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The evolution of warfare in Africa

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It is widely noted that armed conflict in Africa has evolved away from the prominence of insurgencies that are able to mobilize supporters around political programs in favor of more fragmented organizations in the service of their leaders' quests for power and wealth. The causes of this shift are found in changes in the domestic politics of African states that have taken place in recent decades. Regime strategies to disorganize and co-opt opponents and to suppress mass political mobilization have restricted the social spaces in which ideologues formerly organized and recruited cadres. Emigration among educated groups that previously supplied the bulk of insurgent leaders and cadres further reduces the influence of these groups. Alongside these changes, the development of parallel political structures that are rooted in the control of commerce channels resources to new leaders who lead insurgencies to establish their own dominance in this system of politics. This competition crowds out remaining ideologues who would pursue a vision of more radical change.

Key words: conflict, insurgency, ideology, mass mobilization

Armed struggle then and now

The movement of people and resources out of zones of conflict has been a ubiquitous feature of Africa's wars over the half century since Independence. Common terms such as 'blood diamonds' highlight these international links and bring them to the attention of the wider public. The United Nations and diplomats of many countries take these movements seriously enough to support a system of Panels of Experts to keep track of illicit transactions that have contributed to conflict in Angola, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Congo, and Somalia. Non-government organizations (NGOs) such as Global Witness, the International Crisis Group and Small Arms Survey focus their research on tracing the international flows of resources and people in Africa's wars. The movement of global ideas and cultures also shapes how people fight. For example, in Sierra Leone a group called Westside Boys appeared in the late 1990s. While some diplomats tried to determine what side of Freetown they came from, most others knew that the label referred to the fighters' preferences for the music of the American rapper, Tupac Shakur, and his then-popular album *Me Against the World* (Utas & Jörgel 2008). More recently, militias with

names like *Tous pour la Paix et le Développement* in eastern Congo and Somalia's *Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism* show the influence of global ideas in the decisions of leaders as they pick names for their armed groups in efforts to connect to global anti-terrorist and NGO agendas.

Guinea-Bissau stands out as another exemplary case of conflict that features these movements of global resources and ideas. On 23 November 2008 that country was the scene of a coup attempt including a three hour gun battle. Such violence also accompanied earlier successful coups in 2003 and 1998. The latter coup even triggered a brief civil war, after which Guinea-Bissau witnessed sporadic fighting, the proliferation of militias, and general instability. In April, 2007 Antonio Maria Costa, the head of the UN's Office on Drugs and Crime, warned that Guinea-Bissau "must not be allowed to become a narco-state" and that he feared that government officials and members of the armed forces were involved in the trade" (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2007). His office produced a report in 2008 that indicated that the value of drug trafficked through Guinea-Bissau may exceed the country's entire economic output (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2008: 1). The UN Office for West Africa recently linked this problem of drug trafficking to the risk of further conflict across the region, and noted that "In some cases, drug trafficking networks have permeated government structures and security forces... With an estimated 10 million light weapons still circulating throughout the subregion." The report surmised that the availability of guns and criminal networks threatens to undermine governments and spread violence (United Nations Security Council 2008: 4).

Guinea-Bissau's situation is significant. From a contemporary perspective recent events in the country seem predictable, but for anyone with an interest in that country's history, its current instability is unexpected. Historians recall that in 1963, Amílcar Cabral started fighting the Portuguese colonial authorities. He and his PAIGC (*Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde*) guerrilla movement were able to set up liberated zones where Cabral, a professional agronomist, could help people experiment with better agricultural techniques. The PAIGC set up its own system of trade and put considerable effort into thinking about how to build an effective administrative system for their liberated zones (Cabral 1969). They were so successful that by 1973, numerous governments around the world acknowledged that they, and not the Portuguese authorities, were the real rulers of Guinea-Bissau. This led diplomats from these countries to recognize the insurgents rather than the colonial regime as Guinea-Bissau's legitimate government. One scholar provided a typical report after spending time in liberated zones: "There can be no doubt that the PAIGC today is a revolutionary movement building a new society with broad popular support, and a small but well-organized people's army" (Rudebeck 1972: 4-5).

