

## **Economic Incentives, Natural Resources and Conflict in Africa**

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*This paper reviews how rebel leaders motivate followers to fight in wars in Sub-Saharan Africa. Almost all rebel leaders do use economic incentives, but they also avail themselves of other strategies to motivate their soldiers, including political indoctrination, ethnic mobilisation and coercion. The type of incentive employed will depend primarily on the nature of the state confronted. In particular, those movements that face competent national militaries will have to evolve into viable armies while rebels fighting states that are weak and corrupt can afford to lead movements that employ coercion and pursue economic agendas.*

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### **1. Introduction**

Sub-Saharan Africa is home to a large percentage of the world's conflicts. In contrast to the 1960s and 1970s, when most war-related civilian casualties occurred in Asia, the majority of war-related deaths worldwide now occur in Africa (UNICEF, 1990, p. 194). As a result, there has been an increasing focus on the causes of conflict in Africa on the part of policy makers and scholars, especially intrastate war, which is now the predominant form of warfare in Africa (and the rest of the world). In particular, there has been more attention devoted to the economic incentives that rebels face and, related to this, the role of natural resources in inciting conflict and allowing wars to continue. This study reviews the major instances of rebellion in Sub-Saharan Africa since the 1950s (detailed in the appendix) to better understand the workings of modern rebellion and the role of natural resources.

The paper argues that intrastate war must be understood by examining the role of rebels in organising a violent threat to the state. The now vast empirical record that examines rebels in combat suggests that almost all rebel leaders use economic incentives but they also use

other strategies to motivate their followers, including political indoctrination, ethnic mobilisation and coercion. Different rebellions may evolve in very different ways, depending on the types of motivational resources that are available to leaders. Lootable resources may sometimes be critical and sometimes relatively unimportant in a particular rebellion. As rational entrepreneurs of violence, rebel leaders decide to use that combination of motivations that is most likely to be effective given the state they are facing and the terrain of their country. Therefore, while scholars and policy makers are correct to recognise economic agendas as one aspect of civil wars in Africa (and elsewhere in the world), it is simply not persuasive to suggest that economic agendas are the only or even the primary driving force behind rebellion.

At the same time, it is almost always true that lootable resources play some role in rebellion. As observers since Cicero have noted, money is the sinew of war. However, the microlinkages that tie the presence of lootable natural resources to conflict have yet to be adequately developed. Indeed, as will be argued in the section on policy conclusions, many policy makers (and perhaps some scholars) have come to focus on curtailing the trade of lootable resources because such economic sanctions suggest a relatively cheap, efficient and clean way to intervene in the brutal, messy and extremely costly wars of Sub-Saharan Africa. In particular, the almost exclusive focus of some policy makers on curtailing the smuggling of diamonds in Sierra Leone and Angola has allowed attention to be diverted from the fact that demanding such sanctions is an implicit call for the military defeat of the rebels by the government. As calls for military victory appear to be politically incorrect in the current age, the vocabulary of victory and defeat has been transferred to the more neutral and technocratic language of sanctions and restraints on the trade of natural resources.

## **2. Economic Agendas in Rebellion**

The literature on the causes of revolution spans centuries. However, the literature on the economic incentives in rebellion is more recent. One new perspective on post-cold war rebellions that has its roots in the international relations literature argues that revolts now do have a far more explicit economic agenda than was the case before 1989. Berdal and Keen (1997, p. 799) suggest that

During the Cold War, a large and dominant body of literature tended to view civil wars as political insurrections that were met with counter-insurgency. This model appeared particularly applicable in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s, when anti-colonial wars often ran alongside (and sometimes gave way to) a variety of revolutionary struggles.

Keen (1998, p. 33) suggests that 'Ideologically committed leaders – Mao Zedong, Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh – banned economic violence among their forces and produced highly disciplined movements as a result'.

However, Keen (1998, p. 11) argues that, in the post-cold war period, 'war has increasingly become the continuation of economics by other means' because rebellions are no longer anticolonial and because it is much harder than before for rebels to get assistance from the outside. As a result, rebels must live off the land and sometimes become addicted to looting. The mining of diamonds by Jonas Savimbi's UNITA movement in Angola and the creation of private commercial alliances in the vast areas of Liberia that Charles Taylor controlled before he was elected president in 1997 (so-called Taylorland) are seen as prime examples of the new economics of war. Keen argues (1998, p. 41) that some of today's rebel groups have become almost completely focused on loot-seeking and are no longer interested even in achieving power in what appears to be a military stalemate.

This new literature has coincided with the revitalisation of an economic perspective on rebellion that has surfaced periodically since the 1960s. The literature revolves around the classic problem of collective choice: why do rebels fight when their individual contribution to rebellion is likely to be trivial but the risk of injury or death that they face for participating in combat can be significant?

