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# Postconflict Reconstruction in Africa

Pierre Englebert  
and Denis M. Tull

## Flawed Ideas about Failed States

Whether in the wake of internal conflict or foreign military intervention, the reconstruction of public institutions in failed and collapsed states has become a key priority of the international community. Unlike traditional peacekeeping operations, which focus on preventing a resumption of hostilities, state reconstruction focuses on restoring the state's monopoly over the means of coercion. Other objectives include the reestablishment of political institutions (governments, ministries, local administration, national armies, police forces, judiciaries, etc.), the promotion of political participation (e.g., the holding of elections) and human rights, the provision of social services, and economic recovery.

The United Nations has conducted nineteen "complex peace operations" since the end of the Cold War. Ten of these have taken place in Africa.<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding qualified successes such as Namibia, Mozambique, and possibly Liberia, the results of these operations in Africa have been paltry, particularly as regards the establishment of self-sustaining state institutions. Sierra Leone's first post-transition elections in 2007, for example, were marred by violence. Youth who fought in the civil war continue to be marginalized; the economy has stagnated; and economic mismanagement remains rampant.<sup>2</sup> In Burundi, where the UN mandate to "restore lasting peace and bring about national reconciliation" was officially completed in 2006, there remained significant political tensions and pockets of violence in 2007.<sup>3</sup> In Ivory Coast, UN and French

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1. Complex peace operations involve multiple dimensions of institutional reconstruction and peacebuilding in addition to peacemaking. They have taken place in Angola, Bosnia, Burundi, Cambodia, Croatia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Ivory Coast, Kosovo, Liberia (1993–97 and since 2003), Mozambique, Namibia, Nicaragua, Sierra Leone, Sudan, and Timor-Leste.

2. International Crisis Group, "Sierra Leone: The Election Opportunity," Africa Report, No. 129 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, July 2007).

3. United Nations Security Council, "Second Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi," S/2007/682 (New York: United Nations, November, 23, 2007).

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military deployments were unable to end the civil war that broke out in 2002, leaving the country divided into a rebel-controlled north and a government-controlled south. In Sudan, northern and southern Sudanese elites reached a much-heralded peace agreement in 2005, but the country continued to teeter on the brink of collapse following the outbreak of a new rebellion in Darfur in eastern Sudan since 2003. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the UN's largest state reconstruction mission, 17,400 peacekeepers and 2,500 European Union troops were unable to prevent violence in the wake of the 2006 postconflict elections, and conflict in the eastern region actually increased after the 2003–06 transition. Even Africa's earlier success stories, such as Mozambique, which completed its postconflict transition in 1994, remain weak states dependent on international aid, and have faced setbacks.<sup>4</sup>

This article examines the obstacles to successful reconstruction in the failed states of sub-Saharan Africa. For sure, state reconstruction problems are not unique to Africa, and the worldwide record is "mixed at best."<sup>5</sup> Moreover, many scholars who have published on state failure and reconstruction in general have also addressed Africa's plight.<sup>6</sup> Yet, there are at least three reasons for specifically examining the problems of state reconstruction in Africa.

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4. Michael Cahen, "Success in Mozambique?" in Simon Chesterman, Michael Ignatieff, and Ramesh Thakur, eds., *Making States Work: State Failure and the Crisis of Governance* (New York: United Nations University Press, 2005), pp. 213–233.

5. Michael W. Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis, *United Nations Peace Operations: Making War and Building Peace* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 1; and Alberto Cuttillo, "International Assistance to Countries Emerging from Conflict: A Review of Fifteen Years of Interventions and the Future of Peacebuilding," Policy Paper (New York: Security Development Nexus Program, International Peace Academy, February 2006).

6. See, for example, Roland Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace after Civil Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pt. 4; Robert I. Rotberg, ed., *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror* (Cambridge, Mass.: World Peace Foundation, 2003); Robert I. Rotberg, ed., *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004); Michael Barnett, "Building a Republican Peace: Stabilizing States after War," *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Spring 2006), pp. 87–112; James Dobbins, Seth G. Jones, Keith Crane, Andrew Rathmell, Brett Steele, Richard Teltschik, and Anga R. Timilsina, *The UN's Role in Nation-Building: From the Congo to Iraq* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2005); Francis Fukuyama, *State Building: Governance and World Order in the Twenty-first Century* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004); James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Neotrusteeship and the Problem of Weak States," *International Security*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (Spring 2004), pp. 5–43; Simon Chesterman, *You, the People: The United Nations, Transitional Administration, and State-Building* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Robert O. Keohane, "Political Authority after Intervention: Gradations in Sovereignty," in J.L. Holzgrefe and Robert O. Keohane, eds., *Humanitarian Intervention: Ethical, Legal, and Political Dilemmas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 275–298; and Stuart E. Eizenstat, John Edward Porter, and Jeremy M. Weinstein, "Rebuilding Weak States," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 1 (January/February 2005), pp. 134–146. Specifically for Africa, see Stephen Ellis, "How to Rebuild Africa," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 5 (September/October 2005), pp. 135–148; and Tony Addison, ed., *From Conflict to Recovery in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

First, the extent to which state failure is a broadly African phenomenon cannot be overstated. At the end of 2005, 82 percent of UN peacekeepers worldwide (more than 51,000 so-called blue helmets) were stationed in Africa.<sup>7</sup> In the rankings of the 2006 Fund for Peace Failed States Index, 53 percent of states in the “most failed” category (and six of the top seven) were in Africa, as were 28 percent of those in the next category, and 7 percent of those in the third. No African state appeared in the best performing group.<sup>8</sup> Using governance data from the U.S. Millennium Challenge Account, Jeremy Weinstein and Milan Vaishnav concluded in 2006 that 75 percent of the “worst performers” and 90 percent of states “struggling on many fronts” were African.<sup>9</sup> Even the continent’s seemingly stable countries are capable of rapid downward spirals, as demonstrated by Ivory Coast and Zimbabwe after 2000. In fact, nineteen of the twenty-five countries ranked by the Center for International Development and Conflict Management as at highest risk for instability in 2007 were in Africa.<sup>10</sup> Given these figures, the level of violence on the continent—and the subsequent demand for state-building operations—is unlikely to diminish soon.<sup>11</sup>

The damage from state failure in Africa dwarfs the human misery it provokes elsewhere. In the DRC alone, the war of 1998–2003 is estimated to have cost nearly 4 million lives.<sup>12</sup> In 2006, 25 percent of people identified as vulnerable by the UN High Commissariat for Refugees were in Africa, home to only 13 percent of the world’s population, and the continent contained five of the top ten countries of origin of refugee populations (i.e., Burundi, the DRC, Liberia, Somalia, and Sudan).<sup>13</sup> Africa also had the greatest number of inter-

7. Center on International Cooperation, *Annual Review of Global Peace Operations, 2006* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2006), p. 138.

8. Fund for Peace, Failed States Index Scores, 2006, [http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=104&Itemid=324](http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=104&Itemid=324).

9. Jeremy M. Weinstein and Milan Vaishnav, “A Mismatch with Consequences: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Security-Development Nexus,” in Nancy Birdsall, Vaishnav, and Robert L. Ayres, eds., *Short of the Goal: U.S. Foreign Policy and Poorly Performing States* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Global Development, 2006), pp. 11–12.

10. J. Joseph Hewitt, Jonathan Wilkenfeld, and Ted Robert Gurr, *Peace and Conflict, 2008: Executive Summary* (College Park: Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland, 2007), p. 5.

11. See, for example, “Mapping Sub-Saharan Africa’s Future,” Conference Report (Washington, D.C.: National Intelligence Council, 2005), p. 1; and “African Peacekeeping: The Doves of War,” *Economist*, November 22, 2007.

12. Benjamin Coghlan, Richard J. Brennan, Pascal Ngoy, David Dofara, Brad Otto, Mark Clements, and Tony Stewart, “Mortality in the Democratic Republic of Congo: A Nationwide Survey,” *Lancet*, January 7, 2006, pp. 44–51.

13. United Nations High Commissariat for Refugees, “Basic Information about UNHCR,” <http://www.unhcr.org/basics/BASIC5/3b028097c.html>.

nally displaced persons of any continent, with almost 12 million in twenty-one countries in 2006 (out of 24.5 million worldwide).<sup>14</sup>

The consequences of state failure also reverberate more broadly in Africa. When the DRC failed in 1998, it dragged at least seven other countries into its conflict. State decay in Ivory Coast throughout the 1990s was partly induced by failure in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and has had severe repercussions for other countries in West Africa. Today, militias cross borders at will and spread violence between Chad, the Central African Republic, and Sudan. In 2007, Somalia dragged Ethiopia into its conflict.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, with Africa accounting for an increasing proportion of worldwide oil exports and concerns rising about terrorist activities in Liberia, the Sahel, Sierra Leone, and Somalia, state failures will have even wider-range consequences in the future.<sup>16</sup>

A second reason for analyzing reconstruction efforts in Africa is the substantial disconnect between scholarly work on African statehood and the reconstruction policies applied in the continent. Scholars have linked African state failure to leadership failure, the postcolonial nature of African states, the difficulties of democratization in multiethnic societies, and the vagaries of aid dependency.<sup>17</sup> Yet reconstruction efforts in these states typically consist of bringing all of the violent actors together in power-sharing agreements (including those that have already demonstrated failed leadership), reasserting the integrity of the failed state, organizing elections, and showering the country with aid. Moreover, despite some consensus that African elites adopt

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14. Anne Glusker, ed., "Internal Displacement: Global Overview of Trends and Developments in 2006" (Geneva: Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, April 2007).

15. On the regional implications of conflict and state failure in Africa, see Adekeye Adebajo and Ismail Rashid, eds., *West Africa's Security Challenges: Building Peace in a Troubled Region* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2004); United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA), "The Regional Impact of the Crisis in Côte d'Ivoire" (Dakar: UNOWA, 2004); Gilbert M. Khadiagala, ed., *Security Dynamics in Africa's Great Lakes Region* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2006); and Edmond J. Keller, "Understanding Conflicts in the Horn of Africa," in Chandra Lekha Sriram and Zoe Nielsen, eds., *Exploring Subregional Conflict: Opportunities for Conflict Prevention* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2004), pp. 17–54.

16. Independent Task Force, *More Than Humanitarianism: A Strategic U.S. Approach toward Africa*, Independent Task Force Report, No. 56 (Washington, D.C.: Council on Foreign Relations, 2006). On the alleged activities of Islamic terrorists in Liberia and Sierra Leone, see Douglas Farah and Richard Shultz, "Al Qaeda's Growing Sanctuary," *Washington Post*, July 14, 2004.

