The Old Roots of Africa's New Wars

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Events since September 11 2001 have caused mainstream media and politicians in the Western world to pay great attention to changes in the nature of warfare. Some of the apparently novel aspects of warfare, though, have actually been observable for years or even decades. They previously passed rather little noticed among the general public in America, and to some extent in Europe also.

In specialized writings, the dangers to national security of unofficial armed groups of various sorts, ranging from small cells to large unofficial armies (in some circumstances labeled as »terrorists«), using unconventional tactics and weapons and deriving revenue from illegal trade networks, are well recognized. The modern literature on these subjects perhaps dates from the first treatises by military authors on guerrilla and counter-guerrilla war in colonial territories in the 1950s and 1960s, when Maoist doctrines concerning socially-based armed formations attracted attention.[1] The forms of mobilization that accompany military activity by the social networks that are so prominent in contemporary wars may also be traced back to the same period. The most comprehensive surveys show that ethnic wars have been increasing fairly steadily since the 1950s. This leads the authors of one of the main studies to the conclusion that »we cannot entirely blame the explosion of ethnic conflict in the 1990s on the end of the Cold War«.[2]

It is only in the last decade that a number of trends have merged to form an opinion, now widely held in the West, that wars involving ethnic mobilization and unofficial militias implicated in a range of trafficking, for example in central Asia, the Balkans, central and West Africa and many other parts of what used to be called the third world, constitute a new

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1. E.g. John J. McCuen, *The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War: the strategy of counter-insurgency* (Faber & Faber, London, 1966).
2. Ted Robert Gurr and Barbara Harff, *Ethnic Conflict in World Politics* (Westview Press, Boulder CO, 1994), p. 10; also see Figure 1.4 on page 11.

type of war, distinct from earlier types, sometimes called »postmodern« war, or »degenerate war«.³ Counter-actions taken by the US and allied governments since late 2001 have drawn attention to the security implications of the so-called »failed« and »collapsed« states whose existence has also been noted in specialist literature for some years.⁴ In short, the events of September 11 have drawn unprecedented international attention to a number of inter-related phenomena, and especially international terrorist, militant and criminal networks, often with a distinct ethnic identity, that are linked to failed states, often on the rather inaccurate assumption that these are new formations.

The first part of this paper examines the chronology of contemporary wars in Africa, and finds that for the most part they began before the end of the Cold War. The intention is certainly not to suggest that nothing has changed in Africa in the 1990s. The world changes, and the nature of warfare changes with it. The point of the argument is rather to place some of the most striking features of so-called »new wars« in deeper historical context, showing that, in Africa as in many other cases, these have deeper roots than is sometimes implied. The paper then goes on to look briefly at some of the most salient features of Africa's current generation of wars and to suggest the sort of changes these imply.

From Militarized Forms of Politics to War

It is useful to ask whether it is accurate to write of new wars, in the sense of ones that are significantly different from older ones. Can we consider there has to have been some sort of historic rupture, associated for example with the end of the Cold War or the increasing pace of globalization, which has caused an increase in violence and which permits us to distinguish a new type of war that is different from old wars, as many authors consider?⁵

Much depends on how the seriousness of a conflict is measured and how war itself is defined. Europeans over three or more centuries, later joined by the USA, have developed a theory and practice of war in which

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3. Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: organized violence in a global era* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1999; reprinted with a new afterword, 2001), p. 2.
4. I. William Zartman (ed), *Collapsed States* (Lynne Rienner, Boulder, CO, 1995).
5. E.g. Kaldor, *New and Old Wars.*

massive violence can be inflicted by very large bodies of men (and these days, sometimes women too) organized by states. This form of war, fought by the trinity of nation, state and army, reached its peak during the first half of the twentieth century.[6] It was exported all over the world and came to form the basis of international rule-making on war, thought of as a period of intense violence, properly controlled by states, with a clear beginning (such as a declaration of war or a clear act of aggression) and an end (such as a peace treaty or surrender or collapse of a protagonist state). Wars are conceived of as exceptional interruptions to a state of normality, called peace. Europeans have been scarred by the experience they had of conflicts like this in the twentieth century. The former US National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski estimated in 1993 that at least 167 million lives had been »deliberately extinguished through politically motivated carnage« since the start of the twentieth century.[7] The historian Eric Hobsbawm, a veteran communist, holds an equally bleak view of the twentieth century.[8] Simply, it was the bloodiest century on record, which should lead us to be cautious in assessing whether or not the world is becoming a more violent place since the end of the Cold War.

