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The Congo War and the Prospects for State Formation: Rwanda and Uganda compared

STEIN SUNDSTØL ERIKSEN

ABSTRACT *This article analyses the effect of the Congo war on state power in Rwanda and Uganda. Drawing on theories of European state formation, it asks whether the Congo war has led to a strengthening of the state in the two countries. It is argued that this has not been the case. Neither the Rwandan nor the Ugandan state has been strengthened as a result of the war. While the war has weakened the state in Uganda, the remarkable strength of the Rwandan state just a few years after the 1994 genocide must be understood as a result of the security threat faced by the regime from Hutu militias, and not as a result of the Congo war. This means that security threats against the regime can, in certain circumstances, have the same effect on state formation as war had in early modern Europe. I also argue that changes in the state system have altered the links between war and state formation. The ‘war makes states’ connection presupposes a positive relationship between war, regime survival and state formation. In contemporary Africa there is no such link. On the one hand, state survival is guaranteed anyway, no matter how weak the state is. On the other hand, regime survival does not depend on mobilisation of resources through taxation, since resources are available from elsewhere.*

Several states in Africa have experienced an outbreak of armed conflict in recent years. Three parts of Africa have been particularly affected: West Africa (Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, Ivory Coast), the Horn of Africa (Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea) and the Great Lakes region (the two Congos, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Angola).

In the wake of widespread state collapse and civil war, it is not surprising that theories of war and state formation have been applied in order to understand wars in Africa. Tilly’s writings in particular have become a standard reference in the literature about African conflicts. The questions raised in the light of the European experience are whether recent conflicts signal the onset of geopolitical competition in Africa and, if so, whether this could compel rulers of bureaucratically weak, patronage-based states to consolidate their power. Seen in this light, the emergence of warfare and inter-state military competition could be a step towards the consolidation of

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state power. Titles such as 'Give war a chance' (Luttwak, 1999), 'Keep out of Africa' (Ottaway, 1999) and 'Let them fail' (Herbst, 2004) indicate the thrust of such arguments.

Arguments both for and against this thesis could be made on theoretical grounds. On the one hand, one could argue, as Herbst and Luttwak, among others, do, that inter-state war (in contrast to civil war) can lead to a strengthening of states, by forcing participant states to strengthen their power in order to survive. On the other hand, it can be argued that states or the state system have changed, and that war is unlikely to have such effects in contemporary conditions.

This article takes the discussion of the links between war and state formation as its starting point. It focuses on the conflict in the Great Lakes region and asks whether this conflict has led to a strengthening of the state in Rwanda and Uganda. Of all the states involved, these two appear the most likely candidates for state strengthening. First, they faced the most severe security threats of the states involved in the Congo war. Second, unlike in (the Democratic Republic of) Congo, their institutions have not collapsed and they have not suffered from widespread fighting, destruction and plunder inside their own countries.

The war in Congo went on for more than four years. Soon after the troops led by Laurent Kabila overturned the Mobutu regime in 1997, new fighting broke out between government troops and rebels. The rebels were backed by Rwanda and Uganda, and the Kabila government started receiving backing from Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe. Thus five foreign countries were involved in the conflict. Soon Rwanda and Uganda combined controlled roughly half of Congo's territory. A deadlock emerged, in which no party was able to win a decisive victory.

This remained the case until 2002, when a peace treaty was signed in Pretoria. The treaty meant that all foreign troops were to leave Congo. In 2003 a government of national unity was installed, and elections are now scheduled to take place in 2005. However, the peace remains fragile and there have been regular clashes between government forces and various militias. At one point one of the main parties in the government of national unity, the RCD-Goma, withdrew from the government, in protest against the massacre of Congolese refugees in Burundi, believed to have been carried out by Hutu militants. It returned to the government after about a week but, according to the latest reports, strong elements within the RCD are considering abandoning the peace process.

War and state formation

It has been well documented by writers such as Michael Mann (1993), Charles Tilly (1985, 1992), Thomas Ertman (1997) and others that state formation in Europe has been intimately linked to warfare. Thus, Charles Tilly argues that war played a major role in centralising kingly authority. By offering protection in return for payoffs for loyal followers, would-be states were able to centralise control over local strongmen.

According to Mann (1993) and Tilly (1992), there were two main ways in which inter-state war (or threats of it) contributed to state building, which can be classified as geopolitical and economic, respectively.¹ First, geopolitical competition ensured that only those states that were able to defend themselves militarily were able to survive. Others were simply conquered, and incorporated into other states. In this system weak states, seen in relation to their neighbours, would simply cease to exist.

