CIVIL WAR AS A CHRONIC CONDITION

by

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In this paper we follow the definition of war adopted by the "Arbeitsgemeinschaft Kriegsursachenforschung", AKUF (Association for Research into the Causes of War) in Hamburg, according to which war is an armed mass conflict showing the following three characteristics: a) at least one of the groups involved in the armed encounters consists of government forces; b) the parties to the conflict show a minimum of organisation in their activities, even if this means no more than strategically planned raids; c) the armed encounters show a certain measure of continuity and are not simply occasional confrontations – that is, both sides operate following a recognisable strategy (cf. Gantzel/Schwinghammer 1995.31ff.). – We are grateful to Dietrich Genschel and Philip Manow for critical commentaries on the opening section.

War and Civil War

The customary image of war centres on struggles between states: war is where uniformed, highly organised and hierarchically controlled combatants face each other across a front. The war aims are territorially defined, and the difference between war and peace is obvious. The transition from one of these conditions to the other can in some cases even be tied down to the precise minute. The Gulf

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War, for example, ended on 28th February 1991 at 5:00 a.m. After that there was peace.

Nowadays, this "ideal image" has little to do with the actual conduct of war. The majority of hostilities since 1945 have been intra-state civil wars, lacking the clearly defined front lines of inter-state wars (see Gantzel/Schwinghammer 1995, Holsti 1992, Singer 1991; and for the years after the end of the Cold War Wallensteen/Sollenberg 1995 and Schlichte 1996b). In these wars, the distinction between combatants and non-combatants is diffuse. War aims are unclear and become more and more unclear, often even for those directly involved, the longer the war goes on. The warring factions fall apart to be replaced by new coalitions of a composition which was in many cases unthinkable until shortly before they were formed. The borderline between war and peace becomes blurred. Now and again the guns may be silent, but usually this only signals a pause for breath rather than the end of the war. There have been countless efforts to bring about the end of a war of this nature by negotiation, but written agreements fixed often turn out to be mere gestures, and new hostilities frequently break out only a few days after the treaty is signed: civil wars are long and stubborn. (Where 61 per cent of *inter*-state wars between 1945 and 1992 could be ended by agreement through negotiation and mediation, this was the case for only 32 per cent of *intra*-state conflicts – see AKUF database, University of Hamburg; also Licklider 1995).

The 129 purely intra-state wars between 1945 and 1992 lasted on average for 96 months, while the average duration of purely inter-state wars over the same period was 25 months (AKUF).

These data are approximations, as it is not always possible to fix exact dates for the end of a war, especially many intra-state wars: (cf. Gantzel/Schwinghammer 1995.40).

Investigations of the different forms taken by inter-state wars and civil wars quickly reveal that current macrosociological theories of the causes of war provide no answer. The reason for this is that these theories are concerned with explaining the "initial detonation" of wars, but offer no model for the dynamics of their development (for surveys of the research cf. Levy 1989, Mendler/ Schwengler-Rohmeis 1989; discussions of more recent literature can be found in Vasquez 1993; Bremer 1993; Zürn/Brozus 1996).

They examine how secular shifts in certain macrostructures can give rise to political tensions which then find their release in war. However, they do not analyse what happens once the hostilities have actually begun. They differ in the macrostructures to which they attribute the greatest significance among the causes of war – realistic approaches centre on the constellation of power within the international system (e.g. Waltz 1988) and Marxist-inspired studies start from the dynamics of the capitalist development of epochs (e.g. Siegelberg 1994), whilst

culturalistic analyses emphasise the significance of ideological incompatibilities (e.g. Huntington 1993) – but common to all of them is that they understand wars solely as the consequence and function of their structural starting conditions.

However, if we consider typical examples, such as the civil war in Afghanistan, we cannot help but doubt whether an understanding of the starting conditions is sufficient to explain the dynamics of the development of wars. In Afghanistan, the initial aim was simply to topple a regime in Kabul considered to be "ungodly". But although this goal has long since been achieved, the war continues. It has freed itself from its starting conditions and has become its own cause. In general terms, civil wars, if they only last long enough, seem to develop an internal momentum that results in their self-perpetuation: the war becomes its own engine, and strife becomes chronic.

