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Violent Internal Conflict and the African State: Towards a Framework of Analysis

Richard Jackson

Africa is in a deep and persistent malaise. It is by far the least developed continent economically, and the most conflict-prone politically. In policy-making circles and media characterisations, it is 'the hopeless continent' (*The Economist* May 13-19, 2000). Such pessimism is driven in part by the failure to manage – much less resolve – the destructive consequences of multiple violent conflicts. The ineffectiveness of conflict management efforts by the United Nations, the OAU, sub-regional organisations, or eminent personalities like Nelson Mandela or Jimmy Carter, is itself due in large part to the lack of a conceptual framework for analysing internal turmoil. Without an appropriate diagnosis of the causes of conflict, remedial action becomes a futile, if not dangerous exercise.

This article seeks to articulate in preliminary form a framework for understanding and diagnosing the causes of Africa's multiple internal conflicts. It suggests that these are rooted in the everyday politics and discourses of weak states, rather than in outbreaks of ancient hatreds, the pathology of particular rulers, or the breakdown of normally peaceful domestic systems; and argues that the direction of effective conflict resolution lies in reconfiguring local politics and reconstructing the malformed African state rather than in the 'saving failed states' approaches of recent years.

The Problem of Conflict in Africa

Internal conflicts – civil wars, intra-state conflicts, or 'new wars' (Kaldor 1999) – have their origins in domestic rather than systemic factors and involve politically motivated violence primarily within the boundaries of a single state. The fighting in these conflicts may range in a continuum from large-scale and sustained conventionally-based warfare – such as the war of UNITA (*União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola*) against the MPLA (*Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola*) in Angola – to low-intensity guerilla-style warfare – such as the LRA (Lord's Resistance Army) insurgency in Uganda. It may also entail campaigns of genocide or 'ethnic cleansing', such as in Rwanda in 1994 or the ongoing 'slow genocide' in Burundi.

There are several processes by which internal conflicts may be transformed into wider international conflicts. First, they can become a threat to international peace and security when the fighting spills over into neighbouring states or refugee-flows upset regional stability. Second, external states are often directly or indirectly drawn into the conflict through support links to the various sides of the conflict, supplying

weapons, training, or other materials. Third, sub-state actors – such as rebel movements, militias, warlords – often receive financial and political support from diaspora communities or ethnic kin separated by international borders. Lastly, the international community may decide to send in a peacekeeping force, or take such an active interest in the fighting that it becomes a matter of international concern. Rarely can internal conflicts remain sequestered from the wider international system, and separating their internal and external aspects is not straightforward when internal actors seek external sponsors and when external actors are constrained by the necessity of using and accommodating to local agents.

The problem of violent internal conflict in Africa is acute. It has been judged to be “the most warring region on the planet” (Van Tongeren 1999:11; Jackson 2000a:210). Nearly a third of Africa’s conflicts have started since the late 1980s and indeed Africa is experiencing a much greater rate of increase in the number of conflicts than other regions, and currently has the highest number of ongoing conflicts: half of Africa’s states are in conflict, affecting 20 per cent of the continent’s population. In mid-2001, serious internal conflict continued in Algeria, Western Sahara, Sudan, Chad, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Guinea, Liberia, Congo-Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Angola, and the Comoros. Many other African states face instability, high levels of domestic political violence, or burgeoning secessionist or rebel movements such as Lesotho, South Africa, Namibia, Kenya, Central African Republic, Djibouti, Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire, and Nigeria.

The primary challenge posed by Africa’s conflicts lies in their internally driven character (see **Table 1**). At present, the only inter-state conflict in Africa is between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Even this relatively simple border conflict, however, has been transformed into a wider regional conflict involving Kenya, Somalia and Libya, and has taken on many of the characteristics of internal conflicts. For example, both Ethiopia and Eritrea are supporting opposing Somali factions in a proxy war that has now spread to Northern Kenya. Eritrea is also supporting Ethiopian rebels operating out of Somalia and Kenya.

Africa’s internal conflicts pose particular conflict management challenges, not least because they tend to be more intense and intractable than inter-state ones. Empirical studies demonstrate that they tend to be more severe and costly in terms of lives and refugees than most inter-state conflicts, although there are clearly some exceptions (Jackson 1998). For example, since 1960 a full third of Africa’s mainly internal conflicts experienced more than 10 000 deaths (Jackson 2000a). In the same period 10 major conflicts alone claimed the lives of between 3.8 and 6.8 million people (Van Tongeren 1999:11), and in total, an estimated eight million Africans have lost their lives as a direct result of war – five and a half million of whom were civilians (DFID 2000:para.22). The severity of civil wars is also revealed in the statistics on refugees and displaced persons. Africa has the highest level of internal displacement and some of the largest refugee flows in the world. In 2000, there were 11 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Africa and another three million cross-border refugees (DFID 2000:para.21). In many cases, these refugees became the source of

new conflicts, such as in Sierra Leone and Zaire in 1996 (Jackson 2000a; Bercovitch and Jackson 1997). Conflicts that lie at the more severe end of the spectrum, as Africa's internal conflicts clearly do, have been shown to be far more difficult to resolve (Jackson 1998, 2000b).

One of the most disturbing aspects of conflict in Africa is the increasing use of extreme forms of violence, particularly in the post-Cold-War period:

Violence is now deliberately targeted at civilians rather than armed groups, and at entire groups rather than individuals. In the conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Mozambique, Northern Uganda, Sudan and Angola, violence has taken appalling forms. Mutilation, torture of women and children, violent rituals and the forcible involvement of relatives, children and spouses in killing and rape are used as a means of waging war primarily by militia groups and by some state proxies. In some instances, such violence is part of ritual that binds militia groups together. Extreme violence can be used as a means of humiliation or revenge. More frequently, it is used as a means of intimidation, as is the case with the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone. Here, mutilation was brutally applied as part of a strategy to stop people from voting or from gathering the harvest or to spread control over territory by sheer terror and fear, thus avoiding the need to fight (DFID 2000:para.24).

