



# ON THE ORIGINS OF WAR IN AFRICA

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This article outlines some of the pressing causes of war that have plagued Africa since independence. Wars in Africa are unique in some respects because of the particular history of the African continent. However, a close look at the wars in Africa today reveal many contradictions. Whereas many other continents have progressed since their struggle for independence, African communities are still encumbered with large-scale conflicts. Many causes have been suggested for this dire state: greed, extreme ethnic diversity, and colonialism but the solutions to conflict remain stubbornly out of reach. Despite being well-endowed with natural resources, Africa remains the poorest and the most politically unstable region in the world. A comprehensive understanding of Africa depends on understanding these contradictions.

## Introduction

Former US president, Jimmy Carter said, “War may sometimes be a necessary evil. But no matter how necessary, it is always an evil, never a good.” Throughout history, people have fought and wars continue to rage.<sup>1</sup> At any moment, there is war taking place at one place or another or there are plans for war. Although wars differ in intensity and the instruments used, the outcome is the same: people are killed, maimed, displaced and above all, traumatised. Despite their retrograde influence on humanity, war and violent conflict are here to stay. No nation enjoys complete unmolested tranquillity. Within the scheme of things, the demand and supply economic imperatives make the

military industrial complex one of the most profitable. Contemporary international political trends give good reasons to believe that it would remain that way. For some actors, the existence of war guarantees their continuous existence and it in fact gives them a new lease of life.

The intricacies of war rest mainly on four elements: those who fight; those who pay the costs; those who suffer; and those who win. The chaos and confusion created by war allow the emergence of a parallel economy that often serves to fuel the war. Those who fight often do so for economic reasons, and those who suffer the trauma of war may be trapped by those who seek profit. In Africa, warlords

have seized this opportunity to wage war, sometimes against their own government, in order to enrich themselves. The Cold War, with its profligate subsidies for movements of suitable political leanings, provided the necessary ingredients for similar internecine strife and many inhumane activities. After the end of the Cold War, in some instances peaceful means were sought to bring an end to hostilities. Countries that took this conciliatory route became models for others to emulate. Where this did not happen, wars continued and new ones emerged as Western interests shifted and ideological considerations became less important.

For those countries where wars have continued since the Cold War, sustaining a war effort without superpower subsidies has become an expensive undertaking. In the absence of external finance, many wars have shifted away from the genuine grievances that initially set the stage for war. Inevitably, apart from the genuine desire for self-determination, most wars in the developing world now seem to revolve around the desire to control resources whose possession bequeaths power on their custodians. Where the government in power lacked the military capability to deal with the rebels effectively, the possession of natural resources attracted foreign assistance, regardless of ideological differences.

The true definition of belligerents' activities may even fall within the scope of organized crime; at least in the eyes of the government. This is because, for a country technically at war, the normal rules and norms that govern a society are suspended. This in itself allows criminal syndicates to operate under the shadow of confusion and uncertainties for ends that often serve to energize the very same war. In essence, this analysis stems from the premise that contemporary wars and organized crime in Africa are inseparable. This article outlines theoretical approaches to war and its causal explanations within the African context. It also shows the realization of rewards to be gained from orchestrating war and the criminality that often accompanies wars in Africa.

## Theories of war

The conventional definition of war is the continuation of politics by other means. In simple terms, war is the outcome of the failure of diplomacy and politics. In their study on war and underdevelopment, Stewart and Fitzgerald have alerted scholars to the fact that between 1950 and 1990, some 15 million deaths were caused directly or indirectly by wars of all types in developing countries—including international conflicts, civil war and government-orchestrated violence against citizens.<sup>2</sup> In comparison with other figures of war casualties, their estimation is relatively conservative. For instance, in the same vein, Pascal Boniface points out that “in the course of the 2,340 weeks that passed between 1945 and 1990, the world enjoyed a grand total of three weeks without war. Therefore, to speak of that time as the ‘post-war’ years is to mix irony with tragedy.” According to his estimation, the 160 conflicts the world saw during this period claimed between 35 million and 40 million lives.<sup>3</sup>