Why, these models ask, should any one person therefore suffer foregone revenue by joining a rebellion, much less the physical adversity and risk of death inherent in the guerilla lifestyle? Intertwined with the collective action problem is another that goes under the general heading of time inconsistency: rebels must undergo hardships immediately but the rewards of the new order are only in the future. Therefore, even if a leader promises his or her followers selective rewards for risking their lives, there is no guarantee that they will be able to collect when victory is finally achieved. This literature has been an important addition to the theoretical debate because it has focused

attention on the calculations and motivations of individual rebels; it therefore poses an enormous challenge to theories that concentrate on overarching political and historical issues and just assume that the motivation to rebel is obvious. In a similar vein, this literature has directed useful attention to the private gains that may be available to the leaders of rebellion who may do well by doing good. Finally, this literature highlights the potential for a clear disjuncture between the interests of leaders and that of followers [Herbst (2000) reviews the collective choice literature and its applicability to rebellion in greater detail].

The simplest explanation for why some revolutionaries solve the collective action problem is that political change will produce private benefits for the leaders and their followers. Thus, Collier and Hoeffler (1999, p. 8) note, in their analysis of what they call 'looting' and 'justice-seeking' rebellions, that 'Looting rebellions do not face intrinsic collective action problems because the activity is privately profitable. By contrast, justice rebellions face . . . problems in collective action.' In particular, they note that looting rebellions, unlike those that seek justice, need not defeat a government because their aim is met as long as they can keep stealing from the local population and exploiting mineral resources that they have captured.

Critically, this economic perspective claims that the risk of conflict is not determined by the great political issues (e.g. justice, exploitation of the masses, ideological conflict) that are the focus of most analyses of rebellion. For instance, Collier (2000, p. 92) specifically disputes the stated intentions of most rebel groups: 'since both greed-motivated and grievance-motivated rebel organisations will embed their behavior in a narrative of grievance, the observation of that narrative provides no informational content to the researcher as to the true motivation for rebellion'. In their statistical analysis, Collier and Hoeffler (1999, p. 15) observe that

Civil wars are less likely the higher is their opportunity cost, the fewer are lootable resources, and the more substantial are the obstacles to collective action. The variable which is insignificant is the demand for justice. We found no evidence that the level of grievance is an important influence on civil war.

Lichbach (1995, p. 284), in a book-length treatment of collective action issues in rebellion, agrees that 'preference falsification' is omnipresent:

Dissidents do not signal their true preferences for collective action, because demands are made efficaciously, with an eye to their consequences. . . . Dissidents will support a side in which they do not believe, remain neutral, support both sides, switch sides, switch among opposition groups, and take sides only after the conflict is over.

Accordingly, he argues that 'ideological commitment is not needed to sustain a dissident movement' (Lichbach, 1995, p. 286). Tullock (1974, p. 39) made the inevitable conclusion when he noted that profit-seeking individuals will ignore not only the public goods nature of a revolution but even the ideology of the opposing sides when deciding whether to participate.

There are subtle agreements and disagreements between the emerging literature on the economic incentives during civil war and the traditional economics approach. Perhaps the major disagreement is on the nature of intrastate conflict over time. The perspective being developed by political scientists, especially Berdal and Keen, ties the prominence of economic incentives in civil wars directly to developments since the Cold War ended, especially the decline in assistance provided to revolutionary groups as a result of the end to the global geopolitical competition between the Soviet Union and the USA and their allies. In contrast, the economic studies done by Collier and colleagues have a 30 year perspective (beginning in 1965) and do not make any particular claims about the periodisation of violence. Indeed, Collier would dispute the suggestion by Keen that there were ever politically motivated revolts.

Another important point raised, albeit in different ways, by recent studies is on the role of natural resources in fuelling conflicts. Collier's most important proxy for economic agenda in civil wars is the share of primary commodity production in GDP. He argues that

Primary commodity production does not depend upon complex and delicate networks of information and transactions, as with manufacturing. It can also be highly profitable because it is based on the exploitation of idiosyncratic natural endowments rather than the more competitive level playing field of manufacturing. Thus, production can survive predatory taxation. Yet for export it is dependent upon long trade routes, usually originating from rural locations. This makes it easy for an organized military force to

impose predatory taxation by targeting these trade routes. (Collier, 2000, p. 93)

Thus Collier argues that 'diamond exports from Sierra Leone probably account for the high incidence of conflict in that country' (Collier, 2000, p. 106). Diamonds are seen as the ultimate lootable resource because they can be easily mined and transport costs, compared with total value, is trivial.