Although the nature of war has undoubtedly changed since the terrible struggle of the mid-twentieth century, and has done so particularly fast in recent years, the classical idea of trinitarian war remains strong and continues to dominate international rule-making. It seems that the continuing dominance of a classical Western view of war may have caused Europeans until quite recently to overlook certain types of armed conflict occurring outside their own continent that did not fit their definition of wars, or to view these conflicts uniquely through the prism of the Cold War. Our opinions need to be related to a shifting perception of what war actually is. Some analysts define war by the scale of destruction, for example as an armed conflict in which organized belligerents cause a thousand or more deaths per year. But among all the definitions of war, one of the most useful in the twenty-first century is that of Thomas Hobbes, who wrote over three centuries ago that »Warre, consisteth not in Battell only, or the act of fighting; but in a tract of time, wherein the Will to con-

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6. Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (Free Press, New York, 1991).

7. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Out of Control: Global turmoil on the eve of the twenty-first century* (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1993), p. 17.

8. Eric Hobsbawm, »Barbarism: a user's guide«, *New Left Review,* 206 (1994), pp. 44–54.

tend by Battell is sufficiently known«.[9] Hobbes' definition encompasses situations where there is sometimes little fighting over quite extended periods, and where armies rarely clash head-on, but where the will to battle is sufficiently known for us to refer to the situation as a war. The avoidance of pitched battle was a feature of many conflicts in former colonial territories during the Cold War, leading them to be dubbed »low-intensity wars«. Many of the new crop of wars are the descendants or even prolongations of those. It may be, then, that what has changed since the end of the Cold War is less the nature of armed conflict than the perspective from which Europeans and North Americans see it.

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An examination of Africa's current generation of wars confirms that many of them began before the end of the Cold War. We may take as an example Liberia, which is often seen as a paragon of a new or postmodern war. Since open hostilities began in Liberia in December 1989, this war seems to fit the description of the first full-scale armed conflict to have broken out in Africa after the end of the Cold War. Before then, the country was ruled by a Cold War client of the US, the brutal sergeant-turned-president Samuel Doe. When his regime finally collapsed, the US government decided that it was no longer in its own interest to continue its former close relationship with Doe or, indeed, with Liberia. In Liberia, however, military violence had already been systematic for years. Many Liberians say that the war in their country really began at an earlier date. Some say in 1985, others 1983, 1980 or 1979. These are all significant dates in the development of a militarized politics that Liberians, in retrospect, can no longer consider as peace.

Other major centers of conflict in Africa are even older. War in Angola is conventionally described as having started at independence in 1975, but it is more useful to consider it as having begun in the 1960s, in the struggle against the Portuguese, continuing in fits and starts until 2002. Angola became a classic proxy war for larger powers after the fall of the Portuguese dictatorship in 1974. The war was strategically influenced by su-

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9. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651; Penguin edn., London, 1968), pp. 185–6.

perpower activities following the victory of communist forces in Vietnam and, after 1979, by US determination to compound Soviet embarrassment in Afghanistan by opening up new fronts of low-intensity war all over the world. The latter encompassed other Cold War struggles, in the Horn of Africa, central America, the Middle East, and many other theatres. Much of the violence in central Asia dates ultimately from the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947.

In many African countries, politics throughout the period since independence has been conceived in a quasi-military mode, partly reflecting the experience of colonial rule itself. Politics in Africa has often become an absolute contest for power in which all means are permissible, leading for example to periodic, large-scale massacres in Rwanda and Burundi since 1959, that have only earned the name »war« since the early 1990s. I may distort Clausewitz by saying that this is a vision of politics as war by other means. The form of the contest in most African countries changed after 1990, but the fundamentally violent nature of the struggle for supreme power did not. Something similar is true of many former colonial territories, particularly in North Africa, the Middle East and Asia, where the nature of political power has been militarized from its inception in its contemporary form, for example in Pakistan, Indonesia, Iraq, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, and others. Thus, despite arguments to the contrary, armed conflicts in Africa and many other parts of the former colonial world go back deeper than the last decade, and beyond the end of the Cold War. Indeed, many wars of Africa's current generation are directly linked to (or are actual continuations of) struggles which occurred around the time of independence.[10] This means that to understand how these wars became possible, we certainly need to ask questions about the organization of power and authority during colonial times, and how this has shifted since then.

