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Helping Ourselves First: Conflict Management Strategies of Regional International Organizations

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Helping Ourselves First: Conflict Management Strategies of Regional International Organizations

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With the increase in ethnic conflicts since the end of the Cold War, particularly in Africa, more responsibility for conflict intervention has been placed upon regional international organizations (IOs). In this paper, I examine to what extent organizational structure influences how regional international organizations intervene in times of conflict. I argue that regional international organizations should be biased to intervene in ethnic conflict but that institutional design often constrains these organizations. Although the type of violence is a significant factor in the decision-making process, the structure of the organization makes the greatest difference. I test my expectations in the case of the African Union's intervention in South Sudan since 2013.

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Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a steady rise in the number of ethnic conflicts throughout the world. Consequently, peacekeeping has become a central focus of many states and international organizations in an effort to contain and resolve these civil and ethnic conflicts. Unfortunately, many of these efforts have failed to prevent conflict, especially in Africa. In the January 2016 issue of *Foreign Policy,* Guehenno (2016) lists the "10 conflicts to watch in 2016," and four of those ten conflicts—Libya, Lake Chad basin, South Sudan, and Burundi—are located in Africa, the most out of any region in the world.

In this paper, I am interested in how regional international organizations (RIOs) approach domestic conflict and what aspects of the organizations are most conducive to conflict mediation. To what extent does organizational structure influence the likelihood that regional international organizations will intervene in times of conflict? How does an organization's relationship to a conflict and institutional design affect their intervention strategy? I argue that the institutional design of regional international organization—its membership, mandate, and institutional structure—is the most important determinant of conflict mediation strategies. I seek to find the ways in which regional organizations, such as the African Union (AU), may be more advantageous in approaching civil and ethnic conflicts.

Regional international organizations have a unique political position to be more effective and efficient in avoiding, resolving, and promoting peace. International organizations in the modern political scheme are significant agents in international relations, and regional IOs have a direct connection and concise goals for a specific

geographical area. Therefore, I believe that regional IOs can be more effective in dealing with issues of ethnic conflict than other potential actors.

Literature Review

In this paper, I aim to bring together literature on the institutional design of international organizations and on conflict mediation strategies of international organizations. I build on extant literature that examines the effectiveness of IOs in conflict mediation, particularly in the case of the African Union.

Creation and Design of International Organizations

According to Pevehouse, Nordstrom and Warnke (2005) an intergovernmental organization (IGO) is a formal entity that has member states and possesses a permanent secretariat (pg. 9). IGOs are different from other international organizations because the latter can consist of individuals, interest groups, or businesses. The authors identify an increase in IGO creation rates after 1915 then a steady rate until the mid-1990s until only a few handful per year since. Coupled with a relatively small rate of IGO deaths, there is a substantial community of functioning IGO is the global political world. This has led to more regional IGOs in existence than ever before. Lastly, the heterogeneous nature of IGOs affects their influence in society.

Abbott and Snidal (2005) argue that states have selfish motives for international cooperation and use international organizations as a tool to accomplish their goals. They identify centralization and independence as two main characteristics that encourage states to act through IOs (pg. 26). States are able to address global concerns through collective

action using an "established organizational structure and centralized administrative support" (pg. 32). Independence allows member states to support action in another country while using a neutral third party (pg. 43). It is important to explore state motivation in international politics because member states prompt IO intervention.

Intervention

Rues-Smit (2013) critically examines the concept of intervention. He aims to identify what is meant by intervention, 'humanitarian' intervention and 'legitimate' intervention. He argues that an idea different from the conventional framework better accommodates the diversity of the international community. Rues-Smit (2013) also suggests that international orders are the best systemic compositions of political authority. He finds that international orders have multiple units of authority within their own jurisdiction and are organized by principle differentiations. To begin my research, it is necessary for intervention to be explicitly defined. Rues-Smit (2013) makes progress in creating a concise definition. Although, the author was unclear about the exact vocabulary used to define intervention.

Conflict Mediation

Diehl (1993) explores two categories of institutional alternatives to the UN ad hoc system in international peacekeeping operations. He makes several arguments for why regional peacekeeping forces may be advantageous including, greater consensus, greater support, conflict resolution and restraint of third parties. Diehl (1993) addresses resources, impartiality, external threats, and regional hegemony as possible weaknesses

for the arguments against regional operations. In conclusion, he asserts that the UN is model is most appropriate but regional peacekeeping efforts may be desirable when done jointly with the UN.