On the other hand, several scholars and policy makers argue that the presence of natural resources may allow conflicts to continue, or even escalate, but are not the only goal of the fighting. Keen asserts that even the diamonds must be embedded in an understanding of what Collier would call the grievance narrative:

The civil war in Sierra Leone cannot really be understood without comprehending the deep sense of anger at lack of good government and educational opportunities . . . In this overall context, greed has undoubtedly played a role. The failure of the state to provide economic security was matched by a failure to provide physical security. (Keen, 2000, p. 35)

Similarly, de Soysa (2000, p. 124) argues that the presence of certain natural resources causes low economic growth and grievances that lead to conflict. The Fowler report on the role of diamonds in Angola argued that the rough gems are critical to the ability of UNITA to sustain its challenge to the government. Diamonds, according to the report, allow the rebels to buy weapons, acquire friends and external support, and serve as a store for wealth (Panel of Experts, 2000, p. 19). The report does not argue, *pace* Collier, that diamonds are the cause of the war or even used to purchase internal support. Global Witness, in its major report on diamonds in the Angolan civil war, also argues that diamonds have 'played the major role in enabling UNITA to restock its munitions and maintain a flow of supplies which in turn has enabled it to disregard the 1992 election results and to avoid meeting its obligations under the Lusaka Protocol' (Global Witness, 1999). Again, this is not quite the same as arguing that UNITA is fighting only for diamond wealth.

In fact, a large amount of work on what might be called the industrial organisation of rebellion must be done before it can be simplistically assumed that diamonds, or other natural resources, are driving

conflicts. Some of the regressions reporting a relationship between lootable resources and conflict may simply be picking up the fact that lootable resources may be necessary, or at least useful, for a conflict to continue (in order for rebels to, among other things, feed themselves) but are not the drivers of the conflict *per se*. Diamond mining is also a complex operation that does not immediately guarantee profits. For instance, successive Sierra Leone governments dating back to the colonial period have had to deal with the problem of illegal diamond mining and slippage of diamond stocks, given the high value of these low weight goods. Yet, it is immediately assumed by policy makers, especially in the Fowler report, that rebels can make diamond mining profitable. This is not to deny that diamonds, or other lootable resources, may play an important role in the funding of a rebellion. It is to challenge the automatic assumption that conflicts turn, or are always 'fuelled' (to use the term most commonly found in the popular literature), by natural resources. Invariably, as the analysis below will suggest, the motivations and operations of rebels are more complex.

### 3. Rebel Agendas during Civil Wars

While the perspectives detailed above are certainly not contradictory, the analytical assumptions must be examined given that there are differences on key points. In addition, viewing conflict on a continental basis suggests that the economic incentives perspective cannot be the complete picture. Certainly, the wars in Sierra Leone and Angola do appear to fit the perspective of easily lootable resources fuelling a conflict in which leaders have economic agendas. The war in Liberia can also be fit into this perspective, although the resources (notably timber) are not as obviously 'lootable' in a quick manner. However, the ongoing conflicts in Burundi, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan do not seem to fit at all.

Further, if leaders of revolts are always (in the economists' version) motivated by economic gain or if this is a relatively new development (the view of some political scientists), even the commercial logic is not particularly compelling in countries where conditions are friendly to the logic. Why do leaders such as Jonas Savimbi or Charles Taylor not cash out after they have made millions, invest those monies in a hedge fund and retire to more pleasant surroundings? Why do they continue to engage in the extraordinarily dangerous and perhaps unprofitable

strategy of trying to capture the capital? Senior leaders of revolts tend to be killed by the opposition, by their own colleagues or by accidents in the fogs of war with some regularity, as demonstrated by the violent deaths of Ibrahim Afa (EPLF, Eritrea), Mohamed Farah Aideed (USC, Somalia), Amilcar Cabral (PAIGC, Guinea-Bissau), Eduardo Mondlane (FRELIMO, Mozambique), Evo Fernandes (RENAMO, Mozambique), Fred Rwigyema (RPF, Rwanda) and Josiah Tongogara (ZANU, Zimbabwe). The consequences of losing – usually exile, internal banishment or years of prison – are also usually severe and would seem to outweigh the marginal benefits of fighting for another year.

An initial review of the case study literature of close to three dozen rebellions in Africa suggests that there are very few pure cases where only one type of incentive to rebel is present. For instance, there were very few revolutions that were ever ideologically driven and that did not have a clear economic aspect. More specifically, in even the revolts celebrated for their ideological commitment there is a clear looting element. Davidson (1981a, p. 73) noted that the struggle for independence in Guinea-Bissau was subverted for a time because some commanders had turned ‘into petty despots, *militarists* in the worst sense for whom the liberating and modernizing aims of the struggle were more or less completely lost’. Similarly, Kriger notes that, during the struggle for Zimbabwe, ‘Parents, youth, and the rural elite had little choice but to identify with ZANU and provide logistical support for the guerrillas. . . . One dared refuse only at the risk of personal physical harm’ (Kriger, 1992, p. 154). And in the Nigerian Civil War, seemingly as pure an ethnic conflict as there could be, the former commander of the Biafran forces reported that his soldiers, at the end of the war, were only getting one meal every 4 days. As a result, ‘a good number of soldiers in the front lines either moved back in search of food or stayed on and fraternised with the enemy in hope of getting presents of food and cigarettes from him’ (Madiebo, 1980, p. 112). Such fraternisation across enemy lines might be taken as evidence that the economic agenda of rebels outweighed everything else (see Keen, 2000, p. 35), but it should be clear that the exigencies of war in Africa mean that material considerations are always important for all soldiers and commanders. Mao, seemingly the paradigmatic ideological rebel, was actually extraordinarily attentive to what would later be called the selective incentives of revolution. In ‘Mind the Living Conditions of the Masses and Attend to the Methods of Work’ he wrote:



If we do no other work than simply mobilising the people to carry out the war, can we achieve the aim of defeating the enemy? Of course not. If we want to win, we still have a great deal to do. Leading the peasants in agrarian struggles and distributing land to them; arousing their labor enthusiasm so as to increase agricultural production; safeguarding the interests of the workers; establishing co-operatives; developing trade with outside areas; solving the problems that face the masses, problems of clothing, food and shelter, of fuel, rice, cooking oil, and salt, of health and hygiene, and of marriage. In short, all problems facing the masses in actual life should claim our attention. (Quote in Migdal, 1974, p. 245)

Nor, at the other extreme, is it possible to find many pure looting rebellions. Perhaps the best example would be the various militias (e.g., 'Ninjas', 'Zulus' and 'Mambas') that came to prominence in Congo-Brazzaville after 1993. These forces were under the control of different political leaders and did have a nominal ethnic identification. However, what is particularly notable about them is not that they looted – that is common in a large number of rebellions – but that they looted from members of their own ethnic communities, including their own leaders (Bazenguissa-Ganga, 1999, p. 48). Bazenguissa-Ganga (1999, p. 49) reports militia members practically jumping for joy when they heard that their own home areas were being looted because that meant that they would be allowed to 'slaughter the pig' – to use the local grammar – elsewhere. There are few other rebellions where the economic motivation so clearly trumps all other affiliations. Even during the third battle for Monrovia in 1996 – called 'Operation Pay Yourself' by Charles Taylor's troops – there is evidence that at least Taylor's movement was able to take some military objectives instead of being totally consumed by commercial fratricide (Ellis, 1999, p. 108). One of the reasons that there are so few pure looting rebellions is that their cannibalistic tendencies will be self-defeating: stealing from everyone inevitably results in the isolation of the rebels from every possible support group and, as the foot soldiers rob the leaders, organisational coherence will suffer. Economic logic is not the same as the logic needed for effective combat organisations.

At the same time, there is significant evidence that rebel leaders themselves believe that ideology is an important motivational force for their followers. Granted, communiqués to the outside world may have little value in actually explaining the internal motivations of rebellions.

However, some rebellions have devoted significant time and effort to political indoctrination. For instance, the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Army had a curriculum of political and military training that lasted 6 months (Pateman, 1998, p. 126). The FLN in Algeria, the ANC and PAC in South Africa, and the ZANU and ZAPU in Zimbabwe made similar costly investments in the political indoctrination of their fighters and, perhaps even more striking, their followers. This is a cost, to put the analysis back in the collective choice framework, that would not have been acceptable if leaders thought that such indoctrination was useless.

However, motivations for rebellion go far beyond the ideology/material reward debate. An important, although seldom discussed, feature of many rebellions is coercion. In good part because so many of the models of rebellion are derived from market analogies, analysts have a very difficult time including coercion in the structure of rebellion. Other studies are so focused on asking why men rebel and arraying the correct set of motivations that the analysis cannot consider that men (and women) sometimes do not have a choice. However, throughout Africa, rebels devote substantial attention to separating people, usually but not always men, from their communities so that they can have control over them. For instance, in Sierra Leone, commonly called a looting rebellion, the role of coercion was actually critical. As Richards (1995, p. 158) noted, 'Youth were conscripted and encamped for military training, local primary school buildings being pressed into service as camp headquarters'. Some of those forcibly seized by the RUF appear to have later become prominent in the leadership of the Front (Abdullah and Muana, 1998, p. 178). Even when people join a rebellion voluntarily, care is often taken to prevent their return to society. A typical RENAMO practice in Mozambique was to take a boy soldier back to his village and force him to kill someone he knew. After the murder, there was no chance of the child ever being able to return to the village (Cohn and Goodwin-Gill, 1994, p. 23).

The phenomenon of the child soldier, now endemic in many African conflicts, demonstrates the increasing role of coercion, rather than economic incentives, in the deployment of combatants. It is estimated that more than 120,000 children under the age of eighteen are currently involved in conflicts in Angola, Burundi, Congo-Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Uganda (Save the Children, 1999, p. 2). Sometimes, these

children make up a surprising large percentage of the rebel armies. Ellis, working from United Nations' studies, estimates that children accounted for 15% of Liberia's demobilised fighters (Ellis, 1999, p. 132). Museveni's National Resistance Movement contained approximately 3,000 children under the age of 16, of which 500 were girls (Cohn and Goodwin-Gill, 1994, p. 34). Of course, coercion is not the best organising principle for a combat force and there are also many descriptions of soldiers running away as soon as the first shot is fired.