Africa was decolonized during the Cold War. Its sovereign states found their places from the outset in that particular context. In those days, say from Ghana's independence in 1957 to that of Zimbabwe in 1980, incumbent regimes in every part of the former colonial world could expect to receive finance or other support from their great power allies. Many states had enough coercive power to repress attempts at open war by the opposition, and enough money and other resources to run an ef-

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10. Noted in the introduction to Christopher Clapham (ed), *African Guerrillas* (James Currey, Oxford, 1998), pp. 1–18.

fective patronage system. But opponents could also lobby for funding from sympathetic external powers. Those opponents who did succeed in taking up arms were constrained by their external allies to organize, politically and militarily, in ways familiar to their great-power sponsors, in rough imitation of the formal state structures they aspired to control in due course.

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Perhaps the most relevant effect of the ending of the Cold War on Africa's armed conflicts was to deprive political movements of the external funding they had previously enjoyed and the externally imposed political and rhetorical disciplines that this implied. Since then, both states and insurgents have had to develop other sources of finance, for example in diamonds (Sierra Leone, Angola, Liberia) or oil (Angola). We may note in passing that this does not provide evidence for the dangerously simplistic view, currently gaining ground among aid donors, that African wars especially are all about greed, with zero political content.[11] It remains true, of course, that all wars have to be paid for. Furthermore, almost all wars are concerned in some way or other with struggles over the control and distribution of resources. But this is no more than to say that war is very similar to politics, with the crucial addition of a high degree of explicit violence. The precise way in which protagonists exert control over resources, whether through straightforward looting or through some more sophisticated form of management, is all-important.

Africa's wars may have roots that can be traced to the colonial past, but that does not mean that they are caused by colonization, with a half-century time-lag. The transition from militarized forms of politics into war, typical of so many countries in Africa since the end of the Cold War, is due to contemporary crises, including the implosion of some states,

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11. Paul Collier, »Doing well out of war: an economic perspective«, in Mats Berdal and David M. Malone (eds), *Greed and Grievance: Economic agendas in civil wars* (Lynne Rienner, Boulder CO, 2000), pp. 91–111.

short-sighted political leadership, the consequences of hasty and ill-conceived programs of structural adjustment and privatization, and sometimes enforced democratization. These have led political elites to seek new forms of political mobilization in which violence figures less as a means of combating the enemy than as a way of mobilizing support. Economic decline and aspirations to social advancement in a situation where political groups are formed into clientelist networks leads to what the French call a logique de guerre. Political discourses may then contribute to justify hatred between rival groups, often defined on ethnic lines, in a pseudo-traditional fundamentalism.[12]

»Ethnic« Conflict: a Misleading Concept

In many contemporary wars, not only in Africa but also elsewhere, political and military leaders make explicit appeals to culture, often in combination with ethnicity. Some analysts, noting the importance of ethnic and cultural mobilization, consider today's conflicts as a continuation of age-old struggles that are transmitted through the generations within specific civilizations. Such conflicts, according to this view, are likely to re-emerge in cultural form now that the ideological trappings of the Cold War have ceased to be relevant.[13] A similar analysis is particularly frequently applied to Africa, most notably by labeling African conflicts as »ethnic«. To be sure, ethnic identity becomes a factor in just about all wars, as the enemy has to be identified by name, and as enemies routinely recall earlier bouts of hostility against their current opponents. But this is not the same as saying that wars are caused by ethnicity. Attribution of the ethnic label is often used both as description and explanation simultaneously, as a substitute for a more thorough analysis. A cynical observer may think that whenever a politician or diplomat describes a war as »ethnic« or »rooted in ancient hatreds«, it is usually a coded way of signaling an unwillingness to intervene in the situation to any serious extent since it implies that a clash is inevitable.

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12. Jean-Pierre Chrétien, »Les racines de la violence contemporaine en Afrique«, *Politique africaine,* 42 (1991), pp. 15–27.
13. Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (Simon & Schuster, New York, 1996).

