

War across States in Africa

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INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Cold War, Sub-Sahara Africa has had widespread conflict and war. By the start of the 21st century more people were being killed in Africa than the rest of the world combined.¹ There were only a few peace operations in Africa during the Cold War; between 1989 and 2012 there were over eighty.² Yet, as important as it is to note the degree of conflict and war, it is yet more important to understand the nature of war in Africa. Many of Africa's post-Cold War wars have been misunderstood. This is because, we argue, you cannot explain what you have not correctly identified.

There are three broad categories to which Africa's wars are held prisoner, and each comes with an explanation: interstate war, civil war, and the so-called new wars. None of these categories capture the reality of war in Africa and therefore we are left without an adequate explanation of war in Africa. Interstate war is relatively rare in Africa. More importantly, however, the theory of interstate war is predicated on a particular kind of state system that is absent in much of Africa. Civil war is much more common than interstate war in Africa. Yet this category obscures as much about African war as it reveals. The third category is really an amorphous group of scholars who share a common theme. New wars describe a kind of conflict that is argued unique to the post-Cold War world. New wars, however, tend to treat African war as apolitical, when it is politics that drive them.

Africa does, of course, have wars that fit each of these categories. The Ethiopian-Eritrean War (1998-2000) was an interstate war. The war between north Sudan and south Sudan

¹Paul Williams, *War and Conflict in Africa* (Cambridge, UK, Polity Press, 2012), 4.

²Matthias Dembinski and Berenike, "Convergence around Global Norms? Protection of Civilians in AU and EU Peacekeeping in Africa," *African Security* (2013).

(1955-1978; 1985-2005) was a civil war. The Lords Resistance Army's insurgency, begun in northern Uganda, may fit the new war category. The most serious conflicts in post-Cold War Africa, however, do not nicely fit any of these categories. They are not between states; they are not civil wars; and while they have characteristics of the new wars, they are intensely political. We offer a fourth category: *wars across states*. These wars have attributes of all three types noted above. They are not between states (interstate), but elements of neighboring states do fight one another. In their early stages they often resemble a civil war, but they have a distinct evolutionary path. They are replete with themes used to describe new wars: for instance, identity conflict and the proliferation of non-state actors, yet they are nonetheless political.

The actors, staging, and script of these wars set them apart. The first two, actors and staging sets the scene for the third, the evolving script. Most importantly, *wars across states* can only be understood by explaining the affect the Africa state system has on the conduct of conflict and war in Africa. The conflict in the Mano River Basin of West Africa that prominently featured Liberia and Sierra Leone (1989 - 1996); the conflicts centered on Darfur that began in 2003, and which enveloped the periphery of Chad and Sudan; the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), 1996-1998 and 1998- ; and the current conflict across the Trans-Sahel, are all *wars across states*. None can be described as an interstate war, civil war, or even a new war. They do, however, share the common traits of *wars across states*.

The next section provides a brief synopsis of the three categories of war: interstate, civil, and new wars. It argues that many African wars fall outside these descriptive categories. Just as importantly, the analytical tools used to explain those wars, therefore, cannot explain many of Africa's wars, in particular its, *wars across states*. The section that follows argues that because *wars across states* are neither purely international nor domestic, while they have elements of

both, they need an explanation that combines the causes of interstate and civil war. This is followed by a brief sketch of the conflict is the Trans-Sahel as a case study illustrating the nature of *wars across states*.

CLASSICAL EXPLANATIONS OF WAR

Defining conflict, particularly in Africa, has been complicated by divisions within the relevant scholarship between international relations and comparative politics. The former tends to focus on relations among states and the later focuses on the state itself. Thus, for instance, international relations will more likely study interstate wars and comparative politics intrastate wars. Wars that might not be either interstate or civil war can fall between the conceptual cracks. This division also makes it difficult to see overall trends in warfare and, and more importantly, how different types of war interrelate.³ This conceptual challenge is compounded by the nature of many of Africa's conflicts because they do not fit neatly into existing types.⁴ It is, therefore, difficult to create a common taxonomy of conflict.⁵

Interstate War

³Meredith Sarkees, , Frank Reid, Whelon Wayman, and J. David Singer, "Inter-state, Intra-state, and Extra-State Wars: A Comprehensive Look at Their Distribution Over Time," *International Studies Quarterly* 74, 1 (2003), 68.

⁴There are a number of data sets for tracking and studying war. But, they often do not agree on what is a war, or on how to categorize a war. Different typologies can classify the same war as a civil or international war. See Wolf-Dieter Eberwein and Sven Chojnacki, "Scientific Necessity and Political Utility: A Comparison of Data on Violent Conflicts," Publication of the Working Group of International Politics, Social Science Research Center Berlin, Discussing Paper P 01-304 (September 2001).

⁵Jan Angstrom, "Towards a Typology of Internal Armed Conflict: Synthesising a Decade of Conceptual Turmoil" *Civil Wars* 4, 3 (2001), 93.

Interstate war in post-colonial Africa has been rare.⁶ Since most of Sub-Saharan Africa gained independence in the 1950s and 1960s, there have only been three clear instances of interstate war: Tanzania's invasion of Uganda in 1978 to overthrow Idi Amin,⁷ the Somalia and Ethiopian conflict in Ogden territory, 1977-1978, and the 2000 Eritrean – Ethiopian conflict. Other conflicts that might be considered in this category would include: Egypt and Sudan in 1958, Libya versus Chad in the 1980s, Ethiopia versus Somalia in the 1970s, Rwanda versus Uganda in 2002, Ghana and Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) in 1964, Mali and Burkina Faso in 1975 and 1985, and possibly South Africa's destabilization campaign of the 1980s.⁸

Lemke's rigorous work on war led to the conclusion of an "Africa Peace."⁹ He noted that African dyads are less war prone than non-African dyads.¹⁰ As he qualifies, this refers only to interstate relations, as defined by the Correlates of War data (COW).¹¹ This is puzzling, of course, because as Lemke goes great lengths to explain: "[U]nfortunately for Africans, the conditions associated with war are almost uniformly present..."¹² To explain what seems like an anomaly, he looks at the effects of domestic instability on the ability of African states to wage

⁶Wondem Asres, *The State, the Crisis of State Institutions, and Migration in the Horn of Africa: The Case of Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia* (Trenton: The Red Starr Press, Inc., 2007), 16.

⁷In October, 1978, Amin ordered the invasion of Tanzania while at the same time attempting to cover up an army mutiny. With help of Libyan troops, Amin tried to annex the northern Tanzanian province of Kagera. Tanzania, under President Julius Nyerere declared war on Uganda, then began a counterattack enlisting the country's population of Ugandan exiles. On April 11, 1979, Amin was forced to quit the capital, Kampala. The Tanzanian army took the city with the help of the Ugandan and Rwandan guerrillas.

⁸The paucity of international war in Africa is a product of, and partially explains, the failure of the Westphalia project in Africa. In Charles Tilly's famous phrase: "states make wars; wars make states." See also, K.J. Holsti, *The State, War, and the State of War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 29.

⁹Douglas Lemke, *Regions of War and Peace* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 161 .

¹⁰Ibid., 180.

¹¹Ibid., 162.

¹²Ibid., 167.

war. He concludes that instability (measured by the level of economic underdevelopment and number of coups) does help explain the African anomaly.