17. Robert I. Rotberg, "The Failure and Collapse of Nation-States: Breakdown, Prevention, and Repair," in Rotberg, *When States Fail*, pp. 1–50; I. William Zartman, "Introduction," in Zartman, ed., *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1995), pp. 1–11; Christopher Clapham, "The Challenge to the State in a Globalized World," *Development and Change*, Vol. 33, No. 5 (November 2002), pp. 775–795; Jeffrey Herbst and Greg Mills, "Africa's Big Dysfunctional States: An Introductory Overview," in Christopher Clapham, Herbst, and Mills, eds., *Big African States: Angola, Sudan, DRC, Nigeria, South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2006), pp. 1–15; Paris, *At War's End*; and Nicolas van de Walle, *Overcoming Stagnation in Aid-Dependent Countries: Policies and Incentives for Poor Countries* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Global Development, 2005).

policies that maximize their power and material interests, the typical reconstruction agenda assumes instead their altruism and desire to maximize the welfare of the country as a whole with recommendations such as “improve the rule of law,” “hold free and fair elections,” “combat corruption,” and “hold perpetrators of violence responsible for their actions.”<sup>18</sup>

Third, Africa is unique in the extent to which some of its states were already dysfunctional prior to collapse and failure. Most African states have never had effective institutions, relying instead on the personalized networks of patronage. They have never generated sustainable growth. Factionalism has always been politically prevalent, and states have more often been instruments of predation and extraction than tools for the pursuit of public goods. In vast parts of Africa, state failure is less an objective condition than a permanent mode of political operation.

This article is organized around three flawed assumptions that underpin reconstruction failures in Africa.<sup>19</sup> First is the implicit assumption that Western state institutions can be successfully transferred to Africa.<sup>20</sup> The evidence suggests, however, that the region has obstinately resisted attempts at transforming it. The limited success of recent donor-sponsored market reforms and democracy promotion indicates that the grand vision of state building, with its one-size-fits-all approach, is likely to meet resistance. The second faulty assumption concerns the extent to which reconstruction efforts in Africa imply a logic of cooperation between donors and African leaders, which presumes a shared understanding of failure and reconstruction. Many African political elites, however, share neither the diagnosis of failure nor the objectives set out

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18. On the behavior of African elites, see Robert H. Bates, *Markets and States in Tropical Africa: The Political Basis for Agrarian Policies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999); and Jean-François Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (London: Longman, 1993). For examples of the standard policy prescriptions, see Susan Rose-Ackerman, “Establishing the Rule of Law,” in Rotberg, *When States Fail*, pp. 182–221; and International Crisis Group, “A Congo Action Plan,” Africa Briefing, No. 34 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2005).

19. This article is based on fieldwork in two African failed states: the DRC (2001, 2002, 2004, and 2005) and Sierra Leone (2005). We have also done research in Nigeria (2005), Senegal (2002 and 2005), and the Republic of Congo (2001). In each country we conducted informal interviews with government officials, politicians, rebels and ex-rebels or militiamen, administrative personnel, civil-society representatives, foreign diplomats, and UN staff.

20. For the operational checklist of the typical institutional fixes, including effective judicial and law enforcement agencies, functional parliaments, tax authorities, public expenditure institutions, and more generally a state administration that delivers public services, see International Crisis Group, “Liberia and Sierra Leone: Rebuilding Failed States,” Africa Report, No. 87 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2004), p. i; and United Nations Development Program, High-Level World Bank European Commission Meeting on Governance Priorities in the DRC, Kinshasa, May 31–June 1, 2006. For a similar argument about “implicit universalism” underpinning state building, see Charles T. Call and Elizabeth M. Cousens, “Ending Wars and Building Peace,” Working Paper (New York: International Peace Academy, March 2007), p. 14.

by the foreign promoters of reconstruction policies. Instead, they seek to maximize the benefits accruing to them from these policies, as well as from ongoing political instability. The third flawed assumption is that donors will be able to harness the material, military, and symbolic resources necessary for long-term state reconstruction in Africa. Our data on the international fiscal and military resources allocated to Africa's failed states suggest instead a lack of political will among donors to sustain the long-term costly efforts that would be consistent with the lofty goals of state reconstruction. In addition, mixed agendas among donors, torn between reconstruction imperatives and their national policy objectives, can undermine the legitimacy of their state-building efforts in the eyes of African societies. In conclusion, we recommend a greater reliance on indigenous state reconstruction efforts and the promotion by donors of African interest groups capable of holding their governments domestically accountable and of generating the processes of social bargaining necessary for sustainable state formation.

### *Flaw #1: The Institutional Transfer Fallacy*

In the literature on state reconstruction in Africa, the capacity of Western donors to achieve their goals is too often unquestioned, and expectations regarding their success unrelated to their historical record. A look at Western attempts at engineering institutional change in Africa reveals shortcomings that impede the success of such efforts. In this section, we revisit the original state construction project in Africa—colonization—and highlight the shallowness of this enterprise. We then examine constraints on Western development policies and efforts to promote democracy in Africa.

#### WHY MODERN STATES HAVE NEVER EXISTED IN AFRICA

The goal of rebuilding collapsed states is to restore them as “constituted repositories of power and authority within borders” and as “performers and suppliers of political goods.”<sup>21</sup> Almost all African states, however, have never achieved such levels of statehood. Many are “states that fail[ed] before they form[ed].”<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the evidence is overwhelming that most of Africa's collapsed states at no point in the postcolonial era remotely resembled the ideal type of the modern Western polity.<sup>23</sup> The DRC, for example, has never pos-

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21. Rotberg, “The Failure and Collapse of Nation-States,” p. 28.

22. Lisa Anderson, “Antiquated before They Can Ossify: States That Fail before They Form,” *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Fall 2004), pp. 1–16.

23. See Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996); Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa*:

sessed a monopoly on coercion, nor has it ever enjoyed the rule of law or an effective bureaucracy.<sup>24</sup> These may be desired goals of state building in Africa, as they are in other parts of the world, but they are generally at odds with past and present empirical conditions in many African states.

By implication, terms such as “rebuilding,” “resuscitating,” and “reestablishing” are misleading insofar as they imply the prior existence of effective public institutions waiting to reemerge. Given Africa’s historical record, however, reconstruction amounts to re-creating structures that caused failure in the first place. In Sierra Leone, for example, a diplomat from a donor country recently complained that “all our resources have gone toward re-creating the conditions that caused the conflict.”<sup>25</sup> In the DRC, too, there are signs that the 2003–06 foreign-sponsored democratic transition merely ushered in an authoritarian and corrupt political and economic system similar to that of the late President Mobutu Sese Seko, who ruled the country (then known as Zaire) from 1965 to 1997. At best, institutions in failed African states need to be rebuilt and reformed at the same time. At worst, they may need to be created for the very first time.

The structural weakness of Africa’s states can be traced to the colonial era and the peculiar nature of the political institutions that were imposed on African societies by their colonizers. These institutions provided only a shallow basis for the state. Britain’s form of indirect rule was a common feature of all colonial administrations, relying on intermediary local elites to compensate for the thinly spread colonial apparatus.<sup>26</sup> Thus, although colonialism and

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*Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000); Bayart, *The State in Africa*; Pierre Englebort, *State Legitimacy and Development in Africa* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2000); Leonardo Villalón and Phillip A. Huxtable, eds., *The African State at a Critical Juncture: Between Disintegration and Reconfiguration* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1998); Goran Hyden, *No Shortcuts to Progress: African Development Management in Perspective* (London: Heinemann, 1983); Bates, *Markets and States in Tropical Africa*; and Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994).

24. See Thomas Callaghy, *The State-Society Struggle: Zaire in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); and Crawford Young and Thomas Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984).

25. Quoted in International Crisis Group, “Liberia and Sierra Leone,” p. 8. This is not a lone voice. A wide range of interviewees (UN officials, diplomats, and local civil-society activists) aired similarly skeptical views that the reconstructed state was positively different from its failed predecessor. Interviews by authors, Freetown, Sierra Leone, April 2005.

26. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*; Sara Berry, *No Condition Is Permanent: The Social Dynamics of Agrarian Change in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), p. 25; Jean-François Bayart, “The ‘Social Capital’ of the Felonious State,” in Bayart, Stephen Ellis, and Béatrice Hibou, eds., *The Criminalization of the State in Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999), p. 46; Herbst, *States and Power in Africa*, pp. 64–93; and Joshua B. Forrest, *Lineages of State Fragility: Rural Civil Society in Guinea-Bissau* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003).



decolonization represent early instances of state building, they did not involve an in-depth or lasting transfer of modern state institutions. Largely as a result, when they reached independence, the vast majority of African states “plainly did not meet what had hitherto been the normally accepted criteria of statehood.”<sup>27</sup>

#### THE LIMITS OF POLITICAL ENGINEERING FROM WITHOUT

Having transplanted foreign states to Africa, outsiders have since repeatedly attempted to mold African state institutions according to their own templates. Over the last quarter century, in particular, Western donors have increasingly endeavored to engineer economic and political change in Africa’s weak states. Generally, their goal has been to improve the effectiveness of governance institutions and promote development.<sup>28</sup> Since 1990 democracy assistance has also grown in importance, partly as a result of increased perceptions that Africa’s economic stagnation has political roots.<sup>29</sup> In seeking to reform weak African states, donors have conditioned their aid on the states’ willingness to implement specific policy prescriptions. The intrusiveness of these externally driven policies provides important clues as to the chances of success of the even more ambitious contemporary state-building efforts. As the following sections show, the inherent limitations of outside attempts at institutional change and the resistance of African states, however weak, raise doubts as to their chances of success.

#### DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

Africa remains by far the poorest region of the world, with average per capita income lower than it was thirty years ago.<sup>30</sup> Between 1981 and 2001, the share of Africans living on less than \$1 a day rose from 41 to 46 percent.<sup>31</sup> Only a

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27. Christopher Clapham, *Africa and the International System: The Politics of State Survival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 34.

28. The document that first drew attention to the need for domestic institutional and policy reforms in Africa was the World Bank’s so-called Berg report. World Bank, *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Action* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1981). For an analysis of donor goals and policies, see Nicolas van de Walle, *African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis, 1979–1999* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), especially pp. 188–234.

29. Gordon Crawford, *Foreign Aid and Political Reform: A Comparative Analysis of Democracy Assistance and Political Conditionality* (Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave, 2001).

30. David K. Leonard and Scott Straus, *Africa’s Stalled Development: International Causes and Cures* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2003); and Carol Lancaster, “Development in Africa: The Good, the Bad, the Ugly,” *Current History*, Vol. 104, No. 682 (May 2005), p. 222.