If ethnicity in Africa had to be described in one sentence, in its politicized form of »tribalism«, it could be described as a component of nationalism and a product of nationalization.[14] All of the current ethnic struggles in Africa are sectional contests related to the conquest of national power. Anthropologists and historians have effectively demolished the idea, rooted in European nationalist thought and reproduced in colonialism, that ethnic groups (in Africa formerly called tribes) are discrete entities, that may collide with one another only to continue on their way, like billiard balls.[15] Even so, the idea that »tribes« are actually mini-nations, tending to cultural homogeneity and aspiring to some sort of political unity, remains deeply ingrained in Western thinking. As for culture, we may follow Clifford Geertz in regarding it as the name we give to »a historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life.«[16]

> It is justifiable to analyze ethnicity and culture in Africa with a view to understanding how people are mobilized in contemporary wars. But we should not mistake a symptom for a cause. It is misguided to seek explanations for the so-called new wars in ethnicity or culture, no matter how ethnic or cultural they may be.

Ethnic groups, like the cultures with which they become almost synonymous in some contexts, change over time and are not uniform. However, the observation that neither cultures nor ethnicities are homogeneous or unchanging should not lead us to assert that they therefore have no historical existence. On the contrary, systems of attributing meaning transmitted from one generation to another, even if in amended form, are vectors of historical memory and of social and political identity. They are particularly important in this respect in the absence of a state that has

14. cf. Warren D'Azevedo, »Tribe and chiefdom on the Windward Coast«, *Liberian Studies Journal,* xiv, 2 (1989), p. 102; Bruce J. Berman, »Ethnicity, patronage and the African state: the politics of uncivil nationalism«, *African Affairs,* 97, 388 (1998), pp. 305–41.
15. I have borrowed this metaphor from Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Univ. of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1982).
16. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays,* p. 89.

something close to a monopoly of violence, powerful and self-confident enough to encompass or at least tolerate most significant political activity. What has changed in Africa and much of the former third world, and also in some of the former second world for that matter, is the existence of states having these capacities. Where states have lost their ability to govern through bureaucracies, political mobilization has increasingly taken an ethnic form. Where national armies have lost any pretension to a monopoly of coercion, ethnic militias or other private armies arise.

Hence, it is justifiable to analyze ethnicity and culture in Africa with a view to understanding how people are mobilized in contemporary wars. But we should not mistake a symptom for a cause. It is misguided to seek explanations for the so-called new wars in ethnicity or culture, no matter how ethnic or cultural they may be. More relevant to an examination of causes is the way power is organized, usually through a state. If the state is absent, an inquirer may ask how and why it disappeared, declined or imploded. We can even ask how it could be restored or a substitute found. In every case this will lead us to examine the way in which specific countries or societies are inserted into the world. Many non-Western countries, before their constitutional, scientific or intellectual colonization over the past couple of centuries, were governed by political entities or systems that did not have the characteristics of what we have come to regard as conventional states. At one extreme of the precolonial gamut were societies, like many in Africa, which had little approximating to the European idea of a state. At the other extreme were places, like Moghul India or imperial China, which had a hierarchical and even bureaucratic system of administration, but which were in some ways markedly different from modern European states. In every case, a key component of the governance of these societies in precolonial times, or before the twentieth century, was religion. Even where there were bureaucratic states, the separation between religion and politics existed either not at all or not in anything comparable to the way that had become conventional in Europe. Chinese emperors were deemed to rule by virtue of possessing what was translated by Orientalists as »the mandate of heaven« (and one may note in passing that the rise of Falun Gong and other religious movements and the growth of Christianity in China are signs that its communist government is in danger of losing that mandate today).[17] In other words,

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17. David Palmer, »Falun Gong: la tentation du politique«, *Critique internationale,* 11 (April 2001), pp. 36–43.

whether there was an intricate bureaucratic authority (as in imperial China) or no bureaucracy at all (as in pre-settler Liberia or Sierra Leone), governance before the twentieth century was far more closely integrated with religion than had become normal in Europe, which came to exercise such extraordinary influence over the rest of the world in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

European colonization was not initially intended as an apprenticeship in building nation-states, but by the middle of the twentieth century it was being reinvented as a form of preparation for self-government in the modern fashion. In the decades from 1945 to the 1990s, vast territories in Asia and Africa were deemed to be independent sovereign states, which meant being able to deploy such symbols as a flag, a head of state, armed forces and a central bank. This resulted in an increase in the number of UN member-states from 51 in 1945 to 190 today. Transfers of technology and money were made in the name of development. In regard to most of Africa and Asia, this political decolonization occurred during the longest and most widespread economic boom the world has ever seen, lasting from 1945 until the oil crises of the 1970s. The whole architecture of world governance depends on the proposition that the world is divided into sovereign states. This concept remains dominant in spite of challenges in the political and legal field by some recent innovations.