The conflicts of three decades ago in Guinea-Bissau and elsewhere in Africa took place in the context of the global movement of people, ideas and resources, much as they do now. The people who led these armed groups proved to be very capable in conveying a coherent ideology and political program to outsiders, regardless of whether they actually put their ideas into practice on the ground. In that earlier time, the globalized networks

of those who led the fighting could be traced to the professional organizations and institutions such as universities. Amilcar Cabral, for instance, and the future leaders of anti-colonial insurgencies in Angola and Mozambique met at the University of Lisbon. This kind of network provides a stark contrast to Guinea-Bissau's armed networks of criminals and the corrupt agents of its government. The leaders of these earlier armed groups networked at events such as meetings of the Afro-Asian Solidarity Organization that Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah held to promote liberation struggles. The classrooms of the University of Dar es Salaam and Haile Selassie University in the 1960s and 1970s, and to some extent, Makerere University in the early 1980s brought together activists to discuss ideas of armed struggle and provided personal and ideological links between groups that became active in different countries.

Anti-colonial insurgencies from the 1960s and 1970s share with contemporary insurgents the goal to overthrow incumbent regimes. These earlier armed groups, however, articulated detailed visions about what government should do and made many promises about how they would rule once they were in control of the state. They put a lot of resources and effort into building liberated zones to experiment with their ideas about how a state should be run, and to organize local people to support their struggles. The global flows of resources that underwrote these wars came in part through overseas support committees and concerned governments. Even the UN, now focused on monitoring international transactions of armed groups with the aim of ending conflicts, previously backed armed struggles by sponsoring the Eduardo Mondlane Institute in Dar es Salaam which in turn helped the liberation struggle in Mozambique. The United Nations also supported the Institute for Namibia in Lusaka to help Namibians "to undertake research, training, planning and related activities with special reference to the struggle for freedom of the Namibians and the establishment of an independent State of Namibia" free from the control of South Africa's apartheid regime. Within this internationally recognized framework financial support for the Namibian insurgents came from UN agencies and from private organizations, and even included the Ford Foundation (Rogerson 1980: 676).

Regardless of whether or not the results of these struggles delivered on promises made, this earlier image of purposeful warfare in Africa provides a remarkable contrast to the present image of chaotic warfare in parts of the continent. In historical terms, this change happened quite rapidly. One could usefully ask what caused this apparent recession in the incidence of politically focused liberation struggles? This question is also of relevance to the contemporary situations in countries like Zimbabwe. People there have a fairly recent history of armed struggle for liberation. The level of political engagement among citizens in Zimbabwe might have led one to expect that a mass-based movement to support an armed liberation struggle could have appeared by now. It is even conceivable that some neighbouring countries could provide suitable rear bases for armed groups. Yet, we have witnessed not even the beginning of a liberation struggle.

In the broader context of stalled reforms and the extensive street-level criticisms of citizens in many countries, popularly backed armed struggles in Africa are notable for their relative absence. One would think armed revolution or reform would be on the

agenda in many countries. If one listens to Africa's music, reads its newspaper editorials, and talks to people on the street, it becomes apparent that radical political ideas are an integral part of public discourses. Yet the organizational component that once translated these ideas into armed movements is missing. This is surprising, given that the increasing global transactions of recent decades, the advances in technology and the ubiquity of global influences in everyday life have promoted wider popular awareness of political issues. Popular awareness of fighting between Palestinians and Israelis, and of fighting in Iraq and in Afghanistan is widespread. Moreover, the rapid spread of mobile telephones and the internet have created new ways for like-minded people to find each other and make organizational connections.