Another phenomenon that is almost uniform throughout African revolts is ethnic allegiance. While the ethnic dimension of revolts is hardly overlooked in the literature, the role that ethnicity plays in the organisation of rebel movements does not receive the attention that it deserves. Once again, reliance on market analogies makes such sociological phenomena hard to discuss. Yet, the ability to create and mobilise populations around ethnic symbols is seen as critical in many of the narratives of revolt. For instance, Tereke (1990) notes that while popular insurrections were common in both Bale and Tigray (Ethiopia), only the Tigrayan movement succeeded in developing into a major insurgency. He suggests that

The growth and continuity of the insurgency in Tigray ultimately hinged on the TPLF's determination and organizational talent to erect rural Soviet bases and create mass organizations in the face of escalating war. Using effective mobilization techniques that combined cultural symbols, propaganda, and coercion, it was able to overcome the obstacles posed by an atomized society and to rally vast numbers of the rural poor with whom it has established a stable and creative relationship. (Tereke, 1990, p. 149)

Related to the widespread reliance on ethnic vocabulary and practice is the use of witchcraft. Witchcraft serves various purposes in African revolts. It is commonly thought to protect soldiers against bullets. As Crawford Young (1970, p. 988) noted, this is a phenomenon deeply grounded in the traumas caused by the imposition of colonialism:

The folklore of African resistance is filled with remarkably parallel responses to the uniform problem: how can men with spears, bows, and arrows overcome the force of enemies with firearms? . . . The keys to the kingdom of magic were held by those with the specialized knowledge of and access to occult forces; the continuous

intercession and collaboration of wizards was indispensable to insurgent power.

Witchcraft can also be used to create, and sustain, loyalty to a leader. For instance, the use of witchcraft against UNITA dissidents was highly successful in maintaining that organisation's coherence because the practice was supported by a large percentage of the Ovimbundu population, who believed that such practices had deep roots in pre-colonial ideology (Heywood, 1998, p. 166).

Collier finds that ethnic fractionalisation is negatively correlated with warfare (Collier, 2000, p. 98). However, that result does not necessarily contradict the case study literature that finds that particular movements rely on ethnic identity to motivate soldiers. Indeed, a significant role for commanders is to reinforce (if necessary to create) an identity that men can fight for.

Rebellions almost inevitably use a complex mixture of political indoctrination, physical coercion, economic rewards, and ethnic vocabularies and practices to animate followers. Thus, Barnett (1966, p. 200) argues that Mau-Mau should at once be seen as a protest against white occupation of Kikuyu land, a demand for higher wages and a moral-religious struggle against colonialism. Without the latter, the oathing (which specifically prohibited looting, among other things) and other cultural strategies used to mobilise and discipline fighters cannot be understood. Such an eclectic use of incentives is hardly unique to African rebellions. Social banditry has quite often in agrarian societies been associated in a complicated manner with both robbery and the expression of grievances. What Hobsbawm calls *haiduks* – 'free robber-liberators' – are a particularly common theme in many poor societies and their cruelty is often noted. As a result, 'the distinction between robber and hero, between what the peasant would accept as "good" and condemn as "bad", was therefore exceptionally difficult . . .' (Hobsbawm, 1985, pp. 72–3).

#### **4. Rebel Movements as Combat Organisations**

To say that there is a complex mix of motivation present during battle in Africa does not mean that all rebellions are the same. It would, for instance, be hard to find many similarities between the RUF in Sierra Leone, which became known for using forced amputation as a terror tactic, and the ANC as led by Nelson Mandela in South Africa. Indeed,

one of the problems with the extreme view that rebellions always have an economic agenda is that it leads to the conclusion that Nelson Mandela spent almost 30 years in prison solely in order to gain power in order to steal from the gold and diamond mines, and that his criticisms of apartheid were not related to his own personal and political struggle. The acknowledgement of a range of motivations that are available to leaders to motivate and to control followers then leads to the next logical question: under what conditions does a particular type of motivation or incentive become relatively more important?

Rebel movements are so important because they are armed threats to the state, a point surprisingly ignored in the increasingly complex attempt to parse the motivation, as opposed to the actions, of fighters. Therefore, to understand rebels, it is important to understand their ability to undertake their fundamental task: combat. As such, most African rebellions begin life as extremely small and vulnerable operations. The eleven men who started the fighting in Eritrea (Pateman, 1998, p. 117), the famous twenty-seven fighters who began the National Resistance Movement's campaign in Uganda (Museveni, 1986, p. 7), the approximately 100 soldiers of the National Patriotic Front that crossed into Liberia with Charles Taylor (Ellis, 1999, p. 110), the thirty-five trained soldiers who started the RUF in Sierra Leone (Abdullah and Muana, 1998, p. 177) and the 250 that started FRELIMO (FRELIMO, 1982, p. 147) are representative of how vulnerable and small rebel movements are at the beginning. Of course, many rebel movements are defeated early or simply collapse from their internal divisions, never to be heard from again.