> There has been a widespread popular reaction in many parts of the world against what, in retrospect, may be seen as the unprecedented expectations and formidable concentrations of power and wealth raised among vast populations in the three decades after 1945. In many parts of Africa, Asia and the Middle East, this great transformation turned out to be unsustainable beyond one or two generations.

Not surprisingly, many populations of newly-independent ex-colonies experienced the first years of their new status as a change without precedent. People whose ancestors had for generations lived in villages with access to a restricted and only slowly changing range of consumer goods and technology moved to cities. Hundreds of millions of people became the first in their families ever to receive a formal secular education. Populations in third world countries exploded, increasing sometimes doubling in little more than one generation. The creation of juridical independence in itself created national economic booms as the new apparatus

recruited thousands of officials, leading to high economic growth rates at a time when commodity prices were reaching sustained highs. Many new countries were governed by rulers who assumed extravagant personality cults with religious overtones. In retrospect, the separation of the secular and religious spheres in many of these states was more institutional than psychological or cultural. People assumed that if they were becoming prosperous and adopting the trappings of Western sophistication on a scale undreamed of, it was because their leaders had something like the mandate of heaven. Independence appears to have been perceived in many countries, at least for a brief period, in terms close to those of millenarianism.

Mainstream media often report African wars in terms of a reversion to an earlier stage of development. Thus, a thorough study of Western reporting of the Liberian war in the early 1990s concluded that it had been represented generally as »bizarre documentary-style coverage from the ›Heart of Darkness‹ rather than news of a serious threat to international peace and security«.[18] Over and over, in Britain and the USA newspapers have taken the title of Joseph Conrad's famous novella about atrocities in the Congo and applied it to African wars. Use of this cliché is often accompanied by an assertion that a given war is essentially between what used to be called tribes, but are today more politely known as ethnic groups. Generally unspoken, but nevertheless implied if the label is used in analysis of a war, is that these ethnic groups are violent by nature. Little further explanation is then required as to why a war is taking place: the »ethnic« tag is really a shorthand for saying that these wars are caused by the nature of certain cultures that have fundamentally been unable or unwilling to modernize. This, I must emphasize, is not my point of view.

Popular talk of barbarism and civilization is at bottom referring to a concept of human evolution, from the uncivilized to the civilized, that was very widely held in the West until recently. It would not do to be flippant about this: civilization, in the sense of a normative order and structure of authority that makes life easier and more pleasant for those living within it, exists. Anyone who has lived in a land without such an order knows well how much it is to be appreciated. What has to be rejected after the experience of the bloody twentieth century, is the suggestion that mankind as a whole is set on a path of progress towards ever-greater de-

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18. Larry Minear, Colin Scott and Thomas Weiss, *The News Media, Civil War, and Humanitarian Action* (Boulder, CO, and London, 1996), pp. 47–50.

grees of civilization interspersed with occasional backsliding. The history of the twentieth century can be considered as powerful evidence that mankind is not proceeding to a higher plane of civilization, at least not as measured by the propensity to kill, even if the vision of a world proceeding to ever-higher stages of evolution remains strong among some professional thinkers (such as many natural scientists) and among the general public in many Western countries. Theories of linear evolution are strongly held by natural scientists, and still attractive to many members of Western publics and wherever the once-powerful theory of modernization and development has held sway.[19] Social scientists are far less likely to hold such views. Few of them would today be willing to endorse an old-fashioned view of evolution as the spread of European civilization throughout the world. The idea of a continuum running from barbarism to civilization makes modern thinkers uncomfortable. In its place comes postmodern doubt.

The Elusive Answers to the Question of Why Do Wars Happen

Studying the climate in which a war develops is not the same as identifying its causes. Identifying precisely why wars happen is more difficult than social scientists affect to think. After all, after ninety years and thousands of books, there is no consensus on why the First World War happened, or why it didn't happen some years earlier. We may extend this principle of doubt to Africa. In regard to Liberia, for example, it is possible to trace the political instability caused by the loss of legitimacy of the old True Whig Party government, its violent overthrow in 1980 and the disastrous rule of Samuel Doe, financed by the US government. The decline in Liberia's economy can be documented. So too can the rise of Libyan strategic ambitions in West Africa during the 1970s and 1980s. None of this actually started the war in Liberia. Nor does it explain why the violence in 1990 did not take the form of a relatively routine change of regime, such as West Africa has seen many times, but instead turned into a major war that was to spread to other countries. There were no deep structural forces that caused Charles Taylor to murder his rivals for leadership of the opposition movement in June and July 1990, or that