The end of liberation

The conventional explanation for the dearth of centrally organized and ideologically oriented insurgencies takes a materialist direction. One key assumption is that the increased physical mobility of resources on a global level changes how people fight in places such as Guinea-Bissau. But AK-47s have been around for a while – the 47 in its name indicates the year of its first production, 1947. This and other light weapons played critical roles in liberation struggles, as evidenced by the inclusion of the AK-47 on Mozambique's national flag and coat of arms. Moreover, the global availability of weapons does not necessarily correlate neatly with a tendency for armed groups to use them indiscriminately. To take one example: land mines are among the weaponry that strikes most indiscriminately. However, outside of conflicts in Angola and Chad, the use of land mines in other conflicts in Africa has been fairly restrained (if not absent), particularly if one considers this weapon's wide availability. This indicates that the aims and organization of armed groups may determine how arms are used, rather than the simple availability of weaponry playing the key role in shaping the aims and organization of these armed groups. Likewise, it is only in recent past that drug trafficking has appeared as a new element in conflicts in Africa, despite that trade's long existence. 'Blood diamonds' became prominent in some conflicts in the 1990s, even though the alluvial mining of diamonds has for decades played a key role in the political economies of a number of countries. The opportunities to produce cocoa for cocaine or opium to make heroin have been available to past and to some contemporary armed groups in Africa, but have not been exploited. For example, the highlands of Angola and Ethiopia could support drug economies, but armed groups that fought there have not exploited these economic opportunities. This is not to say that economic incentives play no role in shaping armed groups, but rather that armed groups in Africa provide many examples in which they are not hostage to a purely economic calculus.

Variations in the impacts of material opportunities in Africa's conflicts suggest that this material aspect of conflicts might be a result of underlying shifts in political contexts rather than causes of the decline in armed groups' attention to ideological and mass-based mobilizational strategies. I argue instead that there are two major causes that have shaped these changes in how armed groups in Africa fight and in how they mobilize

people, ideas and resources differently from their predecessors. The first change revolves around the end of the Cold War. This major development did not have the impact that is usually claimed by those who argue that contemporary wars are driven by the quest to acquire resources and personal wealth. The second, and in this analysis, the more important change, concerns the evolving nature of domestic politics and state regimes against which Africa's armed groups fight. This politics is reflected in the nature of most contemporary armed groups that fight in Africa, and is the principle cause of the declining incidence of centrally organized and ideologically-driven liberation insurgencies.

This first major change, the end of the Cold War, was not just about emptying Soviet armouries into Africa. The more important change was associated with victory in the struggle against the scourge of apartheid, which the end of the Cold War helped to accelerate. Up to this point in the early 1990s, political success in armed conflict was closely tied to the capacity of leaders of these armed groups to convince powerful foreign backers of the virtues of their cause. Soon after its creation in 1963, the Organization of African Unity, today's African Union, set up a Liberation Committee to provide material and political support for the armed overthrow of colonial and apartheid regimes. The Liberation Committee and UN agencies such as the Institute for Namibia insisted that their beneficiaries control factional struggles within their ranks so that they could present a single interlocutor that the concerned foreigners could trust to pursue their common goals. Eduardo Mondlane, the leader of the liberation struggle in Mozambique, benefited from the Liberation Committee's concern about factional challenges to his leadership from within the liberation struggle. When conflict broke out in the late 1960s, the Liberation Committee sent a commission to help the leader reassert his control and to smooth over social and personal divisions within the armed group (Opello 1975: 74-75). Adherence to a clear political program, or at least to one that was sufficient to attract foreign interest, along with demonstrated links to local populations, helped to propel ideologically-minded individuals who could recruit and organize politically committed followers ahead of the self-interested and commercially-minded who became more prominent in later wars.

This external sponsorship of unified command could also have become a source of division when opposing foreign interests each chose to back opposing insurgent factions. The tendency in the 1970s for US and Soviet officials each to support contending factions (as in Angola) weakened this external pressure on the armed factions to unify around a single leader. Nonetheless, the external relationships of armed groups in Africa during the Cold War continued to favour the agendas of ideologically articulate leaders. Leaders of this kind were favoured in the distribution of resources that they then used to eliminate rivals, to discipline fighters, and to attract supporters. Outside support also depended upon the armed group's demonstration to visiting delegations that they could set up and run liberated zones. The few independent NGOs of that time, extending into the 1980s, tended to follow this international lead in picking which armed groups they would support with their material and political aid, and thus effectively took sides in these conflicts.