Related to these terror tactics, there has been an alarming rise in the forcible recruitment of children into rebel armies. It is estimated that there are presently around 200 000 child soldiers in Africa, many of them forced into fighting for the LRA in Uganda, the RUF in Sierra Leone, the *Interahamwe* in Rwanda, and UNITA in Angola (DFID 2000:para.25).

The external context of internal conflicts also impacts on their management. Internally based conflicts are difficult enough to resolve, but when these conflicts draw in surrounding states and spill across national boundaries, the task becomes all the more problematic. Actually, internal conflicts nearly always draw in neighbouring states in one manner or another (Mitchell 1992). As Ayoob (1986:14) puts it, "Fragile politics, by definition, are easily permeable. Therefore, internal issues in Third World societies ... get transformed into interstate issues quite readily". Modeleski (1964:20) makes a similar point: "Every internal war creates a demand for foreign intervention".

Table 1: Africa's worst conflicts, 1945 – present

<u>Conflict Name</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Estimated Fatalities</u>	<u>Intervening Parties</u>
Congo conflict	1960 – 1965	110 000	UN Force, USA, Soviet Union, Belgium
African territories - Portugal	1961 – 1975	100 000+	South Africa, Rhodesia, Zambia, Zaire

Eritrea – Ethiopia	1965 – 1993	450 000 – 1 million	Soviet Union, Italy, China, Libya, Sudan, Somalia
Nigeria – Biafra	1967 – 1970	1 million+	Britain, France, Soviet Union
Angolan conflict	1975 – present	300 000 – 500 000	Soviet Union, Cuba, South Africa, USA, Zaire
Mozambique conflict	1976 – 1992	450 000 – 1 million	Soviet Union, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Malawi, France, Britain, South Africa
Ugandan Civil War	1981 – present	100 000 – 500 000	Sudan, Britain, Tanzania, North Korea, Libya
Second Sudan Civil War	1983 – present	500 000 – 1.9 million	USA, Libya, China, Iraq, Iran, Uganda
Somalia Civil War	1988 – present	300 000 – 400 000	USA, Libya, Ethiopia, UN Force
Burundi ethnic conflict	1988 – present	250 000+	Rwanda, Zaire
Liberian Civil War	1989 – 1997	200 000+	Libya, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, ECOWAS Force, Sierra Leone
Rwanda Civil War	1990 – present	800 000+	France, Zaire, Uganda, Burundi
Sierra Leone Civil War	1991 – present	100 000 +	Liberia, mercenaries, Britain, ECOWAS Force, UN
Democratic Republic of Congo Civil War	1996 – present	1 million +	Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Angola, Zimbabwe

Sources: Adapted from Copson 1994:29, 106; and original data set in Jackson 1998.

All of Africa's worst conflicts have involved multiple interventions from external parties (see **Table 1**). In fact, Africa has the highest rate of external intervention in conflicts, including the Middle East, which also experiences a great deal of intervention (Jackson 2000a). External intervention is not a primary cause of Africa's conflicts, but more an exacerbating factor. It is directly related to the failure of the African state. In other words, because African political systems "are internally incoherent and because aspects of their internal form are projections of the external environment, they are easily manipulated from the outside" (Mujaju 1989:260).

The external linkages in internal conflicts are manifested in the high level of direct military intervention by outside states. Military intervention into Francophone politics continues to be an important pillar of French policy in Africa, although there are signs that this is diminishing. In the post-Cold-War period, French troops have been most visibly involved in Rwanda (1994), Comoros (1995), and the Central African Republic (1998). The current levels of external intervention in Africa's conflicts are historically linked to Cold War politics. Superpower competition for clients from the 1960s onwards saw the Soviet Union and the USA successfully carve for themselves spheres of influence by virtue of the predominant roles they played both ideologically and militarily in Africa (Obasanjo 1996:16). Particularly in the Horn of Africa and southern Africa, Cold War competition had a pronounced effect. In each case, an exacerbation of local cleavages provided the entry point (Lyons 1996:86).

A direct effect of Cold War interventionism was the massive militarisation of many regions, erecting obstacles to future conflict resolution efforts. Large quantities of weapons were shipped to the Horn of Africa by the superpowers in what became a futile pursuit of influence (Lyons 1996:87). By one estimate, a total of US\$8 billion in weapons was delivered to Ethiopia and Somalia between 1972 and 1990 alone (DFID 2000:para.45). Since then, of course, much of this weaponry has been lost to insurgent groups or found its way onto the black market. By the early 1990s, the entire region was so awash with arms that international efforts to limit arms shipments to the region will continue to have minimal effect on the level of fighting for many years to come (Lyons 1996:87). Several African conflicts that were caused directly by internal disagreements, therefore, were internationalised by the Cold War due to the readily available supplies of weapons systems to warring factions (Conteh-Morgan 1993:29).

Globalisation and Africa's Violent Internal Conflicts

In the post-Cold-War period, Africa's internal conflicts have mutated into new forms. Characterised by a blurring of the lines between war, organised crime, and large-scale human rights violations, these 'new wars' (Kaldor 1999) demonstrate new modalities which distinguish them from earlier, more conventional 'civil wars' (Henderson and Singer 2000; Keen 1998). In terms of the actors typically engaged in Africa's internal conflicts, the processes of globalisation have widened the number

and type of participants. Along with the principal protagonists of government armed forces and insurgents, it is not uncommon to see a range of other internal groups such as ethnically based militias, specialised security services, semi-mercenary units, armed religious cults, warlords, and criminal gangs (De Waal 1997). External parties representing international constituencies are also drawn into internal conflicts, such as humanitarian agencies, peacekeepers, foreign mercenaries, private military companies (PMCs), and entrepreneurs and international capitalists. The goals of the protagonists are also more diffuse. Traditional ideological and political objectives, such as regime overthrow or secession, often overlap with chauvinistic ethno-nationalist and/or economic aims. The dual aims of UNITA in Angola – overthrowing the MPLA government and maintaining control over rich diamond-producing regions – exemplify the expanded conflict goals of actors in Africa's internal conflicts.