Mullenbach (2005) explores the international level of conditions in which third-parties decide to intervene in intrastate dispute. He aims to provide theoretical explanations for the establishment of or the constraints from establishing peacekeeping missions. There are seven international explanations provided about the likelihood of intervention including: military alliances, major power status, military intervention, intermediary intervention, institutional involvement, non-intervention norms, and territorial integrity norms. Mullenbach (2005) quantitatively evaluates 213 intrastate disputes. He finds variations of statistical support for all seven of his hypotheses. There is considerable evidence that being a major power will significantly reduce the likelihood of intervention and the involvement of the UN or another regional IGO previously in the state will significantly increase this likelihood.

Owsiak (2014) explores the different forms of third party conflict management strategies. He has consolidated the concept of conflict management into five broad categories including verbal, mediation, legal, administrative and peace operations. Owsiak (2014) considers the evolution of these strategies throughout the time of conflict and how each strategy affect one another in this evolution. He argues that third-party interventions are interconnected within each individual dispute. Owsiak (2014) identifies several patterns of progression in organization intervention.

Diehl and Regan (2015) consider conflict management attempts holistically as they relate to previous attempts or simultaneous attempts with the same or different

technique. They discuss some strategies on the conflict management rubric to be mutually exclusive or complimentary. In this special issue article, Diehl and Regan (2015) propose spatial connections of mediation to be relevant. They urge authors that utilize statistical analysis to look beyond just the numbers and how each intervention relates to one another.

Conflict Mediation in Africa

Williams (2011) addresses the shortcomings of the African Union (AU) in their efforts to manage conflict in the region. The AU has a vision of an "integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena" (pg. 3). They have implemented a several programs to reach this goal including: the AU commission, the continental early warning system and the African standby force. Williams (2011) states regional institutions such as the AU are not only actors; they are also political arenas. The AU must manage the acceptance of global norms with the societal norms of the region. To reach their goals of regional peace, the AU needs to utilize their global partners and regional knowledge to overcome the issues they faced previously in conflict management.

Quinn, Wilkenfeld, Eralp, Asal, and Mclauchlin (2013) explore the best ways of short-term crisis management and long-term conflict resolution in post-Cold War era Africa. They explain the tradeoffs and success of various forms of conflict mediation. The main theoretical argument is the favorability of manipulative mediation over formulative mediation. Quinn et. al (2013) find that mediation strategies can lead to the formulation of successful short-term outcomes especially when an intrusive strategy is

chosen. Unfortunately, the same strategies have shown little ability towards resolutions in long-term stability.

I extend these literatures to focus on the role of regional international organizations in conflict management. I seek to connect the literature on IO institutional design with the conflict management literature to show how institutional limitations can impact conflict management choices. Furthermore, I seek to focus on conflict management strategies of regional IOs in ethnic conflicts, and specifically the African Union's role in African ethnic conflicts, as a way of stepping into an important gap in the extant literature.

Theory

I argue that the decision to intervene in ethnic conflict is determined by a combination of the institutional design of regional international organizations and the level of violence. See Table 1. First, I argue that institutional design features will bias a regional international organization to pay more or less attention to ethnic conflicts within the geographical reach of the RIO. Then, once a RIO has set itself on a trajectory of conflict mediation, I argue that the level of violence in the ethnic conflict will determine the specific choice of mediation strategy.

I define regional international organizations as operational governmental organizations with at least three member states. RIOs must also have jurisdiction within one specific geographical area, and a majority of its member states must be within that same geographical area.

I argue that the membership of a RIO is an important determinant in its bias toward intervention in an ethnic conflict. An institution cannot operate without the cooperation, influence, and support of its member states. Member states are responsible for providing financial and human capital. Since RIOs are comprised primarily of states within the same geographic area, I argue that members will be more likely to seek intervention strategies to prevent the negative externalities of ethnic conflict. See Image 1. It is known that ethnic conflict can cause spillover effects, such as additional conflict or refugees, and I believe this is particularly important in Africa where tribal lines do not always match state borders. Therefore, a regional organization with high membership from the same geographic area will be more predisposed to intervene in ethnic conflict.

H1: Regional international organizations with high membership numbers from the same geographic area will be more likely to intervene in ethnic conflicts in that region.

Conversely, I argue that other institutional design features, such as institutional organization and mandate, can bias RIOs against intervention in an ethnic conflict. The mission statement of an organization is based on its mandate. Organizations create constitutions and bylaws outlining their roles and responsibilities as an organization. For some RIOs, the mandate restricts the type of intervention that will occur. For example, some organizations are security-focused and therefore more likely to intervene in conflict. However, many regional international organizations are based on economic or

humanitarian issues, and because their purpose is not conflict management, they are less likely to intervene in ethnic conflict.