By 1994, Africa was free of apartheid and colonial rule and the work of the liberation

committees and support groups was finished. Perhaps more important was the growing prominence of the pretence of neutrality among a rapidly growing number of NGOs, and to some extent, among international organizations and foreign governments. This approach justified the injection of resources into conflicts not on the basis of an armed group's performance or its ideas, but instead on the basis of the needs of suffering non-combatants. This created an incentive for commanders within the ranks of these armed groups – not much different from the sorts of people who joined the earlier groups in terms of their social origins – to split from their bosses and claim some of the benefits of warfare for themselves (Lischer 2005). The proliferation of armed groups in Liberia, for example, occurred against the backdrop of some 40 cease fires and 13 peace agreements of that country's 13 year war. The proliferation of externally supported peace negotiations and round table discussions as part of the new international strategy for conflict management gave subordinate commanders incentives to split from their leaders and claim their own place at negotiations. In the event that these negotiations led to a peace settlement and a coalition government, such freelancing leaders, even those who presided over fairly weak factions, could claim a role in the new government.

This shift in international responses to armed conflict meshed well with the domestic and regional strategies of some governments in Africa. The explosion of armed groups in Sudan's Darfur region is partly a consequence of the efforts of that country's government to fragment an insurgency that challenged its control. Sudan's government officials found that they could exploit the willingness of international negotiators to deal with new factions as these Sudanese officials attempted to buy off ambitious leaders and exploit tensions between rivals among these insurgents (Tanner & Tubiana 2007). Meanwhile, the expansion and the lack of coordination of NGO relief aid helped to sustain individual factions. NGO aid injects resources into conflict zones in a very decentralized manner, which provides small factions with multiple opportunities to devise strategies to exploit these resources. Even when NGOs attempt to coordinate their efforts, their rejection of political criteria as a condition for assistance leads them to be much less discriminating about who gets aid and what groups benefit from it, in contrast to the coordination of aid to anti-colonial and anti-apartheid insurgents.

While these global changes are significant, the analysis here stresses how changes in the characters of some state regimes in Africa play a more important role in shaping changes in how armed groups use the mobility of people, ideas, and resources. If one plots the occurrences of the non-ideological, fragmented style of wars across Africa, there is a fairly high correlation between these conflicts' appearances and regimes that engaged most heavily in violent patronage-based strategies to keep themselves in power. It is also significant that three of these regimes, those in Somalia, Congo and Liberia, were also the top recipients of US aid in the 1980s. This suggests that foreign largesse gave these regimes even more leeway to engage in destructive domestic political strategies. These strategies were based upon disciplining subordinates by controlling access to patronage and the violent suppression of any significant independent political or commercial activities. The latter arose out of fears that these activities could lead to the forma-

tion of bases that would harbour those who could challenge the regimes.

These are the regimes that have been most troubled by domestic threats of coups. For many leaders, the threat of coups translates into a significant personal threat. As the South African scholar Patrick McGowan has pointed out, there was a 60 percent chance that a given leader in Africa would leave office in a casket or in exile in the four decades up to 2001 (McGowan 2003: 355). This danger led many presidents to build multiple security services, as much to watch each other as to protect the regime in power. Many also allowed close political allies to organize their own militias outside the framework of the state's agencies. Some also exploited local conflicts, exacerbating them so as to keep local activists focused on protecting their own communities against neighbours and to create a role for presidents to act as arbiters for conflicts that they had a hand in promoting. The threats to presidential power also made it dangerous to allow competent officials to build effective state agencies, preventing the use of their efficiency to rally supporters and to garner the organizational and material resources needed to become the next president.

The advent of competitive elections in Africa has not necessarily broken this pattern of regime politics. In some cases, it has only made this style of politics more violent. Violent struggles over land and access to government largesse have marked Kenya's competitive elections since 1992. Nigerian elections have become occasions for armed violence, especially in the Niger delta region, as political factions vie for access to the country's main source of economic opportunity. Congo-Brazzaville's elections in 1992, 1997 and 2002 were each marked by bloody battles. The problem in each of these cases has been that the introduction of competitive elections has not been sufficient to break the pattern of patronage politics. Instead, it has given senior members of patronage networks opportunities to renegotiate their positions within these networks. The political backing that comes from direct appeals to ethnic kinsmen and to other supporters in elections enables these enterprising politicians to claim more direct access to resources. Their positions within these networks, especially their access to commercial opportunities and the capacity to arm and mobilize young men to fight on their behalf in election campaigns often turns these into violent contests.