In attempting to present an analytical framework for understanding the causes of conflict, it is also necessary to present the level of analysis problem. In *Theory of International Relations*, Kenneth Waltz developed at least three levels of analysis, which were later modified by other scholars in the field. The framework he developed suggests that the causes of war can be analysed at the level of the individual, the nation-state and the international system. The individual level focuses primarily on human nature and predispositions towards aggression; and on individual political leaders and their belief systems, personalities, and psychological processes. The national level includes both governmental variables such as the structure of the political system; the nature of the policy-making process; and societal factors such as the structure of the economic system; the role of public opinion and non-economic interest groups; ethnicity and nationalism; and political culture and ideology. Systemic-level causes include the anarchic structure of the international system; the number of major powers in the system; the distribution of military and economic power among them; patterns of military alliances and

international trade; and other factors that constitute the external environment common to all states.<sup>4</sup> A weakness within this level of analysis framework is that much of the theoretical outline does not seem relevant when dissecting African conflicts. The rationale being that most African conflicts are largely civil wars with fewer interstate conflicts.

Although most of the conflicts to which both Fitzgerald *et al* and Boniface refer took place in the developing world, which was once saturated with proxy wars encouraged by East–West ideological antagonism, most of them have ceased. Instead, new wars erupted which were remarkably different from the wars-by-proxy. These were not anti-colonial struggles for national liberation, which had characterised developing countries during the Cold War era. For instance, between 1989 and 1995, there were between 31 and 54 internationally recorded conflicts in each year, and an average of 15 major wars occurred at any time.<sup>5</sup> The cost of these wars, both on the economies of the countries in which they took place and on the social fabric, is overwhelming.

A dozen explanations on the occurrence of wars come up often and these are some that Barbara Ehrenreich found that satisfy non-specialists: “It is either because of our innate aggressiveness...or because of innate male aggressiveness...or because of imperialism and greed...or overpopulation and a shortage of resources...or manipulation by evil, bloody-minded elites...or it is simply a manifestation of unknowable evil.”<sup>6</sup> There certainly is no single answer. All these factors, sometime combined, have resulted in wars. The analysis that dominated the causes of war after the Cold War came to be focused more on internal arrangements within the society itself. In essence, explanations shifted from the systemic level to the individual level of analysis. However, this does not mean that the systemic level has become irrelevant in the contemporary analysis of the causes of conflicts.

### Causes of war in Africa

The dynamics of contemporary African conflicts and war economies should be viewed within the framework of the shifting character of the nation-state itself. While the

Westphalian conception of the state in Africa is comparatively young, it has largely been forged through protracted struggles, violent conflicts and anti-colonial wars. Major impediments towards the full realization of the state in Africa are seen as stemming mainly from the distressing history of the continent. While there is an element of truth in this, some analysts have simply dismissed reductionist analyses that seek to attribute Africa’s miseries to the legacy of late colonialism. Be that as it may, attempts to dissect Africa’s current predicaments must revisit the complex past.

Many scholars assert that the state in Africa never had an opportunity to be fully institutionalised. Instead, though on the right course to do so, new challenges arising from the tectonic shifts in the international system ruined the entire initiative. For instance, after reaching an apogee in the period from the late 1940s to the early 1970s, the model of state-engineered modernism gave way to a ‘post-modern’ process of globalisation in both capitalist and socialist developed countries (as well as to a relative extent in developing countries). This ‘post-modern’ process was characterized by economic deregulation and the growing influence of markets, which reduced the power and legitimacy of the state.<sup>7</sup> In the contemporary era, the dominant neo-liberal agenda which recommends initiatives to downsize or at least restrain the size of the public sector and reduce social welfare provision, undercuts the usual advantages of being the political party in power and thus of being able to shape public policy and public support in ways intended to mobilize public support.<sup>8</sup> For those countries in transition this reality undermines the project of nation building that is vital in the prevention of ethnic conflicts in diverse societies.

