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Regionalism from an Historical Perspective[1]

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This chapter sets out some elements for a comparative history and analysis of regionalism. It does not engage in a detailed discussion of any particular region or regionalism, but offers a broad perspective and a framework for discussion for contemporary theory and practice. Regionalism and regionalisation – terms which invite confusion and require careful defining – do not take place in a vacuum. While their progress is necessarily informed by geographical, political, economic, strategic, and cultural concerns that are region specific, they also take place in an environment that is in turn informed by norms, trends, values and practices that relate to different regional and global settings. Hence a comparative survey is particularly helpful in understanding current patterns and the development of regionalism.

This chapter regards regionalism in broadly positive terms, as a 'good' that states and non-state actors desire and encourage, and one that merits promotion by regional and international communities. The United Nations Security Council has certainly supported such a view, encouraging in 2004, for example, renewed discussion on the further strengthening of regional organisations. For those concerned with international order, regionalism has many identifiable qualities. Aside from promoting economic, political and security cooperation and community, it can consolidate state building and democratisation, check heavy-handed behaviour by strong states and global institutions, generate and lock in norms and values, increase transparency, and make states and international institutions more accountable. Like democratisation, it also has a 'contagion' effect (Whitehead, 1996, 5–8). Regional actors draw on, copy and link up with other experiences, and here the phenomenon of inter-regionalism is important. Recent examples from Europe in particular, but also the Americas, Africa and Asia support these claims.

This is not to deny its negative aspects, some of which I develop below. Here, the discussion is about voluntary as opposed to coercive regionalism of the Co-Prosperity or Warsaw Pact type, though that distinction can be a subtle one. Regions might be 'enclaves of reaction' (Falk, 2002, 177) or the source of disorder, of terrorism and other crimes. Not all actors are interested in promoting the order-inducing properties of regionalism. But

regional problems invite regional solutions. Terrorism, for example, cannot only be addressed at the global or state level. There are many instances where the region may be the most appropriate level of action, and regional institutions have responded, though not in uniform fashion. In a world of complex and diverse threats and challenges, where state power is inadequate and existing multilateral institutions face severe overload or whose agendas are heavily skewed to favour key states, regionalism is both desirable and necessary. Geographically, ideationally and functionally it is well suited to address questions of regional governance.

Not all share this view. In certain circles, there persists a belief in the principle of universality, of the primacy of the United Nations (UN) and other multilateral institutions, particularly in matters of peace, security and development. The founding fathers of the League of Nations, the UN and Bretton Woods institutions initially opposed the dilution of global goals – as do contemporary advocates of cosmopolitan governance – and in current approaches to international problem solving, the global level remains the first port of call. Regional actors and states might support universalism, or a UN-first approach, as a check on unreliable partners or the misuse of hegemonic power. Another side of this coin is provided by realist approaches to cooperation, which discredit the belief that institutions – regional or not – can mitigate international anarchy. And from the perspective of certain parts of the world today, this view remains salient. In some regions, state power acts as a continuing brake on regional initiatives; for some states, including the United States in its current foreign policy phase, regionalism is seen as a useful, but disposable source of legitimacy.

This chapter stands back from current debates about US unilateralism, and the evolution of a set of policies, that at least since the events of 11 September 2001, have been regarded as unfriendly to institutions in general and regionalism in particular. Simplistically, we can agree that both as regards behaviour towards organisations of which it is a member, like the UN or North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), and even towards region building, say in Latin America – through the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) or Free Trade Area of the Americas processes – there has been something of a break with previous policy. But this pattern of regional and institutional engagement and disengagement has always fluctuated and shifted, reflective of internal debate and outside threat. It is unlikely to be permanent. In this respect the analysis by Joseph Nye, on the enduring need for allies and institutions, remains relevant (Nye, 2002). The same is also true, though to a lesser extent, of other regional great powers, whose interest in regionalism may similarly wax and wane – consider the early European experience. Further, regionalism may find spaces to grow and develop alongside, or in response to unilateralism. More useful for our purposes is a longer view, mapping the development of regionalism over

time, which suggests that the steady expansion of interdependence since the Second World War, together with a growing awareness of the *possibilities* of regionalism, has generated a momentum that started in the Americas, the Arab world and Europe, but has taken hold in a generalised, if highly unequal way such that there is no part of the world where it has failed to make an impression on state behaviour at some level.