These strategies among some regimes has had disastrous effects on African economies and on the capacities of treasuries to sustain patronage-based political networks. The response from presidential offices was to allow loyal supporters to engage in illicit activities, the kinds of transactions that became notorious in the 1990s for their associations with 'resource-driven wars'. In Sierra Leone, for example, 'blood diamonds' dominated the country's export economy, almost all of which was in the hands of the president and his cronies. This method of financing patronage networks and controlling access to economic opportunities allowed rulers to maintain their political control without having to resort to effective state bureaucracies, or even to collect regular taxes. This system of political control also dispensed with conventional notions of legitimacy based upon the state's capacity to provide services to its citizens. War in the 1990s led to changes in the players who benefited from these illicit transactions, but it kept many of the existing net-

works of trade and their associations with political violence in action.

A primary impact of this domestic political strategy lay in its effects on African societies. In particular, it crowded out what the scholar of revolution Eric Wolf called “fields of leverage” (Wolf 1999). Wolf took this idea from Mao Tse-dong’s notion that revolutionaries needed communities where the bureaucratic control of the state and the negative impact of the oppressive world economy were still very weak in the everyday lives of people. They were still unaffected by the “sugar coated bullets” of the city, as Mao called the sorts of compromises that even the politically minded people in cities had to make to survive, even when they recognized that it was their oppressor that kept them alive on a day-to-day basis. These rural people, Mao thought, were the ones who would protect revolutionaries and who could be mobilized to build liberated zones. Their social isolation left them with enough autonomy to survive further disengagement with the oppressive system based in the capital, and with control over resources that the insurgents needed in order to survive.

James Scott, another scholar of revolutions, also pointed to the importance of fields of leverage in his analyses of armed struggles. He added to Wolf and Mao the observation that leaders of successful armed struggles usually came from the educated elite, and in particular from among the students in universities. Universities and even secondary schools serve as fields of leverage in which revolutionary cadres can build solidarity as they discuss and exchange political ideas. Like rural communities, universities provided social spaces for critics to articulate their analyses of political problems. Even more important, these venues helped ideologues and organizers find one another and to join forces to build viable armed political movements. These venues also serve as places to find new cadres and to maintain focus and discipline among them (Scott 1979). One might recall here the earlier point that the international community, with its liberation committees and various support groups, was on the lookout for ideologically driven leaders with cadres who could contain factionalism and control their fighters.

While one does not need professors or university students to make revolutions, Africa’s earlier experiences show that most leaders of the successful liberation struggles were university-educated. Mozambique’s Eduardo Mondlane received his PhD in sociology from Chicago’s Northwestern University in 1960. Guinea-Bissau’s Amilcar Cabral graduated from the Lisbon Agronomy Institute in 1951, where he met the founder of one of Angola’s liberation movements. As noted above, the University of Dar es Salaam was an incubator of armed group leaders, most notably for Uganda and to some extent southern Sudan. Particular classes and instructors provided critical coordination points that brought together ideologues and political organizers and facilitated their contact with other students. These groups of people drove the ideological insurgencies of the anti-colonial struggle, and played key roles in forming the ideological insurgencies that gained power in Uganda (1986), Eritrea and Ethiopia (1991) and Rwanda (1994). It seems that the leaders of armed groups that make for convincing liberation struggles tend to be elitist in character, an observation that was not lost on those who led incumbent regimes.