In parts of Africa, such as the Great Lakes Region, there may now be something like geopolitical pressure, at least in the sense that states invade each other's territory. However, these wars differ from conventional wars, since they are not about territory. The invaders do not seek to change existing borders, or to question the territorial sovereignty of the states they invade. Thus, none of the states that were involved in the fighting on Congolese territory made any territorial claims. In itself, however, this does not mean that geopolitical competition could not have the effect of strengthening states. Even if the existence of the state as such is not under threat, it is possible that the presence of security threats could compel leaders to strengthen the state in order to protect themselves from insurgents operating in neighbouring countries. The question, therefore, is whether the regimes involved in the war in the Congo have been under such a compulsion in recent years. Of the states involved, Uganda and Rwanda would appear to be the most likely candidates for a strengthening of the state, since these states have experienced a genuine security threat in connection with the war.²

Second, in order to survive in this competitive environment, states have been compelled to improve their own financial basis. Warfare is expensive and, in order to cover the costs of war, governments have been forced to increase revenue collection. This in turn has forced them to improve their administrative capacity, in order to be able to tax their population. In some cases war may also give those states that are successful access to substantial resources from outside their own territory, either through plundering of other states' resources or through aid. These resources can then be used to strengthen the state and its control over and support from society.

A common feature of all these links between war and state formation is that they depend on the mutually reinforcing relationship between (or at least compatibility of) regime survival and state formation. In early modern Europe ruling regimes found themselves in a situation where strengthening the state was an imperative for political survival. In other words, strengthening the state was in the interest of the ruling regime, since its very survival depended on it. If we assume that regime survival will be a, if not the, primary concern of rulers, it follows that the positive relationship between war and state formation found in Europe applies in the contemporary world if, and only if, it is still the case that regime survival depends on (or at least is compatible with) strengthening the state.

In the case of the Congo war, therefore, what we need to examine is whether the war created such a situation. In other words, we must ask whether the war compelled state leaders to strengthen the state, and whether regime survival and strengthening of the state are compatible goals. This

paper is an attempt to provide such an examination for the cases of Uganda and Rwanda.

First, however, a few remarks on the concept of state strength, as it is used in this paper. The concept of state strength mainly refers to the state's administrative and economic resources and the degree of central political control over the state apparatus. Factors such as the size and strength of the army and the degree of central control over it are important here, as well as the ability of the state to extract revenue from society to fund its operations. Thus, in this article, state strength will be assessed in terms of:

- a) military power and the ability to maintain a monopoly on violence;
- b) degree of centralisation of political power, including control over the military forces;
- c) extractive capacity.³

In the following, I will examine recent development in Rwanda and Uganda to assess whether there are any indications of a strengthening of the state in the period since the first Congo war began in 1996. Since the main objective is to assess the effects of the war, the focus will be on changes over the time period since the war began.

Rwanda

For Rwanda the situation in Congo around 1996 represented a very real security threat. It is a fact that a large number of Hutu militants have used and continue to use Congolese territory from which to launch attacks on Rwanda. Given the experience of the 1994 genocide, it is clear that, seen from the RPF-regime in Rwanda, the situation in the Congo appeared a serious threat. The existence of this threat was used as the justification for Rwanda's decision to send troops to Congo in support of the rebellion led by Laurent Kabila in 1996. In 1997 Rwanda turned against Kabila and supported the new rebellion, together with Uganda. Together with their local allies in eastern Congo, the RCD-Goma, Rwanda soon took control of almost one-third of Congo's territory.⁴

Has the Congo war led to a strengthening of the state in Rwanda? In terms of military capability, the Congo war revealed that Rwanda is a significant regional military power. Thus Laurent Kabila would not have been able to overthrow Mubutu without Rwandan support. Moreover, the fact that a tiny country with a total population of about eight million was able to control a third of a country as large as Congo is an indication of substantial military strength.

The war also showed Rwanda's strength in terms of fighting capacity. During the war against the Mobutu regime, the ramshackle Zairean army was routed by Rwanda. Moreover, during the so-called second war, when Rwanda and Uganda clashed in a battle for control over the central city of Kisangani, Rwanda was able to beat the Ugandan forces and chase them away from the city.

Rwanda's military strength is also revealed by expenditure data. According to the SIPRI yearbook (2003), official military expenditure as a percentage of GDP has stood at between 4% and 5.5% over the past 10 years. In comparison with other African countries, this puts Rwanda in third place after Angola and Eritrea. Moreover, SIPRI considers real expenditures to be significantly higher—perhaps as high as twice the official figures. Notably, there has been no significant increase in official defence expenditure after the outbreak of the war. However, it is likely that the gap between official and real expenditure has increased as a result of profits generated from exploitation of minerals in Congo. Most probably at least part of the income generated in Congo has been used to fund the campaign. Thus President Kagame himself has described the war as self-financing.