31. United Nations Development Program (UNDP), *Human Development Report, 2005* (New York: UNDP, 2005), p. 34.

handful of countries are likely to meet even half of the eight Millennium Development Goals laid out by the United Nations to reduce poverty by 2015.<sup>32</sup>

Despite some successes, bilateral and multilateral donors have little to show for the more than \$500 billion they have spent in Africa since the early 1960s.<sup>33</sup> Numerous factors hampered the effectiveness of past aid efforts, including strategic Cold War considerations, which led all foreign donors to provide ample funding to kleptocratic rulers such as Zaire's Mobutu and Liberia's Samuel Doe.<sup>34</sup> Yet, equally important have been the conceptual and capacity limitations of donors themselves and the resistance to change of African governments.

As well established as the current emphasis on capacity building seems to be, aid donors have historically wavered regarding the proper role of the state in African development. After a Keynesian period in the 1960s and 1970s when the state was perceived as the engine of growth, donors regarded it as an obstacle to development for much of the following two decades. Starting in the 1990s, they began to abandon this idea. Recognizing that development requires an effective state, donors have begun to focus on building capacity.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, their attitude toward the state has remained ambiguous, competing with an infatuation for the nonstate sector, which has at times hampered the strengthening of state institutions. In some countries, for example, more than 20 percent of total aid is channeled through nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), up from less than 1 percent in 1990, as donors have encouraged nonstate actors to become service providers.<sup>36</sup> This dualism has occasionally provoked fierce competition between state and nonstate actors for outside funding and has had far-reaching repercussions on state capacity, including the attrition of civil servants to better-paying NGOs.<sup>37</sup>

Donors have also been remiss and inconsistent in demanding implementation of conditionality by African governments. As a result, there is little corre-

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32. "A Glimmer of Light at Last? Africa's Economy," *Economist*, June 22, 2006.

33. William Easterly, *The Elusive Quest for Growth: Economists' Adventures and Misadventures in the Tropics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002).

34. See Thad Dunning, "Conditioning the Effects of Aid: Cold War Politics, Donor Credibility, and Democracy in Africa," *International Organization*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (Spring 2004), pp. 409–423; and Michael G. Schatzberg, *Mobutu or Chaos? The United States and Zaire, 1960–1990* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1991).

35. See World Bank, *World Development Report, 1997: The State in a Changing World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Clapham, *Africa in the International System*, pp. 169, 174.

36. Van de Walle, *Overcoming Stagnation in Aid-Dependent Countries*, p. 58.

37. For concrete examples, see Joseph Semboja and Ole Therkildsen, eds., *Service Provision under Stress in East Africa* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1995).

lation between the allocation of aid and the quality of economic management and governance.<sup>38</sup> Donors have also usually failed to coordinate their aid programs, with grave consequences for state building where myriad actors claim to have a role.<sup>39</sup> In Cameroon, for example, donor agencies were implementing 1,184 different projects in 2005. These were evaluated by 400–500 annual missions, with each donor agency having its own modalities and reporting requirements, thus putting a huge strain on an already weak state administration.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the average rate of implementation of conditions included in policy programs sponsored by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was only 50 to 60 percent.<sup>41</sup> Reviewing these and other problems associated with foreign aid, Nicolas van de Walle concludes that contemporary capacity-building efforts in aid-dependent countries are largely “Sisyphean” and “doomed to fail.”<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, many African governments have skillfully evaded outside pressures for structural changes. State elites have frequently manipulated economic reform and used these reforms to recalibrate their power, notably in the realm of privatization of state-owned enterprises.<sup>43</sup> Such avoidance of reform manifests a stark divergence of interests between external actors and local state elites, often creating situations where “outsiders seek to promote development in countries with governments not particularly interested in development.”<sup>44</sup> This divergence thus helps to explain the limited success of outside efforts in creating effective institutions in Africa’s weak states. As the next section shows, similar constraints have hampered donors’ promotion of democracy in Africa.

#### DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

Donors have made the holding of multiparty elections a central tenet of their state reconstruction efforts in Africa for several reasons. These include norma-

38. Van de Walle, *Overcoming Stagnation in Aid-Dependent Countries*, pp. 38–43.

39. As a report observes, “In many post-conflict environments, the chaos on the ground is paralleled only by the chaos of the international response.” See Commission on Post-Conflict Reconstruction, “Play to Win: Final Report of the Bipartisan Commission on Post-Conflict Reconstruction” (Washington, D.C., and Arlington, Va.: Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Association of the United States Army, 2003), p. 2.

40. World Bank country representative, interview by authors, Yaoundé, Cameroon, May 2005; and Nancy Birdsall, Dani Rodrik, and Arvind Subramanian, “How to Help Poor Countries,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 4 (July/August 2005), p. 142.

41. Van de Walle, *African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis*, p. 67.

42. Van de Walle, *Overcoming Stagnation in Aid-Dependent Countries*, p. 73.

43. See van de Walle, *African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis*, pp. 162–164, and the references therein.

44. Van de Walle, *Overcoming Stagnation in Aid-Dependent Countries*, p. 80.

tive biases,<sup>45</sup> a desire to counter the perception that they put stability ahead of democracy, and a belief that authoritarianism contributes to state failure.<sup>46</sup> Yet, earlier attempts at democracy promotion on the continent, in less challenging environments, led to sufficiently underwhelming results to question whether donors are capable of instigating such changes.

Although democracy has made some strides in many parts of Africa, multi-party elections since the 1990s have rarely ushered in institutions able to hold governments accountable.<sup>47</sup> As of 2005, only twelve countries in sub-Saharan Africa were democratic by one measure.<sup>48</sup> The majority of states in the region are semi-democracies where authoritarian practices and violations of human and political rights remain common despite electoral trappings. To be sure, African democratization is first of all an indigenous process, and it would be mistaken to conceive of its fate as merely a function of external efforts. Nevertheless, the insignificant or outright negative association between democracy assistance and democratization in Africa is problematic.<sup>49</sup>

Democracy assistance efforts in Africa have suffered from two main shortcomings. First, donors have paid scant attention to the coexistence in Africa of informal political institutions with formal bureaucratic procedures.<sup>50</sup> Behind the rational-legal façade of statehood, informal decisionmaking processes that are strongly determined by personal relations dominate national politics. These relations constitute patronage-based clientelist networks that vertically connect the political center and its elites to groups in society.<sup>51</sup> Political alle-

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45. Roland Paris, "International Peacebuilding and the Mission Civilisatrice," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (October 2002), pp. 637–656.

46. See, for example, Robert I. Rotberg, "Failed States, Collapsed States, Weak States: Causes and Indicators," in Rotberg, *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, p. 21.

47. Marina Ottaway, *Democracy Challenged: The Rise of Semi-Authoritarianism* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003), p. 3.

48. Monty G. Marshall and Ted Robert Gurr, *Peace and Conflict, 2005: A Global Survey of Armed Conflicts, Self-Determination Movements, and Democracy* (College Park: Center for International Development and Crisis Management, University of Maryland, June 2005), pp. 43–44. See also Freedom House, "Freedom in Africa Today," 2006, [http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/special\\_report/36.pdf](http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/special_report/36.pdf).

49. Stephen Brown, "Foreign Aid and Democracy Promotion: Lessons from Africa," *European Journal for Development Research*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (June 2005), pp. 179–198; and Letitia Lawson, "External Democracy Promotion in Africa: Another False Start?" *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (March 1999), pp. 37–58.

50. See Ian Taylor, "'Advice Is Judged by Results, Not by Intentions': Why Gordon Brown Is Wrong about Africa," *International Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 2 (March 2005), pp. 299–310; Percy S. Mistry, "Reasons for Sub-Saharan Africa's Development Deficit That the Commission for Africa Did Not Consider," *African Affairs*, Vol. 104, No. 417 (October 2005), pp. 665–678; and William Brown, "The Commission for Africa: Results and Prospects for the West's Africa Policy," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (September 2006), pp. 349–374.

51. Jean François Médard, "The Underdeveloped State in Africa: Political Clientelism or Neo-Patrimonialism?" in Christopher S. Clapham, ed., *Private Patronage and Public Power: Political Clientelism in the Modern State* (London: F. Pinter, 1982), pp. 162–189; Richard Sandbrook, "Patrons,

giance to the patron is exchanged for services and goods received by the clients. As a result, the line between the private and public spheres is so blurred that notions of the public good and of independent civil society are ultimately absent.<sup>52</sup> From the outside, this form of politics may be regarded as engendering corruption, misrule, and bad governance. For its participants, however, it is eminently rational, facilitating accommodation processes among elites that lend an often astonishing stability to otherwise weak institutional state structures.<sup>53</sup>

This form of governance came under pressure in the early 1990s when donors sought to impose democracy by tying their assistance to political reforms. For African rulers, this economic pressure clashed with the exigency of distributing patronage to key allies. Keenly aware that reforming their states' political systems would endanger their survival in power, many African rulers undertook only partial reforms, essentially limited to organizing multiparty elections, to accommodate the demands of donors and lessen the political pressure they had begun to experience.<sup>54</sup> Often grossly manipulated, these elections usually allowed incumbents to stay in power. Indeed, with 14 victories in 100 elections throughout Africa since 1990, opposition electoral success remains the exception.<sup>55</sup>

The inconsistent behavior of donors constitutes the second problem of democracy assistance. For not only have donor demands essentially been limited to holding elections, but they have also frequently failed to ensure that those receiving aid meet the conditions under which it is given, even in cases of egregious foul play by state elites. The widely condemned stealing of the presidential elections by Cameroon's ruler Paul Biya in 1992, for example, was not sanctioned by a reduction in aid. On the contrary, Biya as well as his fellow autocrats Gnassingbé Eyadéma in Togo and Mobutu in Zaire received increased (French) assistance while democratizing Benin saw a reduction of develop-

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Clients, and Factions: Explaining Conflict in Africa," in Peter Lewis, ed., *Africa: Dilemmas of Development and Change* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1998), pp. 64–83; and Robert H. Jackson and Carl G. Rosberg, "Personal Rule: Theory and Practice in Africa," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (July 1984), pp. 421–442.

52. See Peter M. Lewis, "Political Transition and the Dilemma of Civil Society in Africa," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Summer 1992), pp. 31–54.

53. Bayart, *The State in Africa*; and Richard L. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emerging African Nation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963).

54. Michael Cowen and Liisa Laakso, eds., *Multi-party Elections in Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002). On partial reform, see van de Walle, *African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis*, p. 61.