This regional momentum has proved unstoppable, extending into ever new and diverse domains. Whether in promoting growth triangles or free trade areas, encouraging democratic practice, providing post-conflict services in war and disaster zones, or shaping responses to terrorism, regional initiatives – from civil society networks and non-governmental actors at one level, to trade alliances and formal state-based institutions at another – play out roles that daily impact upon peoples and states, softening the contours of globalisation and state power.

Thus conceived, regionalism has large, if untapped potential. It is best seen not as an alternative, but a significant complementary layer of governance. Some tasks can be performed better by states, multilateral institutions or non-governmental organisations. What has emerged is a *de facto* division of labour, sometimes consensual, sometimes contested, where regional actors take on increasingly important roles, contributing to what have been called 'multilayered' or 'hybrid' forms of governance (Scholte, 2000).

Although the definitional issues arising from a discussion of regionalism are dealt with elsewhere (see Chapter 1), I start with a brief elaboration of terms, emphasising the need for an expansive and flexible understanding of regions and regionalism. The chapter then moves to an historical and comparative analysis of regional processes, before offering a broad balance sheet of the challenges and opportunities facing contemporary regionalism. While that balance sheet will necessarily look different depending upon the region in question, it is none the less useful to reflect on the current state of the art, since there are many lessons for both established regions and regionalisms, as well as for those whose experiences are more recent or patchy. There are also important lessons to be drawn in respect of regionalism's place within the structures of global governance.

DEFINING REGIONS, REGIONALISM AND REGIONALISATION

Definitions of regions, regionalism and regionalisation have long presented difficulties to scholars. The terms are not fixed, and have been subject to multiple interpretations. History is useful here, not only in charting a course for regional projects but in showing how the vocabulary, along with the practice of regionalism has changed and evolved. Older ideas of geographically defined regions and state-based regionalisms have given way to more fluid and expansive understandings, which aim to capture the new

nature and extent of regional domains – in which states compete with a host of other actors for command of regional spaces and policies. Understanding regions and regionalism today demands a degree of definitional flexibility, and here I propose a multilevel and multipurpose definition, one that moves beyond geography, and beyond states. While this may appear outlandish in regions where state building itself remains incomplete, moving beyond narrow definitions is important since they tend to be self-limiting, and exclude the newer reaches of regional action.

In regard to *regions*, we find that a simple territorial definition may not take us very far – we need to refine regions to incorporate commonality, interaction and hence the possibility of cooperation. One perspective could be to see regions as units or 'zones' based on groups, states or territories, whose members share some identifiable traits: the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development or the Islamic countries, the G-22 or the 'South' for example. A central character of such zones is that they are smaller than the international system of states, but larger than any individual state or non-state unit; they may be permanent or temporary, institutionalised or not.

Our understanding of regions naturally flows into a concept of *regionalism* as a policy and project whereby states and non-state actors cooperate and coordinate strategy within a given region. Here aspects of regime theory are helpful in identifying norms, rules and procedures around which the expectations of different actors converge (Krasner, 1983, 2). The aim of regionalism is to pursue and promote common goals in one or more issue areas. Understood thus, it ranges from promoting a sense of regional awareness or community – *soft* regionalism, through consolidating regional groups and networks to pan- or sub-regional groups formalised by inter-state arrangements and organisation – *hard* regionalism. The relationship between the two is complex. Hard regionalism can precede or flow from soft regionalism – contrast the experience of Europe with that of the Arab world.

Regionalism thus conceived – as policy and project – evidently can operate both above and below the state level. And sub- or supra-state regional activity can inform state-level activity and so on. The state is no longer regionalism's only gatekeeper – recall the role of civil society in the NAFTA process. Indeed, a truly successful regionalist project today presupposes eventual linkages between state and non-state actors, but also cooperation across regions creating an interlocking network of regional governance structures, such as those already found in Europe, and parts of the Americas. All this might form part of a networked governance model, a 'New World Order' as sketched out by Anne-Marie Slaughter, very different from the order proposed by US President George Bush in the wake of the Gulf War of 1991 (Slaughter, 2004).

Finally, as regards regionalisation, a term that is sometimes confused or used interchangeably with regionalism, and I would merely draw out a few distinctions here. If regionalism is a policy or project, regionalisation is first and foremost a process. Like globalisation, it may take place as the result of spontaneous or autonomous forces. At its most basic it means no more than a concentration of activity – of trade, peoples, ideas, even conflict – at a regional level. This interaction may give rise to the formation of regions, and in turn to the emergence of regional actors, networks and organisations. It may thus both precede and flow from regionalism. The regionalisation of trade, markets and investment, and its consequences is familiar territory for students of international political economy and regional integration. Such regionalisation has yielded trade alliances, blocs and formal institutions.