In response to these external constraints, as Duffield argues, the expansion of informal economics mirrors, in part, the survival strategies of rulers in developing states. Their control of informal economies offsets the corrosion of state capability and power, arising from the debt crises, structural adjustment programs, and dilapidated terms of trade. It is on this premise that what is conventionally termed ‘intra-state conflicts’ should rather be

understood as ‘post-modern conflicts’; that is, political projects which no longer seek or even need to establish territorial, bureaucratic or consent-based political authority in the traditional sense. In other words, post-modern conflicts reflect the re-emergence of globalised political economies that are no longer dependent on an inclusive nation-state competence. As such, these conflicts are expressions of new and singular political dynamics in the developing world, which are at odds with the conventional evolutionist assumptions that states are in transition, albeit erratically, to liberal democracy.

Although it is widely acknowledged that war is the largest single economic factor in sub-Saharan Africa, the dominant development paradigm of neo-liberalism has continually refused to acknowledge its consequences.<sup>9</sup> When the social contract between the state and its citizenry fails, war becomes inevitable. The logic is simple: people accept state authority so long as the state equitably delivers services and provides reasonable economic conditions, such as employment and income. When this social contract is broken, usually resulting from a myriad of factors such as inefficiency and the legacy of late colonialism, violence and social disorder are the outcomes. Most contemporary civil wars emerged as the state succumbed to deliberate corrosion by international financial institutions.

The weak institutionalisation of political practice stems from the fact that the African state was never significantly emancipated from society. In addition, the African state has nothing within it that is uniquely African as it is an artificial wholesale transplant of its Western counterpart. Mamdani asserts that, “the form of the state we inherited from colonialism has written into it a distinction between ‘native’ and ‘settler,’ and that each political identity has become the basis of a different type of citizenship in the period after independence.”<sup>10</sup> Understandably, the colonial state in equatorial Africa recognized two types of political identities: civic and ethnic. Civic Identity was the identity of the citizen. It was racially defined. Citizen’s rights, civil and sometimes political, were limited to those considered civilized. The rights of the civi-

lized were written into civil law and were enforced by the central state.

The fact that the state in Africa was never properly emancipated from society could be one reason for the continued existence of failed states in Africa, such as Somalia, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and more recently Côte d’Ivoire.<sup>11</sup> This reality has rendered many African conflicts and civil wars intractable. Although this problem is not uniquely African, it is in Africa that the problem of failed states is more apparent. Making the situation even more complex is the absence within international legal instruments of the necessary tools either to reconstruct failed states or to establish more than one sovereign entity from the existing boundaries of the failed state. Almost inevitably, local warlords have taken over. They are able to control an area and establish commercial activities within it, (sometimes through extortion) while keeping weak central authorities at bay through armed resistance.

Once ‘strongmen’ assert and consolidate their position, the readily available pool of weapons (mostly illegal small arms throughout Southern Africa) has an adverse impact on that society. The economies that these ‘strongmen’ command are largely responsible for the provision of financial resources that fuel the conflict. Studies have pointed out that by exploiting natural resources, such as oil, diamonds and timber, and channelling them to international markets, warlords manage to arm themselves and further aggravated the already intolerable situation,<sup>12</sup> without accountability to the domestic population or actors in the peace process.