H2: Regional international organizations with general and/or non-security mandates are less likely to intervene in ethnic conflict.

Similarly, many RIOs partner with global IOs in more expansive issue areas, because they do not possess the human capital or financial resources to expand their mandates. For instance, the European Union often partners with the United Nations or NATO in conflict mediation efforts because it does not have the organizational capacity to handle these efforts, which are outside its primary mandate. Therefore, I expect that RIOs will be less likely to attempt to manage ethnic conflicts alone, since they do not possess the capabilities to gather the necessary number of troops or financial capital for intervention.

H3: Regional international organizations with low levels of organizational capacity, especially limited financial resources, will be less likely to intervene in ethnic conflicts.

Of all the types of civil conflict, I believe that RIOs are most likely to intervene in cases of ethnic conflict. Ethnic disputes can be a strong motivation for conflict, because they often involve highly salient intangible issues like tribal claims to territorial homeland. Many times, these disputes lead to civilian violence such as fighting, riots, and

even genocide. Therefore, once ethnic violence has begun, RIOs must make the decision whether or not to intervene to resolve the conflict. I argue that once a RIO has decided to intervene in an ethnic conflict (for reasons discussed above), the level of violence in that conflict will dictate the intervention strategy.

I argue that intervention is any formal action taken by a regional IO where they use their agency to interfere in multiple levels of conflict. Intervention can be a variety of actions including but not limited to mediation, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, sanctions, troops or military force, or humanitarian aid (Abbott and Snidal, 2005). Regional international organizations are more likely to have a broader range of intervention strategies because of their institutional design and institutional limitations, but the overall aim will always be to keep levels of violence low so that the conflict does not spread. I argue that a regional international organization will implement more limited forms of intervention with the conflict is not extensively violent, such as issuing warnings or sending humanitarian aid. See Table 1. In these cases, the institutional limitations of the RIO are difficult to overcome. However, I argue that a RIO will implement more severe intervention methods in extensive violence to isolate the conflict to maintain order in the region. Peacekeeping, military force, and mediation are some methods that RIOs will implement in high-level violence. See Table 1.

H4: If a regional organization encounters low-level ethnic violence, then they will conduct fact-finding, early warning and/or preventative measures.

H5: If a regional organization encounters high-level ethnic violence, then they will consider mediation or peacekeeping.

Research Design

I conduct a case study of the African Union to explore my empirical expectations. The African Union (AU) is an excellent case for my theory for a number of reasons. First, all African countries have membership in the AU. Second, its institutional mandate and organization have been evolving since 1963 when it began as the Organization of African Unity (OAU). The AU has a limited mandate which affects the type of intervention they could conduct. It also has strong ties to the UN, which also affects the decision-making process. Finally, the AU has many opportunities to intervene in ethnic conflicts throughout Africa.

Specifically, I conduct a case study on the AU's intervention in South Sudan from 2013-2016. The AU intervened in the form of peace strategies at two different times in Sudan (Williams, 2011). The Sudanese conflict was significant in African society. This conflict was between the northern, Arab-dominated government and Christian and animist black southerners. The AU intervened in this conflict, which eventually led to the partition of Sudan and the creation of the Republic of South Sudan in 2011. This is significant because it was the most recent country to be established in Africa since the independence of Etria in 1993. As the newest country and latest member in the AU, South Sudan, had promise to be a successful state. In reality, South Sudan was immediately entangled in more ethnic conflict. There was conflict between the Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups. There were several failed mediation attempts and a neglected peace

agreement. South Sudan is a prime example of how quickly ethnic violence can erupt and how difficult it can be to resolve ethnic conflict.

My dependent variables are intervention strategy, length of involvement, and success of intervention. My primary independent variables are the level of violence in the conflict and the institutional design features of the African Union—its specific mandate for security issues, its organizational capacity, and its membership.

By focusing on the South Sudan conflict, I am able to construct a timeline mapping of events that allows me to complete a basic process tracing of my key variables. To construct my timeline, I use primary source documents from the African Union Peace and Security Council, which are available on their website (http://www.peaceau.org). I focus on the documents provided by the Council, including press releases, communiques, and reports from senior individuals to determine how institutional features and the escalation of the conflict result in the choice of different conflict mediation strategies.