In the next section we will attempt to understand the mechanisms of the internal momentum of war. We will show how the war process conditions the people and organisations affected by it to contribute, willingly or otherwise, to the continuation or even widening of the war. In a second part, we will discuss ways in which civil wars can be brought to an end by interrupting this momentum. Finally, we address the question of whether the momentum of war is indeed, as suggested by our introduction, confined to intra-state wars or can also take in inter-state wars.

On the Internal Momentum of Civil Wars

Renate Mayntz and Brigitte Nedelmann see the characteristic feature of momentum-based processes in the fact that "once under way or set off, they continue under their own steam and without further external influence, producing and reproducing a pattern which is characteristic to them" (1997.87). Momentum-based processes generate effects which become elements of their own cause; or, expressed from the perspective of the players acting it out, they reproduce from their own substance the motivations driving them. If we are to understand the particular momentum of civil wars, therefore, we need to analyse the way in which the war causes the players affected by it to pursue or at least tolerate its continuation. This circular self-stimulation is a many-layered phenomenon which space prevents us from describing fully here. We will restrict ourselves to interpreting the momentum of civil wars from three different perspectives, based respectively on time, learning theory and the politics of distribution.

War as a Time Problem: the Loss of the Future

War has its own time structure, characterised by the domination of short-term imperatives. Because survival is under permanent threat in time of war,

people and organisations are under constant pressure to concentrate their attention on surviving the next moment. The planning horizon is radically foreshortened. Composure and patience are lost, and people are prepared to do things they possibly would not do under less time pressure.

Reports from the civil wars in Bosnia and Rwanda give this graphic clarity. Here, faced with the universal threat, the populace have engaged in mutual slaughter of those to whom they may in fact have been close: neighbours or fellow-workers and even members of their own family. "The fear of becoming a victim of violence oneself gives rise to preventive strikes" (Elwert 1995.131), which confirm the justification of this fear and provoke further preventive strikes. Civilians hitherto neutral take the side of one or other of the warring factions, so as not to fall between two fronts, and by doing so intensify the war they were actually afraid of. The anticipation of violence from others creates a readiness to use force where it was not present before. Violence becomes a "self-fulfilling prophecy".

The urgency of short-term considerations is reflected not only in a reflex readiness to resort to violence: it is also observable with greater consequences in the economic structures which develop during a civil war. In peace as in war, the players are dependent on a constant flow of resources to secure their survival and ability to act. However, wartime differs from peacetime in that far higher premiums are demanded and paid for the immediate availability of the resources, such as fuel, vehicles and food. It serves no purpose to be superior to the enemy tomorrow if limited resources mean you may be killed today.

In war economies, the emphasis is therefore on the mobilisation of immediately available resources and not, as in peacetime economies, on the securing of future resources. Instead of investing in the future, the population exploits the present. The industrial infrastructure is dismantled. The institutions of the international aid organisations are looted, mineral and natural resources plundered, rare woods sold at well below their world market prices and art treasures offered at laughable figures. Soldiers are not paid: instead, they appropriate the stores and reserves of the population in marauding raids. Production stagnates and finally collapses; but trade and black marketing prosper (cf. the contributions to Jean/Rufin 1996). The war economy is an economy of exploitation, confiscation and trafficking rather than one of investment, co-operation and increase.

That the various techniques of confiscation and exploitation must rest on violence or at least the threat of violence is evident; when all is said and done, their aim is to acquire the largest possible part of the limited resources. The satisfying of incompatible demands cannot be postponed to a later date and resolved by envisaged growth (Luhmann 1996.327) but must be fought out in the here-and-now. The "shadow of the future" (Axelrod 1984), a spur to co-

operation, shrinks to nothing. The management of resources becomes a zero-sum game. We do not need to stress the openly aggressive character of these games (cf. Zürn 1992.153; Scharpf 1997.73).