55. Daniel N. Posner and Daniel J. Young, "The Institutionalization of Political Power in Africa," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (July 2007), p. 131. Note that this rate has increased from 6 percent in 1990.

ment aid.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, state elites have been quick to capitalize on donors' struggles to determine priorities. African governments have learned to evade pressures for political reform by embracing some aspects of economic liberalization as prescribed by donors. This approach has, for example, earned the government of Uganda a degree of respectability despite its reluctance to allow genuine political competition.<sup>57</sup>

It is possible that the introduction of multiparty elections may have positive democratization effects in the long run.<sup>58</sup> At present, however, economic liberalization and democracy promotion in some African states have produced illiberal regimes whose salient features remain excessive presidential powers, clientelism, and patronage. The limited success of donor-promoted economic and political reforms in far less demanding conditions than those of failed states should caution state builders against pursuing overly ambitious objectives.

### *Flaw #2: Divergent Understandings of Failure and Reconstruction*

The frequent lack of success of postconflict transitions in African states comes in large part from the mistaken belief in a shared understanding of failure and reconstruction and from international actors misreading the nature of politics in Africa, particularly with respect to the beneficial properties of failure for local politicians. There are three dimensions of state failure and reconstruction along which donors and African elites have developed conflicting understandings and experiences. First, in most peace-building operations in Africa, a cognitive dissonance exists regarding the nature of state failure and the kind of reconstruction efforts that are needed to address it. Donors typically see such failure as a systemic breakdown and reconstruction as a new form of social contracting. African elites are more likely to view both as an opportunity to maximize their political fortunes. They may see reconstruction as the continuation of war and political competition for resources by new means. Second, reconstruction efforts are frequently at odds with the remarkable degree of

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56. Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 241.

57. Christopher Clapham, "Governmentality and Economic Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (December 1996), p. 818. On Uganda, still widely considered an outstanding reformer, see Andrew M. Mwenda and Roger Tangri, "Patronage Politics, Donor Reforms, and Regime Consolidation in Uganda," *African Affairs*, Vol. 104, No. 416 (July 2005), pp. 449–467.

58. Staffan I. Lindberg, "The Surprising Significance of African Elections," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (January 2006), pp. 139–151; and Posner and Young, "The Institutionalization of Political Power in Africa."

institutional resilience in and of failed states. The public institutions of failed states may be deeply dysfunctional, but this does not necessarily mean that they will be dismantled or that they cease to have some usefulness for local elites. As a result, while reconstruction agreements typically create new institutions for the transition period and beyond, African leaders tend to see legitimacy as remaining in preexisting sovereign institutions. Third, state failure is often accompanied by the creation or growth of parallel local institutions, which provide substitutes for the provision of public goods, such as health care, education services, and security. Reconstruction efforts often neglect these local institutions, despite their demonstrated ability to cope with state weakness and failure.

#### THE INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF FAILURE AND RECONSTRUCTION

Donors act as if they assume that they and African political elites share an understanding of state failure and reconstruction. In a 2004 report, the World Bank noted, for example, that “there is a consensus in the DRC that economic recovery and political stabilization both require the rebuilding and transformation of the State.” The report added that “key actors share a vision of a market-based economy in which the State would withdraw from productive sectors, and work in coalition with non-governmental networks to deliver social services.” Moreover, the authors believed that “powerful constituencies all have to gain from reforms” that included an anticorruption campaign, which they argued had received a “heavy emphasis” from the president and his government.<sup>59</sup> The evidence suggests, however, that such optimism may be unwarranted. The manipulation by African political elites of their institutions’ weakness and of political disorder extends to violent conflict, state failure, and state reconstruction, and undermines the validity of donors’ beliefs in a shared understanding of failure and reconstruction.

African rulers typically exploit their control of the state to appropriate for their own use public resources, rather than provide public goods to their citizens.<sup>60</sup> This behavior is also evident in failed states, where significant benefits may accrue to those in power, for the weaker the institutionalization of politics, the less accountability and the greater the opportunities for predation

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59. World Bank, *Transitional Support Strategy for the Democratic Republic of Congo* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2004), pp. 22–23. The bank’s optimism is also captured in the following sentence: “The commitment to continued reforms, which has been reaffirmed and already demonstrated by the new Government, suggests that it will be possible to build on earlier success in the coming period.” *Ibid.*, p. 18.

60. Peter P. Ekeh, “Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement,” in Lewis, *Africa*, pp. 87–109; and Bruce J. Berman, “Ethnicity, Patronage, and the African State: The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism,” *African Affairs*, Vol. 97, No. 388 (July 1998), pp. 305–341.

and domination.<sup>61</sup> While weak institutionalization is a main characteristic of African autocracies, state failure can be thought of as an extension or consequence of such regimes. It is not so much an affliction of the political system as an acute manifestation of it. Hence, failed states coexist with politics as usual.<sup>62</sup> To a large extent, many of the internal conflicts associated with state failure in places such as the DRC, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Sudan are conflicts about access to the perks of weak statehood.

The absence of checks and balances in failed states provides opportunities for rulers to appropriate public resources. Using Sierra Leone as a case study, William Reno has shown how the rulers of collapsed bureaucracies in such states privatize the means of political control by engaging in shadow parallel economic activities from which they derive the revenues to perpetuate patronage-based networks.<sup>63</sup> In Chad President Idriss Déby used the chaos brought about by the Darfur conflict in neighboring Sudan and a related domestic insurrection in 2006 to renege on his earlier commitment to donors to spend oil royalties on development.<sup>64</sup> In Sudan the northern, Arab-based Bashir government, which depends on the appropriation of oil revenues from the south, has promoted chaos in that region (and, by the same logic, in Darfur), thereby undermining the formal authority and functioning of the state while improving the relative standing of the northern Arabs within its institutions.<sup>65</sup> In the DRC, the Lutundula commission of the transitional National Assembly, which studied mining and other business contracts that rebels and government authorities signed during the wars between 1996 and 2003, identified dozens of illegal contracts.<sup>66</sup> In Ivory Coast, a report commis-

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61. For the classic statement of this thesis, see Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*, especially pp. 3–16.

62. Ann Hironaka provides a useful overview for why various facets of disorder constitute “normal politics” in weak states. Hironaka, *Neverending Wars: The International Community, Weak States, and the Perpetuation of Civil War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), especially pp. 81–103.

63. William Reno, “The Changing Nature of Warfare and the Absence of State-Building in West Africa,” in Diane E. Davis and Anthony W. Pereira, eds., *Irregular Armed Forces and Their Role in Politics and State Formation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 322–345.

64. On donors’ alleged “shared sovereignty” with Chad, see Stephen D. Krasner, “Sharing Sovereignty: New Institutions for Collapsed and Failing States,” *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Fall 2004), pp. 85–120. On the collapse of the oil deal, see Chip Cummins, “Exxon Oil-Fund Model Unravels in Chad,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 28, 2006.

65. See International Crisis Group, “Sudan’s Comprehensive Peace Agreement: The Long Road Ahead,” Africa Report, No. 106 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, March 2006); and Gérard Prunier and Rachel M. Gisselquist, “The Sudan: A Successfully Failed State,” in Rotberg, *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, pp. 101–127.

66. République Démocratique du Congo, Assemblée Nationale, Commission Spéciale chargée de l’examen et de la validité des conventions à caractère économique et financier conclues pendant les guerres de 1996–1997 et de 1998, “Rapport des Travaux, 1ère Partie” [Progress report: Part 1], Kinshasa, February 2006, <http://www.monuc.org/downloads/RapportLutundula.pdf>. See also



sioned by the European Union stated that the president and members of his clan used the confusion of state failure to extend their informal control over the cocoa industry and diverted in “complete opacity” about \$170 million between 2002 and 2004 to be used as “the principal source of occult financing of the regime.”<sup>67</sup>

We are not suggesting that rulers in collapsing states deliberately dismantle state institutions. Rather, their strategies for political survival de facto accelerate the destruction of state institutions. This is particularly evident in the security sector. In Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, and Sudan, for example, governments supported the creation of proxy militias to fight opponents. In the process, however, they found it hard to maintain control over these paramilitary forces, which gained lives of their own, thereby further eroding the state’s control over the means of coercion and weakening the role of the official coercive agencies (i.e., the police and the army).<sup>68</sup> Although they may not necessarily promote such chaos, many African rulers are adept at navigating such environments.

The same logic applies to reconstruction. Whereas donors tend to see reconstruction as a new beginning after the crisis of failure, African elites more often see it as ongoing competition for power and resources, facilitated by power-sharing agreements, increases in foreign aid, and lax international oversight. Many of the African transition elites are after all the leaders of armed factions that have fought each other in bloody civil wars and have become partners by virtue of power-sharing arrangements brokered by the international community for the sake of peace.<sup>69</sup> Members of these elites are often fundamentally problematic partners, however, as nearly all of them bear responsibility for large-scale atrocities. Yet, there is no obvious solution to this moral conundrum, as there can be no peace without involving them. This has been the case in Burundi, the DRC, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Sudan.

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Human Rights Watch, “DR Congo: End Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources,” February 21, 2006, [http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/02/20/congo12692\\_txt.htm](http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/02/20/congo12692_txt.htm).

67. Sid Amiri and Alain Gourdon, “Etude diagnostic des organisations et des procédures de la filière café-cacao de Côte d’Ivoire” [Diagnostic study of organizations and procedures of the cocoa-coffee industry in Ivory Coast], report written for the Ivorian government with financing from the European Union, 2005. See also Pascal Airault, “Où va l’argent du cacao?” [Where does the cocoa money go?], *Jeune Afrique*, May 7, 2006, pp. 32–33.

68. Particularly illuminating is the case of the Young Patriots militias in Ivory Coast. See Richard Banégas and Ruth Marshall-Fratani, “Côte d’Ivoire: Negotiating Identity and Citizenship,” in Morten Bøås and Kevin C. Dunn, eds., *African Guerrillas: Raging against the Machine* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2007), pp. 99–109.

69. Denis M. Tull and Andreas Mehler, “The Hidden Costs of Power-Sharing: Reproducing Insurgent Violence in Africa,” *African Affairs*, Vol. 104, No. 416 (July 2005), pp. 375–398. See also Philip G. Roeder and Donald Rothchild, eds., *Sustainable Peace: Power and Democracy after Civil War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005).

No less significant, many of these leaders are not social outcasts but former members of the political establishment. They have usually not fought to address deep societal grievances but to reintegrate themselves into a system from which they had been excluded. In the DRC, many of the guerrilla and militia leaders of the second war (1998–2003) had once held ministerial positions in the administrations of Presidents Mobutu and Laurent Kabila.<sup>70</sup> These leaders possess the wherewithal to organize violence and force their reinclusion into a profitable political system that, as a result, they do not want to change. That these transition elites have been part of the machinery that has led their states into failure casts serious doubts on the assumption among aid donors that they may share the same state-building agenda.