Analysis

The Global South has a tumultuous ethnic history. Ethnic conflict has frequently turned into unyielding violence throughout the region. Civil wars, insurgencies, and rebel groups plague the Global South. The history of African countries has not been immune to this same ethnic violence. The African Union (AU) is the most significant regional IO in Africa. The AU's membership consists of all 54 African countries. The AU originated in 1963 as the Organization of African Unity (OAU). The vision for the AU was to expand

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the work of the OAU to aid in African empowerment and recognize the political, social, and economic difficulties within Africa.

The AU's Assembly comprises all the heads of state and government from all member states. It determines the organization's policies, establishes its priorities, adopts its annual program, and monitors the implementation of its policies and decisions (Constitutive Act of the African Union 2000). The Assembly may give directives to the Executive Council and the Peace and Security Council on the management, of conflicts, war, acts of terrorism, emergency situations, and the restoration of peace. The Peace and Security Council (PSC) is the standing unit of the AU for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflicts. Their core functions are to conduct early warning and preventative diplomacy, facilitate peacemaking, establish peace-support operations, and recommend intervention in member states.

The creation of South Sudan aligns with the violent and complicated history of many African nations. Sudan had dealt with decades of tensions and violent disputes between the Khartoum, the Arab-dominated government, and the Christian black southerners. After continued involvement by the African Union (AU), several failed treaties, and countless deaths a resolution on Sudan was determined. These groups decided that the best solution would be the partition of Sudan and set about the terms in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement; South Sudan declared its independence on July 9, 2011.

Due to the critical nature of the establishment of South Sudan, several IOs remained in the country; both the United Nations' Mission in the republic of South Sudan (UNMISS) and the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) remained

in South Sudan post-partition. UNMISS was originally established to consolidate peace and security and to help establish conditions for development in the country. As part of its mandate, the AUHIP was to assist South Sudan in addressing its governance and democratization challenges to help build a viable state.

Unfortunately, the peace in South Sudan did not last long. The onset of violence in South Sudan began on December 15, 2013. President Salva Kiir Mayardit, is a member of the Dinka tribe, the largest ethnic majority in South Sudan. He accused his former Vice President, Riek Machar, a prominent member of the Nuer tribe, of attempting to stage a coup. Violence broke out in Juba, the nation's capital, and other cities as a result of their dispute over the suspected coup. The resulting violence in Juba resulted in the death of hundreds and the displacement of thousands (Peace and Security Council 2013).

The Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the AU reacted to the conflict in Juba by stressing the need to address the situation to avoid serious and long-term security implications in South Sudan. I see the AU's choice to bring attention to this conflict as a result of its organizational membership. The PSC directly mentions the possible serious implications for South Sudan as well as neighboring countries and specifically the challenges in the Central African Republic (CAR), which shows concern for the spillover effects of conflict throughout its membership region. See Image 1.

In its initial response, the PSC endorsed and commended the ongoing efforts of other groups in the country, including the presence of the AUHIP and the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD). The IGAD is a regional organization in Africa that aims to achieve peace, prosperity and regional integration in the IGAD region, which includes the six states of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and

Uganda. See Image 2. However, the Council made no effort to specify any action that the AU itself would take. Instead, they requested that the "Council remained seized of the matter and would review the situation in due course" (PSC December 2013). After an initial outburst of violence, the PSC wanted to be informed on the situation but officially remained uninvolved. This process of information gathering is in direct correlation with my hypothesis. The initial outburst was an isolated incident and low level violence, and the AU's decision to gather information on the matter is the expected response of a regional organization.

The initial response AU response to the conflict was intervention. The intervention choices were verbal and mediation strategies (Owsiak, 2014). This ties into my hypothesis concerning low-level ethnic violence. The outset of violence caused the organization to appeal to the South Sudanese stakeholders and maintain surveillance of the issue, but its organizational limitations prevented the PSC from taking further action.

Between the 410th and the 416th meetings of the Peace and Security Council, the conflict in South Sudan escalated and so did the AU response as my hypotheses predict. The Council had concerns about the escalation of the violence, ethnic mobilization of the conflict, and the imminent humanitarian crisis. These concerns lead to more intervention strategies by the international community.

The IGAD coordinated a visit to Juba to calm the situation and seek a negotiated peaceful resolution. During the 411th meeting of the PSC, the Council set out several demands for South Sudan. They also requested that the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) and other AU structures establish a commission to investigate the human rights violations. Here, with the escalation of conflict, I see the AU

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taking a more direct approach to conflict mediation and encouraging other interventions by non-security based organizations.