The tragic side of this extractive war economy lies in the fact that it perpetuates and intensifies the pressure of time which provided its original cause. The more effectively it imposes on the protagonists an exploitation of the available resources, the smaller is the probability that any resources will remain in the future. This self-generated shortage can never lead to exploitation being converted into investment: on the contrary, it increases the pressure for further exploitation. The only imperative is survival. New conflicts are fabricated in order to extend the hostilities to fresh territory and obtain access to resources which have not yet been plundered. Exploitation and plunder give rise to yet more exploitation and plunder. The economy slumps into a self-perpetuating spiral of disinvestment.

If any funds are still invested, it is not in the war zone but abroad, where peace prevails. Investment in war zones seldom pays off – firstly because in these areas any resource which is not immediately consumable becomes a potential booty, which will need to be protected against attack, and secondly because the purchasing power by which to amortise the investment is absent. As long as no one is investing, no one is interested in long-term stability. The future is lost. The players stick to the present, which means: war.

War as a Learning Problem: the Loss of Peace-time Abilities

A complementary perspective on the momentum of war can be gained from regarding war as a learning pathology. The argument runs as follows: Civil war causes abilities necessary for life in a peaceable society to be "unlearned", and the further this loss of civilian abilities develops, the more difficult it becomes to "retrain" from war to peace.

Learning is linked to experience. People and organisations develop their abilities by dealing with problems they frequently encounter. When a civil war breaks out, it is something completely new to most people. The state of war is felt to be an absolute exception to normal conditions, and the population is unprepared or barely prepared to deal with it. Abilities which were useful or indispensable in civilian life are suddenly worthless and irrelevant. Skills such as tact and tolerance, expertise in civilian technology, a knowledge of legal and administrative regulations, cultural capital or technical talent become of only limited use. The "peace sector" in society shrinks, and with it the chances of earning money in civilian trades. Elwert writes: "Commerce, industrial production, peaceful trade and agriculture fall into crisis and, if they depend on the continuous supply of inputs from outside, collapse completely. Wages and

incomes in these sectors drop. . . . For the rank and file in the economic system, wage-earners and small businesses, it becomes expedient, and is sometimes even the only option for survival, to convert into mercenaries and/or marauders. Entrepreneurs are well-advised to invest their liquid capital in building up troops and buying weapons." (1995.133)

For good or ill, people are compelled to readjust from peace to war. Civilian abilities decay; they are displaced by new abilities "fit for war", previously encountered only in minor niches of society. Faced with the choice between flight, death or active participation in the events of war, it becomes a question of survival to learn techniques of violence, the tricks of getting by and unscrupulousness. Not everyone finds this learning process a smooth and easy one. Many are severely "handicapped" in cognitive, normative or often simple physical terms. Others, however, see war as an opportunity for social advancement or for satisfying a diffuse desire for action, and they learn readily and quickly. Children and young people in particular, who have grown up during the war and have no "biographical ballast", often adjust to wartime specialisms with consummate ease. Weapons are available, the chances of making a career and gaining distinction by using them well are obvious, "institutional advancement" can easily be gained from the warring factions, and families able to check the drift to violence have often been torn apart by the war already.

"Retraining for war" is not restricted to the level of the individual, but also takes in social organisations, with lasting effects. Organisations whose profiles of competence are tailored to a peacetime economy – schools, churches, administrations, industrial plants, trade unions, interest groups – either go under in war or adjust to the new conditions by developing their own apparatus of violence. New organisations come into being which are especially designed and useful for war. Wholesalers buy weapons and mercenaries, become war suppliers, living from profiteering or from providing military escorts to international aid organisations or multinational companies. Local dignitaries rise to the status of warlords, promising the population protection and enforcing the payment of tribute in return. Chancers such as the Liberian Charles Taylor set up militias under the protection of which forced labourers mine raw materials which, sold on the world market, in turn finance the weapons and pay-packets of the militias, which are kept together by rewards as well as by force. Peruvian and Colombian guerrillas, wrapped in social-revolutionary emotionalism, specialise in the drugs trade to finance their military and political ambitions.