With their use of violence to acquire power and their lack of ideological commitment, these nonstate actors are often described as warlords. The ease with which they may move from outsider status to government positions suggests, however, that the term “warlord” should not be reserved for nonstate actors alone. Many state elites in war-torn countries engage in behavior similar to that of these nonstate actors, including human rights abuses and economic exploitation.<sup>71</sup> For that reason, rulers of failed African states are no less problematic interlocutors of the international community than their violent nonstate challengers.

International state reconstruction projects offer political elites—whether government officials or insurgents co-opted by power-sharing agreements—new opportunities for accumulation and advancement. From their point of view, such projects provide resources for what Jean-François Bayart has characterized as “strategies of extraversion.”<sup>72</sup> According to Bayart, African elites exploit their countries’ dependence on the rest of the world to establish authority and extract resources at home. Bayart’s historical examples of this process include slavery, some dimensions of the colonial relationship, the Cold War, structural adjustment programs, and recent civil conflicts. Strategies of extraversion have played an important role in Western reconstruction efforts in failed African states. The massive resumption or increase in foreign aid that

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70. This is true, for example, of Lunda Bululu, José Endundo, and Alexis Thambwe. For more examples, including from Liberia, see William Reno, “The Politics of Insurgency in Collapsing States,” *Development and Change*, Vol. 33, No. 5 (November 2002), pp. 841–842.

71. See, for example, *Final Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo* (New York: United Nations, 2002).

72. Jean-François Bayart, “Africa in the World: A History of Extraversion,” *African Affairs*, Vol. 99, No. 395 (April 2000), pp. 217–267; and Robert Latham, Ronald Kassimir, and Thomas M. Callaghy, “Introduction: Transboundary Formations, Intervention, Order, and Authority,” in Callaghy, Kassimir, and Latham, eds., *Intervention and Transnationalism in Africa: Global-Local Networks of Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 13.

generally accompanies postconflict transitions represents a rent to holders of state power, subsidizing governments and state agencies where corruption remains rampant. And because donors are eager for a return to peace and stability, they may take a more lenient approach toward corruption in postconflict states, including putting fewer conditions on new aid inflows than might be expected. The willingness of the IMF and the World Bank, for example, to finance the DRC's economic recovery program and forgive large amounts of its debt in the face of overwhelming corruption and limited macroeconomic progress was telling in this respect.<sup>73</sup> While receiving an estimated \$8 billion in aid between 2001 and 2006,<sup>74</sup> Congolese transition elites went on a corruption binge. In 2005, some \$8 million earmarked for military pay reportedly disappeared each month before reaching the intended recipients.<sup>75</sup> A 2005 audit also revealed that 41 percent of government spending in 2003, the year the transition started, had taken place outside proper budgetary processes. In addition, the presidency had exceeded its budget by 89 percent while one of the vice presidents had spent seven times his allocation.<sup>76</sup> A Congolese NGO termed \$22 million given to the president and the other leaders of transition institutions in the 2005 budget as "obscure allocations" dwarfing the amounts allocated to public health, national education, rural development, and the independent electoral commission combined.<sup>77</sup>

African transition elites therefore have incentives to prolong these transitions for as long as possible. In Congo, it took four years for the parties to agree on a transition platform. Much of the subsequent two-year transition to elections was then largely wasted on procedural matters, and the elections had to be postponed by another year. Still, they could not even be held as rescheduled. In Ivory Coast, elections originally scheduled for October 2005 were postponed until October 2006, and then further delayed as neither the government nor the rebels fulfilled their pledges to disarm while continuing to hamper the functioning of the "national reconciliation" government.<sup>78</sup> In Sudan,

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73. The international financial institutions insist that their economic policies in the DRC are working and have contributed to an economic and political "turnaround." See Jean A.P. Clément, ed., *Postconflict Economics in Sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons from the Democratic Republic of Congo* (Washington, D.C.: International Monetary Fund, 2004). The IMF suspended its disbursements in early 2006, however, because of the government's spending spree in the lead-up to the elections.

74. Data by United Nations Mission in DR Congo (MONUC), "Key Indicators: Development," <http://www.monuc.org/News.aspx?newsID?11448&menuOpened?DRC%20profile>.

75. *Le Potentiel* (Kinshasa), November 2, 2005.

76. *Le Potentiel*, October 29, 2005; *Le Phare* (Kinshasa), October 31, 2005; and *Digitalcongo.net*, November 2, 2005.

77. SERACOB-Central-Africa, analysis of the 2005 budget proposal, personal email communication with authors, June 22, 2005.

78. United Nations Security Council, "Eighth Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire," S/2006/222 (New York: United Nations, April 11, 2006).

too, President Bashir and his National Congress Party have “systematically undermine[d], delaye[d], or simply ignore[d] the elements called for in the [Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005] that would fundamentally alter the status quo and [their] grip on power.”<sup>79</sup>

Finally, a similar logic prevails in the maintenance of conflict in what outsiders euphemistically call “postconflict” societies. In the DRC, transition government members continued their war by proxy using militias and guerrilla groups in the eastern provinces. In the twelve months following the 2003 peace agreement, for example, fighting in the DRC displaced a further 662,000 people, an increase of 22 percent over the previous year, bringing the total number of internally displaced persons in the country to 3.4 million by the end of 2003.<sup>80</sup> Largely responsible for this violence were members of the transition government.<sup>81</sup>

The disjuncture between donors and African elites on the nature of politics and reconstruction in Africa has had other consequences as well, because although they speak the same language, they often have different agendas. On the one hand, international actors commit to what is presented as a partnership with transition governments, composed of both former incumbents and rebels who they believe have made peace and are working toward the democratic settlement of the dispute. On the other hand, transition governments established through power-sharing agreements offer the context for former incumbents and rebels to engage in a game of their own to acquire power and resources. This competition stimulates corruption, procrastination, and continued violence in contradiction to the spirit of reconstruction. Because the prize of politics remains the failed state itself, now made even more attractive by the rents from reconstruction, the former incumbents and rebels have no incentive to engage in real reconstruction and some incentives to sabotage the process. This is why Jacques Klein, the UN secretary-general’s special representative in Liberia, referred to the Liberian transition government as “a coalition of the unwilling, that is a government that is quite often not interested in what we are.”<sup>82</sup> In the next section, we argue that this disconnect stems in part from the institutional landscape of failed states. While pre-failure institutions

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79. ICG, “Sudan’s Comprehensive Peace Agreement,” p. 2.

80. United Nations Security Council, “Fourteenth Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo,” S/2003/1098 (New York: United Nations, November 17, 2003), p. 14.

81. See Stephanie Wolters, “Is Ituri on the Road to Stability? An Update on the Current Security Situation in the District,” Situation Report (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, May 12, 2005).

82. “Liberia: A Shattered Nation on the Long Road to Recovery,” IRIN News, August 17, 2004.

endure, new ones are created as part of the reconstruction efforts. The ensuing institutional overlap provides local elites with significant opportunities to preserve their power.

#### INSTITUTIONAL VACUUM VERSUS RESILIENCE

A second dimension of the disconnect between African conditions and Western perceptions regarding state failure arises from the high degree of institutional resilience found in many failed states. Foreign observers often equate state failure with the absence of public institutions. Robert Rotberg, for example, defines "state collapse," an extreme version of failure, as a "vacuum of authority" where the state is reduced to "a mere geographical expression, a black hole into which a failed polity has fallen."<sup>83</sup> But even dysfunctional public institutions, whether controlled by the government or by rebels, can endure in times of failure, reflecting their continued utility to these political actors. Furthermore, in failed states, nonstate institutions may be created or adapted to provide public goods. State reconstruction efforts may run up against institutional resilience in two ways. First, foreign actors create transition institutions that may compete with the remnants of public authority and never achieve legitimacy. Second, the centralizing desire to reconstruct the formal sovereign state may neglect or even undermine the local institutional initiatives that facilitated the survival and organization of social life during the years of conflict and that could be useful in the future.

Postconflict agreements commonly create new institutions that are expected to supersede or replace existing ones for the transition period. For example, during the DRC transition, power was to be shared between the president and four vice presidents representing the two main rebel groups, the unarmed opposition, and civil society.<sup>84</sup> A transition parliament and several institutions in charge of monitoring the transition were also established. Sudan's peace agreement in 2005 established the position of first vice president, which was filled by a member of the former rebel southern Sudanese People's Liberation Movement. The agreement also created multiple new state institutions shared between the government and former rebels, including a National Constitutional Review Commission to write an interim constitution.

Yet, in a number of cases across Africa, public institutions have managed to survive government collapse. The question then becomes: Who maintains sov-

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83. Rotberg, "Failed States, Collapsed States, Weak States," p. 9.

84. For a detailed account of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, see Paule Bouvier with Francesca Bomboko, *Le Dialogue Intercongolais: Anatomie d'une négociation à la lisière du chaos* [The Inter-Congolese dialogue: Anatomy of a negotiation bordering on chaos] (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004).

ereignty during the transition period? Transition agreements are likely to identify multiple parties as sharing power in the newly designed institutions. Incumbents, on the other hand, tend to view sovereignty as residing within the institutions over which they presided during the conflict. Curtailed as the sovereignty of these incumbents may be by the transition agreements, they do not see their authority as emanating from these accords. President Kabila, for example, maintained and further developed a parallel structure of authority while formally sharing power in the transition institutions. He retained control over all of the state's intelligence services and set up the Special Presidential Security Group, estimated to contain 15,000 troops that remained separate from the national army and was answerable only to him. In Ivory Coast, after the January 2006 decision of an international working group that the mandate of the pro-president national parliament should end, President Laurent Gbagbo protested that his country was "not a failed state where institutions have collapsed. Every institution functions. Unfortunately, the decisions we take do not manage to reach the entire territory. Hence we have called on [the West], not in order to replace our institutions, but to disarm the rebels who prevent my decisions from reaching the whole country."<sup>85</sup> Throughout the country's failed transition, Gbagbo systematically promoted ambiguities in the understanding of his powers as opposed to those of the Reconciliation Government and did not hesitate to use his Young Patriots militia to undermine the actions of UN-sponsored institutions.