In the security domain, *regionalisation* has come to aquire a somewhat different meaning. It is used to refer to regional, as opposed to global, responses to conflicts that have themselves often become regionalised: where inter- and intra-state wars spill over borders and affect and draw in neighbouring countries and actors, attracting the attention of the international community. These region-level conflicts do not only involve local actors and institutions, as in the case of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) intervention in Sierra Leone. In regions whose own institutions are weak or non-existent, we have seen a growing trend towards the involvement of 'out of area' regional institutions: two recent examples are the engagement of NATO in Afghanistan, or the European Union (EU) in the Congo.

The importance of regionalisation is made daily apparent by the attention it receives in diverse multilateral fora, in the UN, international financial institutions and related circles about the appropriate division of labour in the promotion of international peace and security, or in reference to aid, trade and development policy. In this context it is about developing, devolving power and responsibility to the appropriate regional level. If major financial crises have typically been dealt with at the global, rather than regional level (Russia, Argentina) post-Cold War international conflicts, and this includes other examples from Africa (Liberia), Asia (East Timor), Europe (Yugoslavia) and the former USSR (Georgia) have been the scene for diverse experiments in regionalising peace and security. Indeed measuring the success or failure of regionalism at the security level has become increasingly linked to the ability of regional groups to act as security providers inside and outside their respective areas, to contribute to what has been called an 'evolving architecture of regionalisation' (Fawcett, 2003, 11–30).

Revisiting terms and hence the parameters of regional action is important. Still one should not be confined by them, nor indeed to throw up one's hands in despair at their diverse nature and use. Ultimately regions and regionalism *are* what states and other actors make of them. To make sense of the idea of

regionalism, a certain amount of both definitional and theoretical elasticity is required: there is no 'ideal' region, or any single agenda to which all regions aspire. Regions, like states, are of varying compositions, capabilities and aspirations. They may also be fluid and changing in their make up. Regionness, like identity is 'not given once and for all: it is built up and changes' (Maalouf, 2003, 23). At a practical level, the UN Charter, in its definition of regional agencies is imprecise and inclusive.

Aside from the above difficulties attached to discussions of regionalism, a related problem lies in its Eurocentrism. While regionalism and regionalisation are clearly global phenomena, as reflected in the title of this volume, a cursory review of the literature reveals an enormous, and often unhelpful bias in terms of analysing and explaining their progress and prospects in terms of the European experience. If some early models were intended for export, the disappointments of extra-European regionalism led to few sustained studies of its nature and progress. Europe's capture of the regional paradigm has been hard to shift, and persists in the newer literature on 'inter-regionalism', epitomised by the Asia–Europe Meeting process, though there is now more evidence of alternative approaches. Here I move beyond Europe, and the variety of models it offers. In thinking comparatively and theoretically about regionalism, it is important to offer a broader analytical and comparative focus, pulling together evidence from different regions and practices. The African, Latin American or Southeast Asian, Middle Eastern, or more recently the Central Asian cases offer different empirical and theoretical insights – about shared identities and values, self-sufficiency, containment and the management of unequal power.

Certainly in contemplating the regional phenomena, we must recognise that the make up of the region under discussion is vital to understanding its prospects and possibilities. In particular, the nature and capacity of states and regimes are central to any discussion of regionalism, though it would be unwise to discount regions because of regime type or state instability. Regionalism may thrive better in a democratic environment where civil society is relatively advanced, but it is not only the preserve of democracies, as examples from Southeast Asia also show. Democracy and trade proved a strong combination in the creation of a Southern Cone Common Market (Mercosur); their absence has helped prevent the development of an Arab one, moves to promote an Arab Free Trade Area by 2008 notwithstanding. Similarly security regionalism has worked better for some areas, (contrast ECOWAS to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)) and so on. The point here is to discover and develop those functions which particular regional groups are most adept at performing at a given time. It is also appropriate to think of different ways to improve regional capacity; and there is a role for the international community in this regard.

The next part of the chapter reviews the history of regionalism from a comparative perspective, an exercise which helps to illuminate the present state of the art. It is also salutary to remind ourselves that while for some parts of the world regionalism is a very recent and rather shallow phenomenon, there are important antecedents in terms of revealing the limitations and prospects of current practice. To a large extent present experience and understanding of regionalism remains grounded in its past.