In spite of the security threat represented by the Interhamwe militias, the Rwandan state has been able to maintain a monopoly on violence internally—at least after 1998, when the rebellion in the northwestern part of the country subsided (Longman, 2004). However, this does not indicate that the war or the existence of a security threat has led to the strengthening of the state, as was the case in Europe (at least according to Tilly and others). In fact, the Rwandan state was remarkably strong before the onset of the war:

A mere two years after the extreme human and material destruction of 1994, the Rwandan state had been rebuilt. Rwanda was again administered from top to bottom, territorial, military and security structures were in place, the judicial system was re-established, tax revenues were collected and spent. The regime was able in a short time to establish total control over state and society. . . While many other African countries tend towards state collapse, the Rwandan state has reaffirmed itself vigorously (Reyntjens, 2004: 209)

In sum, the strength of the Rwandan army was established before the war, and not as a result of it. This means that Rwanda's military strength must be explained by developments preceding the war. I will not go into details here about the historical origins of state strength in Rwanda, but one possible explanation of the current military strength of the Rwandan state is the army's origins as a rebel movement in exile, together with the experience of the 1994 genocide. The result has been the creation of a cohesive army with a strong sense of common purpose and an acute sense of insecurity.⁵ A strong state under strict regime control would be able protect the regime and its constituency against internal enemies. In this way a security threat against the regime and the section of the population that it represented compelled the RPF to strengthen the state, even if the existence of the state as such was not threatened. This implies that, in certain situations, threats against the ruling regime can have the same effect as threats against the state itself, and lead to a strengthening of the state.

In economic terms the picture is somewhat different. Rwanda soon developed strong economic interests in the parts of Congo areas under its control. It has been clearly documented that Rwanda (like Uganda) has made large profits from illegal business activities in the Congo (United Nations Security Council, 2002; Cuvelier & Marysse, 2003; Jackson, 2002).

The best-known example is the production of and trade in coltan, which became a major source of income for both the RCD and Rwanda. In addition to coltan, Rwanda also controlled trading networks and the export of other commodities, such as gold, diamonds and timber. What is most notable about Rwandan exploitation of minerals in Congo is that Rwanda has been able to maintain central control and prevent large-scale private profiteering by officers (Reyntjens, 2004; Vlassenroot & Romkema, 2002). Instead, the profits generated through mining, trade and smuggling in Congo have by and large benefited the state. Thus, in a hearing before the Belgian Senate Commission in 2002, former Rwandan MP Deus Kagiraneza described a system of parallel accounts, and stated that Rwanda ‘profit[s] from the seizure of weapons, the impounding of stocks, the exploitation of mines “at a rebate” and the rebudgeting of war bounty’ (quoted in Reyntjens, 2004: 190). This has been possible because of the highly disciplined nature of the Rwandan forces and the economic agencies associated with them.

The prospects of such profits may or may not have been the motive for Rwandans’ initial involvement, but it is quite clear that, once troops were in the Congo, they took advantage of the opportunities that were found. It is also clear that at least some of the profit generated from their activities was channelled into the official state budget. Thus the export of gold, diamonds and coltan from the country increased manifold during the army’s stay in Congo, even though there was no increase in domestic production of these goods.

Under the supervision of the Congo desk at the Ministry of Defence in Kigali a sophisticated structure has been established. This ensures that profits from Congo are channelled to the government in Kigali (Tull, 2003; Reyntjens, 2004; Vlassenroot & Romkema, 2002). This is partly done through direct control at the site of extraction, and partly through handpicked intermediaries. Rwanda has even developed its own system of tax collection inside the Congo. Rwanda has therefore avoided a fragmentation of the state, in which central control over the armed forces would be undermined by the army’s economic activities in the Congo. In this way the war in the Congo has become a source of income for the state, without at the same time leading to a weakening of central control.

Although it seems likely, it is hard to assess whether the income thus generated has exceeded the cost of the war. Willum estimates the net profit for Rwanda from the war in the Congo in 1999 at US\$250 million (Willum, 2001). If, from this figure, one deducts the entire official defence budget of \$81 million, the war would still have generated a profit of \$170 million for this year alone. Even if we acknowledge that the real costs of the war may be higher than the official figures suggest, we must also take into consideration that the military budget is not all spent in Congo, and that most of this expenditure would continue even in the absence of war. Thus it should not be considered a war expense *per se*.