Throughout the course of the last century, civilizational disunity and religious divergence have sparked some of the bloodiest wars. Samuel Huntington captured some of the cases that occurred during this period in his *Clash of Civilizations*. Although his analysis has been criticisms as an attack on Islam, the substance of his argument on the growth of religiously-inspired wars remains valid. Huntington’s thesis focuses largely on the contest between the West and ‘other’ civilizations. There is much detail on the line that separates Croatia from Serbia and subsequently,

catholic versus orthodox and Muslims, but little attention is paid to Africa. Indeed, Huntington is not certain that an African civilisation exists. The clash of civilizations seems to manifest itself through religious wars, either between Arabs and Israelis, Indians and Pakistanis, Lebanese Shiites and Maronites or Buddhists and Hindus. Africa has also had its own share of the conflicts and wars stemming from this thesis, although the civilizational aspect of it remains highly contested. For instance, Sudan has witnessed the bloodiest Christian–Muslim war. In Nigeria, religious skirmishes often break out between the Muslim north and the largely Christian south. Many other African countries that have two or more distinct religious practices have not been immune to this form of conflict, among them, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Chad and others. The more profound causes of recurrent conflicts in Africa are as follows:

#### *Identity, ethnicity and inequality*

The question of group inequality and identity is a serious one. So-called ‘tribal’ wars or more appropriately, ‘ethnic wars’ have troubled humanity since time immemorial. The only difference now is that this form of conflict has had to ‘go global’ in accordance with the dictates of contemporary international patterns. Mercenaries are fighting wars throughout the world and Africa has not remained immune. For instance in Sierra Leone, recent reports have revealed the involvement of foreign troops in the conflict brought in to fight on behalf of one or both of the warring factions. This enterprise has experienced a boom in the recent years with former military officials of the old establishments working as mercenaries to earn a living.

Few countries are heterogeneous and identity becomes a causal factor in war as allegiance of men and women to their nation and intimacy to the state are the hallmarks of their spirit of patriotism. The doctrine of national self-determination explicitly sets out the basis on which states form and break-up. Historically, there are no cases of all members of a particular state gathered in one geographic region. Inevitably, many states contain sizeable ethnic minorities. In Africa, the situation

is further complicated by arbitrarily drawn boundaries, many of which consist of straight lines that cut through ethnic group boundaries. The consequence of this missing correlation between ethnicity and geography has frequently been dangerous tensions that may lead to war. A government inspired by extreme nationalism may conduct a policy aimed at the assimilation of national minorities. National groups that are not in control of a state may feel dissatisfied with the regime and claim the right to self-determination, as demonstrated in the attempt to carve Biafra out of Nigeria.

In wars of national or ethnic identity, minorities are often at risk of total annihilation.<sup>13</sup> Here, the native–settler dichotomy that Mamdani presents becomes more acute. Prior to the Rwandan genocide of 1994, the government (Hutu dominated) had been stockpiling weapons for months and then passing them on to Hutu militias as part of the planning for a systematic butchery of the minority Tutsi. What followed was the last and most gruesome genocide of the century. The mere fact of being outnumbered means that minorities lack the human potential to execute a successful break-away. The majority simply plunder the assets of the minority, remove their remnants in the state apparatus and cream off external assistance. The logic is simple. For instance, food can be rationed and used to reward political clients and punish opponents.

In the Congo in 1992, 200,000 Balabu were expelled from Shaba and Kasai as non-indigenous. As it stands, in the context of the current war, the Congo continues to face a rather severe predicament. Ethnic conflict is demonstrating how shifts in ethnic identity depend on the socio-economic and political context of the moment rather than on some objective criteria of identity.<sup>14</sup> In his study, Emizet points out that the implications of this reality are such that the Congolese leader will have to confront difficult challenges, which include accommodating the ethnic basis of political demands, especially in the Kivus where non-Tutsi ethnic groups are unlikely to compromise on land issues because they still regard the Congolese-Tusti-Banayamulenge and Banyarwanda as aliens from Rwanda.<sup>15</sup> This intensifies the

struggle for dominance among and between various social groups and in some instances, among and between ethnic groups.

Often when scarce resources are divided on the basis of nationality, non-nationals are more likely to make an assertion for that status in order to get a share. Their claims on the country's depleted resources further antagonize the already-resentful nationals. In such a volatile scenario, the absence of protection subjects non-nationals to untold misery through abuse, and, in the worst cases, even physical violence that may lead to war.<sup>16</sup> Nationalism not only induces wars but also, through the severity of its influence, makes compromise and acceptance of defeat for the minorities more difficult, even when their only hope of victory is through the mobilization of their resistance to the point where they are prepared to fight with their bare hands.