Lemke understands, however, that: “If the legal entities defined as states in our datasets are not the empirical interacting entities [states] our theories describe, then our research designs will be indeterminate ...”¹³ Africa is not peaceful, as Lemke suspected, because weak states cannot attack their neighbors, but, rather have been conflict prone precisely because as weak states they cannot police their peripheries.¹⁴

Africa does not have a shortage of interstate rivalries, but it rarely leads to interstate war. One way to demonstrate this is to compare “strategic rivalries” to “enduring rivalries.”¹⁵ “Strategic rivalries” are “threatening competitors who are categorized as enemies.”¹⁶ “Enduring rivalries” is where two states in competition have the expectation of future conflict; but most importantly these rivalries are quantified by their actual number of militarized disputes. They have already fought. Strategic rivalries, therefore, are pairs of states that have unresolved disputes severe enough to anticipate the start of a war. Enduring rivalries are when strategic rivalries actually have a history of war. In theory, all strategic rivalries have the possibility, even

¹³Ibid., 188.

¹⁴Both economic underdevelopment and coups contribute to state weakness in Africa and to the creation of conflict zones. The former relates to the lack of physical infrastructure connecting the capital (the seat of power) to the periphery of weak states. The latter both perpetuates patrimonial rule and contributes to the fracturing of political society. In the aftermath of a coup, not only does the new ruler often replace a country’s military with his own, but the old guard can form the rump of a new militia that can hide in the hinterland until a new opportunity arrives.

¹⁵The distinction is made by William R. Thompson. He has two additional categories, Interstate Rivalries I and Interstate Rivalries II. The latter two categories closely track enduring rivalries, but more importantly for the point made here, are based on “militarized” disputes. William R. Thompson, “Identifying Rivals and Rivalries in World Politics,” *International Studies Quarterly* 45, 4 (2001).

¹⁶Ibid., 558.

probability, of triggering a war. The question is, do different structural environments, a strong state system versus a weak state system, affect the actual propensity for interstate war?

The perceptual perspective of the “strategic rivalry” includes a total of 174 rivalries. Since this set includes rivalries that have not yet been militarized (“enduring rivalries”), it can be used as a proxy for potential military disputes. The “enduring rivalry” count, predicated on actual prior conflict, has a total of 63.¹⁷ Therefore, only in 63 of 174 potential cases were rivalries militarized. For Africa, 31 “strategic rivalries” are listed; 5 “enduring rivalries.”¹⁸ Thus while what can be considered the potential for conflict that led to conflict occurred thirty-six percent of the time across all cases; it only occurred sixteen percent of the time in Sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁹ Table 1 below shows how rarely rivalries become militarized in Africa, approximately half as often as all the cases.²⁰

¹⁷Ibid., Table 1, 570-573.

¹⁸Ibid., 582.

¹⁹Wondem Asres, *The State, the Crisis of State Institutions, and Migration in the Horn of Africa: The Case of Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia* (Trenton: The Red Starr Press, Inc., 2007), 16.

²⁰Although, it is imperfect because “enduring rivalries” must have at least six militarized disputes. For instance, it does not capture the inter-state war between Uganda and Tanzania.

Table 1: Rivalries in World Politics

Rivalries	Strategic	Enduring
Angola-South Africa	1975-1988	
Angola-Zaire	1975-1977	
Burundi-Rwanda	1962-1966	
Cameroon-Nigeria	1975-	
Chad-Libya	1966-1994	
Chad-Sudan	1964-1969	
Congo-Brazzaville-Zaire		1963-1987 ²¹
Eritrea-Ethiopia	1998-	
Eritrea-Sudan	1993	
Ethiopia-Italy	1869-1943	1923-1943
Ethiopia-Somalia	1960-1988	1960-1985
Ethiopia-Sudan	1965-	1967-1988
Ghana-Ivory Coast	1960-1970	
Ghana-Nigeria	1960-1966	
Ghana-Togo	1960-1995	
Guinea-Bissau-Senegal	1989-1993	
Kenya-Somalia	1963-1981	
Kenya-Sudan	1898-1994	
Kenya-Uganda	1896-1995	1965-1989
Malawi-Tanzania	1964-1994	
Malawi-Zambia	1964-1986	
Mauritania-Morocco	1960-1969	
Mauritania-Senegal	1989-1995	
Mozambique-Rhodesia	1975-1979	
Sudan-Uganda I	1963-1972	
Sudan-Uganda II	1994-	
Tanzania-Uganda	1971-1979	
South Africa-Zambia	1965-1991	
South Africa-Zimbabwe	1980-1992	

Source: Thompson, "Identifying Rivals and Rivalries in World Politics."

²¹Probably due to missing data, see *Ibid.*, 568.

To summarize, the infrequency of interstate war in Africa is not due to the lack of triggers or immediate causes, but rather because the structural conditions of Africa's weak state system act as a brake on this kind of conflict.²²

Civil War

"Civil war' is the classical complement to 'interstate' war."²³ It is more common in Africa than interstate war: Collier, Hoeffler and Sambanis identified 78 civil wars between 1960 and 1999 in Africa.²⁴ Elbadai and Sambanis note that over the last forty years twenty Sub-Saharan African countries had a civil war.²⁵

The definition of civil war may vary from scholar to scholar, but almost all emphasize that they are internal conflicts and that the government is an essential player in the conflict.²⁶ Small and Singer's study, *Resort to Arms*, contains a widely-accepted definition of civil war.

... any armed conflict that involves (a) military action internal to the metropolis, (b) the active participation of the national government, and (c) effective resistance by both sides.²⁷

²²Ethiopia accounts for three of the five enduring rivalries. The evolution of state development in that part of the Horn of Africa more closely resembles the evolution of the Westphalia state system than the weak Africa state system. Its wars, not unexpectedly, look like Westphalia wars.

²³Herfried Münkler, *The New Wars* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1998), 22.

²⁴Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler and Nicholas Sambanis, "The Collier-Hoeffler Model of Civil War Onset and the Case Study Project Research Design," in *Understanding Civil War*, Collier and Sambanis, eds. (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2005), 3.

²⁵Ibrahim Elbadawi and Sambanis, "Why Are There So Many Civil Wars in Africa? Understanding and Preventing Violent Conflict," *Journal of African Economies* 9, 3 (2000), 2344.

²⁶Michael Brown, ed., *Ethnic Conflict and International Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Salehyan, *Rebels*, 4.

²⁷Nicholas Sambanis, "What is Civil War" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, 6 (2004), 816. For a similar definition see, Fearon and Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," 829-830. Their definition includes casualty thresholds; and Ogechi Emmanuel Anayanwu and

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The COW project defines a civil war as: "... sustained military combat resulting in at least 1,000 deaths per year, pitting central governments forces against an insurgent force capable of effective resistance, determined by the latter's ability to inflict upon the government forces at least 5% of the fatalities that the insurgents sustain."²⁸ Salehyan defines it as a "... contest between government and armed opposition groups fought within the borders of a given country."²⁹

It is important to note at this juncture that all civil wars are intrastate conflicts, but the inverse is not the case. If we combine Singer and Small's definition (with its insistence that the state is an essential actor in the war), with the 1,000 death threshold that separates conflict from war, we can clearly distinguish civil war from other types of intrastate conflict. Many analyses, nonetheless, fail to differentiate between a civil war and other types of intrastate war.³⁰

The actors in a civil war are the state represented by the sitting national government and a challenger. The actors in many of Africa's so-called civil wars, however, belie that simple dyadic definition. What they are fighting for and against whom is not always clear and in many of Africa's wars, the state is often little more than a bystander. As well, at times it becomes almost impossible to distinguish coercive agents of the states from rebels. The term "sobels," for instance, was coined to describe the combatants in Sierra Leone – it signifies soldiers by night and rebels by day. The same combatants can at one point represent the state and at another a rebel group.