Africa's internal conflicts in the post-Cold-War period have also demonstrated an expanded repertoire of strategies for pursuing conflict goals, most notably strategies that involve serious human rights violations. Although the use of terror by civil war armies has been commonplace throughout history, the atrocities witnessed in Rwanda, Somalia, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, to name a few, have articulated a new lexicon of terms to describe the horrors experienced by civilian populations – ethnic cleansing, mass rape, genocide, politocide, child soldiers. In February 1996, Sierra Leonean rebels sought to abort the first elections for more than 25 years by terrorising local populations. Hundreds of ordinary people had their fingers, hands, arms, noses, or lips chopped off with machetes before and during the election (Shawcross 2000:169).

The outcomes of these conflicts have also increased in their range of possibilities. While some have resulted in regime change (Liberia) or secession (Eritrea), others have settled into almost permanent conditions of state collapse (Somalia), warlordism (Sierra Leone), or cycles of ceasefire followed by further outbreaks of fighting (Angola, Sudan, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo). A few have resulted in fragile political settlements enforced by powerful external actors (Central African Republic, Lesotho), while an even smaller set has reverted to conditions of semi-state-collapse (Democratic Republic of Congo).

The Conceptual Problem of Internal Conflict

The emergence of useful frameworks for analysing contemporary internal conflict is hampered by two key assumptions that underpin much current diplomatic thought and practice in relation to the problem of international conflict. First, there is a tendency among policy-makers and strategic analysts to view international security in traditional Clausewitzian terms as a problem of inter-state war, where conventional forces fight pitched battles for the control of territory. Second, inter-state war is itself generally conceived of as a breakdown in the normally peaceful relations between states. These (implicit) analytical lenses also tend to dominate the analysis of internal conflicts. Formulating the problem of conflict in these terms – as

primarily inter-state and essentially abnormal – is proving to be problematic at both the diagnostic and remedial levels.

In the first instance, it is an incontrovertible fact that in the post-war period the majority of international conflicts have been located in the developing world and they have been internal or intra-state in character, or have possessed a substantial intra-state dimension, even if by all appearances they seem to be inter-state disputes (Ayoob 1996:37; Kaldor 1999:29). Our brief review of internal conflict in Africa substantiates this assertion. More importantly, it is the conclusion of every major empirical study on international conflict (Small and Singer 1982; Jung and Schlichte 1999; Byman and Van Evera 1998; Wallensteen and Sollenberg 1997). Regarding the second common assumption, the internal conflicts that have come to predominate as threats to international peace and security are not 'breakdowns' in normally peaceful political systems, or the aberrant suspension of domestic politics. Rather, they are the direct result of a particular form of politics that is rooted in the structures and processes of 'weak states', and which has its own political logic. In extreme forms, internal conflicts are the deliberate creation and maintenance of 'war economies', situations which accrue significant benefits for an array of local and international actors (Keen 1998). In this sense, internal conflict can be viewed as a rational policy within a constrained political space.

In the face of such unambiguous data, it is surprising that the study of international conflict has largely focused on the Clausewitzian type of inter-state war. Civil conflicts have – until fairly recently (David 1997) – received only marginal attention in the scholarly literature on international conflict management and security analysis (Scherrer 1999:52; Licklider 1993:6-7). Even within the dominant research tradition, however, comparative research on the causes of war has achieved virtually no cumulative results since systematic empirical investigations began. More often than not, results are 'atomistic' and even contradictory. This is the direct result of researchers employing different definitions, empirical indicators, time periods, regions under analysis, and methodological premises, and failing to integrate levels of analysis and overall theoretical approaches (Gantzel 1997:138). In other words, there is a lack of accepted theoretical frameworks for conflict analysis and diagnosis.

Civil war research, long confined to 'area studies' but recently gaining acceptance in international relations, is beset with a similar array of problems. For example, a section of the current literature focuses on so-called ethnic conflicts in international politics (Kaufman 1996a). Typically, it is asserted that 'tribally based warfare' erupts "where ethnic and other hatreds had long been officially suppressed but never extinguished in the hearts and minds of populations" (Snow 1996:26, 38). Quite apart from its ethnocentric baggage (Howard 1995/6:28-29), the ancient hatreds analysis is mono-causal. It risks ignoring the prosaic political and economic roots of ethnic conflict (Keen 1998:10-11). In addition, while identity politics may well depend on collective memory, it is also the case that these are often 'reinvented' when other

sources of political legitimacy – socialism, post-colonial forms of nationalism – fail or corrode (Kaldor 1999:7).

Accompanying the 'ethnic' explanation is a focus on mass-led dimensions, as if most internal conflicts were outbursts of spontaneous and uncontrollable social forces. These approaches undervalue the role of the political elite in the social life of particular communities, and in the interaction between the various political communities constituting the international system. They also fail to consider the logic of perceived threats, constraints, and opportunities that lead elites to make the choices they do in situations of ongoing political crisis (Job 1992:28). Analytically misguided, mass-level explanations of internal conflict have serious policy implications. In most cases, under-appreciating elite decisions and actions hinders conflict management efforts (Ayooob 1992:63; Brown 1996:584).

A more serious problem lies in the portrayal of contemporary civil wars as simply a breakdown in a particular system, or a retreat from normally peaceful political forms. Emphasising the existence or re-emergence of 'ancient hatreds' or a "primitive instinct for violence" (Kaplan 1994) puts a stress on irrationality, as if persisting civil war "is a perversion of reason that would otherwise lead men and women to adopt peaceable behaviour" (Bardal and Keen 1997:797-98). Both views of civil war – as a systemic failure and as defying rational explanation – ignore the considerable objective (and subjective) rationality of employing political violence in politically fragile, ethnically fractured, and economically weak states (Herbst 1996/7). In such circumstances, violence can perform a variety of functions in alternative systems of profit, power, and protection.