As a result, rebel leaders are, literally from the start, acutely conscious of the coercive power of the state and opportunities to seek refuge from the state. It is an unfortunate example of how divorced some aspects of social science have become from the real world of war that the most commonly enunciated lesson of rebellion is today largely ignored: the terrain of struggle must be understood. For instance, FRELIMO noted early on that 'our forces are far inferior to the enemies'. Therefore it designed a strategy to take account of its weakness that stressed fighting the enemy by attrition (FRELIMO, 1982, p. 147). Museveni was also concerned at the beginning primarily that his nascent movement not be destroyed. All tactical concerns were subordinate to that primary goal: 'Loss of territory is, at this stage, of no consequence. In our case, the more important considerations are the preservation and expansion of our forces by avoiding unnecessary

casualties, and destroying the enemy's means of making war . . . ' (Museveni, 1986, p. 12).

It is not merely the coercive power of a state that rebels are obsessed with. They must also be vitally concerned with how the state itself motivates its soldiers because defections from the state's security forces are critical to the achievement of victory. As Russell noted in one of the rare systematic studies of rebellion

No mass rebellion can succeed without the defection of some of the regime's armed forces. . . . In a situation where people are rebelling, the behavior of the armed forces has been shown to be a decisive factor in the outcome of the rebellion. For revolutionaries to come to terms with this means that they must devote a great deal of thought to how to encourage defections from the police and the army. (Russell, 1974, p. 87).

Political ideology is therefore not merely a grievance narrative but a potent weapon in what can be life or death struggles.

The strength of opposition has a profound effect on the dynamics of rebel movements, especially their need to prepare for and engage in combat, and their need to create an ideology. Leaders of rebellions who face the constant risk of extermination from a relatively strong state must build a cohesive fighting force where the motivations of soldiers has been internalised through political and ethnic indoctrination leavened with the usual amount of military coercion. Political and ethnic indoctrination provides a set of reasons why men should risk their lives in combat even if their individual effort is not going to change the outcome of the battle. Even the relatively low-tech wars of Africa require a certain organisation coherence – to supply fuel and material, and to provide logistics – that makes looting rebellions, in particular, implausible for armies that are to be tested in combat.

Some rebels face states that are exceptionally weak and which may be in a process of advanced disintegration, only partially because of the rebellion itself. The deteriorating economic fortunes of many African countries combined with a decline in external assistance for poorly performing states (as donors seek to aid 'winners') has caused an atrophy of some states' security forces. These states are so weak that they have not maintained their security forces and may not even be paying their soldiers. As a result, their ability to project force is extremely limited. Rebels have been notably successful in overthrowing

precisely those regimes (Barre in Somalia, Doe in Liberia, Mengistu in Ethiopia, Mobutu in Zaire) that were notably weak because they had been cut loose from their superpower patrons after the cold war. Accordingly, the rebels who confront some African states may not have combat as their primary objective because the state does not threaten their very survival. These rebel movements may therefore use other means – including looting and coercion – to motivate their followers. The fact that stealing and abduction will not yield effective combat forces with well-honed combat skills is not very important because these organisations will not fight often and they can often survive simply by terrorising the civilian population. These rebel movements can afford to focus on developing agendas (including economic agendas) that are usually incompatible with combat because they will not be fighting the states they confront in anything approaching a traditional civil war. Time-consuming political and ethnic mobilisation may not be worth the investment required.

Rebel movements that do not, effectively, face a state or confront security forces that are so weak that combat is hardly central to the mission of the rebel movement can afford to continue to operate as rather unimpressive military organisations and devote significant attention to other tasks, including enriching themselves. Kabila's Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire is perhaps the paradigmatic example of such a movement as it really did not fight Mobutu's forces as it marched across then-Zaire. The Zairian state had delayed paying its military so often that most of its soldiers simply ran away when finally confronted with an armed enemy (Thom, 1999, p. 117). The logistics for Kabila's crossing of Zaire – nominally a difficult task which would require some organisational cohesion – were handled by the Angolan military. The only fighting that Kabila's army did was when it briefly encountered UNITA forces near Kinshasa. Similarly, the only way that RENAMO in Mozambique could operate as such a thuggish organisation (a high percentage of its soldiers were abductees) was because the FRELIMO government was so inept (Young, 1997, p. 145). For instance, RENAMO garnered most of its weapons from fleeing FRELIMO troops. Similarly, the Somali clans and the Congo (Brazzaville) militias can operate as looting agencies because they do not face a state that they have to fight against. As was understood by the ancients, you should choose your enemies carefully because you will become more like them.

