking both economic development and political dialogue on the basis of integration of post-conflict regions into European governance structures. This has proven to be a highly effective template for conflict resolution and ideals have in fact been applicable to regional organizations worldwide.

By contrast, ASEAN's capacity to resolve conflicts has been more restrictive because of its founding principles of noninterference and consensus building. Despite the importance of these principles in encouraging cooperation and dialogue among its 10 members, unfortunately, they have markedly hampered ASEAN from having the ability to intercede in internal conflicts, especially when they occur in a member state. This is most obvious in cases, like the one ongoing crisis in Myanmar, where because ASEAN cannot intervene due to its noninterference mentality it was criticized as being ineffective in dealing with discord within a state. ASEAN's approach is based on diplomacy, dialogue, and consensus, which while necessary for regional cooperation, is inadequate for situations requiring urgent intervention or the enforcement of law. As a result, the organization's framework for conflict resolution is limited by the founding values that give precedence to sovereignty and mutual respect for collective action during a crisis. However, it

should be recognized that ASEAN's regional stability has largely been maintained through the channels of diplomatic dialogues and soft power, and has had some success at mediating disputes and preventing them from escalating into war.

On the contrary, the African Union (AU), for example, has been more aggressive in conflict resolution, as can be seen in efforts by the AU to resolve problems with the conflict related to the African continent. Although the AU has adopted interventionist measures, such as peacekeeping missions and diplomatic mediation, ASEAN does not. The AU has developed the African Peace and Security Architecture, a framework for the prevention and settlement of conflict, peacekeeping, and reconstruction in a post-conflict situation. While the AU is by no means silent on the matter, it has emerged as a player in peacekeeping in Sudan, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and played a leading part in brokering a deal to end post-election violence in Kenya in 2008. Despite these successes, the AU has some way to go in ensuring that it fulfills its role in peace and security. Still, the essential difficulty lies in the lack of politically consistent will of member states, and the lack of funds and logistical constraints. However, the AU is hamstrung by myriad political divisions within the AU that often prevent coordinated action, and the absence of any strong enforcement mechanism renders the AU slower and more reactive to the outbreak of violent conflict. Indeed, the AU's efforts have been painfully slow and on several occasions ineffective, especially in the contexts of current conflicts in South Sudan and the Central African Republic. Despite this, the AU's peacekeeping and mediation efforts show great promise for the effective contribution that regional organizations can make in the maintenance of peace and security, although the organization's limitations often prevent its success.

At the end of the day, regional organizations are indispensable in mediating and maintaining

peace in their defined regions. Comparing ASEAN with the AU and the EU shows that while each organization has developed its own mechanisms matched to its political and institutional realities, no one model fits all when it comes to conflict resolution. What is learned from the experiences of these three organizations provides useful lessons for enhancing the role of regional bodies in global peacebuilding. First, the very existence of regional organizations hinges on their capacity to evolve state behavior with respect to changing patterns of conflicts, both traditional territorial disputes, internal political crises, and new security threats such as terrorism and climate change fragile states and climate change induced displacement, among others. Second, regional organizations have the capacity to intervene and solve conflicts only if their member states demonstrate a spirit of political will and cohesion in support of the said organization, they possess adequate resources, and in accordance with the strength of their institutions. Last, regional organizations are in a position to strike a balance between their interest in collective action and reverence for state sovereignty, as they search for creative ways to take up issues that transgress national boundaries.

The success of regional organizations in resolving conflict will depend upon their capacity to reformulate strategies, develop organizational capacity, and strengthen coordination among member states. Since the international system is yet to find effective ways of dealing with intricate security matters; regional organizations will be increasingly having to fulfill a key part in forging peace and security. Through this, the ASEAN, the AU, and the EU represent the successes and limitations of regional bodies everywhere from which regional actors may learn in order to be better prepared to deal with today's and tomorrow's conflict as well as a more stable and peaceful world order.

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