In a valuable contribution to the emerging literature on internal conflicts, Brown (1996:573) distinguishes between background and proximate causes, and identifies four main clusters of factors that lead to violence:

structural factors such as weak states, security concerns, and ethnic geography; political factors such as discriminatory political institutions, exclusionary national ideologies, inter-group politics, and elite politics; economic/social factors such as widespread economic problems, discriminatory economic systems, and economic development and modernisation; and cultural/perceptual factors such as patterns of cultural discrimination and problematic group histories.

Another important approach attempts to differentiate internal conflicts by type to see what kinds of contingent generalisations can be produced. Here, conflicts are categorised into types according to their sources or causes. Rupesinghe (1992:14-20), for example, suggests five different kinds of internal conflict: ideological conflicts, governance and authority conflicts, racial conflicts, environmental conflicts, and identity conflicts. Brown (1996), in turn, divides internal conflicts into two dimensions: elite-triggered or mass-triggered conflicts; and internally driven or externally driven conflicts. This gives four main types, of which there are a number

of sub-types, such as ideological conflicts, ethnic conflicts, power struggles, 'spill-over' conflicts, and economically motivated conflicts.

A promising development in some recent studies lies in a re-focusing of attention on state variables. Efforts to 'bring the state back in' to the analysis of internal conflict have so far focused on two related processes. The first is the process of state-building in the developing world. It is argued that, in a general sense, conflict is the result of state-making – both in terms of territorial consolidation and institution-building (see Ayooob 1992, 1993, 1995, 1996). The process of European state-building, apart from taking centuries, was often bloody and violent (Tilly 1975, 1985). No less than the European experience, the process of creating nation-states in Africa also involves war-making (Herbst 1990). Furthermore, irrational colonial boundaries, chronic underdevelopment, external interference, and the attempt to compress the long process of creating a nation-state into a very short timeframe (Howard 1995/6:52) have made the state-building project in these regions even more prone to violent internal conflict than was the case in Europe. In extreme cases, the erosion of state autonomy can lead to states collapsing or failing altogether (Zartman 1995). During the European experience non-viable states were absorbed by stronger states or reconfigured in new forms. However, the nature of the present international system makes this option virtually impossible. Unfortunately, at the same time, an effective international response to the problem of state failure has yet to be found.

A second process that explains internal conflict is globalisation. The pressures of globalisation on fragile states in particular, have resulted in the emergence of what is sometimes called 'post-modern conflict' (Kaldor 1999; Duffield 1998). Post-modern conflict involves substantial economic aspects as entrepreneurs make use of opportunities to profit from the uncertainties created by widespread conflict (Bardal and Keen 1997; Keen 1998). It also involves a diverse range of actors, from local militias to states, multinational companies, humanitarian organisations, and international bodies such as the United Nations. Each of these parties generates their own set of interests and pressures in a complex interplay of local and external interactions. Within this deconstructed setting, the warring factions employ what some perceive as novel warfare strategies, such as ethnic cleansing, child soldiers, mass rape, banditry, and the use of mercenaries.

What this indicates is that the historicity of internal conflict is sometimes misplaced in recent comparative research, either by stressing its unique post-modern character, or by reducing it to irrational outbursts of ethnic hatred. What is required to redress this theoretical gap is a "social theory, or at least a frame of reference based on systematic general categories, in which the historical-developmental aspect is reconstructed with respect to different epochs and which takes into account the structural dynamics which condition the emergence and behaviour of actors" (Gantzel 1997:139). Building on previous efforts to reintegrate the state as a key variable, it is argued below that internal conflicts are rooted in the nature and historically grounded processes of the 'weak state'. While not claiming to be a formal causal model, the weak-state framework is nonetheless a useful analytical tool that

can help scholars organise the literature on internal conflict, and practitioners evaluate its policy implications.

The Weak-state Framework

The general argument being advanced in this study is not an altogether unfamiliar one, especially in the literature on the political development of post-colonial states. Its novelty lies in its application to international conflict research. Until recently, international relations scholars have been reluctant to inject political variables – such as state processes – into conflict research. The theoretical approach outlined here has its origins in recent attempts to link internal conflict in the developing world with the processes of state-making (Ayooob 1992, 1993, 1995, 1996; Gantzel 1997; Herbst 1990; Howard 1995/6). The key to this approach is the premise that “state-making, the political variable of primary concern to political elites and decision-makers in Third World countries must form the centrepiece of any paradigm we attempt to construct for the explanation of internal and external behaviour of Third World states and regimes” (Ayooob 1992:64). In other words, state processes – state construction or adaptation, ruling class formation and consolidation, patrimonialism and alliance creation – lie at the heart of internal conflict. Emphasising political factors in internal conflict is supported by recent empirical research (Henderson and Singer 2000), and is a necessary step in the development of more effective conflict resolution strategies.

The Nature of Weak States

It is possible to distinguish between strong and weak states using a matrix of social, political, and economic factors. Strong states involve “the willingness and ability of a state to maintain social control, ensure societal compliance with official laws, act decisively, make effective policies, preserve stability and cohesion, encourage societal participation in state institutions, provide basic services, manage and control the national economy, and retain legitimacy” (Dauvergne 1998:2). Beyond the issue of state capacity, however, strong states also possess high levels of socio-political cohesion that is directly correlated with consolidated participatory democracies, strong national identities, and productive and highly developed economies. Perhaps most importantly, strong states exist as a ‘hegemonic idea’, accepted and naturalised in the minds of the population so that they “consider the state as natural as the landscape around them; they cannot imagine their lives without it” (Migdal 1998:12; Skinner 1978).

Weak states are defined by a mirror set of opposite characteristics. They are marked, first of all, by unconsolidated or non-existent democracies. In addition, they face serious problems of legitimacy. Typically, the legitimacy crisis is expressed through very low political participation rates (and correspondingly high levels of disengagement or ‘exit’ by significant sectors of the population such as peasants), a

reliance on coercion to ensure compliance, unstable politics (for example, governmental crises, coups, plots, riots, rebellions), severe social cleavages (ethnic, religious, or class), and the centralisation of power in a ruling elite, usually focused on a single leader or political party. In order to secure political control in a volatile environment, weak-state elites are sometimes forced to construct elaborate patronage systems. Patrimonialism coexists with coercion in a delicate balancing act of keeping rivals at bay and clients happy.