Raphael Chijioke Njoku, "The Cause of Wars and Conflicts in Africa," in *War and Peace in Africa*, Toyin Folola and Njoku, eds. (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2010), 21.

²⁸Errol Henderson and J. Singer, "'New Wars' and Rumors of 'New Wars'," *International Interactions* 28, 2 (2002), 179.

²⁹Idean Salehyan, *Rebels without Borders: Transnational Insurgencies in World Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 4.

³⁰Henderson and Singer, "Rumors of 'New Wars'," 185.

Table 2: Select African Civil Wars (1989-2006)³¹

Country/Date	State contested?
Algeria, 1992-1998	Yes
Angola, 1989-2001	Yes
Burundi, 1993-2002	Yes and No
Chad 1982-1990	Yes and No
Chad 2006	Yes and No
Rep. of Congo 1997-2000	Yes
DRC 1997-2000	No
Cote d'Ivoire 2002-03	Yes
Ethiopia/Eritrea 1962-1991	Yes
Guinea-Bissau 1998	Yes
Liberia 1990-2003	Yes and No
Mozambique 1989-1992	Yes
Rwanda 1990-1994	Yes and No
Sierra Leone 1998-1999	Yes and No
Somalia 1991-2006	Yes and No
Sudan 1989-2005	Yes
Uganda 1981-1986	Yes
Uganda 1987-2004	Yes and No

³¹Adrien M. Ratsimbaharison, "Greed and Civil War in Post-Cold War Africa," *African Security* 4, 4 (2011), 273. He cites his sources for this table as: nils Petter Gleditsch et al. "Armed Conflict 1946-20001: A New Dataset," *Journal of Peace Research* 39, no. 5 (2002); Uppsala Conflict Data Program and International Peace Institute, *UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset Codebook Version 4-2007*, www.pcr.uu.se/publications/UCDP_pub/UCDP_PRIO_Codebook_v4-2007.pdf; Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*, 2008, www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html

While the conflicts in Table 2 are categorized as civil wars, lumping them into one category obscures important differences among them and hides the broader systemic forces at work. In some cases they do not fit the classical definition of a civil war, because the state is not always being contested; in other cases the multiplicity of actors makes it difficult to fit the conflict into the dyadic model of the state (government) versus a challenger. And where the dyadic model cannot capture the multiplicity of actors, there is often a defining regional dimension, again revealing systemic forces at work. In Table 2, yes and no under state contested signifies that the state may have been part of a dyad at one point, but at other points it is not clear that the state was contested. No (only in the case of the DRC), means much of the time the state was almost completely absent from the conflict.

The Chad civil war between 1982 and 1990 followed state collapse. *Le Monde* stated in 1980, “The modern state inherited from the colonial period no longer exists.” If the state had collapsed, it is difficult to argue that it was one of the contestants during the entire conflict; it certainly was not providing “effective resistance.” The conflict in Chad (2006) is three years after the start of the Darfur conflict in 2003. It had multiple actors from Darfur (Sudan) and Chad and it was fought across borders. What is being contested is not always clear.

The Lord’s Resistance Army fighting in Uganda (1987-2004) has not always challenged state power; it, as well, has operated out of southern Sudan, the eastern DRC, and the Central African Republic. It is not even properly an intrastate conflict, which is a necessary if not sufficient attribute of a civil war.

The conflicts listed in Liberia and Sierra Leone started as civil wars, but the central role of the state waxed and waned as the number of rebel groups proliferated. These groups

crisscrossed the border between the two states. The Uppsala Conflict Data Project (UCDP) stated:

From the very outset of the rebellion [in Sierra Leone] Sankoh's RUF movement received support from the NPFL leader Charles Taylor in Liberia, who lent soldiers as well as arms and safe havens to Sankoh's troops, who were initially based in Liberia. Sankoh's and the RUF's links to Liberia and Charles Taylor are manifold, and also included the illicit sale and smuggling of diamonds to Liberia, and to the pockets of Taylor himself, in return for arms, supplies and other types of support. Taylor was a primary driving force in the creation and sustenance of the RUF.³²

The Liberia/Sierra Leone conflict is at the epicenter of the Mano River Conflict Zone.

The civil war in Rwanda included "soldiers without borders," with origins in Burundi, the eastern DRC and Uganda. They crossed into Rwanda from Uganda in 1990, with leadership drawn from the army that fought in Uganda's 1981-1986 civil war. These so-called civil wars spilled over into the conflict in the DRC (1996-2000). All of these conflicts fueled the Great Lakes' Conflict Zone.

Somalia has been a collapsed state since 1991, and such as the state is being contested, it is only in and around the capital of Mogadishu. Somaliland and Puntland are formally part of Somalia, but are *de facto* states, well outside the reach of the *de jure* state of Somalia.

Ten out of the eighteen civil wars in Table 2, therefore, do not neatly fit the definition of a civil war. And we could add Sudan (1989-2005), which appears as a clear case of a civil war –

³²Uppsala Conflict Data Program, 2008. www.ucdp.uu.se/database

North versus the South, but within which a new conflict in 2003 began in Darfur with cross-regional causes and effects.³³

The debate over the causes of civil war in Africa has split into two camps. The greed argument posits that it is about economic gains. Rebels are seen as quasi-criminals with no political objective.³⁴ The grievance argument argues it is about politics. The dichotomous “greed” and “grievance” argument on the causes of civil war has two weaknesses. First, it ignores the conflation of economics and politics in neopatrimonial regimes. Second, it ignores the fact that in Africa’s weak states, characterized by juridical statehood and strained center-periphery relations, fosters conflict zones where the domestic and international are conflated as well.

Two inferences are drawn from the greed versus grievance debate that matter here. First, in the case of Africa, no matter whether you come down on the greed or grievance side of the argument, we are talking about weak states. As Berdal and Malone state: “A narrow state centric approach to assessing these conflicts is, therefore, both of limited analytical value and policy relevance.”³⁵ Second, because wars change as they are being fought, we must distinguish among the conditions for war, the immediate causes of war, and how the former affects the evolution of war. The initiation of a conflict or war may be a grievance, which would imply a

³³As Sambanis has repeatedly noted, there is a lack of clarity in the definition of civil war and much arbitrary classification in the formal modeling of civil war (2005, 303-305). Nicholas Sambanis, “Conclusion: Using Case Studies to Refine and Expand the Theory of Civil War,” in *Understanding Civil War: Volume 1: Africa* Paul Collier and Sambanis, eds. (Washington, D.C. The World Bank, 2005).

³⁴Halvard Buhaug and Jan Ketil Rød, “Local Determinants of African Civil Wars, 1970-2001,” *Political Geography* 25 (2006), 320.

³⁵Mats Berdal and David M. Malone, “Introduction,” in *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars*, Berdal and Malone, eds. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 2.

political objective such as the overthrow of the state, but can evolve into a greed-driven conflict.

As Berdal and Malone continue:

Indeed in some cases examined, what is usually considered the most basic of military objectives in war – that is defeating the enemy in battle- has been replaced by economically driven interests in continued fighting and the institutionalization of violence at what is for some clearly a profitable level of intensity.³⁶

In effect, what these inferences tell us is that what are commonly called civil wars, or in other cases labeled reform insurgencies, may start out as such but continue to be fought for reasons distinct from their original cause – the nature of the conflict changes.

Collier's contribution to the greed side of the debate is revealing. He frames his economic argument for Africa's wars as a "collective action" problem. Collier is arguing that a classic collective action problem, particularly in ethnically heterogeneous states, makes it difficult for the rebels to create a large enough force to defeat the state, but, they can create a large enough force to fight for limited economic gains, and for control over limited territory.³⁷

Collier, in fact, is explaining a different kind of war. Because the state is no longer the "center of gravity," it is no longer a civil war.