It has also been reported that the government has used the war to expand its internal revenue base. Thus, according to Human Rights Watch, both peasants and schoolteachers were forced to pay a special war tax to help fund

the war in Congo (Human Rights Watch, 2000). This could indicate that the Rwandan government, like early modern European states, has used the war to develop its administration and its revenue base, thereby strengthening state power internally. On the other hand, IMF data on government revenue show that, while tax revenue (excluding income from exports) has increased significantly in recent years, this trend started before the onset of war. While the war may have reinforced this trend, it was underway before it began.

In so far as the Rwandan regime has become dependent on income from Congo, a withdrawal may be a threat to its interests. Whether Rwanda has been able to maintain its sources of income and its control over economic activities in Congo after the withdrawal of troops in 2002 is not entirely clear. Since the RCD is still in control of the areas formerly controlled directly by Rwanda, it seems likely that it is able to maintain at least some degree of control and therefore to reap some profits even after the withdrawal of troops.

It should be added, however, that the strength and central control referred to here concerns the armed forces, and does not necessarily apply to other parts of the Rwandan state. It is also important to note that such central control as is found in the Rwandan army has become possible by extremely authoritarian means, and through a policy that has reserved state power and resources for a small section of the Tutsi elite, mainly drawn from the group which led the coup after the 1994 genocide. In particular, the inner core of the regime, the so-called Akazu, consisting mainly of Tutsis exiled in Uganda before the RPF took over power, has been 'accumulating material resources, jobs and privileges' (Reyntjens, 2004: 190). Thus 'the instruments of power and enrichment are concentrated in small networks based on a shared past in certain refugee camps in Uganda, belonging to the same school and kinship links' (Reyntjens, 2004: 188–189). So, while the government has maintained control over the army, it has also, in classic patrimonial fashion, used the resources to reward its clients. It is an open question whether this system, in which a relatively small minority monopolises power, and the majority is excluded on an ethnic basis, is sustainable.

The Rwandan state, then, is characterised by a combination of strong military capacity, strict central control over the armed forces and maintenance of regime power through patrimonial practices. While the war might have strengthened the degree of central control, there are no indications that it has made the state less patrimonial. However—and this is the key point here—the logic of regime survival has not undermined central control. The relatively strong state in Rwanda may not be an effect of the war, but at least the war has not undermined it. The irony is that, while the existence of a security threat made it possible to strengthen the state before the war, this threat was also a major reason for Rwanda's involvement in the war.

Thus the Rwandan state is clearly strong in the sense of having a large and effective army, and a high degree of central control over the armed forces (and over other parts of the state). It has also increased its capacity of resource extraction at home as well as abroad in recent years, including during the period of war. However, this strength is not primarily an effect of

the war in Congo, but of processes before the war, even if the war may have reinforced them.

This means that one cannot say that the strength of the state in Rwanda is a direct result of the war. However, one might tentatively conclude that at least the war has not weakened the state, and that it might have improved the state's financial basis. Thus, in the Rwandan case, there has been no contradiction between the imperative of regime survival and that of state building.

A puzzling fact about Rwanda, however, is that this strength, in terms of military power and central political control, coexists with widespread patrimonialism. Given the virtual consensus about the detrimental effects of patrimonialism on state capacity, the existence of an apparently strong patrimonial state is something of an anomaly. However, the fact that power, and thereby control over resources used for patrimonial purposes, has been centrally controlled in Rwanda may have limited the damage done by patrimonialism to state capacity. Centralised corruption of the kind seen in Rwanda is likely to be less detrimental to state power than decentralised corruption.⁶

Uganda

As in Rwanda, the government of Uganda is also faced with armed resistance. According to the government's own Amnesty Commission Report, there are no fewer than 22 armed rebel groups, with a total of about 40 000 armed rebels fighting against the government in the country (*The Monitor*, 2003). Although most of these represent no serious security threat, some, such as the Lord's Resistance Army in the north and the Allied Democratic Forces in the west, are strong enough to cause the state to launch large-scale military operations in attempts to defeat them.⁷

Uganda justified its intervention in the Congo conflict by citing the presence of Ugandan rebels using Congolese territory to launch attacks on the country (Clark, 2002). Ugandan officials argued that, since the Congolese government was unable to control this area, Uganda had the right to defend itself by using force to attack the rebels inside the Congo. This justification was by no means baseless. The Alliance of Democratic Forces (ADF), an armed rebel group based in the western part of Uganda, but operating from bases inside the Congo, had on several occasions attacked towns on the Ugandan side of the border. The ADF, which received economic and military support from the government of Sudan, first attacked Uganda from its Zairean base in November 1996 and continues operating from Congo (Prunier, 2004).