REGIONALISM IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Broadly speaking, regionalism has always been with us. Regions as empires, spheres of influence, or just powerful states and their allies have dominated in different international systems. Regions – like Europe in the nineteenth century – were world leaders. In a more modern sense however, since regionalism and regionalisation are distinguished from universal others, thus representing activity that is less than global, we might profitably start with looking at the international system that emerged after the First World War. The 1920s provide an arena for considering the place of regional groups in the context of a League of Nations system which accorded them legitimacy (in Article 21 of the Covenant); they are also important for mirroring the still important debates about universalism versus regionalism, sovereignty and collective security. A lesson of the League, and one reaffirmed today in the UN, was that the organisation could not act as a key security provider when the great powers reserved enforcement for themselves.

Outside the League, beyond functional cooperation, reflected in the growth of international agencies, formal institutions were few (one exception was the Inter-American System); non-state based organisations fewer – the Comintern was one example. That any institution could deliver peace and security, provide a vehicle for economic cooperation and integration, or promote a common ideology, was a novel idea, and one that failed the test of the 1930s. Security was sought unilaterally through ententes and alliances of either permanent or ad hoc nature. Economic interdependencies were deep in many instances, but there was not sovereignty pooling in any sense. States called the tune. But the League, like the UN later, encouraged states and peoples to think differently about peace, security, equality and development, contributing to a new definition of international relations, and a changed normative architecture. Similarly, the experience of the 1930s informed cooperative efforts in the early European institutions post-Second World War.

Once embedded, such ideas persisted, to be refurbished in the UN era, which in turn came to embrace regionalism more squarely. Following lobbying from different states, notably Arab and Latin American, the UN legitimised regional agencies, offering them, in Chapter VIII, Art. 52, for

example, a formal if undefined role in conflict resolution. Regional economic and social commissions were also an early and integral part of UN activity, drawing in a wide range of actors and setting up new agendas – consider the influential Economic Commission for Latin America. In short, the principle of regional action and cooperation was firmly established. And the Charter link is important here for the endorsement and legitimacy it supplied and the accountability it demanded.

At one level, the possibility of regional action, or of meaningful relations evolving with the UN and regional agency, was curtailed by the Cold War and the composition of the Security Council. But the region as unit of analysis was elevated by the East–West divide, which created an exemplary regional system. With the evident constraints on the UN, peace and security were delivered unilaterally or regionally, through the Warsaw Pact, NATO and related institutions. At another level, the European Community project, built around the idea of economic community, but with security and democratic consolidation as key priorities, became a powerful model.

This empowerment of regional actors, despite their superpower dependence, and the relative quiescence of the UN, created a powerful precedent. Regional organisations proliferated in the post-war period, notably the Organisation of African Unity, Organisation of American States (OAS), the League of Arab States, as well as the NATO-inspired security pacts such as the Southeast Asian Treaty Organisation and the Central Treaty Organisation. Some spawned, like the UN, a set of related organisations: regional development banks and the like – huge bureaucracies drawing on regional as well as external funds and expertise. A network of inter-regional relationships developed alongside the business of states and multilateral institutions. The record of all this activity was necessarily mixed: some institutions reached an early plateau and failed to thrive, others expanded and survived, in the fashion once described by Karl Deutsch (1978, 226). The dual challenges of decolonisation and the Cold War made coherence difficult or enabled institutions to be captured by powerful members or outside actors. But these were key years for regionalism with lessons, not only in economic integration and institutional development, but balancing power, non-alignment, and the development of security communities. Transnational and non-governmental actors, multinational corporations, aid agencies and the like, many also with regional focus, also start to encroach on the international scene, shifting the normative frame of regional operations.

For developing countries in particular, regionalism had the added appeal of a 'southern' movement, of reformist Third Worldism, as expressed by groups like the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77. As was also the case with the Arab states in the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries, who raised oil prices in response to the Arab–Israel War of 1973, regionalism was a 'southern' issue. Such parallels continue today, with

the continuing representation of developing country interests in diverse multilateral and regional fora, where 'contesting globalisation' has become a recurring regional or trans-regional theme. The World Social Forum is one example.

Interesting also, from a contemporary perspective, was the growth of sub-regional cooperation which took place in the late Cold War period, demonstrating the refocusing of regional concerns from economics to security (Buzan and Waever, 2003). This saw diverse regional actors in more assertive, post-independence mode, seeking new roles for themselves in shaping the local economic and security environment. Changing economic orthodoxy, the example of Europe, and a more narrowly defined set of security concerns pushed states into new cooperative projects. Some examples are the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Caribbean Common Market, ECOWAS, South African Development Coordination, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, the GCC and the Economic Cooperation Organisation. Somewhat different in their geographical reach and orientation were the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, now the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe, or OSCE) and the Organisation of Islamic Conferences (OIC): the OSCE demonstrating the application of the lowest common security denominator to a still diverse political and ideological regional framework, the OIC representing a statist attempt to appeal to a trans-regional identity: Islam.