An alternative to Collier's explanation, and one more consistent with what he actually describes, is that as a state becomes weaker, it is not worth fighting over. It is not about the state qua state. When the state no longer can provide the resources necessary to sustain patron – client networks essential to neopatrimonial systems, it is not worth fighting over. What starts out as a

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Paul Collier, "Doing Well out of War: An Economic Perspective," in *Greed and Grievance*, Mats Berdal and David Malone, eds. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000).

civil war, ironically, further weakens the state or triggers state failure. This is why the one measurement of grievance that Collier notes is consistent with civil war is a prior period of economic decline.³⁸ This decline does affect the calculus of potential rebels, but not necessarily as he explains. As the state as a potential neopatrimonial resource diminishes, it is both easier to contest and, ironically, less likely to be contested. In the case of a failing Democratic Republic of Congo, Prunier argued that Kigali decided it was no longer worth supporting the overthrow of the new government there:

After all, why take power at the center and have to bother with the setting up of another bogus government, which might again decide to turn independent? What mattered more and more as the war went on were the economic interests. And these were in Kasai and Katanga, not Kinshasa.³⁹

This is most evident in the cases of state collapse where the state no longer has an effective military at its command. Using Collier's logic, it should then be relatively easy to create a large enough force to challenge the collapsed state. But in these instances the conflict is more likely to push away from the center of the state and across borders fostering a *war across states*.

Collier's economic explanations of civil war, at least in the African context, are better at explaining how these wars evolve than explaining why they started, which in most cases is political. For instance, in the DRC, Hutu versus Tutsi grievances cannot be ignored. Political rights, one of Collier's proxies for grievance, was a catalyst for conflict in eastern DRC. In Darfur, economic inequality and political rights fed the grievances rebels in Darfur held against the ruling elite in Khartoum. In the Niger Delta, the Federal government's control over oil

³⁸Ibid., 97.

³⁹Gerard Prunier, *Africa's World War: Congo, The Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 234.

revenues, gained from the Delta, fueled the conflict. Yet, in these three cases grievances mixed with economic motivations as we would expect in a neopatrimonial political system to shape the evolution of conflict.

Collier does an excellent job of showing how civil war creates or changes the payoff structure for rebels and so does imply an evolutionary dynamic inherent in the conflicts. However, what he is really describing is not a new payoff structure, but a shifting political calculus imbedded in neopatrimonial politics. For instance, he argues that conflict leads to an increase in monopolistic behavior. In fact, this is the essence of neopatrimonial rule, from Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire, to the riverian elite dominating in Sudan, to the series of kleptocracies in Nigeria. He notes that:

[T]he rebels are not rebelling against the government at all; they are simply taking off their uniforms in order to reduce detection and thereby increase the opportunity their official weapons provide for predation...., a rebel group does not need to defeat the government, but it does need to replace the government monopoly of violence with a rebel movement duopoly of violence.⁴⁰

Collier is describing the end of a civil war and the start of a different kind of conflict or war, neither classical war (interstate or civil) or a reform insurgency. The conditions that he describes that fuel conflict should be seen as part of a continuum, not as a break in what was normal, including; rent-seeking, criminality, and imperfect information, are all parts of neopatrimonial politics. This is why Berdal and Malone's defense of the greed explanation is only half correct. They state: "The fact is that much of the violence which bodies such as the UN have been concerned in the post-Cold War era has been driven not by a Clausewitzian logic of forwarding

⁴⁰Berdal and Malone, "Introduction.

a set of political aims, but rather by powerful economic motives and agendas.”⁴¹ In much of Africa, however, the political and economic agendas cannot so easily be separated. As Williams argues greed and grievance are not separable categories and, “...in fact there has never been such a thing as an apolitical war.”⁴² The relationships shaped by neopatrimonial politics, not material resources, shape the conflicts.⁴³

The rebels do, however, need to get their illicit gains to the market, and as Collier notes, they are likely to shift assets out of the country.⁴⁴ The weakness of the state creates incentives for the rebels who are already ensconced in enclaves far from the center of the state to look for new patrons in neighboring states. The patron – client networks of neopatrimonial regimes are regionalized setting the stage for *wars across states*.

New Wars

Africa’s post-Cold War conflicts do not fit into “old” war categories, either interstate or civil war.

New Wars is a somewhat amorphous even ambiguous category of war. Not all scholars who are grouped into this category even use the term new wars. Some, most prominently Kaldor, use the term explicitly. But as a separate category, there are common themes that allow a body of literature to be grouped together. They tend to agree that: there are a group of post-Cold War conflicts that are fundamentally different than “old wars” and that they are mostly internal wars; the systemic effects of globalization is a primary explanation for why they are

⁴¹Ibid.,” 4.

⁴²Williams, *War and Conflict in Africa*, 8.

⁴³ Reno, *Warfare in Independent Africa* , 165.

⁴⁴Ibid., 102.

different; and these wars are not Clausewitzian, in the sense that they have no discernable political logic.

Are they really new? In Berdal's words: "One of the principal difficulties with the New Wars thesis lied in the juxtaposition of the 'newness' against what is supposedly a distinctive 'Clausewitzian' era of warfare."⁴⁵ For Holsti (who does not use the term), war has become more a problem within states than between or among states.⁴⁶ Holsti calls them "Wars of a Third Kind."⁴⁷ Kaldor states "The new wars can be contrasted with earlier wars in terms of their goals, the methods of warfare and how they are financed."⁴⁸ Van Creveld focuses on the waning role of the state.⁴⁹

But the idea that these wars are something "new" suffers from two problems. First, is the extrapolation that the nature of war itself has changed.⁵⁰ In Smith's words:

War no longer exists... war as cognitively known to most non-combatants, war as a battle in a field between men and machinery, war as a massive deciding event in a dispute in international affairs: such war no longer exists.⁵¹

In Münkler's words: "There are no longer war fronts, and, therefore, few actual engagements and no major battles; military forces do not lock horns and wear each other down."⁵²

⁴⁵Mats Berdal, "How 'New' Are 'New Wars'?" *Global Economic Change and the Study of Civil War*, *Global Governance*, 9, 44 (2003): 93.

⁴⁶Holsti, *The State, War, and the State of War*, xi.

⁴⁷Ibid, Chapter 2.

⁴⁸Mary Kaldor, *New Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 6.

⁴⁹Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: The Free Press, 1991).

⁵⁰Errol Henderson and J. Singer, "'New Wars' and Rumors of 'New Wars'" *International Interactions* 28, 2 (2002), 179. Colin M. Fleming, "New or Old Wars? Debating a Clausewitzian Future," *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 32, 2 (2009): 215.

⁵¹Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane Books, 2005), 1.

Second, many of the elements that, if not considered unique to *new wars*, are at least considered prominent characteristics of them, are in fact nothing new. The so-called new wars in Africa, in fact, have elements of “old wars,” or at least Africa’s past as well as of new wars. De Waal states:

There are indeed new forms of war in Africa, resurgent older forms of warfare, and novel combinations of different practices. Moreover, the most important political reality of the last decade in Africa has been the decline of centralized power.⁵³

Gray, for instance, notes that intercommunal strife has been around for a long time.⁵⁴ Newman shows that many factors attributed to *new wars* are nothing new, including: criminal elements, ethnic cleansing, targeting civilians, and genocide.⁵⁵ Kalyvas points out that some scholars distinguish "old civil wars" from "new civil wars," by saying the former have collective motivations while the latter have private motivations;⁵⁶ the new war thesis emphasizes private gain. Kalyvas, however, notes that private gain was hardly absent from past conflicts. Keegan, states:

All regular armies, even the armies of the French Revolution, recruited irregulars to patrol, reconnoiter and skirmish for them; during the eighteenth century the

⁵²Herfried Münkler, *The New Wars* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1998), 3.