Second, weak states invariably lack cohesive national identities. Primary loyalties are often expressed in sub-national terms, and 'exit' from the state – psychologically, socially, economically, and/or politically – are common. In essence, the 'hegemonic idea' of statehood is missing or only weakly present: "... the modern state structure in Africa often forms little more than a thin carapace" (Cornwell 1999:62). This relates to the conditions of their emergence into juridical statehood. In the European experience, state-making was first and foremost an internal process in which the state's authority within a given territory emerged organically and was quickly followed by external sovereignty, the formal recognition of other states. In contrast, the colonial state was an alien intrusion forcibly imposed on an arbitrarily defined territorial unit. Decolonisation gave such territories formal sovereignty, or juridical independence, before a cohesive national identity was ready to emerge.

Third, weak states are defined by varying levels of institutional incapacity and a frequent inability by governments to implement their policies (Byman and Van Evera 1998:37). At the extreme end of the scale, the institutions of state are incapable of even a minimal level of operability and may actually be in a terminal spiral of collapse. At the least, weak states possess under-resourced and underdeveloped institutional capacity, and face enormous difficulties in mobilising the population or regulating civil society. Even relatively straightforward governmental tasks such as tax collection or maintaining minimal levels of law and order can prove difficult.

Institutional weakness, furthermore, is both cause and consequence of ongoing economic crisis. Weak states typically exhibit all the symptoms of economic underdevelopment – dualistic and poorly integrated mono-economies, heavy debt burdens, low or negative growth rates, high inflation and unemployment, low levels of investment, and massive social inequalities. Weak states are not precluded from periods of sustained economic growth such as were enjoyed by Botswana and Uganda in the 1990s, but by comparison with the developed states of Western Europe or North America they lag significantly behind.

Finally, and in addition, weak states are characterised by an external vulnerability to international actors and forces, which is the direct result of their internal fragility. As Ayooob puts it, "fragile politics, by definition, are easily permeable. Therefore, internal issues in Third World societies ... get transformed into interstate issues quite readily" (1986:14). Mujaju makes a similar point. He argues that because the political systems of weak states "are internally incoherent and because aspects of their internal form are projections of the external environment, they are easily

manipulated from the outside" (1989:260). External vulnerability can be observed in the permeability of weak-state borders to arms smuggling, refugee movements, and general contagion effects that are manifest in areas like West or Central Africa. Historically, it is obvious in the meddling by the superpowers and great powers in Third World conflicts (such as France in Africa), and the political affairs of weak states generally.

The weak state/strong state formulation is not a binary measure, but rather a continuum along which states can be positioned. In addition, state strength or weakness is dynamic, and states can move along the continuum over time given sufficient changes to key factors: weak states can become strong, and strong states can weaken. A number of states presently lie somewhere between strength and weakness, possessing some of the characteristics of a strong state – for example, effective institutions and a strong economy – but lacking others, such as an enduring sense of national identity, or legitimacy. Botswana, for example, possesses some characteristics of strong states – relatively effective state institutions, a growing economy, participatory politics – and is clearly further along the continuum towards state strength than is Sierra Leone, which lacks any of these characteristics.

The recognition that most African states are 'weak' is borne out by recent conceptualisations. They are variously seen as 'underdeveloped' (Cottingham 1974; Jackson and Rosberg 1982), 'overdeveloped' (Leys 1976; Nyang'oro 1989), 'soft' (Rothchild 1987; Doornbos 1990), 'swollen' (Diamond 1988), 'fictive' (Sandbrook 1985), 'quasi-states' (Jackson 1990) or 'shadow states' (Cruise O'Brien 1991). Each of these conceptualisations expresses one or more aspects of the crises facing Africa's weak states, and encompasses both the internal and external dimensions we have described. It is important to recognise that the structural features of weak states have very deep historical roots, most often in periods of intense colonial exploitation, and are not passing ephemeral phenomena (Young 1994; Boone 1994; Bayart 1993; Ake 1981).

Weak-state Elite Strategies

The politics of weak states – the actions of elites in response to internal and external demands and opportunities – are conditioned by the underlying structural characteristics we have described: institutional weakness, economic scarcity, problems of legitimacy, political instability, lack of national identity, failure to secure the hegemonic idea of the state, and external vulnerability. For the most part, weak-state elites aim to ensure their continued political survival and maintain an integrated state. Furthermore, with a mixture of careful manipulation, external support from powerful patrons, and a measure of fortune, weak states can stay intact and maintain relative stability for long periods, despite internal disorder, corruption, and poor economic performance. However, they are always vulnerable to internal or external shocks, and elites are more often than not forced to adopt strategies that

carry significant risks of precipitating civil violence. The structural characteristics of weak states place extraordinary pressures on decision-makers and the policy-making environment. In effect, they transform weak-state politics into a continual process of crisis management, or what Migdal calls “the politics of survival” (1988:227-29). Political elites have to manage both internal and external pressures, usually through forms of “elite accommodation” in order to sustain a meaningful semblance of sovereignty (Reno 1998:2). Internally, they have continually to secure hegemony and manage local ‘strongmen’ – individuals or groups who exercise power in their own right (ibid.), and who pose challenges to weak-state rulers. Externally, the demands of great power patrons, international financial institutions (IFIs), multinational companies (MNCs), and inter-governmental organisations (IGOs) such as the UN have to be accommodated or carefully manipulated in order to maintain access to resources and to avoid sanctioning behaviour. Typically, a number of strategies are employed to these ends, and they can be seen in the table below.