At the other extreme is the firepower and military competence



associated with entrenched white settler regimes. Portugal, for instance, managed to field a credible force across three fronts (Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique) for close to a decade before, in the end, the terrain and domestic weakness caused the government in Lisbon to collapse. The Portuguese counter-insurgency effort was notable for 'their understanding of the struggle and adaptation to it at the theater level and in successfully converting national strategy to battlefield tactics'. Among other things, Lisbon managed 'The complete re-orientation of the entire Portuguese armed forces from a conventional force to one for counterinsurgency. . .' (Cann, 1997, p. 11). Other formidable forces that fought against rebels included the British in Kenya during Mau-Mau, the French against the FLN in Algeria, the Rhodesians against ZANU and ZAPU, and the white South African government against SWAPO in Namibia and the ANC and the PAC within South Africa.

White regimes were not the only ones who were able to mount large-scale and relatively effectively military campaigns against rebels. The Ethiopians fought a large-scale conventional struggle against the Eritrean and Tigray liberation forces, while the Nigerians confronted the Biafrans with a relatively formidable military organisation. As a result, the Eritreans, Tigrayans and Biafrans, like the national liberation forces that fought against minority regimes, had to form themselves into conventional armies or be destroyed. For instance, the EPLF in Eritrea had 20,000 fighters under arms, including brigade-level heavy weapons, artillery and engineering units. It also had 200 tanks and a 'navy' made up of fast attack speedboats (Pateman, 1998, p. 121).

The rebels who confronted these competent armies recognised that they were not going to win a quick battle. Therefore, they understood that they had to mobilise relatively large groups of men for long periods of time to conduct actual combat operations. They also had to develop large cadres of supporters who would provide critical material support and sanctuary to them. Not surprisingly, they therefore had to develop holistic ideologies to explain why men were fighting and to motivate them for political and ethnic reasons since the fruit of victory would not be tasted for quite a long time. These movements also used their ideology to try to weaken the other side. Perhaps the classic instance is the MPLA in Angola, which was not a particularly effective fighting force against the strong Portuguese army. Rather, its 'major successes instead came in converting



Portuguese military officers to its cause, thus mobilizing political support in Lisbon for turning power exclusive over to the MPLA' (Luke, 1982, p. 421). This is not to say that profiteering or coercion were absent from these revolts or that the leaders would not have preferred these means to developing a political ideology (especially if it meant enriching themselves). Rather, all that it is necessary to assume is that leaders will try to do what is necessary to survive and to achieve victory. That is why after the rebellions were over the leaders could treat their putative followers so badly (a question which bedevils some authors).

One of the central reasons that looting rebellions have appeared more frequently in recent years is not because, as Keen suggests, rebel movements have become weaker. Rather, rebellions motivated by coercion and looting are on the rise because *states* have become weaker. While rebellion in Africa was previously against strong settler states, it is now against weak and disintegrating independent governments. Rebel leaders who, like water, choose the path of least resistance therefore can rely increasingly on coercion and looting. Accordingly, the child soldier problem is largely a post-colonial phenomenon. Settler states could not have been defeated by children. The leaders of national liberation struggles were no more noble than may of the leaders of later rebellions, but they did need to organise on a fundamentally different basis to succeed.

## **5. Conclusion: Policy Recommendations**

The productive new literature on economic agendas has spawned a number of different recommendations. De Soysa (2000, p. 126) suggests that, in the short-term, the international community should take steps to end the use of lootable resources by rebel movements while promoting economic development in the long-term. Collier (2000, p. 106) echoes this view and also argues for asset diversification. In the United Nations, ending the ability of UNITA and the RUF to market diamonds has become central to the international approach to both conflicts.

There is nothing wrong with both these short- and long-term suggestions as important parts of an approach to end conflict. The problem is that too exclusive a focus on ending diamond exports or economic diversification puts an extraordinary emphasis on the economic aspects of a conflict. This is despite the fact that the analytic

assumptions of those who argue for economic agendas in civil wars still vary considerably, and despite the significant case study literature which finds that even in Sierra Leone – seemingly the paradigmatic case of diamonds fuelling conflict – other factors, including ideology and coercion, are critical motivators of the rebellion. The danger that too-exclusive a focus on economic agendas in civil wars was demonstrated by recent remarks to the UN Security Council by the Sierra Leone Ambassador, Ibrahim Kamara:

We have always maintained that the conflict in Sierra Leone is not about ideology, tribal or regional differences. It has nothing to do with the so-called problem of marginalized youths or, as some political commentators have characterized it, an uprising by rural poor against the urban elite. The root of the conflict is diamonds, diamonds and diamonds. (Quoted in Crossette, 2000, p. A9)

Indeed, what is striking is that the emphasis on the economics of civil wars to some degree obscures the dynamics of what remain military conflicts. This paper finds that rebels are enormously sensitive to changes in the military balance and that the current rebel movements came about in part because the states in some African countries are so weak. Therefore, important leverage could be gained in ending these conflicts by increasing the coercive ability of the states that fight rebels. The seemingly obvious point that rebels can best be defeated by increasing the coercive ability of their opponents is not, however, popular in either the academic or policy making literature. Aiding the military capacity of governments in Freetown or Luanda is hardly appealing given their demonstrated incompetence and frequent human rights abuses. Enhancing the coercive ability of states also inevitably means more fighting, something both academics and policy makers shy away from. In contrast, ending the illegal export of diamonds or other lootable resources, promoting export diversification and enhancing long-term growth are much 'cleaner' alternatives that do not involve armies, combat and the messy questions surrounding military assistance. The appeal of the economic agenda of civil wars appears, in part, to be that the resulting policy recommendations point to ending conflict without getting the international community involved in the messy business of actually promoting fighting, much less the defeat of one side.