#### *Natural resource endowment*

The possession of natural resources within a particular country has often been a source of grief and unhappiness to its citizens. On the positive side, in those countries, such as Botswana, where the possession of these resources is properly managed, the state has brought affluence and much-needed foreign exchange earnings. It is often argued that Botswana avoided conflict over resources by distributing their rents widely within the population. However, in those countries where the management was weak, many countries in Southern Africa have degenerated into zones of chaos<sup>17</sup> as nascent rebel organizations seized the opportunity to extract resources whose profits enabled them to launch a civil war. The argument is that natural resources offer rebel groups a unique opportunity, because they typically produce rents and are location-specific, and can be looted on a sustained basis. It is estimated that the correlation between resource-dependence and civil war is curvilinear, suggesting that the risk of civil war declines when resource dependence reaches exceptionally high levels, at which point "the increased tax revenue eventually augments the capacity of the government to defend itself sufficiently to offset the enhanced finances of the rebels."<sup>18</sup>

Most African civil wars started as clashes over access to natural resources. For instance, apart from oil, Klare discusses the river systems where human demands press against limited supplies as well as conflicts over timber rights and minerals in Africa. It appears that most resource-based conflicts occur in very poor countries with weak governments, which make them susceptible to aligning themselves with foreign companies to market their resources globally. Only now are societies starting to recognize that a country's most vital resource is its people and not only its natural endowments.<sup>19</sup> In some instances, external destabilization elements whose aim is to maintain the status quo for commercial considerations should not be underestimated. Under the colonial yoke, resources were literally stolen from their rightful owners under duress. The end of colonialism, and the colonial power's resource exploitation, meant that other ways had to be developed to secure access to the lucrative resources which had been surrendered at independence.

Apart from colonialism, the West bears some moral responsibility for most of the civil wars that ravaged the African continent. For instance, even though he first took to the bush in the 1960s, at the height of his popularity, Savimbi was the darling of American right-wing, conservative politicians and the CIA. At one stage, President Ronald Reagan invited him to the White House and hailed him as a freedom fighter for his efforts to oust President Eduardo Dos Santos and his leftist Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). Furthermore, during the cold war, Mobutu was regarded as a powerful pro-Western figure supported by the United States, fearful that Zaire's resources would fall into the hands of the Soviet Union. While maintaining a safe distance from the problems, within five years of independence the CIA helped Mobutu to push his way into the presidency in 1965. The resources in then-Zaire prompted several countries, among them, Israel, France and even Morocco to send troops to save Mobutu's skin.

The nature and location of natural resources affects the occurrence of war. Addison *et al* identified two main types of resources. First,

there are *point resources* such as minerals; these are non-renewable, geographically concentrated and their extraction requires little labour input. Second, there are *diffuse resources* such as soils and water, these are renewable and geographically spread and they are used in the production of crops and livestock usually mobilizing large amounts of labour. The argument is that countries that are abundant in point resources are more likely to experience conflict than countries that experience only diffuse resources, especially when the later also undertake land reform. For instance, in Congo-Brazzaville where there is one mineral resource, offshore oil, it was necessary for the rebels to capture the capital city, the centre of the state apparatus, and the main port, Pontoire during the 1997 civil war. In contrast, Angola's two mineral resources, offshore oil and alluvial diamonds in the interior, have enabled both the MPLA government and Unita rebels to engage in a protracted conflict for decades. In Liberia and Sierra Leone, the diversity of resources and their geographical spread have led to the development of warlords and a highly fragmented conflict between a weak government and numerous armed groups controlling resources in the interior.