Table 2: The underlying and proximate causes of internal conflicts

<u>Underlying Causes</u>	<u>Proximate Causes</u>
<p>The structural characteristics of weak states</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Institutional weakness *Economic crisis *Legitimacy and political crisis *Patrimonialism *External vulnerability and contagion 	<p>The politics of weak states – elite strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Ethnic politics *Exclusive politics and political centralisation *Authoritarianism and repression *Patronage politics *Democratic politics and manipulation *Warlord politics and war economies

Ethnic politics, or the politics of identity, are often a strategy of first choice for many weak-state elites. Ethnic politics in Africa have their roots in the contradictions inherent in the exercise of state power by colonial authorities seeking to establish hegemony (Boone 1994:111). Ethnic identity formation facilitated indirect rule, which in turn retarded emergent class consciousness. Following independence, weak-state elites also used the appeal to ethnicity in their own attempt to establish hegemony, “institutionalising the divisions which exist by making ethnic identity the basis for political and (to a lesser extent) economic participation, and by striving to improve the competitive strength of the ethnic groups of the top leaders of the ruling faction” (Ake 1976:9). For example, after coming to power in a coup in 1981, General Andre Kolingba established what has been termed an ‘ethnocracy’ in the Central African Republic (CAR) (Havermans 1999a:222-3). Every important political, military, and judicial position was filled by his own or affiliated ethnic groups. Later, when Ange-Felix Patasse came to power in 1993, he took revenge by excluding Kolingba’s group (the Yakoma) in favour of his own group, the Sara-Kaba.

The high premium on political power produces a zero-sum ethnic struggle for dominance (Diamond 1988:21), which may be expressed in violent internal struggles. As mentioned, ethnic competition has the advantage of being a major antidote to class consciousness. The politics of identity can also serve as a source of political legitimacy when other sources – socialism, nationalism, populism – fail or corrode (Kaldor 1999:7). By creating vertical links across class strata (through identity-based patron-client networks, political graft, resource allocation, and so on), it helps to maintain a level of integration quite out of proportion to objective class differences, which are often severe. Furthermore, the conditions in weak states are ideal for this: ethnic consciousness is already well developed, and ethnic mobilisation is always likely to be successful in societies with homogenous political constituencies and regions, and only a rudimentary development of secondary associations. Of course, the danger of the appeal to ethnicity is that it can easily spiral into all-out war or, for a time, out of control of the elite and into mass civil violence. In the CAR, the struggle between ethnic groups over access to the country's scarce economic resources led to serious conflict in 1996 that was only controlled through regional and UN peacekeeping operations.

The patterns of exclusive politics, political centralisation, and authoritarian forms of governance that are so evident in Africa, and which are so often at the root of internal conflicts, have similarly deep historical roots. Colonial authorities in Africa subjected the economy to strict control in order to restrict the flow of wealth to the population. The consequence of this was to leave the bourgeoisie, or the elite, with a precarious material base and a need to establish hegemony. The absence of a bourgeoisie grounded in a solid and independent economic base and successfully engaged in the private accumulation of capital compelled them to take direct control of the state, thus transforming politics into a material struggle. It provided the opportunity to build class power through the mechanisms of the state in the context of increasing scarcity (Fatton Jr. 1988:254-55). In other words, class relations in weak states are transformed from relations of production to relations of power (Sklar 1979:537). The violent conflict in Congo-Brazzaville that killed more than 10 000 people in 1997 (and which continues today) was fuelled in large part by the struggle for control over the country's rich oil resources by rival factions in the country's elite (Havermans 1999b:228-9).

Exclusive politics, political centralisation, and authoritarianism arise in weak states because the state is deprived of the relative autonomy needed to make reform possible, despotism unnecessary, and genuine democracy viable. These modes of governance mask the incapacity of the ruling elite to transform its power into effective, political, economic, and cultural policies (Fatton Jr. 1988:254-55). From this perspective exclusive politics – the one-party state, for example – is in fact, class action by the elite to establish and retain hegemony. Furthermore, the struggle for control of the state is Hobbesian and vicious and only reaches equilibrium when one contestant emerges the victor. In addition, centralisation and exclusion has the advantage of depoliticising society by reducing the effective political participation of the population, intimidating them with state power, and concentrating all power in

the hegemonic fraction of the bourgeoisie (Ake 1976:13). As with ethnic mobilisation, these strategies also carry risks. Generally, "the exclusionist strategies adopted by many of the leaders of independent Africa and the steady concentration of power around a coterie ... works against any consolidation of systemic legitimacy in the state as structure" (Cornwell 1999:67).

More specifically, the struggle for hegemony or the application of severe repression can spiral into armed conflict when excluded or targeted groups attempt to protect themselves or take control of the state. In Liberia, the brutal and erratic regime of Samuel Doe eventually led to his downfall. When Charles Taylor invaded from neighbouring Cote d'Ivoire in December 1990 with a group of only 150 fighters, Doe responded by slaughtering hundreds of people in Nimba County for supposedly collaborating with the rebels. In response, thousands rallied to join Taylor's National Patriotic Forces of Liberia (NPLF) and within a few months Taylor was threatening the capital Monrovia. Siad Barre's brutal repression of the Isaq clan in 1988 can be seen in the same light and, interestingly, had the same effect.

In the post-Cold-War period, African elites have had to accommodate both internal and external demands for greater levels of political participation, multiparty democracy, and 'good governance'. This has most often resulted in the adoption of multiparty democracy, largely through the medium of competitive elections. There is widespread agreement that democratic consolidation has yet to take place following the 'third wave' of democracy which swept through Africa in the early 1990s. In fact, many African elites have successfully managed the transition to multiparty democracy and retained control of the state, usually through the subtle (and not so subtle) manipulation of internal opponents and external perceptions. There is now a growing literature which examines the linkages between multiparty democracy (and its manipulation), and internal conflict (Mansfield and Snyder 1995). In any case, democratic manipulation is a high-risk strategy which can also unleash unforeseen levels of civil violence.