However, such a 'clean' approach to ending conflict is unlikely to

work or is at least unproven. The RUF, UNITA and other rebel movements have proven remarkably flexible and may be able to cope with international action against their economic base. Indeed, one of the primary lessons of economics is that agents often have a set of alternatives available to them and can often shift to second- and third-best alternatives if one aspect of their modus operandi is exogenously changed. Given the mixed motives for rebels portrayed in the case study literature, it is likely that ending civil wars will be much messier for both domestic and international actors.

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**Appendix**

Country	Movement	Operational period	Grievance/ cause	Major reference
Algeria	FLN: Front de Libération Nationale	1955–62	Overthrow French rule	Hutchinson, 1978
Angola	MPLA: Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola	1956–76	Overthrow Portuguese rule	Luke, 1982
Angola	UNITA: Uniao Nacional Independencia Total de Angola	1956–76	Overthrow Portuguese rule	Minter, 1994
Angola	UNITA	1975–	Defeat MPLA government	Minter, 1994
Chad	FROLINAT: Front National pour la Libération du Tchad and its many successors	1966–	Opposition to government	Nolutshungu, 1996
Congo-Brazzaville	Various militias	1993–4, 1997–8	Ethnic mobilisation and general hatred of the elite	Bazenguissa-Ganga, 1999
DROC	Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL)	1996–7	Overthrow Mobutu	Reed, 1998
DROC – Zaire	FLNC: Congolese National Liberation Front	1977–8	Kataganese fighting for independent Shaba	Glickson, 1994
Ethiopia	TPFL: Tigray People's Liberation Front	1975–91	Tigray self-determination	Young, 1998

Appendix (continued)

Ethiopia	EPLF: Eritran People's Liberation Front	1973–91	Freedom for Eritrea	Pateman, 1998
Guinea-Bissau	PAIGC: Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde	1956–74	Overthrow Portuguese rule	Davidson, 1981a
Kenya	Mau-Mau	1952–7	Overthrow British rule	Barnett, 1966
Liberia	National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL)	1990–7	Various grievances against Doe	Ellis, 1999
Mali	Mouvement Populaire de l'Azaouad (MPA)	1990–5	Tuareg oppositional group	Keita, 1998
Mozambique	FRELIMO: Fronte de Libertação de Moçambique	1962–74	Overthrow Portuguese rule	Luke, 1982
Mozambique	RENAMO: Resistencia Nacional de Mocambique	1976–94	Overthrow FRELIMO	Minter, 1994
Namibia	SWAPO: Southwest African People's Organisation	1957–91	Namibian independence from South Africa	Brown, 1995
Nigeria	Biafran Army	1967–70	Biafran independence from Nigeria	Madiebo, 1980
Rwanda	RPF: Rwandan Patriotic Front	1987–94	End Hutu dominance	Prunier, 1998
Senegal	MFDC: Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance	1990–	Independence for Casamance	Ingham, 1990
Sierra Leone	RUF: Revolutionary United Front	1991–9	Overthrow government	Abdullah and Muana, 1998
Somalia	Clans – roughly a dozen in all	1989?–	Clan enrichment	Compagnon, 1998



## Appendix (continued)

Country	Movement	Operational period	Grievance/cause	Major reference
South Africa	ANC: African National Congress	1912–94	Overthrow apartheid	Davis, 1987
South Africa	PAC: Pan-African Congress	1958–94	Overthrow apartheid	Davis, 1987
Sudan	Anya-Nya	1962–72	Protest Lack of southern representation in national or regional institutions	Johnson and Prunier, 1993
Sudan	SPLA: Sudan's People's Liberation Army (SPLA)	1983–	Oppose Northern Dominance	Johnson and Prunier, 1993
Uganda	NRM: National Resistance Movement (NRM)	1980–6	Overthrow Okello regime	Ngoga, 1998
Uganda	HSM: Holy Spirit Movement	1986–7	Regaining Acholi power.	Behrend, 1998
Uganda	LRA: Lord's Resistance Army	1987–	Opposing Museveni.	Behrend, 1998
Zimbabwe	ZANU: Zimbabwe Africa National Union	1963–80	Independence for Zimbabwe	Kruger, 1992
Zimbabwe	ZAPU: Zimbabwe Africa People's Union	1961–	Independence for Zimbabwe	Brickhill, 1995