Conflicts & Wars

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Moss & Resnick, *Conflict, War, & State Fragility*

The authors write that most conflicts in Africa are difficult to resolve because they are hindered by prolonged political instability. Political violence exacts significant costs on individuals, nations, regions of nations, and from the entire global system.

The causes of conflict are myriad, and each conflict is caused by a mix of them. They list state weakness, strong traditional power bases, poverty, political competition over resources, winner-takes-all systems, and external meddling as the most important variables for predicting a breakout of war. They emphasise that ethnic divisions alone do not spark conflict or definitively explain how conflicts begin. However, research has established a relationship between underdevelopment and conflict, but the direction of causality is far from clear. The "resource curse" hypothesis seeks to relate political violence to geographic endowments of non-elastically-demanded, centrally-located, simple-to-extract primary commodities (such as diamonds, oil, or gold).

Conflict in Africa has been so intense and so-prolonged that many states have become vulnerable or collapsed entirely. Major world powers regard failed states as a threat to global security, and thus there have been efforts to develop regional and international peacekeeping forces to prevent the spread of violence. External donors have employed conditional lending or suspended loan conditions so as to promote peacebuilding.

Foreign Policy, *Failed State Index* (2009)

The authors write that failed states are those which are unable to protect their citizens from violent conflict or provide the social institutions necessary for ordinary life. They ask what should be done by leading states in the global North to reduce the misery which inhabitants of failed states face.

The index in 2009 is the fifth such, relying on 12 indicators of solvency and competency. The 60 worst scoring on the index are deserving special attention. They also draw a distinction between weak states and weak countries – often, a strong state can preside over a failing society (puzzlingly, they use Iran as an example of this). Not all failed states present systemic threats to the entire world; indeed, some are so far-gone that al-Qaeda chose to leave.

Kaplan, *the Remarkable Story of Somaliland*, (2008)

Ironically, non-recognition of Somaliland may have been why it has proven to be the exception to the violence which surrounds it: Somalilanders have to turn

to each other for assistance, since there is no expectation that international help is on the way (since it would all arrive through intermediation in Mogadishu). Therefore, people in the North work in solidarity with others, even when disputes arise.

Additionally, Somaliland was colonised by the British, who preferred indirect rule, whereas the south of Somalia was colonised directly by the Italians, who preferred to demolish the traditional repositories of authority and administer the colony directly. These divergent paths began a century ago, and the artificial border between the two remained a wedge throughout the independence period and lead-up to the secession war.

Kaplan describes the Northern state as non-Westphalian, in that its legitimacy derives from sources only found in the local culture and not European notions of statehood, sovereignty, and legitimacy. The north is still not a great place for women, for example, but neither is the south; at least in the North, violence is under control and women feel confident that police can and will prosecute criminals. Clan identities still structure society, but in Somaliland elders mediate conflicts before they get out of hand; compare this to the south, where clan divisions are the organising lines of entire militias.

The relationship between the state and civil society is close in Somaliland, but rather than the state smothering its citizens, the closeness ensures government accountability. In contrast to the approach of other nationalist movements in Africa, traditional authority was not undermined but indeed made a planned-component of the state. This leads to snags of their own: women are excluded from the political process, and nepotism overrides merit in bureaucratic appointments. But institutionalised clannism is one diverging point which Kaplan points to in explaining the peace of Somaliland.

All of this has been achieved without international recognition, but that is not to say that such recognition isn't needed. Sovereign states enjoy African Union representation, international drawing rights, and so on, and Somaliland has had to make do without. Kaplan argues that the breakaway territory *should* be recognised internationally, both to acknowledge their control of their territory, and to maybe serve as an example of good governance being rewarded. Indeed, it was a separate country before confederation with the south, and other countries in Africa have seceded and been recognised despite devolving into violence. The main obstacles outside of academia to recognition are Ethiopia and Djibouti, who prefer to see an insolvent Somalian state which cannot compete with them; outside of the Horn of Africa, Arab states are resolutely anti-recognition, and Western nations prefer to see Somaliland's status as an "internal" matter.

Kaplan cautions that elections do not a democracy make. Democratic institutions and culture must be inclusive, competent, and accountable to be meaningful, and the ways to make them so are unique to each society. He also warns that sending in bundles of aid money may only alienate a state from its citizens:

> Helping underdeveloped countries should not be about propping up

> the state from outside but rather about connecting it – and making it accountable where possible – to its surrounding society. (260)

Secondly, ethnic cohesiveness (which is different from homogeneity) can make a peaceful society more possible. In societies with two or three predominant ethnicities, competition for scarce resources can result in a "winner takes all" mentality; Somalilanders' struggle for recognition creates solidarity which avoids this pitfall. (This raises a concerning question: should governments continue to recognise failed states? Wouldn't the loss of recognition incentivise national sovereignty?)

Third, Kaplan writes that institutional design (including clans as an instrument of governance) has also been key to Somaliland's success at state-building. This may have been possible without secession, but, again, it is not guaranteed. At the very least Kaplan argues that federation, not centralisation, should be considered as a solution. Most importantly, designing a new constitution should be a local-generated, organic process, not imposed from without by political scientists.