The longer the war endures, and the more thoroughly individuals and organisations have retrained from peace to war, the more unlikely any correction of the pathological learning process becomes. This is because wartime abilities,

once learned, press to be used: those who have made a business out of providing military escorts cannot help but prefer the demand for the service to continue; those who have started in the drugs trade to finance their war sooner or later realise that they are perpetuating the hostilities to enable them to continue with the drugs business (cf. Labrousse 1996). When, during the civil war in northern Mali, peace negotiations in the capital dragged on too long, the rebels left behind by their leaders in the provinces knew no other way of securing their basic needs than starting out on fresh looting.

The chance of correcting the learning pathology is also poor because retraining back from war to peace is burdened with considerable transitional costs. As shown by the example of Mozambique, which has been attempting the transition to peace since 1993 after thirty years of hostilities, restructuring a civil-war economy is expensive in money and effort (cf. Przeworski 1991, chap. 4). The infrastructure necessary for the successful operation of a peaceful society, with the individual abilities and organisational authority required, must be rebuilt from scratch. For these to be provided and return a peace dividend takes time, and during this period the peace process is not self-supporting. This is illustrated not least by the fact that Mozambique's national budget has to be more than fifty per cent financed by international aid because the tax income from its destroyed economy is too low to finance the reconstruction process by itself. Without external aid, the transitional costs of a conversion to peace would be too high; the war would continue for want of workable alternatives.

War as a Problem of Distribution: the Development of Vested Interests

The third approach to understanding the internal momentum of civil war lies in describing it as a "vested-interest phenomenon": in civil wars persons and organisations gain power and therefore have little interest in ending the conflict.

Civil wars have structural consequences for a society. Some sections of the population find themselves lower on the scale – political elites, the educated and property-owning classes, public servants, white-collar staff, workers in industry, small traders and agricultural workers. Others rise, especially the military officer class, economic opportunists, smugglers, profiteers and weapons dealers, to which we can add marginal social groups who find employment as mercenaries or militiamen – the urban unemployed, refugees and young people without ties.

Those who have been brought down in the world have an obvious interest in ending hostilities. As long as they can hold on to the gains they have made in the war, those who have risen by it may also have no objection to its end. For the winners in war, this is often the case. Zeljko "Arkan" Raznatovic, who organised

the supply of fuel to Serbia during the international embargo and rose as a result from being a criminal to become a business mogul, had no need to fear losing his wealth if the hostilities ended and therefore had no reason to boycott the peace process.

However, those who depend on the war to keep their position do present an obstacle to ending the war. They have *vested interests* in the civil war and also have the means of violence to prosecute these interests. This category includes the military leaders in the war and their militiamen. The first fear losing their power over the political leadership, while the second group will be faced with a return to unemployment, poverty and inaction. Neither of these groups is prepared to end the war and agree to disarmament except on condition that they are recompensed by being given lucrative positions in the army or national administration. After an extended period of attrition, however, most countries wracked by civil war lack enough resources to satisfy the demands of all the combatants. Where the compensation is too small, the warlords and militiamen threatened with losing their livelihood see more reward in holding on to their armouries and extending the war (King 1997.31ff.). When, in Mali, a section of the rebels in the north of the country were integrated into the army as part of the peace agreement, the section which had been left out split off and continued the war on their own account. When the Liberian warlord Charles Taylor was unable to obtain the compensation from the peace negotiations which his fighters had demanded of him, his army split into a number of factions, which then turned on him.

Even where the offer of material compensation buys a temporary renunciation of violence, it creates a burden for the peace process. By mortgaging resources which are needed to reconstruct the economy and reassimilate refugees, it reduces the chance of mastering the transition to peace on an economic level and increases the probability that the country will fall back into war.