Extreme competition and internecine class struggle in weak states also provide the ideal conditions for the emergence of 'caesarism', whereby a leader is entrusted with great power and arbitrates in an absolutist form of government. These presidential monarchs maintain their patrimonial power through the illegal appropriation of state revenues and the establishment of corruption in a network of patrons and clients (Fatton Jr. 1988:259). Corruption, graft, patron-client networks, and patrimonialism in weak-state politics are not simply the result of a breakdown in normal politics, or the rise to power of unusually corrupt leaders. Rather, they can be construed as class action necessitated by the fragility of the material conditions of the ruling elites.

Furthermore, the process reinforces itself in important ways. For example, it often serves to unify the dominant classes in a framework of co-operation centred on the state, while simultaneously preventing the political organisation of the subordinate classes by maintaining and accentuating their isolation, individualisation, and

ethnicity. This process also aids in resource extraction and capital accumulation by the ruling elite, because control of the political apparatus guarantees control over the productive forces of society. It may also enable the ruling elite to develop political bases and control the regional and sectoral allocation of resources. The patronage and corruption inherent in the structure of the state, furthermore, are enhanced when there is the absence of effective institutions to check the abuse of power and ensure administrative accountability (Diamond 1987:583). Reform coups are often launched to combat unacceptable levels of corruption, which can in turn lead to internal conflict. This is an internal shock that can unleash disintegrative forces in the state. For example, the successive kleptocratic governments in Sierra Leone sowed the seeds of the state's demise by systematically excluding the majority of Sierra Leoneans economically and politically. One response to the endemic corruption was the formation of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) led by Foday Sankoh, which demanded an end to government patronage and graft. Later, the RUF mutated into one of the most destructive and bestial rebel armies anywhere in the world.

Weak-state Politics and Internal Conflict

Weak-state politics and internal conflicts are linked in two primary aspects. In the first and most extreme case, rulers (and their rivals) see great benefits in the creation and maintenance of 'war economies' or 'complex emergencies' (see Bardal and Keen 1997; Reno 1995, 1998a, 1998b; Duffield 1998; Kaldor 1999; Keen 1998; Jung and Schlichte 1999). Far from being a breakdown in normally peaceful politics, or an irrational outburst of ethnic hatred, many of Africa's current internal conflicts are the direct result of deliberate, rationally calculated strategies aimed at accumulation by state (and non-state) elites. In the environment created by intrusive globalisation, with increased external demands and decreasing internal resources, conflict and instability may be associated with innovative and expanding forms of political economy (Duffield 1998). Some internal conflicts are, in fact, a new form of politics, what many are calling 'warlord politics' (Reno 1998a).

Globalisation processes are the key external variable in the so-called 'explosion' of internal conflict in Africa since the fall of the Berlin wall. A large number of Africa's states were sustained by the patronage they attracted from Cold War protagonists which allowed them to buy off political rivals, suppress local strongmen through superior arms, or quell internal opposition in the name of anticommunism or anti-imperialism. Mobutu's regime was a classic example of this process. The loss of this support following the decline of superpower rivalry, and subsequent international pressure towards economic and political liberalism undercut the ability of African leaders to maintain their regimes without resorting to war or reinventing patrimonialism in new and innovative forms. In a related process, the political space for African elites has been narrowed by the imposition of the political and economic conditionalities of the Washington consensus. That is, "by emptying the political arena of ideas, competition for power was reduced to its bare essentials, personality

and local/ethnic considerations became paramount, and the remnants of the state were likely to fall prey to the untrammelled competition for power” (Cornwell 1999:71).

Globalisation processes have also widened the gap between the developed and developing regions of the world and exacerbated the economic crisis that lies at the heart of many weak states. Declining revenues for both patronage and coercion have forced weak-state leaders to adapt, often towards the direct military control of resources and populations. More ‘traditional’ internal conflicts, or civil wars, which have been ongoing since the cold war period – Sudan, Somalia, Angola – are now showing similar adaptations, particularly towards the formation of entrenched war economies.

At the less extreme end of the scale, internal conflict is the inadvertent result of nonetheless risky strategies by African elites to hold onto power – particularly in times of crisis – establish hegemony, or manage political demands. Pursuing exclusionary politics, the indiscriminate use of state coercion on civilian populations, unleashing ethnic chauvinism, or manipulating multiparty elections are all high-risk strategies that can lead directly to war. Similarly, the failure to deal appropriately with spill-over or contagion effects, internal or external shocks, or eroding state autonomy (state collapse), can also result in internal conflict. As illustrated in **Table 2**, it is the structural features of weak states which are the context or underlying causes of internal conflicts, and the strategies of elites which are the proximate cause or trigger. The key variables in explaining internal conflict, therefore, are weak-state structures and weak-state processes.

The Advantages of the Weak-state Framework

While some analysts regard today’s current crop of internal conflicts as an entirely new phenomenon, the framework outlined here explains their deeper historical roots. As Duffield argues:

Contrary to conventional wisdom, if we wish to examine conflict we must begin by analysing what is normal. Or at least, those long-term and embedded social processes that define the conditions of everyday life. The purpose and reasons for conflict are located in these processes. From this perspective, political violence is not different, apart or irrational in relation to the way we live: it is an expression of its inner logic (1998:67).

In Africa particularly, the confluence of external factors brought about by the end of the Cold War and the intensification of globalisation processes has altered the form but not the substance of internal conflicts. The conflict in Angola, for example, continues to be a struggle for control of the state by rival elites, even though the war itself has mutated into a new form of political economy centred on the illegal diamond and arms trades. The framework therefore helps us to understand the

rapidly increasing linkages between domestic and international politics, and the ways in which globalisation processes impinge on the decision-making space of local political elites. In this sense, the weak-state framework acts as a bridge between previously separate domains of research; that is, it conceptualises the increasing overlap between international relations and area studies, or comparative politics. At the same time, it sheds new light on the effects of globalisation. It suggests that the peripheral regions of the world – such as Africa – far from remaining untouched by these forces, are powerfully affected, but not necessarily towards positive change.