In the post cold war era, major players are no longer focused on ideological considerations. Instead, a new battle of economic interests, with the earth's natural resources as the ultimate trophy has emerged. For instance, apart from containing Saddam Hussein's aggressive posture towards his neighbours, inspiration for the first Persian Gulf War was

the protection of US oil interests in the Middle East. This may be true if one takes into account the warning once echoed by Henry Kissinger, US secretary of state at the end of 1974, that the United States might resort to military action if oil-exporting countries threatened some actual strangulation of the industrialized world.<sup>20</sup> This is because war provides economic opportunities, such as the capture of valuable natural resources that are otherwise unavailable in peacetime. Ultimately, the belligerents may prefer low-intensity conflict to total war when the former has a greater pay-off.<sup>21</sup> It is thus obvious that, economic factors play a large role in determining the actions of actual and potential belligerents.

#### *On greed and grievance*

The greed and grievance analytical framework argues that there is a particular rationale behind war. Some scholars see resource-related grievances as a possible mechanism that may spark violence or civil war. Grievances arising from economic issues, often triggered by poverty or inequality have also tended to influence civil wars. Depending on the resource being contested, the conflict may eventually reach a point of self-determination or secession, as was the case in Angola-Cabinda and in the southern part of Sudan.

There are two schools of thought currently dominating the thinking on the causes of contemporary conflict related to greed and grievance. The first sees violence as a response to a range of grievances including systematic dis-

**Table 1: Conflicts in Africa and the role of natural resources:**

Country	Date	Deaths	Point resources	Diffuse resources
Algeria	1922 -	70,000	oil, gas	
Angola	1975 -2002	500,000	oil, diamonds	timber, ivory
Cameroon/Nigeria	1997 -	<1,000	oil	
Chad	1980-94	300,000	oil, uranium	
Congo-Brazzaville	1993, 1997	9,000	oil	
DRC	1993 -	200,000	copper, cobalt diamonds, gold	timber
Liberia	1989-96	175,000	iron, diamonds, rubber	timber, drugs
Sierra Leone	1992-1999	80,000	diamonds, bauxite	timber
Sudan	1983 -	1,600, 000	oil	cattle, timber

Source: Addison et al 2001

crimination and human rights violations, inequalities in wealth and political power, or a scarcity of resources, particularly where these fall along existing social cleavages such as ethnicity or religion. The second characterizes war as irrational, either originating in 'ancient hatreds', causing a needless disruption along the normal path to development, or simply as 'mindless violence'.<sup>22</sup> Theorists on war and peace see the causes of civil wars as stemming from the greedy behaviour of those with control over resources and the grievances of marginalized communities who seek justice. Since the formation of state and society was an act of will that served as a means of escape from an intolerable situation, the state is thus obliged to fulfil its function. In this vein, the French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau spoke about the state exercising the 'general will', that is, the source of legitimate authority that resides with the collective will, in contrast to individual interests. For many countries in Africa, the formation of such a state and society remains an ideal.

In those instances where the state enthusiastically deviated from fulfilling its responsibilities in accordance with the general will, the very act ignited grievances by those affected. For instance, successive South African governments wittingly skewed the allocation of national resources in favour of the white minority. Initially, blacks' resentment of this reality led to the formation of diplomatic resistance structures. There was, in accordance with Colliers' analysis, a litany of grievances against the government for its oppression, unfairness, and the victimization of the majority of the population. Political movements championing the cause of the poor emerged and with time, the situation evolved to a point where revolutionary armed struggle to contest power with the state by violent means became an option.