All of the above groups whether aspiring to pan-regional or sub-regional status were products of the Cold War era, yet have survived into the present, showing how earlier reasons for cooperation may not have changed. Many have adapted their agendas and even charters to fit the new economic and security architecture that has since evolved. As we now witness ever newer impulses to regionalism, which at times complement and at times contradict older patterns and trends, the lessons of the past remain relevant.

THE NEW REGIONAL CLIMATE

If the Cold War proved to be an arena for selective, but cumulative regional growth and projects, the post-Cold War period offered new scope and opportunities. Although in retrospect it might appear that many of the older limitations and constraints on regional behaviour had hardly been removed, expectations soared that the end of the Cold War would indeed offer new incentives to international organisations. Despite, or partly because of the parallel process of globalisation, regionalisation has grown in salience. Both the number and membership of regional organisations, as well as interest in what was dubbed the 'new regionalism', has grown exponentially. The process appears irreversible, no longer to be dismissed by critics as a mere fad. The regionalism of the 1990s was promoted by the

decentralisation of the international system and the removal of superpower overlay; growth or regional identities. Changing regional power balances found expression in new institutional forms and practices. There was also a trickle down effect from the UN and also the EU (like in the 1960s) as far as the empowerment and perceived capability of international institutions was concerned, reminiscent, in the latter case, of the 1960s. The Single European Act generated competitive region-building in both the Asia-Pacific region and the Americas. Economic regionalism was spurred on generally by doubts and fears about globalisation, and the nature of the multilateral trading order. Despite ongoing reforms to the Bretton Woods and GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) institutions, these still remain inhospitable to all but the more robust developing economies.

As regards security, the spiralling of intra-state wars and growing pressure on the United Nations promoted in turn further task sharing with regional organisations, with terms like regionalisation and sub-contracting creeping into the vocabulary of cooperation. Different UN Secretary Generals, notably Boutros Boutros-Ghali, have called for a greater role in this regard. He spoke of the new regionalism, not as 'resurgent spheres of influence but as a complement to healthy internationalism' (Boutros-Ghali, 2000, 110–13). Nor was regional action limited to state-directed activity – non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were also empowered. So in many ways the post-Cold War environment demanded a greater regional awareness and involvement, and was actively promoted by a range of international actors. The larger space that has thus been opened for regionalism is important both to the more competent regional groups, but also to those regions which lack viable structures, or whose own institutions are weak.

If regionalism has expanded to meet new demands and needs, it has also prospered in a more permissive international environment where regions have been relatively freer to assert their own identity and purpose. There is little doubt that most regional actors and groups welcome this development and the opportunity it has brought to increase their say and representation. Regionalism has, for weaker states, provided a point of entry into a Western-dominated order, in which their interests are often perceived as marginalised, and also a forum where interaction and agenda-setting were possible. It may guarantee a seat at the negotiating table. These impulses are necessarily poorly developed in regions of the 'periphery' where organisations are weak or new. But there is growing awareness of the possibility of regional groups influencing developments within their own area and contributing to norm creation over time, and there are quite robust examples from Europe, but also the Americas, Southeast Asia and Africa to show this. A lesson here for emerging states that may yet have only poorly developed institutions, or those who have traditionally relied on the politics of power, is that they cannot afford to ignore the potential of regionalism.

Partly, engaging in regionalism is just doing what others do. Like democratisation, it is a project that can attract aid and development funds. Cynically, regionalism may provide a mere veneer of respectability and legitimacy to traditional state endeavour. In a world where established states are regionally organised, no state wishes to remain outside current trends, hence the interest of an outlier state like China in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, or indeed ASEAN (see Chapter 10). Even strong states, who might eschew the limitations and constraints it imposes – a point to which I return – like to speak the language and adopt the practices of regionalism.

BALANCE SHEET

When we speak about the expansion of regional activity or of regional empowerment, burden sharing with the United Nations as characteristics of the post-Cold War era, what do we mean in concrete terms: what has changed in existing institutions and what new institutions have evolved? There has been much rhetoric, and at times little evidence of concrete achievement, so some precision is required. And again we need to look at the different tracks of regionalism. For evidence of 'new regionalism', an expression coined in the 1990s, one could single out the continuing growth in numbers, as well as the expansion of capacity, membership, and range of tasks of different organisations (Fawcett and Hurrell, 1995, 3). Not new, but increasingly important, is the phenomenon of inter-regional cooperation where different regions craft and coordinate common strategies and policies, well developed in Southeast Asia and Latin America. A final dimension relates to the growth of transnational networks, civil society groups and NGO activists who operate across borders, which enter and increasingly participate in the regional domain.