This kind of security threat could in principle compel the Ugandan regime to strengthen the state in order to protect its territory more effectively. However, given the form that Uganda's involvement in the Congo has taken, it appears to have had the opposite effect. On the one hand, the intervention in Congo has not eliminated the ADF, which, although it has been weakened, continues to operate (Clark, 2003: 160). In fact, the majority of Ugandan

forces were placed in areas far away from where the ADF operated (Clark, 2003: 149). Thus, although the invasion of Congo has weakened the ADF, it has not eliminated it.

On the other hand, as documented by William Reno, the war soon became a source of profit for the Ugandan armed forces, as many of its members became involved in the trade of minerals from the Congo (Reno, 2002). As a consequence, the ruling regime's control over the armed forces was weakened by the country's involvement in the Congo war. The official exports of gold and diamonds from Uganda increased manifold after the country's involvement in the Congo (United Nations Security Council, 2002), even though there was no evidence of any increase in domestic mineral production.

In the case of Uganda a UN panel (United Nations Security Council, 2002) describes in some detail the organisation of economic activities in the parts of Congo the country controlled. Ugandans were mainly involved in the exploitation of gold, coltan and diamonds. However, Ugandan activities in Congo were less centralised and less controlled by the state than was the case in Rwanda-controlled areas. According to the panel's report, the network consisted of a core group of high-ranking officials, private businessmen and selected rebel leaders. The key figures mentioned were Museveni's brother, Salim Saleh, and Major General James Kazini. The network generated revenue from four types of activities: export of minerals, import of consumer goods, tax collection and simple theft. As noted above, some of the exported minerals were included in national export statistics. Thus Uganda's gold export increased eightfold between 1995 and 1997, although there were no indications of a significant increase in domestic production (Reno, 2002). Similarly, export earnings from diamonds increased from zero in 1996 to 1.7 million per year between 1997 and 2000 (United Nations Security Council, 2002, addendum, 11; Global Witness, 2004). It appears that the war in Congo has strengthened the revenue base of the Ugandan state as well.

At the same time, the fact that the state has less central control over army operations in Congo than does Rwanda makes it likely that a larger proportion of the assets obtained in Congo ends up in the pockets of officials. While such a pattern may strengthen the army's support for the ruling regime, it also undermines the cohesion of the state. If the government seeks to reign in such predatory elements, and take control over the resources they have access to, it runs the risk of alienating the groups on whose support its power rests. The regime, therefore, becomes dependent on a policy that contributes to further fragmentation of the state administration in general and of the army in particular. 'UPDF involvement in the Congo war... [institutionalises]... the private interests of officers within the military' (Reno, 2002, p. 429). This in turn further weakens political control over the armed forces, contributing to a weakening of central state power. By tolerating private profiteering by officers, the government also runs the risk of alienating parts of the military that do not benefit from it. That this is a real risk became clear during the 2001 election campaign, when many officers supported the opposition candidate, Kizza Besigye. Moreover, in June 2001,

50 officers defected from the army and vowed to launch a guerrilla war against Museveni. This has not (at least not yet) created a major threat to the regime, but such developments nevertheless show that the regime has been weakened and that its strategy is a risky one.

It is also notable that, in contrast to Rwanda, the Ugandan state has not been able significantly to increase its domestic tax collection. According to the IMF, income tax collection, a good indicator of state capacity, only rose from 1.3% of GDP in 1996 to 1.9% in 2000. And while the Rwandan state has increased the proportion of tax revenue to GDP from 6.4% in 1997–98 to 10.5% in 2001–2002, the Ugandan state has only increased collection from 10.5% to 12.5% over the same period (calculated from IMF, 2002; 2003).

However, this contrast should not be overdrawn. Both countries remain well below the African average (16.2%) in terms of revenue collection as a proportion of GDP. Moreover, both also remain extremely donor dependent, with the proportion of grants of total government revenue at 36.5% in 2001–2002 (Uganda) and 42.3% in 2001 (Rwanda), respectively (calculated from IMF, 2002; 2003).

It is important to note, however, that the two states' involvement in the war has not led to any reduction in aid. In fact, as argued by Reno (2002), the war may have improved relations with donors, since export earnings increased as a result of the exploitation of minerals in Congo. The improvements in export earnings and balance of trade made it possible for the two countries to appear as economic success stories, which therefore deserved continued aid and credit.⁸ Thus regimes and states are maintained through external funding, and do not depend on improving their own capacity for revenue collection.

The conflict in Congo has also revealed some striking differences between the armies of Rwanda and Uganda. First, it became clear when the two armies clashed in Kisangani in 2000 that the Rwandan army was far superior to that of Uganda in terms of fighting power. Second, as has been described in the UN report and elsewhere, the government of Rwanda was able to exert far stronger central control over its forces in the Congo than could Uganda. This became evident in the way the exploitation of minerals was organised. Thus, in contrast to Rwanda, which had a strong and centrally controlled army before the war, and was able to maintain central control during the occupation of Congo, Uganda's regime was less able to control the activities of officials during the war.