### The organized crime element

War economies that serve to sustain belligerents often reach a point where economic (rather than political) motives become dominant. In Africa, the sale of future exploitation of mineral rights and other resources increased in the 1990s as belligerents sought to widen the range of

resources under their sphere of influence, which could be pledged as surety against various transactions. Some scholars have thus come to attribute the growing number of African civil wars not to genuine concerns of grievance, but to the lucrative and burgeoning 'booty futures' markets. While the sale of this booty continues to initiate and prolong civil wars in Africa, the complex web of obscure but pernicious types of contracts concluded between rebels and their commercial clients provided the necessary funds needed to launch assaults on governments.<sup>23</sup>

Futures markets played an important role in at least three cases of conflict in Africa. In Sierra Leone, Angola and the later DRC conflict, the weaker party sold oil or mineral futures to help pay the costs of ongoing combat, thereby lengthening the conflict. This inevitably led to the fragmentation and criminalization of the conflict as military units changed their activities from politico-military objectives to economic ones. In Sudan, the rebels used resource extortion to raise money needed to buy equipment and thus prolong the conflict. In the DRC, the rebel organization, the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo/Zaire, led by Laurent Kabila, received a huge windfall after it became clear that it was defeating the government militarily. For instance, in April 1997, Laurent Kabila signed a US\$885 million contract with American Mining Fields, a US firm intent on exploiting Congolese copper, cobalt, and zinc. Simultaneously, the minerals parastatal, *Minière de Bakangwa*, switched its support from the government to ADLF, offering Kabila both cash and the use of its aircraft fleet.<sup>24</sup>

From the government perspective, the contracts concluded over mining rights were obviously invalid. In accordance with international conventions on sovereignty, rebel forces are not legally entitled to conclude contracts but as unscrupulous foreign companies are bent on exploiting resources; governments often turn a blind eye when commercial considerations outweigh the costs. For instance, Bond points out that at some stage De Beers had to capture Unita's diamonds in Angola. Though this move indirectly fuelled the war, it nevertheless rescued the company whose

share-price had crashed by more than 50 percent.<sup>25</sup> Thus, criminality is not to be underestimated in the war equation. People can be bracketed for a while, even if hundreds of thousands may suffer, hail the market. As the conflict degenerated into an international war, the potential for profits from resource looting by foreign governments further weakened the incentives to end the conflict. For instance, the 1999 Lusaka Peace accord could not be implemented because it required foreign combatants to withdraw from the DRC and subsequently lose their access to the readily available resources, most of which pledged as payment for their support.

In the later parts of the DRC conflict, it is evident that the trade in many commodities, such as coltan, diamonds, gold and timber, has worsened sharply since the war began, especially from those areas where troop numbers are highest. Two high-profile reports by the UN Panel of Experts presented comprehensive information on the extent to which economic motivations are the principal determining factors for the continuation of war. There is obvious connection between the conflict and foreign interests engaged in the exploitation of natural resources. All foreign governments involved in the conflict have used their political alliances with internal actors on all sides of the conflict to legitimise the systematic illegal exploitation of the DRC resources. Natural resource exploitation has become a key factor in determining military deployment, thus perpetuating the cycle of violence.

## Conclusion

Although war appears eminently rational to its protagonists, and their leaders in particular, it has derailed Africa from its development path. Profits, rather than political power seem to be a growing motivation for violence and civil wars in Africa. Inevitably, the point of the war is seldom simply to win it, but to prolong it so as to continue engagement in lucrative criminal operations under cover of warfare. Economic and political motivations may mean that, for some, prolonging the war is just as useful as winning it. Only the economic opportunities presented by a break-

down in law and order can sustain violence at the levels that have plagued many African conflicts.

Whereas in the Clausewitzian dissection, war was seen as the continuation of politics by other means, the contemporary discourse reverses the equation and war is increasingly becoming the continuation of economics by other means. The view that wars are essentially irrational and imposed on societies is becoming obsolete. This article asserts that wars should be regarded as emerging from the political and economic processes taking place within society—particularly when ‘peace’ involves violent processes as the corollary of economic development and political consolidation.<sup>26</sup> The major causes of war in Africa outlined above will continue to present a major threat until African leaders and communities fully dedicate themselves to democratic principles of governance. In those countries where democracy and the rule of law are respected, the presence of abundant natural resources has been efficiently administered. Instead of instigating violent conflict, as is the case in the DRC, Sierra Leone and the Sudan, natural resources can instead become reliable sources of much-needed foreign exchange earnings. The newly-formed African Union, founded on democratic ideals, promises new approaches to the continent’s wars, which should no longer be viewed as a necessary evil.