The framework outlined here offers a number of important advantages for conflict research. Heuristically, it incorporates many of the important factors identified in the literature in a parsimonious framework, going beyond superficial typologies or mono-causal models (ethnic hatred, for example) to illuminate underlying political processes. It directs our attention to the key political processes and background factors that lie at the heart of Africa's violent internal conflicts, such as economic crisis, identity politics, authoritarian and exclusionary political structures, power struggles, and legitimacy crises, which are often interconnected in important ways (Byman and Van Evera 1998:44). By focusing on weak-state structures and processes, the framework links and systematises these interconnections in a coherent and systematic approach. The framework also puts war back into the state from whence it first came (see Tilley 1985). It highlights the intimate relationship between states and state-building, and the pursuit of hegemony – political, economic, and social – by violent means.

Managing Weak-state Conflict

The preceding analysis implies that current approaches to international conflict resolution – which are inherently state-centric in character – need to be carefully re-evaluated. First, identifying weak states as the key variable in Africa's internal conflicts suggests that there are likely to be many more internal conflicts in the new century. It also suggests that the conflicts currently under way in Africa are going to be difficult to resolve and will require considerable resources for state and social reconstruction. The task is not made easier by the processes of globalisation, which are contributing to the pressures and underlying conditions that propel Africa's weak states towards internal conflict. The consequences for conflict resolution practitioners and scholars is that early warning and preventive diplomacy must assume a greater priority. Numerous African states exist on the verge of internal conflict, and they must be monitored and assisted before large scale violence erupts or war economies become entrenched. When a state has been identified as being at risk, there are numerous preventive measures which can be applied: diplomacy and mediation, fact-finding missions, arms embargoes, the creation of demilitarised zones, disarmament and decommissioning of weapons, the preventive deployment of military or civilian peacekeepers, and programmes to deal with economic and humanitarian crises, to name a few.

Second, while many current approaches to international conflict management – forms of peacekeeping, diplomatic bargaining, power mediation, UN task-sharing – are oriented towards state maintenance and the international (and national) status quo, the weak-state framework suggests that multi-track diplomacy (Diamond and McDonald 1996) and state reconstruction approaches will probably be more appropriate and effective. Unless the ultimate underlying cause of internal conflict – the weak state – is reconfigured and reformed (transformed into a strong state, for example) conflict resolution or even the more limited goal of conflict management is unlikely to be successful in the medium to long-term, and internal conflicts are likely to re-erupt. In fact, the framework reveals how international humanitarian intervention, if it is not carefully conceived and implemented, may actually harm the prospects for peace by aiding warlord political structures, legitimising illegitimate leaders, and preventing bottom-up or civil society-led state reconstruction (Kaldor 1999; Patman 2000). As Bardal and Keen have noted, “without a better understanding of the interaction between the political and economic agendas of parties, the conflict-mitigating efforts of outside actors may have the opposite effect of what is intended” (1997:807). Certainly, the resolution of internal conflict is unlikely to be achieved through traditional diplomatic approaches alone, as necessary as these may be in the initial stages of securing an end to the physical violence. The question, therefore, is how to transform a weak state into a strong state so that intense and important conflicts – which are inevitable in political and social life – are dealt with non-violently and positively.

As the framework implies, one of the key problems of weak-state politics (which can often lead to internal conflict) lies in the concentration of power and its accompanying tendencies towards authoritarian and exclusionary forms of political discourse. Strategies for dealing with this condition might include establishing appropriate forms of participatory politics, power-sharing arrangements, strengthening civil society as a counterweight to state power, and constitutional checks and balances in the use of power. Quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations (Quangos), such as commissions, tribunals, and trusts, for the promotion of human rights, protecting the rights of minorities or vulnerable groups in society, land claims, grievance settlement, and reconciliation and justice, are relatively rare in weak states. Such bodies would provide an important set of safeguards and pressure valves. They would also act as norm-creators, infusing everyday politics with respect for human rights, the rule of law, and notions of justice.

Related to this, weak states possess weak institutions. Capacity-building must assume a greater priority in conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction, especially in important areas such as law-making, law enforcement, and the judiciary. Individual security is the *sine qua non* of national security in the weak state context. Specifically, conflict resolution efforts should include activities such as human rights training, good governance programmes, election monitoring, police training, civic education programmes, and judicial training.

Perhaps the most serious problem for Africa's weak states is underdevelopment and ongoing economic crisis. These can lead directly to political instability. At the very least, they create the conditions whereby politics is transformed into a vicious competition for scarce resources. A vast range of activities can be adopted as part of an overall conflict resolution programme in this regard: debt cancellation or rescheduling, aid programmes, sustainable development programmes, local capacity-building activities, fairer trade terms and so on. Economic development is also vital for combating the chronic corruption that taints every weak state. The important point is that all of these activities are normally considered peripheral to conflict resolution, and only attempted in isolated instances. They must now assume a more central role and be applied alongside high-level diplomatic efforts to secure cease-fires or enforce political settlements.

Dealing with the effects of identity politics involves conflict resolution activities aimed at reconciliation and justice, grievance settlement, power-sharing, guarantees for minority rights, confidence building measures, and targeted development programmes. These are just some of the elements necessary for a conflict resolution approach aimed at transforming the underlying logic of weak-state politics and the conditions which lead to internal conflict. We might also add that weak states possess external sovereignty as well, and efforts need to be made to strengthen regional organisations and their functional capacity for conflict resolution, regional security, arms control, co-ordinated trade, economic harmonisation, norm creation and maintenance, human rights, and democratisation.

Conclusion

The violent conflicts which litter Africa's political landscape pose twin problems. At a practical level, there is tremendous pressure on diplomats and institutions such as the Organisation of African Unity to find durable solutions and ease the human suffering inflicted by seemingly intractable civil wars. At a theoretical level, there is little agreement on the nature and causes of these 'new wars'. In fact, the two problems are inextricably linked. While solving the theoretical puzzle of internal conflicts does not automatically furnish the political will for achieving lasting pacific outcomes, the lack of intellectual solutions certainly precludes it. Without an effective diagnosis, a cure will remain elusive.

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