Thus, as in the Rwandan case, the security threat faced by Uganda as a result of the Congo war was not of a kind that compelled or enabled the Ugandan regime to strengthen the state. Instead, because the regime is politically dependent on support from the army, it has been unable or unwilling to control the behaviour of its armed forces in Congo, and to prevent private profiteering. However, unlike the RPF in Rwanda, the ruling regime in Uganda was not faced with a serious internal security threat. And, unlike the Rwandan government, it could not draw upon a truly catastrophic event like the 1994 genocide to mobilise internal support.

In the Ugandan case, therefore, both state and regime have been weakened by the war. Because there was weaker central control over the army, the regime was unable to prevent large-scale profiteering by officers. This, in turn, meant that officers developed private economic interests that ran counter to the interests of the state. In such a situation the regime may strengthen its support among officers, since they get access to resources through war, but the long-term result is likely to be a weakening of the state, even if some of the gains from plunder end up in state coffers. The reason for this is that the coherence of the state is undermined when officials use their position to further their own economic interests. Moreover, such a system, in which loyalty depends on access to economic gain, may in the long run undermine the position of the regime as well. If the regime depends on the loyalty of the army, while this loyalty depends on officials' continued economic gain, any development which undermines officers' opportunities for economic gain represents a risk for the regime, since it may cost it the support of the army.

Thus the Ugandan state does not control its own territory or have a monopoly of violence within it, since rebel groups continue to operate in several parts of the country. Furthermore, central control over the military has been weakened, the capacity to collect revenue has not improved and the position of the ruling regime within the country is weaker than before the war:

Whatever ideological goals Museveni may have had in the Congo intervention, they have certainly not been realised by his adventure there. Rather the levels of repression and corruption in his government have escalated, while Ugandan citizens have a diminished sense of the president's respect for the rule of law. Even the putative goal of improving the country's security situation has not been realized.

[Ugandan] officers have seemed more bent [on profit and exploitation than military achievement]. . . Museveni has alienated himself from his staunchest external allies and fallen into conflict with his closest regional supporter. (Clark, 2003: 161)

Warfare, state formation and the politics of regime survival

We must conclude, therefore, that the Congo war has not led to a strengthening of the state in Rwanda and Uganda. The war has not compelled states to centralise power and strengthen their control over society, or dismantle existing patronage networks. Contrary to what was the case in early modern Europe, it appears that, in contemporary African conditions, war is not associated with a strengthening of the state. This, in turn, is linked to key features of the current international system.

Geopolitical differences

The international system within which war and state formation takes place has changed in several important ways, profoundly altering the effects of war

on state formation. Relations between European states were strongly competitive, to the extent that those states that were unable to compete in military terms simply disappeared. By contrast, relations between African states in the period since independence have been peaceful (Herbst, 2000). In spite of the 'artificiality' of colonial borders, one of the first acts of the Organisation of African Unity was 'to pledge member states to respect the frontiers existing on their achievement of national independence' (Herbst, 2000; Reno, 2002). Thus there were no inter-state wars in Africa until the late 1990s. Although there were several armed conflicts, these were civil wars rather than interstate wars. As such, the conflicts were either about control over the existing state or about failed separatist attempts.⁹ Changes in existing borders are extremely rare, and even states that have invaded other states' territory do not call for such changes. While Uganda and Rwanda both controlled large parts of Congo for several years, they did not seek to incorporate these areas into their own state, or even to encourage the secession of these areas from Congo. Instead, they recognised existing borders and the formal sovereignty of the Congolese state. War was officially waged to protect the invading states from insurgents operating from another state. The continued existence of the Congolese state has been affirmed by all parties involved, including Western powers and those, like Uganda and Rwanda, who have invaded its territory.

In Rwanda's case the state's aim was to protect Rwanda from attacks by Hutu militants operating from bases in Congo, where they had taken refuge after the 1994 genocide. Uganda made similar claims, insistent that it was fighting insurgents operating from across the border. Thus, while security threats could still in principle compel leaders to strengthen state institutions, inter-state war does not necessarily represent such a threat today. The Congo war did not represent a threat of extinction for Rwanda and Uganda, since their continued existence has been guaranteed by the international system. International recognition and participation in the system of states has guaranteed the continued existence of states, no matter how weak they are and how limited their actual control over their territory has been.

This commitment reflects the broader international status of the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention. It has meant that, in contrast to early modern Europe, weak states in Africa have not been threatened by extinction, or by invaders seeking to annex parts of their territory. International recognition and participation in the system of states has enabled states to survive, in spite of limited real control and at times extreme weakness. During the Cold War Jackson and Rosberg argued that external recognition was the only reason Africa's weak states continued to exist at all, in spite of limited real control and at times extreme weakness (Jackson & Rosberg, 1983).