## Notes

1. This analysis defines war as organized systematic physical violence and killing conducted for political purposes – that is, to gain control of government or sustain political power.
2. F Stewart and V Fitzgerald 2000, Introduction: Assessing the Economic Causes of War, in F Stewart and V Fitzgerald, *War and Underdevelopment*, Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford University, p. 1.
3. P Boniface 1999, *The Will to Powerlessness: Reflections of our Global Age*, Queen’s Quarterly, Queen’s University at Kingston, p. 34.
4. For a full discussion, see K Waltz 1979, *Theory of International Relations*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
5. F Stewart and V Fitzgerald 2000, p. 2.
6. See B Ehrenreich 1997, *Blood Rites Origins and History of the Passions of War*, Metropolitan Books. Henry Holt and Company, Inc.

7. M Duffield 1998, Post-Modern Conflict: Warlords, Post-adjustment States and Private Protection, *Civil Wars*, Volume. 1, Number 1, pp. 66-102.
8. See C Tshitereke 2000, Securing Democracy: Party Finance and Party Donations – the South African Challenge, ISS paper Number 63, Institute for Security Studies, Pretoria and Cape Town, p. 2.
9. See R H Green 1993, Neo-liberalism and the Political Economy of War: Sub-Saharan Africa as a Case of a Vacuum, in *States or Markets? Neo-liberalism and the Development Policy Debate*, C. Colclough and J. Manor, eds., Oxford University Press, Oxford.
10. See M Mamdani 1998, When does a settler become a native? Inaugural lecture, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch.
11. In the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Côte d'Ivoire, much of what is taking place today is as a result of the tight authoritarian grip that Mobutu and Houphouët-Boigny had in their respective countries. Mobutu is reported to have once said: after me expect chaos.
12. V Gamba and R Cornwell 2000, Arms, Elites, and Resources in the Angolan Civil War, in *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars*, M Berdal and D Malone, eds., Lynne Rienner, Boulder, Colorado.
13. See for instance, T Gurr 2000, Minorities at Risk, United States Institute of Peace. Gurr covered at least 227 communal groups which met the criteria for classification as a minority at risk for at different times between 1945 and 2000.
14. See P Boniface 1999, *The Will to Powerlessness: Reflections on Our Global Age*. According to his analysis, Quebecers believe that they could continue easily to do business with the Americans in the even of a separation from Canada. On the other hand, English speaking Canadians ask: 'since you have been able to do so well as a part of Canada, why not stay?' p. 99
15. K Emizet 2000, Congo (Zaire): Corruption, Disintegration, and State Failure, in *Weak States and Vulnerable Economies: Humanitarian Emergencies in Developing Countries*, Volume 2 EW Nafziger, F Stewart and R Vayrynen, eds., Oxford University Press, Oxford.
16. C Tshitereke 1999, Xenophobia and Relative Deprivation in *Crossings*, Volume 3, Number 2, Southern African Migration Project, Idasa, Cape Town and Queen's University, Kingston.
17. For instance, M Ross 2001, points out that the gradual shift in the 1980s and 1990s in the DRC from large-scale deep-shaft mining, for which the government provided security, to small-scale alluvial mining, helped foster independent military units that were economically and politically autonomous from the government. See "How Does Natural Resource Wealth Influence Civil War? Unpublished Paper, Department of Political Science, University of California at Los Angeles, p. 18.
18. See also, M Ross 2001, "How Does Natural Resource Wealth Influence Civil War?" Unpublished paper, Department of Political Science, University of California at Los Angeles, p. 9.
19. T Klare 2001, *Resource Wars: The New Landscape of Global Conflict*. New York: Henry Holt. Reviewed by R Cooper 2001, *Foreign Affairs*, May/June.
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