There is also widespread evidence that rebel movements embrace pre-transition state institutions. The rebels of the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD-Goma) in eastern Congo preserved most of the institutions of the Congolese state from 1998 to 2003. "Far from building an administrative structure from scratch," Denis Tull writes, "the RCD simply took charge of the feeble administrative apparatus it found in place."<sup>86</sup> Few rebel groups anywhere in Africa have developed significant public institutions over the areas they control. In northern Ivory Coast, the Forces Nouvelles chose to maintain the state administration, despite the fleeing of many civil servants to the government-controlled southern region. In southern Sudan, there was only the flimsiest of institution building during the two decades of separatist conflict (1983–2003).<sup>87</sup>

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85. "Côte d'Ivoire: Interview de S.E. Laurent Gbagbo après la présentation des Voeux de Nouvel an 2006" [Ivory Coast: Interview of His Excellency Laurent Gbagbo after the new year greetings ceremony], <http://ambaci-dakar.org/arc0-2006.html>.

86. Denis M. Tull, *The Reconfiguration of Political Order in Africa: A Case Study of North Kivu (DR Congo)* (Hamburg: Institute of African Affairs, 2005), pp. 132–133.

87. Kenn Crossley, "Why Not to State-Build New Sudan," in Paul Kingston and Ian S. Spears, eds.,

Moreover, nonstate institutions, many informal but more effective than their state counterparts, have developed or strengthened in the margins of many failed states over the last couple of decades, as a result of state weakness and the lack of state services. During the war in eastern Congo between 1998 and 2003, for example, church organizations played an essential role in the continuation of public services, such as health care and education. This was particularly true of the Catholic Church. In Somalia, clan elders were largely responsible for the creation of new institutions in the margins of statehood, which led to the separation of Somaliland in 1991.<sup>88</sup> In general, across Africa, multiple service-providing associations have developed in the wake of failing states in a form of "new communal politics."<sup>89</sup>

#### CONSEQUENCES FOR STATE RECONSTRUCTION

The resilience of failed state institutions in Africa and the continued utility of their nonstate counterparts conflict with the international reconstruction agenda for at least two reasons. First, new institutions created by transition agreements may overlap with existing ones, leading to confusion and questions about the legitimacy of the new system. The conflict between the Marcoussis-derived reconciliation government of Prime Minister Charles Konan Banny and the pretransition parliament composed of supporters of President Gbagbo in Ivory Coast in 2006 illustrates the potential for overlapping institutions to clash, as attempts by the Banny government to dismiss the parliament resulted in attacks against UN forces and international humanitarian personnel.<sup>90</sup>

The creation of new integrated national armies can also pose problems. In the DRC, several army battalions in the east, formerly under the control of the RCD-Goma, refused to join the new national army and continued to threaten its effectiveness beyond the transition period, by maintaining their own control over parts of the territory.<sup>91</sup> In addition, the demobilization of large numbers of fighters let loose formerly controlled armed youth. In Sierra Leone, for example, many such former combatants have joined quasi gangs engaged in

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*States within States: Incipient Political Entities in the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), pp. 135–151; and Øystein H. Rolandsen, *Guerilla Government: Political Changes in the Southern Sudan in the 1990s* (Uppsala, Sweden: Nordic Africa Institute, 2005).

88. Matt Bryden, "State-within-a-Failed-State: Somaliland and the Challenge of International Recognition," in Kingston and Spears, *States within States*, p. 167.

89. Catherine Boone, "'Empirical Statehood' and Reconfigurations of Political Order," in Villalón and Huxtable, *The African State at a Critical Juncture*, p. 137.

90. For a detailed recapitulation of these events, see "Côte d'Ivoire: Anti-UN Riots," *Africa Research Bulletin: Political, Social, and Cultural Series*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (February 2006), pp. 16487–16489.

91. See International Crisis Group, "Congo's Elections: Making or Breaking the Peace," *Africa Report*, No. 108 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, April 2006).

diamond mining, with the result that “the conditions for ongoing conflict are still very much present” in a country widely considered a success of reconstruction.<sup>92</sup>

Second, the tendency of reconstruction programs to dismiss the contributions of indigenous institutions—such as self-help associations, churches, NGOs, and other grassroots organizations—alienates citizens from the rebuilding of their states and undermines democratic accountability. In the DRC, former belligerents and professional politicians took over nearly all the transition functions, leaving representatives of local institutions sidelined. Human rights groups and women’s associations, in particular, many of which represented the only safeguard against predation during the conflict, were poorly integrated and continued to suffer government repression during and after the transition.<sup>93</sup> Of course, not all indigenous institutions are legitimate, and some do seek to maximize their interest. Moreover, some of them have historically been associates of the state and instruments of its domination.<sup>94</sup> Yet, bona fide popular representation and the foundations of political accountability are more likely to develop from local initiatives than from political elites at the center.

### *Flaw #3: Inconsistencies between Ends and Means*

A third flaw in Western state reconstruction efforts is the inconsistency between the donors’ lofty goals and the means available to reach them. To begin, state building demands financial and military resources that donors cannot realistically harness. Moreover, it requires a degree of neutrality and a stock of moral capital that donors may lack or that may conflict with their other policy objectives.

#### FISCAL AND MILITARY CREDIBILITY

International reconstruction does not come cheap. In the DRC, the MONUC peacekeeping operation alone cost more than \$1 billion a year. In addition, the

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92. Bruce Baker and Roy May, “Reconstructing Sierra Leone,” *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (March 2004), p. 45.

93. See Human Rights Watch, “Democratic Republic of Congo: Elections in Sight: Don’t ‘Rock the Boat’?” Backgrounders (New York: Human Rights Watch, December 15, 2005).

94. Such associates include the Paramount Chiefs of Sierra Leone. See, for example, Paul Jackson, “Chiefs, Money, and Politicians: Rebuilding Local Government in Post-War Sierra Leone,” *Public Administration and Development*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (February 2005), pp. 49–58; and Richard Fanthorpe, “On the Limits of Liberal Peace: Chiefs and Democratic Decentralization in Post-war Sierra Leone,” *African Affairs*, Vol. 105, No. 418 (January 2006), pp. 27–49.



funding of the 2006 elections exceeded \$400 million.<sup>95</sup> These amounts do not include overall official development assistance (including reconstruction aid), which totaled \$8 billion between 2001 and 2006.

In 2007, the UN oversaw five reconstruction operations in Africa, representing a considerable financial toll on the organization and its main contributors. As UN operations end in countries such as Sierra Leone, other failing states such as the Central African Republic, Chad, Guinea, or Zimbabwe move up the list as candidates for the next UN reconstruction efforts. The financial demands of African state reconstruction are thus likely to continue. Moreover, some scholars have increasingly called for broader, deeper, and longer-lasting types of state reconstruction efforts. This "neotrusteeship" agenda involves an international presence over periods of up to several decades, including the creation of international civilian administrations.<sup>96</sup>

Although there are merits to the neotrusteeship approach, the evidence suggests that international actors lack the capacity and will to maintain the necessary commitment to rebuilding African states, highlighting two trends. First, reconstruction aid to Africa is typically short lived. Pledges tend to peak in the year of, or the year following, the formal transition or cease-fire agreement between belligerents, and then rapidly decline. Second, with the exception of the smallest states, such as Liberia and Sierra Leone, international reconstruction efforts are often superficial and limited in their capacity to contribute to the restoration of lasting peace and security.

Figure 1 illustrates the first trend. Aid pledges to the DRC and Sierra Leone showed rapid rises with the beginning of their formal transition away from state failure, only to collapse as rapidly the following year. In Ivory Coast, where the conflict began in 2002, aid pledges that year represent European Union, French, IMF, and World Bank commitments. These followed an apparently successful reconciliation forum between the country's main politicians, and the organization of pluralistic local elections, which were deemed a significant achievement over the flawed presidential election of Gbagbo in 2000. Aid to Burundi, which peaked with the presidential elections in 2005, fell in 2006 after a February donor conference raised only \$85 million of an expected \$168 million.<sup>97</sup>

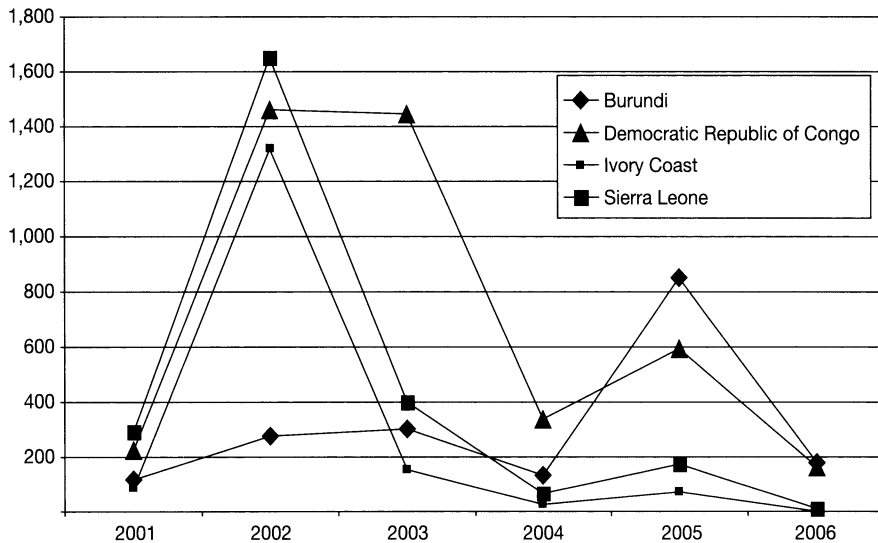
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95. United Nations, "Democratic Republic of the Congo: Elections Fact Sheet," n.d., <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/monuc/elecFS.pdf>.

96. On the neotrusteeship argument, see Fearon and Laitin, "Neotrusteeship and the Problem of Weak States"; Krasner, "Sharing Sovereignty"; and Fukuyama, *State-Building*. Specifically for Africa, see Ellis, "How to Rebuild Africa."

97. *Africa Research Bulletin: Economic, Financial, and Technical Series*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (February/March 2006), p. 16870.

Figure 1. Reconstruction Aid Pledges in Four African Countries (\$ millions)



SOURCE: Compiled from *Africa Research Bulletin: Economic, Financial, and Technical Series*, 2001–06. Figure includes all aid commitments, excluding debt reduction agreements in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone. Actual disbursements can fall short of these pledges.

Foreign aid commitments to African state reconstruction also appear significantly less substantial than in other regions. According to DRC government data, at \$39 per year, the per capita cost of reconstruction in Congo compares unfavorably with non-African cases such as Afghanistan (\$129), Bosnia and Herzegovina (\$211), El Salvador (\$79), Iraq (\$508), Kosovo (\$240), and East Timor (\$278).<sup>98</sup> Although greater spending does not necessarily lead to greater success, this comparison illustrates the gap between actual reconstruction funding in Africa and the donors' self-appointed task. The fleeting nature of these commitments also casts doubt that they will be financially sustained over several years, let alone decades.