Stopping Mechanisms

As we have shown, civil wars develop a tendency to self-perpetuation for three reasons: first, because they radically shrink the "shadow of the future" (Axelrod 1984), with its effect of promoting co-operation, secondly, because they result in peacetime abilities being lost and thirdly, because they systematically empower those players who have least interest in an ending of hostilities. However, this tendency to self-perpetuation does not of course mean that civil wars do indeed have to continue in perpetuity.

"Processes of internal momentum do not continue indefinitely, but can sooner or later be brought to an end if their supporting causal structure is destroyed, which can be done both endogenically or exogenically, intentionally or

otherwise," write Mayntz and Nedelmann (1977.103). Eventually, every civil war comes to an end: the only question is when and how. In the sections below we discuss four "ideal-type stopping mechanisms": exhaustion of resources, victory, successful negotiations and external intervention.

Exhaustion of Resources

During a war, people and organisations live mainly from what they find: civil wars exist on extraction. This means that they can only last as long as there are resources which can be exploited. Once society's stocks are used up, the intensity of the battles falls off and the war dies of consumption from within. There is nothing more to extract; the disinvestment spiral reaches its end.

How quickly this point is reached depends on the level of resources available and the intensiveness of the techniques with which the war is waged. Both of these, the stock of capital and the intensity of costs, are variables, and are partly fixed by the level of development and the special conditions of the country at war. In some countries there are more industries to be dismantled and more mineral resources to be exploited than in others. Sometimes the adversaries have access to former army stocks, and sometimes not. In particular, however, the availability of resources and the capital intensity of the war depend on the behaviour of the protagonists themselves and the response of the international community.

The capital intensity of present-day civil wars is normally low, especially when these occur in so-called developing countries. The weaponry is usually limited to small arms, which are on offer in the "grey zones" of the world market, often at below cost price. The costs of waging war are therefore first and foremost a function of the size of the organisations involved; but even at low cost intensity the eventual collapse of the civil war is inevitable unless fresh resources are brought in from outside. As the parties to the conflict anticipate the exhaustion of resources well ahead, they generally make active efforts to forestall it by opening up external resource channels. For this, two strategies have been developed in the past: coupling the civil war economy to the world market and mobilising friendly external powers.

The latter strategy played a major role in many civil wars during the Cold War. The public avowal of "socialism" or "democracy" was an important symbolic resource which could be used in payment to one or other of the blocs by the parties to the civil war, even though these declarations often held little credibility, as witness the frequent changes of allegiance in the Horn of Africa or Afghanistan, for example. With the end of the Cold War, however, the possibility of ideological affiliation has been more limited. The warring factions could, of course, try to exploit other differences, by for example raising the spectre of "Islamic fundamentalism", or by references to "aggressive expansionism" by the USA, as

employed by Africa's French-speaking regimes in order to continue to benefit from military and financial aid from France. As a rule, however, they have to find new ways of preventing the exhaustion of resources by their war efforts.

The most widespread expedient is an attempt to link the war economy to the "grey zones" of the world market. The proceeds from drug production and drug dealing and from the export of diamonds or tropical woods or the sale of options on future exploitation secure inflows of resources into the war zone and delay exhaustion. Often, financial support from communities of the diaspora and the sale of humanitarian aid play a role in this (on the latter see King 1997.39).

Even after intensive efforts, however, there is no guarantee that the warring parties will succeed in stabilising their reproduction, let alone expanding their economic base. International boycotts aimed at reducing or, in an ideal case, cutting off the inflow of external resources can play their part in bringing about the exhaustion of resources and the end of the war. (The effectiveness of international embargoes is often limited. They tend to bring war profiteers into the act to satisfy the needs of the warring factions via informal deals, which are difficult and expensive to monitor. In addition, the criminality unintentionally fostered by these measures remains a heavy burden in the post-war period.) However, the exhaustion of resources for violence is not the same thing as a return to peace. On the contrary, it leaves the country in poor circumstances from which to begin the process of building a peaceful state: there are quite simply no funds for setting up new institutions. In a run-down country in the aftermath of civil war, hostilities only cease because there is nothing left to plunder – but without peace returning.