The principle of non-intervention has been somewhat weakened since the end of the Cold War. At the global level this is seen in the increased popularity of so-called humanitarian interventions. In Africa it can be seen in the increased tendency to intervene in conflicts in neighbouring countries, as was seen during the Congo war. The unwillingness of donors to impose

sanctions or reduce aid to Rwanda and Uganda in reaction to their invasion of Congo may be seen as an expression of the same trend. Paradoxically, therefore, the weakening of the norm of non-intervention has made it possible for Uganda and Rwanda to engage in war without state survival being at risk.

Externalisation of funding

In contrast to early modern Europe, African states do not depend on the internal mobilisation of resources to fund the state. Instead, a large proportion of the state's income is derived from external sources. First, states defined as poor gain access to substantial economic resources from outside (Bayart, 1993; Boone 1994; Clapham, 1996). We have shown that in the cases of Rwanda and Uganda, between one third and half of the state's income comes from foreign aid.

Second, the structure of the contemporary world economy is such that state leaders can take advantage of global markets to secure income even in the absence of a strong capacity for domestic revenue collection. This is particularly evident for countries with significant mineral resources. In these sectors, it may be possible to profit from a chaotic situation, as long as minimum security can be provided at the sites of extraction. Such security can easily be provided by private security firms, private armies or mercenaries, as has been the case in Angola, Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone. As a consequence, strong vested interests have developed, which include those of Western companies as well as state officials and local warlords.

The availability of such resources gives the state access to easy income, and removes the incentive for creating strong institutions for the purpose of taxation. Uganda and Rwanda took advantage of the situation in neighbouring countries to increase the state's income. It is also possible to link up with networks of international crime and to become involved in activities like drug smuggling, money laundering, arms trading, etc. In all cases the result is that states get access to revenue through links with the outside world. This is what has been described as 'warlord politics' (Reno, 1999), or the criminalisation of the state (Bayart *et al.*, 1999) Economic globalisation has created opportunities for state leaders which absolve them from the need to create strong and efficient state institutions at home. Thus, in addition to obtaining funds through formal channels (aid, military assistance) state funding is also achieved through crime (smuggling) and warlord politics, in which the state, often in collaboration with international capital and private security firms, secures rents that provide funding for patronage to reproduce regimes, but in ways that do not strengthen the state.

The fact that the Congo war has been at least self-financing has meant that the states involved have not been compelled to strengthen their internal revenue base to fund the war. Instead, they have been able to use resources obtained in Congo to buy support at home. In Rwanda's case this has not weakened the regime, since the government has, by and large, maintained

control over troop activities in the Congo. Uganda, by contrast, has been unable to do this, and the position of the regime has been weakened.

In the short run the availability of funds from outside the country (whether through aid or through plunder or crime) may strengthen the state in relation to society and improve its chances of political survival. In the long run, however, it prevents the state from developing its administrative capacity and ability to raise revenue.¹⁰

It also affects the linkage between war and state formation. According to Tilly and others, one of the main links between the two is that wars compel states to improve their capacity for revenue collection. But if funds are available from elsewhere, and these funds continue to be forthcoming even if the state is involved in war, there is no such compulsion. In this situation the fact that the Rwandan and Ugandan states have access to funding through external linkages has meant that the war has not compelled them to improve their own capacity for revenue collection.

Conclusion

To sum up, while both Rwanda and Uganda faced real security threats in Congo, these threats were of a different kind than those faced by European states during the period of state formation. They were not faced by the threat of extinction, since their recognition as states within existing borders was not under threat. Instead, they were faced with insurgents operating from Congolese territory. But since the existence of the state itself was guaranteed, the insurgents represented a threat to the regime rather than to the state. Both states chose to face this threat by military intervention. This strategy seems to have strengthened the position of both the regime and the state in Rwanda, which has been able to maintain strict control over the activities of its army in Congo, and to benefit economically from the war. In Uganda, army support for the regime was preserved during the war, but the government was unable to control the army's activities in Congo. As a result, the war contributed to a further fragmentation of the state, and increased the regime's reliance on strongmen that it was unable to control.

While the 'war makes states' connection presupposes a positive relationship between regime maintenance and state formation, contemporary Africa is characterised by the absence of such a link. This is the result of changes in the state system, which have cut the links between war and state formation found in early modern Europe (fixity of borders, externalisation of funding). On the one hand, state survival is guaranteed anyway, no matter how weak the state is. On the other hand, regime survival does not depend on mobilisation of resources through taxation, since resources are available from elsewhere (aid, crime, plunder, globalisation, warlord politics). Control over the state remains attractive, since it gives access to resources. However, war does not compel regimes to obtain resources in ways that strengthen the state. As a consequence, war no longer forces regimes to strengthen state power in order to ensure their own survival.