The PSC also expressed its intention to impose targeted sanctions. The UN Security Council adopted a resolution to increase the strength of UNMISS. Force and use of strength was not the initial role of UNMISS so it was necessary to expand these roles to accommodate for the escalation in violence. This need for an official expansion of the missions mandate furthers my argument based on institutional limitations. The Council appeals to the AU member states to dedicate troops and personnel to cooperate with this mission. However, because of the AU mandate to not use force, they utilize the presence of an existing coalition. They also do not take on the financial role of this strategy but take advantage of their international partner. These actions, therefore, demonstrate support for my hypotheses that institutional design can limit the conflict mediation strategies used by regional international organizations.

The conflict in South Sudan follows the difficult and variable path of many ethnic conflicts. Following the meetings in January 2014, the AU Peace and Security Council meet infrequently to expressly discuss the conflict in South Sudan. The Council notes some progress in development of third party resources to help resolve the conflict (PSC June 2014). The continued involvement of the IGAD is noted repeatedly and they are tasked with the lead role in mediation of the South Sudanese conflict. The organization subsequently creates the IGAD Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (MVM). The Council notes with satisfaction their role and the role of others made to send troops into the country to help with resolution. The Council calls for the establishment of an AU High-Level ad hoc Committee of Heads of State and Government to strengthen the

support to the IGAD (PSC August 2014). I see here the continuous reliance on its international partners as well as mostly security based organizations involved in the peace process. The invested role of the IGAD is based on their bias towards the specific geographical area and their desire for peace in the region.

Early in 2015 the conflict makes a positive move in the peace process with the entrance of the Agreement on the Reunification of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement or the Arusha Agreement. The agreement calls for the Transition Government of National Unity (TGoNU) which is essentially the reunification of Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). This strategy is not followed through and we see a resurgence of violence later in 2015. The Council notes with utmost disappointment the resumption of violence and the continued violations. Specifically, the communique states "the current escalation threatens to unleash irreversible consequences for this young nation" in reference to the ongoing issue in South Sudan (PSC May 2015). The Council also requested that the UN Security Council consider arms embargo on the aggressors.

The humanitarian crisis in the same year reached catastrophic levels. The few humanitarian agencies suffered attacks on their personnel and assets as well as critical suffering of citizens. The Council called for protection of these organizations and requested increased humanitarian assistance. There were continued attacks against civilians as well as forced displacement, acute food insecurity, access restrictions and obstructions to humanitarian aid. Due to their lack of security mandate, there is reasonable hesitation among humanitarian organizations to intervene because of the risks associated in ethnic conflicts. There is also a manipulation and poor distribution of the

humanitarian resources. The institutional design of humanitarian organizations calls for the assistance of other groups for protection and appropriate resource management.

Currently South Sudan still suffers from the civil war and the situation is devolving. Violence has escalated since the 2015 outbursts. The Transitional Government on National Unity has since fallen apart following continued violence. The future of the political process in South Sudan remains unknown (Council on Foreign Relations 2017). The humanitarian crisis has worsened. The country is suffering from famine and the Sudanese people have continuously been attacked. The Council concluded a field mission at the end of 2016. The Council expressed the need for accountability, the importance of ensuring humanitarian access and encouraged the TGoNU to act in accordance to the Peace Agreement.

Conclusion

This study has shown the critical role regional international organizations have in mediating ethnic disputes. I found that regional bias does make a RIO more likely to intervene in conflict. While security organizations are more likely to intervene in ethnic conflict, I also found that humanitarian organizations still maintain a presence in conflict zones. Furthermore, I found that organizational capacity is relevant in predicting the extent of IO involvement, but with the aid of other international partners and coalitions, a RIO will still choose to intervene in ethnic conflicts. I also see that my theoretical expectations of behavior based on the level of violence were accurate; regional international organizations are more likely to attempt costlier mediation strategies in higher levels of violence.

For future research, it would be beneficial to conduct a detailed document analysis of other third-party regional actors involved in the mediation of conflict. An analysis of a conflict that has been resolved would also be beneficial to this research. This further exploration could reveal an organization's concluding behavior in the peace process. It would also be interesting to see how an organization behaves when there is no escalation and levels of violence are not extensive.

Regional international organizations are major actors in the international political arena. Their bias within the region may be a liability at times, but it is without a doubt an asset to conflict mediation and the overall peace of a region. Organizations such as the AU have been successful at overcoming any limitations in their institutional design–membership, mandate, and institutional structure–to allow for continuous and successful intervention in ethnic conflict. These features give organizations the capabilities to and the motivation for conflict mediation.

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Appendix

Table 1

	Low-level violent ethnic conflict	High level violent ethnic conflict
Expected response of RIO	Fact- findings, early warning and/or preventative measures	Sanctions, peacekeeping, military force, mediation

Image 1

Image 2