Wars halted by the exhaustion of resources are characteristically suspended in limbo: the opposing participants maintain a precarious balance of power and bide their time. They use the temporary ceasefire to patch up their economic base as best they can and restore their fighting ability. The danger that hostilities may flare up again remains great. Nevertheless, an interruption of the war brought on by the exhaustion of resources can present an opportunity to settle the conflict without further violence. The chances of this increase if the parties see a possibility of holding in peace the positions they have won in war. The Liberian warlord Charles Taylor, for example, was able to finance a very successful election campaign with the income from his wartime business. The position he had gained in war was given democratic legitimacy and could henceforth be consolidated by peaceful means.

Negotiations

Wars can be settled across the negotiating table if the parties succeed in agreeing rules of distribution which will – in their own estimation – leave them

better off then they would be if the war continues. It is primarily stalemate situations which make negotiated settlements a promising course of action.

Needless to say, negotiations are always difficult and threatened with breakdown. To the parties to the conflict, even entering into negotiations is a problematical admission, since pursuing the war into the interior appears a more legitimate exercise than an "empty compromise" with the hated enemy (cf. Zartman 1993.26). Also, it is often unclear whether the other side is seriously negotiating or merely trying to exploit the ceasefire to consolidate its position. Finally, it may be that the negotiating parties obtain fresh information – on the real weaknesses of the other side, for example – which may make a resumption of the war appear attractive. At all events, a negotiated end to a civil war is always less stable than the victory of one or the other side (cf. the empirical findings in Licklider 1995).

For a "negotiated peace" to come about in the first place, two problems must be solved: the problem of agreement and the problem of implementation. The problem of agreement lies in the need for the leaders of the parties involved in the war to agree on a peace formula, and the problem of implementation in winning over the leaders' rank and file to accept the concessions agreed in the formula.

The problem of agreement is a particularly explosive one, because the negotiators on each side are often subjected to pressures which leave them little room for compromise (see esp. King 1997.30ff.). In borderline cases, it may be more rewarding to continue a hopeless war rather than make concessions to the enemy: although the war may be damaging on a collective level, a willingness to make concessions will often mean a certain end to the individual career of the negotiator who shows it. His claim to leadership will be under constant threat from competitors in his own camp.

If, despite these difficulties, an agreement is reached, the second problem, the problem of implementation, takes over: the leaders of the parties involved, or of their delegations, have to persuade their followers to accept the agreement, including the concessions it contains. In many wars in the Third World, they fail in this because the relationship between the leaders and their followers is structured on a purely client-and-supplier basis: the rank and file give their leaders their support because and as long as they can offer them military success and adequate material compensation. If too little is offered – as a result of unsatisfactory peace negotiations, for example – their followers will frequently withdraw their support and split off. Their ideological solidarity is often too weak to prevent the disintegration of the group. In addition, a war economy based on extraction demands only a minimum of co-operation: diamond smuggling, military escorting or looting are also perfectly possible outside the old political groupings, which means that the groups which split off will not suffer major economic hardship.

As a result, leaders attempting to end the war through negotiations are faced with a dilemma. If they stick to demands which will satisfy the expectations of their followers, their opponents will be unable to meet the demands of theirs. If, on the other hand, they achieve an agreed settlement, there is immediately the risk that they will fail to get agreement internally. Successful negotiations thus assume that the expectations of the individual players and those of the collective can "somehow" be reduced. The exhaustion of resources, leaving nothing to be won, may give this result, and perhaps also external intervention, excluding the continuation of the war as a fall-back option.

Victory

The problem of agreement no longer applies if there is a victor, who is able to exploit the losers and adequately satisfy the distribution claims of his followers. For this victory to result in peace, the victor must at the same time succeed in inculcating in the losers sufficient interest in peace to prevent them from sabotaging it whenever they have the opportunity. In practical terms, this means that the former enemies must not be put in a position where they are left with no other option but sabotage or flight. However, a "victorious peace" often falls apart for the simple reason that neither of the parties to the conflict ever achieves the necessary superiority. The "king-making mechanism" outlined by Norbert Elias – the monopolising of political force by one of the protagonists – does not always come into effect. The internal momentum of civil wars rarely produces a clear winner.