In the absence of geopolitical pressures threatening the survival of the state, state leaders in both countries have chosen to use these profits to secure their own position through the use of patronage, instead of seeking to strengthen state institutions. The main reason why war has not compelled regimes to strengthen the state is that regime survival has not depended on it. In the Ugandan case both state and regime seems to have been weakened as a result of the war, because of an inability to exert central control over officers involved in private business activities in Congo. The regime relies on the political support of an army it does not fully control. Thus, it cannot act decisively to centralise its control of the army.

The Rwandan regime, by contrast, had been able to build strong state institutions before the onset of war, and maintained much stricter central control over its armed forces. As a result, it has been able to channel resources obtained in Congo to the state, and avoid the centrifugal tendencies experienced by Uganda. The ability of the Rwandan state to maintain central control must be linked to the extreme experience of the 1994 genocide and the threat faced by the RPF regime from Hutu militias. In Rwanda therefore the strength of the state is not a result of the war. Instead, the security threat faced by the regime has had a similar effect on the state as war had in early modern Europe, making the strengthening of state institutions a necessity for the political survival of the regime.

Thus the crucial links between war, regime and state formation have been cut. This does not mean that there are no circumstances where war, even today, could force regimes to strengthen the state. However, it seems clear that, in the case of Uganda's and Rwanda's involvement in the Congo war, this was not the case.

Notes

- 1 In addition, Mann points out that involvement in wars can increase the population's support for and identification with the state, and its willingness to comply with state regulations, including tax regulations. Thus warfare can increase the legitimacy of states by strengthening nationalism and citizens' identification with the state. I will not deal explicitly with this dimension here.
- 2 As for Congo itself, it also seems clear that the war has not in any way led to a strengthening of the state. This is not because the war did not represent a security threat. It obviously did. However, the position of the regime in Kinshasa has been so fragile and the state apparatus, most particularly the army, so weak and fragmented that it has been totally unable to use the war as an opportunity to strengthen its power. Moreover, the fact that Congo has been the battleground of the war as well as the victim of plundering by other states has further undermined the state's ability to centralise power. For Zimbabwe, by contrast, the war in the Congo did not represent a security threat. The country does not border Congo, and there are no armed groups from the country operating in the Congo.
- 3 Thus the issue of administrative capacity, which is so strongly emphasised in debates about the developmental state, is not included in this analysis. In a vast literature, see, for instance, Evans (1996), Hobson & Weiss (1995) and Leftwich (2000). Although there is no doubt about the importance of administrative capacity for economic development, the development of such capacity should not be seen as part of state formation *per se*. In fact, the process of state formation analysed by Tilly, Mann and others took place long before the development of the kind of Weberian bureaucracies that have become essential for economic development.
- 4 There were two main reasons for Rwanda's withdrawal of support for Kabila. First, Kabila proved to be unwilling or unable to disarm the Hutu militias, and Rwanda once again argued that it needed to intervene directly to protect itself. Second, the presence of a large number of Rwandan troops in the Congo had become a political liability for Kabila and threatened to undermine his own power. In

- response, he demanded that all foreign troops should leave Congo. For more details, see Lemarchand (2003).
- 5 Another important factor is that Rwanda, unlike most African countries, has a strong state tradition, which goes back to pre-colonial times.
 - 6 This argument—that patrimonialism may be less damaging for state power when it is centralised than when it is decentralised—has some affinity with arguments from the literature on corruption, where the point has been made that decentralised corruption is more damaging for economic growth than centralised corruption (Shleifer & Vishny, 1999).
 - 7 It may or may not have been the existence of the ADF rebel group that motivated Uganda to intervene militarily in Congo. John F Clark has argued that the main motive was a wish to support Rwanda, rather than a perceived threat to Uganda's own security (Clark, 2002). What matters here, however, is not the motives of Ugandan leaders, but the effect of the intervention in terms of state power in Uganda.
 - 8 Willum (2001) makes the same point for Rwanda.
 - 9 In a sense one can say that politics in Africa are the exact opposite of traditional political science models, both domestically and internationally. In contrast to 'realist' models of international relations, politics between states have been peaceful and well ordered. On the other hand, domestic politics have been unstable, fragmented and without the kind of order presupposed in traditional models.
 - 10 Moreover, since access to external funds is tied to specific conditions, it makes the state accountable to external donors rather than to its own population.

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