Let us consider just a few institutional examples of this new regionalism. If we look at the Western European Union, ASEAN, OIC, ECOWAS, or the OAS and the African Union (AU), we can identify increased commitments to unity among members, expansion of tasks and services and charter reform. Numerical expansion has been a characteristic of both European and Asian institutions from the EU and NATO to ASEAN or the ECO. In terms of new organisation, the former Soviet space stands out in this regard for the range of projects, from the Commonwealth of Independent States to the Central Asian Cooperation Organisation. Outside this area of activity, new projects have taken root in the Asia-Pacific (the ASEAN Regional Forum, and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation), and South America (Mercosur). The type of security cooperation developed within ASEAN suggests the possibility of a distinctive Asian security agenda, built around the concept of 'regional reconciliation', while Mercosur has shown some agility in

balancing sub-regional and hemispheric agendas while creating a viable political and security community in the Southern Cone. Consider also the latest initiatives of the AU to promote regional security and development, of which the NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development) initiative is but one example. In line with newer security threats, strategies to combat terrorism have been added to existing conventions in the EU, ASEAN, OAS, as well as other groupings, as in the strengthening of the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism after 11 September or more recently in the EU's decision of March 2004 to upgrade its own capacity following the Madrid bombings.

In this and other areas, the potential for inter-regional cooperation is considerable. The principle of EU/NATO cooperation with other regions and regionalisms is already well established, and indicative of a trend towards the growth and expansion of regional networks (Pugh and Sidhu, 2003). Increasingly significant, but less studied, are the extensive links within different regions themselves, in Africa and Latin America for example. Lagging behind in all these areas, are regions like the Middle East and South Asia, the existence of formal arrangements notwithstanding. For the latter, SAARC has yet to provide a vehicle for overcoming regional divides, despite promising developments early in 2004. For the former, its own institutions, like the Arab League or GCC, have proved notoriously weak in the face of persistent crisis and war. Ongoing discussions about the best modalities of cooperation in the wake of the US intervention in Iraq, including CSCE-type projects, focus almost exclusively on externally driven and designed initiatives, which pay little attention to the nature of the regional domain (Fawcett, 2004). Somewhat more promising, and an example of inter-regionalism is the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, or Barcelona Process, launched in 1995. It is unsurprising that these two regions, the sites of the two most recent US-led interventions, remain outside the zones of 'new regionalism', although some efforts have been made to bring Afghanistan into contact with relevant regional groupings like the OSCE and ECO. Broadly speaking, they characterise an unstable system, within which the impulses to regional society, despite a high degree of cultural affinity, are poorly developed.

The picture is necessarily diverse: regionalism remains a work still in progress. Still, it is hard to escape the conclusion that overall, this is a picture of regional empowerment and of increased capacity. If in the European case, further (if incomplete) moves towards integration and constitutional design, as well as membership expansion, stand out, changes in doctrine and institutional capacity have also been a characteristic of African, American and Asian institutions, which have moved into fields like democratisation, human rights protection, as well as upgrading security capacity and provision for peacekeeping. To this, we could add to the still undertheorised role of

non-state-based regionalisms: whose weight has increased significantly, as their presence at population, environment and trade fora demonstrate. Just as important is their security role in post-conflict peacebuilding as deliverers of aid, relief and related services.

Theoretically, as discussed in this volume and elsewhere, there are almost as many ways of explaining regionalism as there are types of regionalism themselves. Much depends upon the vantage point of the observer. Both from an historical and contemporary perspective, as suggested here, aspects of realism retain crucial explanatory value when applied to the regional initiatives of many emerging as well as established states. Regionalism remains tightly constrained by the exigencies of state security and power, and the resultant balancing and bandwagoning behaviour. Structuralist notions of core and periphery regions are also useful: core regions set the dominant economic, political, and security agendas; peripheral regions have more limited choices. Yet more liberal theories of interdependence, neo-functionalism and institutionalism also have particular value in examining patterns in regions like Europe where economic integration and security community is well established. Some have started to have more purchase elsewhere as regions pass from the early to the later, more mature, stages of regionalism.