Table 1 illustrates the second trend. By and large, geographically small countries with small populations have relatively dense operations with more than 100 peacekeepers per 100,000 people.<sup>99</sup> In contrast, larger countries have too

98. Cited in Economist Intelligence Unit, *Democratic Republic of Congo: Country Report* (London: Economist Intelligence Unit, December 2004), p. 23.

99. In comparison, however, pre-surge U.S. and allied troops in Iraq numbered 672 per 100,000 people and 41 per 100 square kilometers, and were still deemed insufficient for the task of rebuilding by several analysts and dissident generals.

Table 1. UN Peacekeeping Operations in Five African Failed States

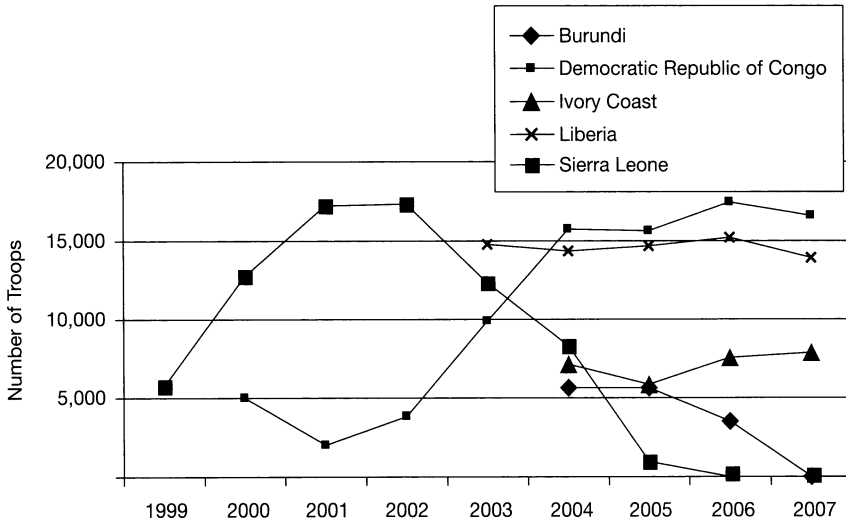
Country	Highest Number of Peacekeepers	Date	Peacekeepers per 100,000 Persons	Peacekeepers per 100 Square Kilometers
Burundi	7,145	May 2004	112	28
Democratic Republic of Congo	19,566	January 2006	33	1
Ivory Coast	9,098	June 2004	53	3
Liberia	17,700	January 2006	508	18
Sierra Leone	18,339	March 2001	304	25

SOURCE: <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/>.

few peacekeeping forces. While MONUC personnel numbered close to 20,000, their size was dwarfed by the combined number of former government and rebel troops (about 200,000), and by the size of the many militias they were called to engage in eastern Congo. To reach the same density per population as Liberia, thus far considered a relative success story, the DRC would need 301,198 UN peacekeepers, representing a fifteenfold increase of its current number. This would require an annual increase in peacekeeping operations spending in excess of \$14 billion, more than half the average annual flow of aid to all of sub-Saharan Africa. Similar increases would also be needed for Ivory Coast and for Sudan. The situation in Sudan is similar with a peacekeeping density for the country as a whole of 39 per 100,000 people and 0.64 per 100 square kilometers. We cannot conceive of this scattered presence as more than symbolic.

In addition, multilateral troops depart soon after the formal end of transitions. Figure 2 shows this trend for Burundi and Sierra Leone. In August 2007, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called for a drawdown of UN troops in Liberia to 9,750 by 2010. In the DRC, MONUC is expected to pull out after the local elections scheduled for 2008. To some extent, this is logical. If the country is deemed rebuilt, there should be no further reason to provide troops. Yet, the frequent continuation of low-intensity conflict or the resilience of many of the factors originally associated with the conflict challenges the consistency of these withdrawals with the reconstruction objectives. In Burundi, the rebels of the Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People–National Liberation Forces were still engaged in significant acts of warfare as the UN withdrew in 2005 and 2006, including regular bombings of the capital, Bujumbura. In Liberia the UN noted “slow progress in strengthening the security sector” at the same

Figure 2. Trends in Number of UN Peacekeepers in Five African Countries



SOURCE: <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/>.

NOTE: Data for 2007 as of August 30.

time as it called for troop withdrawal.<sup>100</sup> As for Sierra Leone, Bruce Baker and Roy May noted that the “aid programme currently being implemented is not effectively addressing the underlying factors predisposing Sierra Leone to internal conflict.” They concluded that it is a “mistake to assume that Sierra Leone is a post-conflict society.”<sup>101</sup> In the DRC, violence actually increased after the 2006 elections in North Kivu Province where 4,500 UN troops were stationed. As Figure 2 indicates, however, elections are usually equated with successful reconstruction and the end of the international mandate. That such an equation is erroneously and dangerously narrow has been well documented elsewhere.<sup>102</sup> In the next section, we show that the leverage of external actors can be further undermined by their lack of political credibility.

#### DONOR LEGITIMACY

International sponsors of transitions present themselves as homogeneous benevolent actors, intent on maximizing the welfare and security of African societies at large and presumably welcomed by the latter. Such a view calls for

100. “Liberia: Drawdown for Peacekeeping Mission On Track, Says Ban Ki-moon,” UN News Service, August 16, 2007.

101. Baker and May, “Reconstructing Sierra Leone,” pp. 53–55.

102. See, among an increasing number of other voices, Paris, *At War's End*.

a reality check, as these societies are inevitably divided on the reconstruction agenda and in their support for local political forces. Although backing one faction is not necessarily a bad thing, it can threaten the legitimacy of the reconstruction exercise among other factions. Moreover, it may not always be in every Western power's interest to promote the construction of stronger states in Africa. Africans are not oblivious to these mixed motives and the legitimacy of several foreign interventions has suffered as a consequence of their ambiguity.

In the DRC, the International Committee for the Accompaniment of the Transition (known by its French acronym CIAT) included the main foreign supporters of the transition, and regularly proclaimed its neutrality and its attachment to the democratization process. Yet, several important Congolese social constituencies, such as students and residents of the opposition-friendly Kasai Provinces and the capital, Kinshasa, believed not without cause that CIAT's main power-brokers—Angola, the EU, France, and the United States—were actually intent on promoting a Kabila victory. As a result, there was much skepticism about the actions of CIAT, and acts of hostility against foreigners and MONUC were common. Before the landmark elections of July 30, 2006, the head of the EU observation mission to Congo felt obliged to note publicly that the elections were “not a masquerade preordained to legitimate one of the candidates' rights.”<sup>103</sup> In Ivory Coast, the main divide among the foreign actors was between France and South Africa, with the latter perceived as on the side of President Gbagbo and inimical to what it saw as France's neocolonial presence. While President Gbagbo benefited from South Africa's mediation, he and his supporters in the south were deeply suspicious of the French and the UN, which they deemed partial to the rebels. In January 2006, after the International Working Group called for an end to the mandate of the pro-Gbagbo parliament, pro-government youth militias destroyed UN offices and vehicles and forced some peacekeepers to withdraw under army escort.<sup>104</sup> Gbagbo then called the French and UN troops an “occupation force.”<sup>105</sup> Similarly, the ruling National Islamic Front in Sudan angrily resisted the deployment of UN forces in the Darfur region until 2007 and threatened jihad if Western peacekeepers were deployed.<sup>106</sup>

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103. UN Mission in DR Congo, “EU Said DRC Election Not ‘Masquerade,’” Xinhua news service, July 19, 2006, <http://www.monuc.org/news.aspx?newsID?11810>.

104. See *Africa Research Bulletin: Political, Social, and Cultural Series*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (January 2006), pp. 16487–16489.

105. “Ivory Coast Crowds Storms UN Base, Gbagbo Party Quits Government,” Agence France-Press, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/ACIO-6L5SGR?OpenDocument>.

106. *Africa Research Bulletin: Political, Social, and Cultural Series*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (March 2006), pp. 16589.

There are, of course, instances where local African populations perceive foreign actors as legitimate promoters of reconstruction, the case of the United Kingdom in Sierra Leone being one example. The United States also benefited from a stock of goodwill in Liberia in 2003. Yet, ambiguous relations between certain groups in society and peacekeepers are more common in African states and can prevent mission effectiveness. Such legitimacy deficits also hint at the difficulties that longer-lasting neotrusteeships are likely to encounter.

### *Conclusions and Policy Recommendations*

Three flawed assumptions underpin international efforts to rebuild failed states in Africa. The first is that Western state institutions can be successfully transferred to the continent. The second is that the diagnosis of failure is shared among donors and Africans. And the third is that international actors have the capacity to rebuild African states. These flaws point to the limits of what donors can realistically achieve in the failed states of Africa.

State building generally suffers from an outsider bias. The very nature of international reconstruction efforts suggests that the knowledge, capacity, strategies, and resources of external actors are crucial ingredients for success. Donors presume that local institutions have been wiped out by conflict and disorder and that war-torn societies are unable to rebuild these institutions on their own. The World Bank states that “fragile states lack the capacity for autonomous recovery.”<sup>107</sup> As a result, externally led reconstruction efforts, which tend to follow the “best practices” that have been successful elsewhere, are “not necessarily perceived by local actors as the answers to their problems.”<sup>108</sup> Best practices as panacea include the early introduction of democratic elements, notably elections. In the absence of functioning state institutions or foreign-sponsored security safeguards, early elections have sometimes spurred even more violence or have at best ratified wartime institutions and leaders (e.g., Angola in 1992, Rwanda in 1994, and Liberia in 1997).<sup>109</sup>

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107. The citation is taken from the overview section of the World Bank’s website “Fragile States: The LICUS Initiative.” See [www.worldbank.org/licus](http://www.worldbank.org/licus).

108. Marina Ottaway, “Rebuilding State Institutions in Collapsed States,” *Development and Change*, Vol. 33, No. 5 (November 2002), pp. 1004–1005; and Barnett R. Rubin, “Constructing Sovereignty for Security,” *Survival*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (Winter 2005/06), p. 104. See also Carrie Manning, “Local Level Challenges to Post-Conflict Peacebuilding,” *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Autumn 2003), pp. 25–43.

109. For the general argument about premature democratization, see Paris, *At War’s End*. On elections as one element, see Terrence Lyons, “Transforming the Institutions of War: Postconflict Elections and the Reconstruction of Failed States,” in Rotberg, *When States Fail*, pp. 269–301.