⁵³Alex de Waal, “Contemporary Warfare in Africa,” in *New Wars: Restructuring the Global Military Sector*, Mary Kaldor and Basker Vashee, eds., (Pinter: Washington, DC, 1997), 287.

⁵⁴Colin S. Gray, “How Has War Change Since the End of the Cold War,” *Parameters* 35, Spring (2005):19.

⁵⁵Edward Newman, “The ‘New Wars’ Debate: A Historical Perspective is Needed,” *Security Dialogue*, 35, 2 (2004).

⁵⁶Nicholas Kalyvas, "'New' and 'Old' Civil War: A Valid Distinction" *World Politics* 54, 1 (2001), 102.

expansion of such forces – Cossacks, ‘hunters,’ Highlanders, ‘borders,’ Hussars – had been one of the most noted contemporary military developments. Over their habits of loot, pillage, rape and murder, kidnap, extortion and systematic vandalism their civilized employers chose to draw a veil.⁵⁷

Clausewitz was an historian, so he also realized that each epoch defined the nature of war, which is why he made clear in Chapter three of Book Eight, that every age had its own kind of war.⁵⁸ As Paret states:

No doubt the centralized state, which only recently had emancipated itself from a tangle of inhibitions to gain unfettered use of its energies, would also decline. He [Clausewitz] did not speculate on the forms that the state might assume in the future ...⁵⁹

In the case of post-Cold War Africa we do not have to speculate on what form the state may take. Elbadawi and Sambanis, attribute the high incidence of civil war in Africa to the failure of state building.⁶⁰ In many cases African states had yet to resemble the centralized state of which Clausewitz spoke. In some cases the state collapsed, creating the conditions for regional conflict and war. Hettne noted that failed states create “black holes.”⁶¹ Reno notes that the three cases of failure he examines

⁵⁷John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 5.

⁵⁸Fleming, “Old or New Wars,” 233.

⁵⁹Paret, *Clausewitz*, 3.

⁶⁰Ibrahim Elbadawi and Nicholas Sambanis, “Why Are There So Many Civil Wars in Africa: Understanding and Preventing Violent Conflict,” *Journal of African Economies* 9, 3 (2000), 264.

⁶¹Björn Hettne, “Globalization and the New Regionalism: The Second Great Transformation,” in *Globalism and the New Regionalism*, Hettne, András Inotai and Osvaldo Sunkel, eds. (New York: MacMillan Press, 2000), 16.

(Liberia, Sierra Leone, DRC), occurred within “zones of conflict.”⁶² Holsti called them “zones of war.”⁶³

WARS ACROSS STATES IN AFRICA

Weak states in Africa have created a propensity for conflict and shaped that conflict. Because these wars do not truly occur within the container of individual states, or between states, there is a systemic component to them. In Buzan’s words: “For a system to exist requires the existence of units, among which significant interaction takes place and that are arranged or structured according to some principle.”⁶⁴ The African state system, as with any system, is shaped by how its interdependent parts interact. As Dessler relates, “The job of a structural theory is to explain the connections between the conditions of action and actions itself.”⁶⁵ In the case of Africa, the condition of action is a weak state system. The action is *wars across states*.

As John Ruggie argues:

It follows that the functional scope of the international system will also vary, depending upon the hegemonic form of state/society relations that prevail internationally at any given time. Therefore, the hegemonic form of state/society relations, or lack thereof, constitutes an attribute of the international system and can be used as a systems level explanation.⁶⁶

This same logic can be applied to the subsystem or regional level in Africa.

⁶²Reno, *Warlord Politics*, 49.

⁶³Holsti, *The State, War, and the State of War* (Princeton University Press, 1996), 141.

⁶⁴Barry Buzan, “From international system to international society: structural realism and regime theory meet the English school,” *International Organization* 47, 3 (1993)331.

⁶⁵David Dessler, “What’s at Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate” *International Organization* 43, 3 (1989), 444

⁶⁶John Gerald Ruggie, “Continuity and Transformation in the World Policy: Toward a Neorealist Synthesis” *World Politics* 35, 2 (1983), 280.

Understanding war in Africa demands we understand African politics, or Ruggie's prevailing form of state/society relations. Three interacting characteristics of the post-colonial African state shaped the nature of its post-Cold War politics and concomitantly shaped the contours of conflict in Africa. First, is juridical statehood in Africa. Second, is the stubborn prevalence of neopatrimonial rule. They are the double helix of the DNA of Africa's weak states. Third, state weakness, due to a combination of neopatrimonial rule and juridical statehood, became most pronounced in the periphery; weak states lacked effective administrative capacity and lack control over their hinterland.⁶⁷

Juridical Statehood

Africa is made up of legal entities we call states; they are juridical states. The Berlin Conference of 1884/8, where Europe carved-up much of Africa, created what became the contemporary collection of African states.⁶⁸ The Organization of African Unity (OAU) certified the Berlin rules under Article II paragraph III of its Charter; resolution 16 of the OAU stated that it: "solemnly declares that all member states pledge themselves to respect the borders existing on their achievement of national independence."⁶⁹

While these states have legal status allowing them to attract and accept funds from various sources overseas, they lack *de facto* statehood. In Englebert's words: "At a time when many African states lack the capacity to project their power across their territories, it bears

⁶⁷Morten Bøås, "Towards a Political Economy of Regionalized and Transnationalized States: Informal Economies, Floating Borders and Networks," (2000).

⁶⁸The conference was attended by: Germany, France, Great Britain, Portugal, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Russia, Austria-Hungary, the U.S., Denmark, Sweden/Norway, the Netherlands, and Turkey.

⁶⁹http://chr.up.za/hr_docs/african/docs/ahsg/ashg4doc

stressing that they exist today as sovereign entities only because they were once colonized.”⁷⁰

After World War II, under United Nations Resolution 1514, colonial powers were called to transfer “all powers to the peoples of those territories, without any conditions or reservations.”⁷¹

Juridical statehood allowed the ascendant political class to do what they wanted with the subject population, since they obtained their legitimacy from the outside there were few reasons to court domestic legitimacy.⁷² The legitimacy afforded the modern state by the provision of public goods was missing.

Because during the Cold War Africa’s artificial states derived their legitimacy from external recognition, they were much more secure than states of equivalent relative weakness had been before in the international system.⁷³ It also enabled neopatrimonial politics in Africa. And, during the Cold War outside players, in particular, the U.S. and Soviet Union, but including China, and France, hand-picked or supported Africa’s authoritative rulers (big men); the same external players were often the source of funding for Africa’s neopatrimonial networks.⁷⁴

Juridical statehood contributed to the arrested development of the state in Africa. International legitimacy offered a crutch; the Africa state did not have to stand on its own domestic legs. In Reno’s words: “Unlike classic state building rulers elsewhere, quasi-state rulers did not hold power by virtue of effective internal control and capacity to mobilize citizens

⁷⁰Pierre Englebert, *Africa: Unity, Sovereignty and Sorrow* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009), 61.

⁷¹Cited in William Reno, *Warfare in Independent Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 16.

⁷²Georg Sørensen, “War and State-Making: Why Doesn’t it Work in the Third World?” *Security Dialogue* 32, 3 (2001), 347.