The politics of identity, captured by theories of social constructivism, which prioritise shared experience, learning and reality – as against crude measurement of state power – also offer some interesting clues. Alone, it does not explain the success or failure of a given regional project: shared identity is not a sufficient condition of regionalism. Yet identity invariably kicks in at some stage of the regional process. For the case of the Middle East, identity – as Arabism or Islam – explains important aspects of alliance behaviour, but there remains a striking disjuncture between shared ideas and institutions (Barnett, 1996, 400–47). In East and Southeast Asia, the notion of an Asian way appears to have some salience in framing regional options in both trade and security matters, the more so since the Asian financial crises and 11 September. In the European case, construction of a shared identity has gone hand in hand with institutional development and deepening integration.

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Such considerations serve as a backdrop to considering the present state of the debate, a discussion of some of the difficulties most commonly associated with regionalism, as well as to revisiting some of the arguments in its favour before offering some tentative conclusions. Three related issues, drawn from historical experience and present reality, remain particularly

pertinent to discussing contemporary regionalism: capacity, sovereignty, and hegemony.

First, the ability of any group to impact on any given regional space depends on the capacity of its members. The mere creation of a regional grouping, usually the result of the signing of multilateral treaties and agreements, may have no more than rhetorical consequence if members are unable or unwilling to proceed to further stages of cooperation. Will, for example, the Caspian Sea Cooperation Organisation advance from a 'concept' to a fully fledged organisation (Herzig, 2004)? The limited capacity and resources of many groups, especially outside the advanced industrialised countries, are obstacles to action, whether in the military, economic, diplomatic or institutional sphere. Such limitations are augmented by Charter constraints, which place high priority on principles like sovereignty and non-interference. Where suspicion, rivalry and competition are persistent, the prospects for cooperation are further reduced. It is perhaps not an unfair critique of a number of institutions that they have never gone beyond the debate and discussion stage, and can thus be dismissed as mere talking shops. Such was the case with a number of attempts to ape the early EC-style institutions in developing countries. Not all the newer institutions will endure or produce significant results, but some will, and the reasons for this will relate to state capacity, regime type, domestic as well as external pressures and influences, levels of interdependence and the growth and development of shared interests. Since none of these conditions are fixed, groups whose roles are currently limited could assume new functions. Mercosur is an example of a grouping which built on the experience of the 1960s to reemerge more forcefully as an organisation with a viable economic, but also political and security dimension, which its members are anxious to see preserved.

The bigger point to stress here is that the capacity of states is an impediment to cooperation, and will, along with the nature of the regional and international environment, crucially affect the success or failure of any regional project, as many examples from the sphere of peacekeeping demonstrate (Lepgold, 2003). Hence the relative newness or fragility of states may be an important factor; in an unstable system cooperation is likely to be sporadic and superficial, limited to one or two functions, and driven by powerful insiders and outsiders. However from such unpromising beginnings a stable system can emerge showing how an appreciation of the time frame is important in judging regionalism's prospects: conditions change and with them the prospects for further cooperation. Perhaps a good analogy, again, is that of the early experience of developing countries whose initial attempts at cooperation took place in conditions that are not so dissimilar to those of the Soviet successor states.

The ability of states to cooperate is linked to their willingness to do so, and here the constraints that sovereignty imposes plays a central role. While

for some, regionalism sets the stage for a decline in the salience of states, for others it can be seen as a means for their individual or collective advancement – an enduring fear of early functionalist writers. States cooperate in regions as they do in alliances, in self-regarding fashion, and in furtherance of their security interests. It is sovereignty that still matters for states and its resilience will always check and balance any cooperative project, particularly where sovereignty is fragile, having only recently been obtained. Hence, new states are particularly sensitive to such encroachment.