Menkhaus, *Governance with Government in Somalia*

Where Kaplan focuses on the success of the north, Menkhaus is writing about the failure of statebuilding, peacebuilding, and other international initiatives in the south. Unique to the south is that it has been stateless for so long, meaning that the inertia of lawlessness is deeply entrenched. Despite having the deck stacked against them, Menkhaus writes that there have been local successes at governance-building without a government.

Communities are never passive when anarchy erupts in failed states. They always seek to recreate the structures of collective security and basic governance in the absence of a state; sometimes they succeed, sometimes they fail, in varying degrees, owing to a many variables.

Menkhaus offers five arguments. First, the longer a state has remained "collapsed," the harder it will be to revive a state. Second, the governance-without-government efforts are shaped by constantly changing interests of many constituencies, which range from stake-holders to spoilers. Third, state- and peacebuilding work seem to work against each other in the near term, since inhabitants of a long-failed state have no reason to believe in a positive-sum view of political competition. Fourth, tax revenue (rather, the lack thereof) is not sufficient in truly broken states to reverse the vicious cycle of lawlessness generating lawlessness, so consensus and not buy-outs of political opponents is the only way forward. Fifth, Menkhaus proposes that Somalia's national government play the role of chief mediator, which is far from the Westphalian ideal for which humanitarian-interventionists advocate but which is at least a realistic option. This would capitalise on the last remaining sources of authority in the country: traditional, local power.

Chege, *Kenya: Back from the Brink?*

Chege traces the origins of ethnic killings and riots in the aftermath of the 2008 Kenyan presidential election. He argues that a consensus model of governance is needed to consolidate nascent democratic culture and institutions. He adds that the new model should enshrine fœderal provincial autonomy, a mutual veto, and proportional electoral representation to remain viable. Also needed are the civic rights to own property and vote in competitive elections. Lastly, hate speech ought to be banned as a tool for political organisation.

The story begins, as all things should, with the British Empire and how badly they screwed everything up. Colonial policy had deracinated Kikuya lands and forced them into the Rift Valley as sharecroppers; they parlayed their misfortune into ethnic predominance in business and enterprise after independence was won. The KANU regime oversaw great strides in economic development until 1982, when Daniel arap Moi consolidated power into a single-party state. Corruption grew and growth tapered off. This state of affairs only ended when the NARC coalition rode to power in 2002, which reversed the stagnation but did not make good on anti-corruption promises.

Kibaki's party was always loathe to share power with the Odinga's LDP, preferring to return to the consolidated presidency of the first Kenyatta administration. They fired the first salvo by abandoning the memo of understanding given to their coalition partners and freezing them out of the cabinet. In response, the LDP found an unlikely ally in the KANU opposition, who jointly pressed for a constitutional convention. The opposition wanted devolution of powers and more equitable funding for provinces; the government wanted to consolidate power. The referenda failed to pass when rumour spread that the new constitution was "a Trojan horse for continued Kikuyu dominance." (132)

Moving into 2006, Barrack Muluka's claimed in a widely circulated newspaper article that the Central Province (the Kikuyu heartland) was leeching off the other provinces economically. It didn't matter that this was a misrepresentation of the facts; it was valuable political ammunition for the opposition. Chege describes Odinga as a populist who appealed to economically disenfranchised people, most of whom were not Kikuyu. The Kikuyu chauvinists compared him to Idi Amin and asserted that a Luo such as him could never govern, despite relying on his LDP in the NARC coalition. The PNU also spread rumours that an ODM victory would inaugurate a genocide – not sure what the logic was here – and the polarising rhetoric mutated into hate speech broadcast on radio.

The tense atmosphere around the election laid the path for violence, but delays in the count and certification meant that Odinga started with a clear lead which diminished over time. This is perfectly ordinary in an election, but Kibaki made a critical mistake in being sworn in immediately, rather than waiting until tensions had subsided. Maybe nothing could have stopped what happened next: Anti-Kikuyu riots began immediately after. Chege writes that some had signs of being planned (a critical condition for something to be called a genocide).

The lead up to the Kenya elections of '08 has some dark ironies. The National Alliance convinced Kibaki do abandon power sharing because it "would have divided Kenyans along ethnic lines;" the result of this move was, ironically, to divide Kenyans along ethnic lines. The National Alliance believed they could either transcend ethnic divides or that they had such a preponderance of power that the division was immaterial. They were wrong. Secondly, the PNU spread rumours that an ODM victory would catalyse a genocide. Instead, an ODM *defeat* was what sparked the ethnic violence. Lastly, because the election was scrutinised so intensely by all sides, it took even longer to certify the results. The delays loaned credibility to the accusations of fraud (which was what happened just so recently in the US in 2020).

Chege writes that the central conflict is between devolution and centralisation, and what each would mean for the different ethnic groups of Kenya. Effective democratic governance, as described in the first paragraph of this section, is the solution he proposes. Local autonomy and individual rights to economic livelihood are not mutually exclusive concepts, despite what Kenyan politicians at the time believed. During the year of 2008, international mediation led the PNU and ODM to make a national unity government; this coalition is running again in the upcoming election of 2022.