⁷³John Ravenhill, “Redrawing the Map of Africa, in *The Precarious Balance: State and Society in Africa*, in Donald Rothchild and Naomi Chazan, eds. (Boulder: Westview, 1988), 283.

⁷⁴See Aristide Zolberg, “The Specter of Anarchy,” *Dissent*, 30, summer (1992), 309.

but recognized that decisions made in strong states empowered those who inherited African colonies...⁷⁵

Neopatrimonial Politics

In a neopatrimonial system government officials hold positions in bureaucratic organizations, but they use these positions to secure private gains rather than to promote or create public policy that provides public goods.⁷⁶ Neopatrimonial rule can be defined by three characteristics. First, in contrast to the impersonal and abstract legal-rational rule, expected from the modern state, the neopatrimonial state is defined by personal rule. Second, the boundary between the private and the public is blurred and the state becomes the main means for accumulating power and wealth. Third, politics are structured around vertical patron-client relationships, typically centered on a big man. These strongmen often gave themselves exaggerated honorific titles: Kwame Nkrumah – *Osagyefo* (victor in war); Sékou Toure – *le Grand Silly* (elephant); Jomo Kenyatta – *Mzee* (the elder) and *Babu wa Taifa* (father of the nation); Julius Nyerere – *Mwalimu* (teacher); Idi Amin – Field Marshall and Conqueror of the British Empire; and Jean-Bédél Bokassa – The First Emperor of the Central African Empire.

Bureaucrats are links in the neopatrimonial chain, or serve as conduits between patrons and clients.⁷⁷ In the often-used metaphor in Africa, the state mediated who got a place at the table and who got to “eat.” In a twist to Marx, relations of consumption (not relations of production) defined the power relationships between the state and society.

⁷⁵Reno, *Warlord Politics and the African State* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 18.

⁷⁶Christopher Clapham, *Third World Politics: An Introduction* (London: Helm, 1985), 48: cited in *Ibid.*

⁷⁷Chabal, “Introduction,” 4.

At independence the state was captured by local political elites.⁷⁸ The post-colonial neopatrimonial state depended on the state's expanded control over the economy as the source for patronage.⁷⁹ Instead of creating wealth, the new states created control regimes, where the government regulated trade and manipulated interest and exchange rates. It was tied closely to urban-based industries.⁸⁰ This was done by so-called socialist and capitalist regimes alike.⁸¹ The African state in many cases became both the primary wage employer and the main consumer. The patronage resources available to the state and the ruling elite was in direct proportion to the size of the public sector.⁸² The share of public enterprises in gross domestic product of African countries as the Cold War was ending was twice as high as developing country average: 17.5% to 8.6%.⁸³

Neopatrimonial rule was inherently degenerative in Africa. There was a contradiction between the internal logic of neopatrimonial rule, which granted the elite greater rewards the smaller the number of guests invited to the table, and the growing demands for the people for a seat at the table. Growing exclusivity and concomitant inequality strained whatever legitimacy the post-colonial state had, even as the juridical state survived with the help of external patrons.

Over time, neopatrimonial rule hollowed out the post-colonial state creating weak states. These states did not provide essential public goods, which would include or presuppose a healthy

⁷⁸Robert Bates, *When Things Fell Apart: State Failure in Late 20th Century Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 37.

⁷⁹Larry Diamond, "Class Formation in the Swollen African State." *Journal of Modern African Studies*. 25, 4 (198), 572.

⁸⁰Bates, *When Things Fell Apart.*, 56.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 37.

⁸²René Lemarchand, "The State, the Parallel Economy, and the Changing Structure of Patronage Systems," in *The Precarious Balance: State and Society in Africa*. Donald Rothchild and Naomi Chazan, eds. (Boulder: Westview, 1988), 155.

⁸³Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2000), 117.

bureaucracy, lack of corruption, growing GDP, and a functioning currency. Most importantly, the state progressively lost its monopoly over the legitimate use of force. In extreme cases, such as the DRC, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, it led to state collapse. State collapse, however, was a regional event most often triggered by external forces pressing-in on a hollowed-out state.

Center – Periphery Relations

Neopatrimonial rule and juridical statehood compounded the strains between the center and periphery of post-colonial African states. About forty-five percent of all African boundaries are straight lines that either correspond to an astrologic measurement or are parallel to some other set of straight lines. This means that ties among peoples on either side of the bequeathed international borders were likely to be as strong or stronger than the ties between people in the central region of the state and the periphery, a condition exacerbated by neopatrimonial rule.

Post-colonial Africa inherited distorted patterns of center-periphery relations, where there was tension between core zones that contain the greatest concentration of people and the peripheries where the government was less important.⁸⁴ Within the neopatrimonial logic of Africa, the distribution of public expenditures sustained the growth of town or agro-industrial investments and gave few benefits to the rural areas.⁸⁵ Much of Africa never established a monopoly over the legitimate use of force in their periphery, an essential element for establishing *de facto* statehood. America and Europe were able to establish effective political, economic and military control for the land over which they claimed sovereignty. For instance, in the early years of the Republic, the United States was challenged by tax revolt in western

⁸⁴Christopher Clapham, “Rethinking African States,” *African Security Review* 10, 3 (2001).

⁸⁵Jean-François Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (New York: Longman, 1993), 64.

Pennsylvania, the periphery of the new country – the “Whiskey Rebellion.” Secretary of Treasury Alexander Hamilton put together an army, under the titular head of then President George Washington, and put down the rebellion. This not only demonstrated the ability of the fledgling state to project authority to the far reaches of the country through the military, but secured the right to collect taxes. Center-periphery relations in Africa took a different path. In most cases, weak African governments had a hard time deploying forces across their territories and little or no ability to collect direct taxes.⁸⁶

The break between the center and the periphery, furthermore, strengthened the informal economy at the expense of a formal economy in decline. These informal or shadow economies, always present in Africa’s weak states, spill across the poorly policed borders shaping new patron – client networks that rely less on the center for resources and more on cross-border ties.

These three factors created a perfect storm in post-Cold War Africa that has devastated large swaths of the continent, including: the conflict in the Mano River Basin that started with Charles Taylor’s 1989 crossing into Liberia from Côte d’Ivoire; Laurent Kabila’s 1996 insurgency in Zaire backed by Rwanda and Uganda; and the Darfur conflict that reignited in 2003 at the interstice of civil war in Chad and Sudan.

The Evolution of Wars across States

These characteristics of the weak African state not only explain why conflict is so prevalent in post-Cold War Africa, but why it does not follow the familiar pattern of classical war. Many of Africa’s conflicts have different actors, staging, and ultimately, follow a different script than do interstate or civil wars. Their center of gravity is not so much defined by borders between states or control over the capital, as it is by the control of clientelist networks that often

⁸⁶ Englebort, *Africa Unity, Sovereignty and Sorrow*, 54.

transcend state boundaries. The conflicts centered on the Mano River Basin, the eastern DRC, and Darfur, all followed a broadly similar pattern of a *war across states*. The underling conditions of each of these conflicts were juridical statehood, neopatrimonial rule, and peripheral areas outside state's monopoly over the legitimate use of force. The current conflict centered on Mali has similar underlying conditions and may already be following a similar path leading to a *war across states*.

A CONFLICT ACROSS STATES IN THE TRANS-SAHEL

The Trans-Sahel is the latest region of Africa to feel the after-shocks of state collapse. Conflict across the Sahel is nothing new.

But the nature of conflicts in the Sahel and Sahara has changed, and the patterns of violence have become more complex. The sources of crises have become more mobile, acquiring a cross-border dimension that requires regional solutions.⁸⁷

In this case, Libya and then Mali failed triggering the common systemic effect of a *war across states*.