The distribution of the prospects of victory depends on differences in size, equipment and organisation of the warring factions, as well as on the combatants' level of ruthlessness and determination (cf. King 1977.49ff.). The potential for a ruthless approach to balance out material disadvantage to a certain degree was shown by the Renamo in Mozambique: after South Africa withdrew its support in 1984, they nonetheless succeeded in securing a basis for reproduction – by brutally press-ganging the population of the areas they occupied into service in the army and militias (Geffray 1990). Only when the army of the Frelimo government adopted a similarly ruthless strategy and drove the population out of reconquered areas completely were they able to finally defeat the Renamo.

External factors also affect the prospects of a military settlement of a civil war. By supporting or failing to support one of the parties, the international community can decisively alter the balance of military power. External support, however, is becoming increasingly difficult to find, because since the end of the Cold War there is no longer any universally plausible friend-and-foe pattern available for the supercoding of complex civil war situations. During the civil disorder of the 1960s in the former Belgian Congo, it was still a relatively

simple matter for the Western states to decide in favour of supporting the military faction under General Mobutu and against the "left-wing oriented" followers of Lumumba. In 1977, however, there was no consensus between the USA and France as to how the hostilities in Zaire should be regarded (cf. Le Monde, 18/19 May 1997).

The prospects for a settlement of the war by victory remain uncertain. But even where there is a clear victor, this does not mean that a lasting peace has been achieved. Victors tend to burden the losers one-sidedly with the costs, institutionalise revenge and exclude the losers from office and resources. The excluded losers develop no interest in peace; and as a result the peace remains precarious and the hard-won victory leads directly to the next erosion.

External Intervention

The final mechanism for bringing civil wars to an end consists of an ending to the war enforced on the participants by external powers. External intervention can interrupt the momentum of civil wars or make it more difficult, or even impossible, to use physical force. The principle is simple: intervention forces are sent into the country, separate the warring parties, monitor the ceasefire and create the conditions in which the society can find its way back to a peaceful existence. In practice, however, the dispatching of intervention forces is a difficult enterprise with a high risk of failure (cf. the empirical findings on military intervention in wars after 1945 in Gantzel/Schwinghammer 1995.130ff.; also see Duyvesteyn 1995).

The first and most important condition of success is that the intervention forces themselves should not become dependent on the war. The contingent of the ECOMOG intervention troops in the Liberian civil war sent mainly from Nigeria often had to wait for months for their meagre pay, and therefore began looting and dismantling the material infrastructure on their own account. ECOMOG commanders are also said to have become involved in the meantime in lucrative smuggling of raw materials and industrial waste. Activities of this sort only served to intensify the civil war. The state or coalition of states contributing to an intervention force must therefore be willing and able to supply its troops from outside and prevent them becoming dependent on the war economy themselves. This will incur sizeable costs, varying according to the size of the contingent and the duration of the mission.

As a rule, these costs are difficult to avoid, because a further condition of peace resulting from a peace mission is that the intervention forces which are sent in must be large enough to ensure adherence to the ceasefire more or less throughout the territory and stay in the country long enough for people and organisations to regain confidence in a normal state of affairs free of violence. Short tours of duty in

the war zone will not achieve anything, but will often merely allow the warring factions a pause for breath, when they can gather their strength and continue the fight from a stronger base after the departure of the intervention troops. However, lengthy missions are difficult to impose on the intervening states themselves. Once a mission has shown some success and calm has returned to the country formerly at war – and to the front pages – it becomes difficult to explain to the political audience at home why it is necessary to continue the mission.