Of course Africa continues to have universities, including some that have seen im-

proving material and intellectual standards in recent years. But the economic problems of the last several decades have also meant that people who earlier would have become promising activists may not see their futures as tied to their continent. During the first half of the 1990s, for example, 20,000 university academic staff emigrated from the continent, with 10,000 from Nigeria's thirty major universities and several research centres alone finding employment in the US (Jumare 1997: 113). World Bank researchers estimated that at the start of the 21st century, one third of Africa's professionals had emigrated. In an extreme case, every doctor in one graduating class at the University of Zimbabwe left the country (Brown 2002: 20). On the receiving side, this meant that through the 1990s, Africans were the most educated among immigrants to the United States, with more than 57 percent of adults, or almost 400,000, arriving with some university-level education (Anonymous: 1994: 10). For Nigerians, the figure is even more dramatic, with 83 percent possessing this qualification (Kapur & McHale 2005: 18). It may be that many would-be leaders of liberation struggles instead drive taxis in Washington, DC or teach in some remote university in North Dakota, where they struggle with blizzards and the factional fighting of academic departments instead of the challenges of factionalism in armed groups.

Those ambitious people who remained, confronted political systems that demanded acquiescence as a condition for access to economic opportunities. This even included compromises that one had to make in politician-dominated illicit markets. Thus even the illicit markets could not easily harbour those who would use its resources to challenge regimes. The proliferation of 'campus cults' or armed gangs of youths on Nigerian campuses showed another way by which these regimes used violence to shrink the fields of leverage that liberation struggles historically used to organize. The Babangida administration in the 1980s faced considerable opposition from student groups and the academic lecturers' union, groups that historically have served as bases of support for the emergence of reform and radical insurgents in Africa. The injection into this context of armed youth as well as the scheming of local criminal operations disrupted the organizational efforts of others. Powerful individuals could direct the activities of these 'campus cults' sufficiently to target political critics, while still allowing these leaders to pursue their own self-aggrandizing interests. This social context now favoured armed group leaders whose interests focused more on material gain and in advancement within the existing network of political patronage. This development mirrored similar situations elsewhere, where violent activities were more geared toward changing one's positions within an existing hierarchy (even to the point of establishing oneself as the new head of it), rather than a wholesale remaking of political authority or the redefinition of what the state should do.

Ironically, this analysis shows that those states that are commonly thought of as the weakest in Africa are not weak in terms of inhibiting the organizational capacities of opponents, despite the existence of widespread dissatisfaction with their rule. These regimes show a surprising capacity to exercise indirect control over the transactions and political activities of people who are not directly incorporated into patronage networks.

While these regimes may preside over institutions that are very weak in bureaucratic terms, these regimes are able to use their patronage networks to co-opt and to undermine coordinated attempts to oppose them. To the frustration of many, contemporary armed responses to deep societal and political dissatisfaction take the form of vigilantism in Nigeria. Vigilante groups mobilize politicized youth who may strive to protect their communities from violence, while at the same time leaders of these youth groups may feel that they have little choice but to seek patronage from a local politician in order to survive the corrupt system that they may personally hate. This explains how politically aware individuals can develop complex ideological understandings of the problems around them at the same time that they join groups that support this system of rule. They lack fields of leverage in which they can experiment with mobilizing techniques and develop their political programs. The proliferation of fake NGOs and suitcase NGOs and NGOs that are subservient to the interests of the outside financiers further fragments this organizational terrain. Foreign NGOs employ those with connections, skills and education that characterized the leadership of earlier insurgencies, which pulls these people even further from direct opposition to political systems. Moreover, employment in NGOs provides a path for upward mobility for otherwise frustrated educated people, and thus removing another prime complaint that motivated previous generations of educated people to join insurgencies.

In the absence of these historic fields of leverage, people's armed struggles tend to remain local in geographical terms and parochial in their substantive concerns. It is very difficult for these groups to consolidate in the manner of 'people power' revolutions in the Philippines in the mid-1980s or the democratic movements in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s or Eastern Europe's more recent 'color revolutions'. Armed groups grow up around these conflicts, and unless the political centre collapses as in Somalia, Congo and Liberia, these armed conflicts help to bolster regime positions and undermine the prospects of organized armed opposition. When these patronage-based political systems collapse, the factions knit together under the old system begin to struggle against one another for the right to claim state power. This struggle pushes aside other opponents. In Congo, for example, an assortment of businessmen and provincial strongmen who rose to prominence under Mobutu spent much of the late 1990s in contention. This conflict pushed aside the popular political movement for democracy under Etienne Tshesekedi that once appeared to be the likely replacement for Mobutu Sese Seko's regime. Likewise, in 1990 at the outset of the war in Liberia, what had been a vigorous democratic opposition in the 1980s failed to withstand the violent competition among various former associates of the dictator Samuel Doe.