After the end of the Cold War, Mali was a magnet for foreign assistance. It seemed to have all the trappings of a transitioning democracy. But beneath this veneer, the same political processes that define state weakness elsewhere in Africa were evident. It was a juridical state propped up by foreign assistance. Domestic sources of legitimacy flowed from patron-client networks. There was an enduring rural – urban divide and the “problem of the North” was left unsettled. The Tuareg insurrections across the Sahel in the 1990s and 2000s were a reaction to

⁸⁷Anouar Boukhars, “Rethinking Security across the Sahara and the Sahel,” *Fride Policy Brief*, No. 199 (April 2015), 1.

the states neglect of their hinterlands and the promotion of agricultural and sedentism economies over pastoral nomadism.⁸⁸

Mali was long considered post-Cold War Africa's shining star – "... a beacon of democratic hope in Africa."⁸⁹ It escaped single party rule in 1991 when popular protests led to a coup overthrowing the twenty-three year reign of General Moussa Traoré. A new constitution and multiparty elections were held the following year; a generally free and fair election was held every five years since. Yet, "... it is a textbook case study of the failure of Western governments and international donors to correctly diagnose the sources of Sahelian state fragility."⁹⁰

Democracy ended on March 21, 2012 when troops outside the capital of Bamako launched a mutiny. The sitting president, Amadou Toumani Touré (known as ATT), who had been elected in 2002, fled the capital. The head of the ruling junta was U.S.- trained army captain Amadou Sanogo.

The trigger for the March 21st coup d'état was the string of defeats of government forces by the latest Tuareg rebellion in the North. The rebellion was led by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), founded in 2011. In the first half of 2012, it was augmented by desertions from the Mali army in the North: three of the four Malian military units operating there defected.⁹¹ This was followed by the collapse of the Mali operational command in the North.

⁸⁸Ibid., 3.

⁸⁹Susanna D. Wing, *Constructing Democracy in Africa: Mali in Transition* (Bankingstoke, Palgrave, 2008), 6.

⁹⁰Boukhars, "Rethinking Security across the Sahara and the Sahel," 5.

⁹¹Susanna Wing, "Briefing Mali: Politics of a Crisis," *African Affairs*. Advanced access published May 29, 2013.

There is a long history of the marginalization of the Tuareg going back at least to the 1962-3 repression by the Malian army of its first president, Modibo Keita (1960–1968). But the latest revolt was possible because of regional systemic pressures.

The conflict in Mali is part of a long running regional conflict. al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), one of the protagonist in the Mali conflict, was born when Algerian Salafists fled to Mali from Algeria in 2003. Just as the Laurent Kabila's Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour Libération de Congo (ADFL) were sourced from neighboring states, the MNLA, the vanguard of the latest revolt in Mali, was kick-started by supplies and insurgents crossing-over from Libya. The end of the Gaddafi regime was the beginning of the latest round of fighting in Mali, just as the end of the Hutu regime in Rwanda was the beginning of the 1996 conflict in Zaire. Thousands of Nigerien and Malian Tuareg fled Libya when they were deprived of Gaddafi's patrimony; and they returned home well-armed. And Azawad, the homeland claimed by the Tuareg, overlaps with parts of Mali, Niger, Algeria, and Libya, just as the Kinyarwanda-speaking people spread across the Great Lakes region. These are regional conflicts.



The double helix of the Africa's weak states, juridical statehood and neopatrimonial rule are as determinant of Mali's slide into war, and to the evolution of that war, as it was with the conflict in the DRC. Unlike the DRC, however, Mali was able to hide behind the façade of

democracy. The weaknesses in its democracy, nonetheless, were evident even before the Tuareg rebellion reignited. There were many irregularities in the 2002 elections.⁹² Yet, even with the apparent erosion of liberal democracy from the start of Traoré regime, Mali had strong support from the West, propping up its juridical statehood. International aid accounted for over twenty-five percent of the general budget.⁹³ This money was highly centralized in the executive branch – i.e. controlled by big men with the president at the center. And the limited amount the legislature and MPs had to disperse was imbedded in clientelist networks.

In effect, Traoré and his government refined what could be called neopatrimonial democracy. The formal treatments of democracy were used to obscure the formidable institutional power of patron-client relations. In the waning months of Mobutu Sese Seko's autocratic rule, his troops were set loose on the populace of Kinshasa (among other places). In Mali, in the waning days of Traoré second term, residents on the outskirts of Bamako had their property taken by members of the president's inner circle.⁹⁴

At the legislative level, parliamentarians in Mali prioritized narrow constituency needs and their small network of clients over the provision of public goods.⁹⁵ In van Vliet's words: "Because these networks connected only a small minority of people to the spoils of the system, they further alienated ordinary citizens from the political system."⁹⁶ As elsewhere in Africa, neopatrimonial politics, even if dressed-up as a democracy, was inherently unstable. In Mali,

⁹²Bruce Whitehouse, "What went wrong in Mali," *London Review of Books* August 2012. <http://lrb.co.uk/v34/bruce-whitehouse/what-went-wrong-in-mali>

⁹³Martin van Vliet, "Weak Legislatures, Failing MPs, and the Collapse of Democracy in Mali," *African Affairs* 113, 450 (2014), 53.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵van Vliet, "Weak Legislatures," 47.

⁹⁶Ibid., 59.

these networks also supported urban areas at the expense of rural areas: since the 1980s as urban poverty declined there rural poverty remained the same.⁹⁷

Not only was neopatrimonialism the form or rule beneath the façade of democracy, it structured the relations between the center and the periphery, or the region of Bamako and the North. Mali never had a firm grasp on its North, instead successive governments co-opted local hierarchies into their clientelists networks. In some cases, the Mali government enlisted non-state militias to counter anti-state rebellions in the periphery, much as did Sudan when it enlisted the *Janjaweed* to fight the rebels in Darfur. When a Tuareg rebellion rose up in the North in 2006, Traoré negotiated a peace treaty and withdrew the army from much of the North. Rather than fighting the rebels (with millions of dollars of U.S. military aid), he tried to manipulate regional divisions – divide and rule; a move right out of Mobutu’s old play book.⁹⁸

Rather than develop the North, Traoré expanded his network into the illicit activities there. As Utas states: “This system of governance was adverse to development and only benefited a few, in Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal, but also crucially, in Bamako.”⁹⁹ In 2010, Malian officials even were complicit with AQIM and drug traffickers in the north.¹⁰⁰ The Mali government’s links with AQIM and organized crime further damaged its credibility in North, and was in fact publically denounced by the MNLA.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷Ibid, 50.

⁹⁸Winrich Khüne, “West Africa and the Sahel in the Grip of Organized Crime and International Terrorism – What Perspectives for Mali after Elections.” Johns Hopkins: Center for International Peace Studies, 6.

⁹⁹Mats Utas, “Mali: the fallacy of ungoverned spaces (by Yvan Guichaoua,” February 14, 2013. <http://matsutas.wordpress.com/2013/02/14/mali-the-fallacy-of-ungoverned-spaces-by-yvan-guichaoua/> accessed 2/4/2014.

¹⁰⁰Wolfram Lacher, “Organized Crime and Conflict in the Sahel-Sahara Region.” The Carnegie Papers. Middle East. September 2012, Washington, DC, 13.

¹⁰¹Ibid, 14.

The conflict in Mali is different in many ways than the ones in the DRC, the 1990s conflict in the Mano River Basin that involved Liberia and Sierra Leone, and the conflict centered on Darfur of the last decade (which encompassed Sudan and Chad). But it does follow a similar pattern. The actors are a heterodox mix of state, non-state, and hybrid actors; the staging of the conflict traverses the region; and it has not followed the script of a classical war - interstate or civil. It is becoming a *war across states*.