This is a major problem general to all interventions: they are driven more strongly by political imperatives in the intervening states than by the circumstances of the civil war they are designed to pacify. The reason for this is in part that civil wars are complex and confusing events, and it is often practically impossible to discern from outside who is in fact fighting whom and for what. An important part is also played by the fact that intervention forces are often sent for reasons of self-interest. Countries intervene because governments feel they have to show their electorates how moral and helpful they are, and because "peace missions" provide a good opportunity to pay off old political debts and show evidence of loyalty to their allies – or because they enable them to try out new alliances. The measure of the success of an intervention is frequently also highly self-referential. If there are no casualties in the country's own contingents, if co-operation with the other intervening states works well, if comment in the media is favourable, the intervention is a success. Its effects on the war itself remain secondary and unexplored. Who still remembers what course was taken by the war in Somalia after the American troops had left?

All in all, the effect of "peace missions" is an ambivalent one. They may serve to shorten the war if and because they increase the probability of success in peace negotiations. For example, once the intervention troops in Bosnia-Herzegovina had succeeded in credibly blocking the negotiating parties' fall-back option of resuming hostilities, it was considerably simpler to achieve agreement on the arrangements for a still fragile peace.

The political elite will gain persuasive power over the military. The winners of the war will be unable to insist on full compensation, and the chances for post-war order will increase. However, interventions may also have the effect of extending the war if they prevent the war from ending via the victory of one of the protagonists. The parties which have gained superiority will always see the intervention as an unjustified obstruction of their victory, whilst it removes from the potential losers the incentive to surrender and so create the conditions for peace.

Are Inter-state Wars Immune to the Momentum of Civil Wars?

The difference between inter-state wars and civil wars lies in the fact that the former do not immediately put the state's monopoly of the use of violence in

question, whereas the latter specifically begin when the state no longer has this monopoly. Civil wars begin when, along with the state's monopoly, the "cause of peace" loses its power base. Violence can then spread unchecked across all social contexts. War becomes potentially total. There is nothing which can resist its momentum, and this is what makes it so difficult to bring to an end. In inter-state wars, on the other hand, violence remains more or less external to the societies involved. Although the war is more destructive at the "front", it does not leave a mark on peace at home. It remains limited in its social consequences, if not always in its local effects. The state's monopoly of the use of violence secures internal peace and prevents the war developing an internal momentum. Once the warring states decide there is going to be peace, there is peace. If necessary, they can resort to their apparatus of compulsion to indicate to the combatants unmistakeably that the war is ended.

So much for the ideal types. In reality, things are less clear. Civil wars are rarely completely total; pockets free of violence emerge, in which warlords and other enforcing bodies hold a local monopoly of power. And conversely, inter-state wars rarely remain purely external to the participating societies.

Long inter-state wars frequently compel the states involved to implement measures which undermine the monopoly on force and give inter-state wars their own internal momentum. They compel commerce and industry to be converted to the needs of the war effort. As a rule this means giving up long-term investments in favour of short-term war consumption. The result of this is that the economy becomes poorer, and the only countermeasure with short-term effect lies in victory over the enemy and the collection of reparation payments. This in turn means that the war effort must be intensified (the time problem); in addition, it means that a significant part of the social resources have to be invested in the development of wartime abilities and organisational authority. This makes the transitional costs of a conversion to peace increasingly high (the learning problem). Finally, the war results in the social and political rise of military personnel and other groups relevant to the war, whose careers are closely linked to the outcome of the war. This can make it difficult to agree peace compacts which fail to take account of the special interests of these groups (the distribution problem).

None of these developments will necessarily result in the breakup of the state monopoly of the use of violence; but they may erode it. For countries which have been at war, the moment of truth comes with demobilisation. For the victors, this is still a relatively small problem, as they can offer their citizens symbolic compensation and shift some of the transitional costs on to the losers. For the countries which are the losers, however, demobilisation often brings on an existential crisis. As the example of many of the loser states of the First World War shows, the demobilising state may in fact fall apart. The outcome of this is

civil war, which fills the social vacuum hitherto protected by the logic of war. Our (cautious) answer, therefore, to the question of whether inter-state wars are immune to the internal momentum of war is: not immune, at best more resistant.

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