Though much cited, the sovereignty argument does not constitute a convincing case against regionalism. Former UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali has famously observed that 'the time of absolute and exclusive sovereignty ... has passed' (Boutros-Ghali, 1992, 17). And this comment is relevant to the work of international institutions. Certainly the principle has become more porous in respect of the UN Charter where new norms in respect of intervention for humanitarian and other purposes are emerging. The same could be said for NATO and other European institutions. Similar changes may be observed in the Charters of the AU and OAS – note the Inter-American Democratic Charter of 2001 – and smaller groups like ECOWAS and Mercosur. Others adhere strictly to the principle. Respecting sovereignty may constrain, but does not preclude regional-level activity, and the Southeast Asia states have some lessons here. ASEAN may have failed to act over East Timor (though ultimately contributing forces to the Australian-led mission in 1999), yet in their proactive response to the earlier Cambodian crisis, confidence-building measures and the politics of consensus and cooperation, all helped contribute to a more secure regional environment. A third, and related problem, for regional groups is that of dominant states or hegemons. The relationship between regionalism and hegemony poses an interesting challenge. While state sovereignty reduces the capacity of regionalism, strong states are also likely to abuse it. Critics argue that regional groups merely serve the interests of different states, usually powerful ones. It is often the case that one major actor sets the agenda in any regional organisation. That actor may have been instrumental in its creation and maintenance, or at times the dominant role may pass from one state to another. All regional activity in the Americas is predicated on the dominant role of the United States, whether bandwagoning in NAFTA or balancing in Mercosur. In that respect the Monroe Doctrine, as an early statement of hemispheric regionalism, lives on. Elsewhere we can see how the achievements of ECOWAS have depended on Nigerian muscle, or how the Saudis have regarded the OIC as their own project. In an emerging region like Central Asia, institution building has much to do with balancing or bandwagoning with the local strong power, often Russia (Allison, 2004). Seen at its most negative, regionalism can be viewed as an instrument for the assertion of hegemonic control (Mittelman and Falk, 1999, 175). One might further argue

that hegemons by their very nature eschew deep commitment to institutions which will limit their freedom of action (and some recent parallels are pertinent here: the sidestepping of NATO by the US for example).

Hegemony is a poor reason for decrying regional action: it is an argument for setting standards and guidelines; for promoting institutional democratisation. Strong powers play a vital role in promoting regional peace and security – acting where others are unable or unwilling. In this regard parallel cooperation with UN structures and guidelines can help modify behaviour, mitigating hegemony and increasing accountability. Institutions can promote greater transparency, but importantly also supply legitimacy that may be lacking from unilateral efforts. States may choose to ignore international law and institutions, but such actions have costs, both at the domestic and international level.

Hegemons may be reined in by regional organisations (Germany in Europe is the obvious early example), even those they have been instrumental in creating. For Latin American states, the OAS has at times acted as a vehicle for containment, albeit a limited one, of their powerful northern neighbour.

CONCLUSION

The above note is an appropriate one on which to end a review of the history and prospects of regionalism, at a time when those prospects appear to have been seriously compromised by the behaviour of the world's leading hegemon. For some, the events of 11 September 2001, and the subsequent development of strong unilateralism on the part of the US, and the corresponding pull of bilateral as opposed to multilateral or regional understandings between the US and its allies, suggest the disposability of regionalism: indeed the death of any emerging liberal global or regional order. This view is both simplistic and shortsighted, and reflective of too rosy a view of the processes of regionalisation and globalisation. There is rarely a clear divide between unilateral and multilateral choices, more often than not cooperating with others is a necessity rather than an option. Selective unilateralism can reduce, but also enhance regional autonomy and options.

We have, of course, been reminded of the limits of regionalism, and recent events provide a useful cautionary lesson. But if a review of the history of regionalism shows precisely how bumpy its progress has been, it also demonstrates its relative robustness and progressive, if uneven development. First we have witnessed a variety of experiments with different regional types, from those, which have a broad reach to narrower sub-regional projects. The range of activity has been similarly diverse, from economics and politics, to security and culture. Charter pronouncements, which profess an economic agenda, may overlie political or security intentions. Or institutions can evolve to acquire new functions. Some of the regionalisms discussed here

have already done so. All this does not, in itself, necessarily indicate deep cooperation or integration, in the sense of uniting previously disparate parts to form some identifiable whole. What it does show is that regionalism has an importance that transcends the agenda of individual states and actors, and hence can modify patterns of behaviour. In this respect regionalism retains an important, if complex relationship to international order.

It is no longer possible or appropriate to engage in a starry-eyed exercise about regionalism's prospects, or to present regionalism as an alternative paradigm to any global or state-led order. In exploring its history and different domains, this chapter has highlighted its many limitations at different levels. Still regionalism, both as a demonstration of shared identity, and collective action, is now well established globally. Sustained high-level cooperation remains unlikely outside core regions: this would require more stable and durable regional systems to emerge, ones in which state power is consolidated, where regional rivalries are mitigated, where shared interests can be identified and fostered. A stable regional system is not a sufficient condition for regionalism, but it helps. International cooperation and support is also important, states can learn from the aid and experience of others. In these and other areas outlined here, the lessons of the past continue to prove instructive.

NOTE

1. This chapter draws on L. Fawcett, 'Exploring Regional Domains: A Comparative History of Regionalism', *International Affairs* 80/3 (2004) 429–46.