Yet, postconflict countries such as Uganda and Somaliland have demonstrated the possibility of successful resurgence of relatively strong indigenous state institutions by African standards. Although they are by no means unmitigated successes, they have fared better than their externally sponsored counterparts. At the very least, they have involved elements of social contracting that are absent in the latter and that provide their public institutions with more substantive—albeit not necessarily more democratic—foundations. These countries rarely figure in current state-building debates, however, probably because they were not subject to the extensive international peacekeeping and state-building efforts seen today.<sup>110</sup> But this is precisely the point. The state reconstruction outsider bias tends to neglect local agency and indigenous capacities for institution building. In contrast, we call for recognizing the potential for indigenous recovery in Africa (and elsewhere) and question whether extensive and intrusive external approaches might be as much part of the problem as of the solution.

Western policymakers assume that the chances of successful state building increase with the intensity of outsiders' inputs such as per capita assistance or the strength and mandate of UN peacekeeping missions.<sup>111</sup> Taking the point to its logical conclusion, the most intrusive forms of intervention, such as transitional administrations and neotrusteeships, would offer the best approach to resurrect state institutions in the wake of war.<sup>112</sup> Our analysis suggests otherwise. Similarly, in a comparative survey of the effects of external intrusiveness on state building that does not include cases of indigenous state building, Christoph Zuercher notes only slightly better but nonrobust results for intrusive missions. He argues that both intrusive and nonintrusive missions are "not very successful at facilitating absolute progress in aspects of state-hood other than security."<sup>113</sup>

The case for intrusive intervention is further thrown in doubt when considering instances of indigenous state reconstruction in Africa. Uganda, for example, experienced a devastating conflict in the 1980s. The international

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110. See Doyle and Sambanis, *Making War and Building Peace*; and Paris, *At War's End*.

111. See, for example, James Dobbins, John G. McGinn, and Keith Crane, eds., *America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2003). The assumption that more state building is better state building underpins actual policy. This is evident from patterns of resource allocation to particular states, at least as concerns the top level in the hierarchy of importance. Failed states that are deemed to be important (e.g., Afghanistan, Bosnia, Iraq, and Kosovo) receive many more outside inputs than do peripheral states.

112. Krasner, "Sharing Sovereignty"; and Ellis, "How to Rebuild Africa."

113. Christoph Zuercher, "Is More Better? Evaluating External-Led State Building after 1989," Working Paper, No. 54 (Stanford, Calif.: Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law, Stanford University, 2006), pp. 20, 23.

community, however, was not the driving force behind its postconflict reconstruction efforts.<sup>114</sup> Instead, the government of President Yoweri Museveni was firmly in charge. The government bitterly and successfully opposed outside calls for the introduction of multiparty politics and installed instead its own peculiar brand of one-party system.<sup>115</sup> Yet, the government's seeming adoption of market economics earned it funds from donors. Although providing substantial support, outsiders refrained, and indeed were restrained by Uganda's postconflict government, from taking the lead in the establishment of political order—a marked contrast with current state-building efforts.<sup>116</sup> Outsiders were relegated to donor roles under terms formulated by the national government or else the government has pretended to carry out reforms that it only partially implemented, instead building fairly effective patronage networks that have enhanced state power.<sup>117</sup>

Jeremy Weinstein argues that effective national leadership and outsiders' subsidiarity tend to emerge in situations where well-organized insurgencies claim victory in wars whose outcomes are not negotiated by outsiders.<sup>118</sup> If one subscribes, as we do, to Weinstein's view, the role of the international community in postconflict reconstruction might be seen as fundamentally problematic. The prevailing high level of outsiders' intrusiveness may produce a crowding-out effect, stifling the rise of indigenous state builders rather than filling a hypothetical institutional vacuum.

The case of Somaliland, where the international community was not involved at all in rebuilding the state, is even more revealing, for it suggests that outside support may not even be necessary for successful state building. The dynamics in Somaliland differ significantly from those in Uganda because the Ugandan postconflict government emerged from a successful insurgency. In Somaliland, political and business leaders effectively seceded from Somalia

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114. See, for example, the chapters on Ethiopia and Uganda in Shantayanan Devarajan, David R. Dollar, and Torgny Holmgren, eds., *Aid and Reform in Africa: Lessons from Ten Case Studies* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2001), pp. 101–226. See also the contributions on Uganda and Ethiopia in Zartman, *Collapsed States*, pp. 33–48, 125–139.

115. Clapham, "Governmentality and Economic Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa," pp. 816–817.

116. This point is also advanced by Jeremy M. Weinstein, "Autonomous Recovery and International Intervention in Comparative Perspective," Working Paper, No. 57 (Washington, D.C.: Center for Global Development, April 2005).

117. Gilbert M. Khadiagala, "State Collapse and Reconstruction in Uganda," in Zartman, *Collapsed States*, p. 47; and Torgny Holmgren, Louis Kasekende, Michael Atingi-Ego, and Daniel Ddamulira, "Uganda," in Devarajan, Dollar, and Holmgren, *Aid and Reform in Africa*, pp. 142–143.

118. Weinstein, "Autonomous Recovery and International Intervention in Comparative Perspective," pp. 10–11.



after central authority had collapsed in 1991 and quickly developed public structures of basic stability and order, enabling the resumption of commercial activities. They have also organized a constitutional succession and several credible local and national elections.<sup>119</sup> Perhaps the most successful recent instance of state building in Africa, Somaliland has benefited from next to no external support and remains diplomatically unrecognized.<sup>120</sup> In contrast, the state has bargained with powerful local interests such as businesspeople and clan elders. As William Reno explains, local authorities, relying on businesses for revenue, “are forced to take into account business interests in promoting economically efficient policies and in limiting commercial risk within Somaliland. Thus unlike southern political actors, Somaliland’s authorities have an immediate interest in imposing uniform order and controlling coercion.”<sup>121</sup>

Externally led state-building efforts are not always doomed to failure. As the Sierra Leone and Liberia examples indicate, outside reconstruction efforts can achieve some success, although the mid- and long-term trajectories of these two countries remain in question. Both countries are also fairly small, a fact that has no doubt allowed donors to engage in reconstruction with more immediate results than in a place such as the DRC.

The international community is not well equipped for creating effective state institutions, regardless of the scale and intensity of its involvement. Expansive and highly intrusive state-building operations are not necessarily more successful than less intrusive ones. In both Uganda and Somaliland, relatively strong state institutions emerged despite—or because of—the absence of state-building operations of the kind currently deployed to the DRC and Ivory Coast. The hard truth is that outsiders are not necessarily more proficient than locals at building political institutions, no matter how many experts and resources they may send into a failed state. External reconstruction assistance, including development aid, is not always ill spent, but there are limits to what it can achieve. In the short term, it can finance steps that are necessary for stabilization such as humanitarian and development projects and disarmament

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119. Ken Menkhaus, *Somalia: State Collapse and the Threat of Terrorism*, Adelphi Paper, No. 364 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 17, 22.

120. A former part of Somalia, Somaliland declared its independence in 1991. On the relative success of state building in Somaliland, see William Reno, “Somalia: State Failure and Self-Determination in the Shadow of the Global Economy,” in Valpy Fitzgerald, Frances Stewart, and Rajesh Venugopal, eds., *Globalization, Self-Determination and Global Conflict* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), pp. 147–178; and Martin Doornbos, “Somalia: Alternative Scenarios for Political Reconstruction,” *African Affairs*, Vol. 101, No. 402 (January 2002), pp. 93–107.

121. Reno, “Somalia,” p. 170.

processes. Financial support is also instrumental for buy-off tactics, that is, economic incentives for elites to join peace and reconstruction processes. Due in part to the disbursement of such peace dividends, countries such as the DRC, Liberia, and Sierra Leone have come a long way ever since they succumbed to conflict and failure. Short-term stabilization through peacekeeping and aid is insufficient, however, for the long-term construction of self-sustaining state institutions. In the mid-term, development assistance can be effective only if it serves as an instrument that supports priority measures determined by African actors. Too often, reconstruction programs reflect the preferences of donors. Moreover, as we have shown, high levels of development aid are not sustained in Africa's failed states. And as the past record suggests, nor is development aid particularly effective in building or reshaping institutions, even in countries at peace.

Thus, the success and failure of state resurgence depends ultimately on local actors. The experiences of Uganda and Somaliland show that some measure of institution building can occur if local interest groups are leading the process. It may take time, and outcomes may fall short of liberal democracy. Yet, international actors should resist the temptation always to step in and offer comprehensive fixes in failed states, for they may instead stifle promising local initiatives. The top-down approaches embraced by donors do not work. In failed states, local institutions emerge as responses to crises. In their efforts to build state institutions, donors too often neglect these institutions or regard them as obstacles, especially nonstate ones. For example, local nonstate mechanisms in the realm of justice or conflict resolution are often neglected or marginalized by donors who want to build state-led justice systems. Such a state-centric approach is short-sighted for two reasons. First, even in ideal conditions, constructing an effective state judiciary will take many years or decades. Second, state-centric approaches marginalize local institutions and alienate local citizens from the state-building process.

At once more modest and more important are the tasks of identifying and supporting domestic efforts of reconstruction, whether or not these efforts come from political elites. The essence of state building in Africa is thus not to construct state structures per se, but to foster state formation, that is, interaction and bargaining processes between government and society. Doing so would be a key element in the promotion of local ownership and the construction of a viable political order in postconflict countries. Particularly important among these domestic processes is the mobilization of resources, especially taxes. This is not just a financial issue, but a political one. The state needs resources to provide public services, which are a prerequisite for its domestic le-

gitimacy. Especially in the early stages of state building, local businesses can play a key role in fostering the link between taxation and the provision of public goods. Because they have a vested interest in the restoration of political order, and because the state depends on their tax payments, the government may be responsive to business demands. What donors should do is support local businesses and their associations in order to strengthen their leverage vis-à-vis the government. Donor assistance should also target specific groups such as local media, conflict resolution bodies, and human rights watchdogs that can contribute to promoting state accountability. This involves a balancing act of at once supporting local actors and leaving them enough political space to develop their own institutional solutions for constraining state rulers.

The emergence of such productive bargaining processes is unlikely if government revenues come overwhelmingly from external donors.<sup>122</sup> Massive donor interventions, whether political or financial, promote external rather than internal state accountability. More often, yet, they create incentives for the governments of failed states to implement superficial policies according to external preferences in return for more assistance, resulting in partial reforms that are in the interests neither of local society nor the international community.

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122. Numerous studies have shown the close link between high aid flows and poor levels of governance and accountability. See Todd Moss, Gunilla Pettersson, and Nicolas van de Walle, "An Aid-Institutions Paradox? A Review Essay on Aid Dependency and State Building in Sub-Saharan Africa," Working Paper, No. 74 (Washington, D.C.: Center for Global Development, January 2006), pp. 14–18, and the references therein.