The consequence of these changes is that Africa's conflicts have become more local in their political dynamics, even as they continue to tap into global material networks. The weakening or the collapse of centralized patronage systems, either as a result of violent contention as in Somalia, Congo and Liberia, or as a result of electoral competition in Kenya, Congo-Brazzaville, and Côte d'Ivoire, provides political space for ethnic strongmen who do not have to tailor their appeals to gain international supporters and

who can work as adjuncts to patronage bosses. The dearth of revolutionary cadres leaves these leaders with little competition from political alternatives, which further cedes this political space to them.

Will people find renewed mobility of opportunities to pursue armed reform, armed change, or armed disasters, or whatever one cares to call ideologically-driven liberation struggles in Africa? Those who are worried about the consequences of ideologically-driven change might find some advantages in the current dispensation. For example, Sub-Saharan Africa has remained surprisingly immune to the attractions of the armed form of Islamist internationalism that many expected to appeal to the impoverished and politically marginalized Muslim communities in some states. While this is a cynical conclusion, it is also a pragmatic one and can be expected to hold some appeal to anxious officials in countries in Africa and elsewhere in the world. This view ignores the possibility that armed conflict can unfold as part of a process of self-repair. This is a complex and difficult notion, however, as doing so means supporting processes that are highly likely to violate international norms concerning human rights and conventions concerning relations with globally recognized incumbent rulers of sovereign states.

Complete rejection of international support for armed struggle ignores fairly recent practice and experience. Global norms also sanctioned colonial and apartheid forms of rule and backed armed struggle to overthrow these regimes. It was easier then to come to something approaching a global consensus around this condemnation than it would be to decide on what contemporary forms of domestic rule are to be similarly proscribed. But also recall that there are many today who praise the accomplishments of the liberation struggles well within the range of living memory when significant numbers of politicians and activists were eager to choose sides and provide concrete support for their favourites. This was true even when they supported negotiations and peace settlements. Some echoes of this sort of intervention have appeared with the African Union's recent declarations that the organization will not recognize governments that have come to power through coups or other violent extra-constitutional means. The African Union began to back up these declarations when the organization announced in September 2008 that it would suspend the government of Mauritania that came to power in a coup the month before (Agence France Presse 2008). The African Union did not follow through with its threat, however, when supporters of the coup said that they would refuse to step down.

Undoubtedly, there are substantial gains to be found in the record of democratic reform in some countries. But it is also a problem that people cannot take matters into their own hands in desperate situations in the old fashion or even in the more recent fashion of the relatively peaceful 'colour revolutions' of places like Ukraine, or the 'people power' of the Philippines or South Korea or Thailand. This outcome is not the result of a dearth of interest in politics among most people, or of an inability or incapacity to organize at a grassroots level. As the analysis shows, the next step, the aggregation of local-level groups and the disciplining and redirection of the diverse motives of individuals does not occur as it once did in Africa or as it occasionally still does elsewhere in the world.

Historically, serious economic crises in global core countries have been associated

with sharp changes in the terms of the politics of countries in the global periphery. It remains to be seen whether this means that Africa will again see major armed movements that offer credible promises of social change. The prospects are fairly strong that it will. That in turn should create a crisis for the academic disciplines of political science and economics, which have used narrow observations about the motives of actors to promote determinist claims that individuals in Africa's conflicts are fated to chase loot and to prey upon civilians. A scholar from the future who looks back at these analyses may conclude that they were particular only to that fairly limited period of time and ignored the underlying crisis of politics. Perhaps one should take to heart the advice of Jon Carson, the National Field Director for President Obama's successful campaign, who was wary of focusing on narrow causal relationships to the exclusion of politics. He explained that he needed people who understood how politics works, so he said: "I try to throw out all the political science majors when I do hiring" (Lizza 2008: 51).

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