The MNLA, which triggered the latest round of fighting in the north, was originally aligned with AQIM, and two of its offshoots, Ansar al Dine (Defenders of the Faith) and the Movement for Tawhid and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). Both AQIM and MUJAO drew their members from across the Sahel. The leading actors of MUJAO, for instance, come from the Lamhar tribe base in Gao, but also have tribal and business ties in southern Algeria. It also draws recruits from Nigerien Songhais and Peuls in the Niger valley.

By the end of March, early April 2012, rebels had taken the North and the three northern cities of Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal. The alliance, such as it was, then fell apart. Mokhtar Belmokhtar broke with AQIM and created the Al Mua'qioon Biddam (Signed in Blood Battalion) that later led the attack on Al Amenas (a gas plant) in Algeria.¹⁰² AQIM ousted the MNLA from Timbuktu and the MUJWA ousted it from Gao. These groups, and others, have a complicated and fluid relationships with transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) that operate across the Trans-Sahel with the complicit support of local notables in Mali's North. In Timbuktu at one point criminal networks and jihadists militants entered into an alliance.¹⁰³ When AQIM entered Timbuktu, it ordered the militias that had been supported by the Mali

¹⁰² Wing, "Briefing Mali: Politics of a Crisis," 7.

¹⁰³ Wolfram Lacher, "Organized Crime and Conflict in the Sahel-Sahara Region." The Carnegie Papers. Middle East. September 2012, Washington, DC , 17.

government out of the city, and those militias then formed the National Liberation Front of Azawad.¹⁰⁴ This brief outline only scratches the surface of the fracturing and complexity of the insurgency in Mali.

The actors and staging of the conflict in Mali are creating a script similar to what we have seen in the Mano River Basin, the DRC, and Darfur. There are state and non-state actors involved and both are imbedded in fluid alliances with TCOs. The Trans-Sahel provides the staging and the conflict's center of gravity is not necessarily the state.

After the French intervention in January 2013, the coup leader Sanoga formed an alliance with Ansar al Dine and its leader Ag Ghaly. The former was to get the South and the latter the North.¹⁰⁵ Although the gambit failed, it reflects the fluid relationships among insurgents. When Ansar al Dine pulled out of the preliminary peace talks at Ouagadougou, some of its fighters defected to groups rich in cash from drug trafficking.¹⁰⁶

The staging of this conflict transcends Mali. The trigger of the latest round was the collapse of Libya. However, it is fueled by, in Khüne's words: "... the penetration of West Africa and the Sahel by increasingly symbiotic networks of organized crime and international terrorism ..."¹⁰⁷ AQIM includes many Algerian nationals with extensive personal business ties in Northern Mali.¹⁰⁸ In the face of the success of the French Opération Serval in Mali, the conflict spread: *Africa Confidential's* headline in June 2013 read: "After Mali Niger."¹⁰⁹ Well organized attacks on a French military barracks and a French company in Niger were

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 16.

¹⁰⁵*Africa Confidential*, 15 February 13, 54, 8 (2013), 2.

¹⁰⁶*Africa Confidential*, 18 January 54, 2 (2014), 12.

¹⁰⁷Khüne, "West Africa and the Sahel in the Grip of Organized Crime and International Terrorism," 1.

¹⁰⁸Alexis Arieff, "Crisis in Mali," *CRS Report for Congress*, January 13, 2013, 11.

¹⁰⁹*Africa Confidential*, 7 June 2013 13, 54, 12 (2013), 11.

orchestrated on May 2, 2013 by MUJAO and Al Mua'qioon Biddam. And because of threats from Boko Haram, Niger closed two-thirds of its frontier with Nigeria. Boko Haram, may have joined with MUJAO, whose leadership was drawn from multiple countries of the Trans-Sahel.¹¹⁰

The conflict in Mali is not following a classical script; given its staging and actors we should not expect it would. After the Tuareg rebellions of the 1990s and 2006, peace of a sort was negotiated, respectively, the National Pact Accord of 1992 and the Algiers Accord of 2006. Neither was really implemented.¹¹¹ Africa and the international community have responded to the latest fighting. On December 20, 2012, the UN (UNSC 2085) authorized an ECOWAS force, the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA). It was slow to develop and generally not considered strong enough to stop the insurgency's drive south, so the French intervened with approximately 4,000 troops on January 11, 2013. French Foreign Minister, Laurent Fabius stated on January 13th that the intervention would only last a few weeks. They were reading from the wrong script

The French soon realized that this would not be a quick mission. It was also evident that ASIMA alone could not stabilize Mali, to say nothing of the region. Rather than a total withdrawal after a few weeks, the French left 1,000 troops to support the 12,600 troop United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSAM), which included 6,000 troops from AFISAM that it had superseded.

The 2012 French intervention did lead to the preliminary talks at Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in June 2013. This had followed two agreements brokered by ECOWAS: one in April

¹¹⁰International Crisis Group (ICG), Mali: Security, Dialogue and Meaningful Reform. Africa Report No 201 11 April, 2013, 26.

¹¹¹Wing, "Briefing Mali: Politics of a Crisis, 6.

2012 that led to the junta ceding power to Traore; and the second in May, which gave Sanogo status as the “former head of state,” and granted Traore interim status as president for a year.

But the North is still unstable, and the conflict has metastasized. Ouagadougou was an agreement between only Mali and the MNLA. More worrying, the newly elected government of Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta (IBK), even as he received seventy percent of the votes in 2013, seems to have slipped back into old clientelists habits.¹¹² Rather than build-up the North, old divide-and-rule tactics are being deployed. Beneath the surface not much has changed.

CONCLUSION

The peacekeepers in Africa have undoubtedly saved many lives. But they are not just handicapped by the usual litany of institutional weaknesses, such as: mandated restrictions on their missions; under-equipped and out-numbered forces; and the political machinations of Africa and extra-regional actors alike. They are, in effect, fire-brigades operating in a vast forest where even as one blaze is put-out, another begins, or the original one has already spread beyond the reach of the fire-fighters. The question is why do these fires so frequently strike Sub-Sahara Africa, and why do they so easily blow across borders creating self-sustaining conflict zones?

The Africa weak state system, as distinct from that of the strong states of the Westphalia state system, creates the propensity for war in Africa and shapes the contours of those wars. It explains why, even as war had declined among some states, it has advanced in Africa.

Goldstein, in arguing that war has declined, struggled with this apparent antinomy: he states, “In my view, this ability to hold two contradictory beliefs at once-the world is no less dangerous, and

¹¹²International Crisis Group, “Mali: Reform of Relapse,” *Africa Report* N° 210 (January 2014). *Africa Confidential*, 10 January 2014 55, 1, 8.

conflict has declined-reflects our confusion in thinking about war.”¹¹³ Yet in some parts of the world war has increased and we are confused because they are a different kind of war.

At the beginning of 2014 the three largest UN peacekeeping missions were in Africa: UNAMID in Darfur (20,071), MONUSCO in the DRC (18,884) and MINUSMA in Mali (12,600). These conflicts have been difficult to end. The immediate triggers and causes of these conflicts may be unique. They do, however, follow similar patterns. Each is the epicenter of a larger conflict zone sending shock waves across borders. The actors, staging, and scripts of these conflicts has created a logic different logic than the conflict of the 20th century.

¹¹³Joshua S. Goldstein , *Winning the War on War: The Decline of Armed Conflict Worldwide*, (New York: A Plume Book, 2012), 20.