19. E.g. the remarks by Leonard Brehun, a Ghanaian businessman caught up in a foreign war, in *Liberia: The War of Horror* (Adwinsa publications, Accra, 1991), p. 113.

made the US government decline to intervene in mid-1990, or that induced Charles Taylor to fight the West African ECOMOG peacekeeping force in August 1990 when he could more easily have achieved his aim of becoming head of state by playing a waiting game.[20] Nor, crucially, was it anything to do with the structures of Liberian politics and society that caused Iraq to invade Kuwait in August 1990, turning full US attention to another theatre at a critical moment in West Africa's history.

How we explain these combinations of circumstances, for example as chance, coincidence, the result of human error or something else, is largely a matter of the deepest convictions concerning the rules governing life and fate, or the lack of them. For Liberians themselves, religion plays an important role in explaining matters of this kind. Religion is a way of thinking about cosmology and causation, a mode in which many Africans think about the wars that scar their continent today. Many Africans have a religious belief that any major disorder in the invisible sphere will have a probable or even an inevitable effect on the physical fortunes of the community of believers. By the same token, any major event, such as a war, a famine or an untimely death, is widely held to have its root cause in the invisible world. Suppositions of this kind are common among religious believers in all parts of the world, including in the USA. Secular explanations can tell us how things happen the way they do, but not why. Religion provides an explanation for events more completely than social science, in some respects, and in particular can aspire to answer why things happen, and not just how. This includes providing answers to why wars happen.

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Some thoughtful writers argue that social science, based on the European experience of a separation of church and state and an accompanying intellectual distinction between the two, has come to forget the crucial role of religion in the longer run of history. The anthropologist Jack Goody argues that religion actually trumps ethnicity as a determinant of

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20. Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: The destruction of Liberia and the religious dimension of an African civil war* (C. Hurst & Co., London, 1999), pp. 80–7.

conflict in many cases but is ignored by too many analysts.[21] Edward Luttwak has made a broadly similar observation, lamenting the »materialistic determinism« used in analyzing so many of the world's conflicts, to the exclusion of religion, which he calls »the missing dimension«.[22]

Populations all over the world in recent decades have had not just to come to terms with changes in the global economy and in financial markets but to find a convincing view of providence or fate in a world greatly changed. There has been a widespread popular reaction in many parts of the world against what, in retrospect, may be seen as the unprecedented expectations and formidable concentrations of power and wealth raised among vast populations in the three decades after 1945. These expectations were generated by massive systems of social engineering made possible by new technology and the bureaucratic organization associated with states, often introduced by colonial rule or associated with the exercise of European or American influence. In many parts of Africa, Asia and the Middle East, this great transformation turned out to be unsustainable beyond one or two generations. Some states, particularly in Africa, effectively went bankrupt in the late 1970s and early 1980s and, in return for the loans required to stay afloat, were obliged to delegate key areas of policy to the international financial institutions. Attempts at liberal economic reform imposed by the latter, including the wholesale privatization of state services, have often led to unexpected and undesirable results, including a complex interaction between formal and informal spheres of activity in both politics and economics.[23] Also in the late 1970s, conflicts in the former third world, manipulated by superpowers, began to result not only in a greater demand for arms but also to a change in the boundaries between formal and informal warfare, notably with resistance to Soviet occupation in Afghanistan.[24] With the end of the Cold War, armed insurrectionary groups that had previously relied on funds from one or the other super-power turned increasingly to drug-trading or other forms of self-finance.

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21. Jack Goody, »Bitter Icons«, *New Left Review,* second series, 7 (2001), p. 15.
22. Edward Luttwak, »The Missing Dimension«, in Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson (eds.), *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1994), pp. 8–19.
23. Béatrice Hibou (ed), *La privatisation des Etats* (Karthala, Paris, 1999).
24. R.T. Naylor, »Loose cannons: covert commerce and underground finance in the modern arms black market«, *Crime, Law and Social Change,* 22, 1 (1994–5), p. 11.

Whatever the particular conjuncture of factors that causes a war to start, all wars can easily reproduce themselves. An equilibrium can develop between the technical requirements of arms and manpower necessary to fight, the financing of such means, and the political gains that result from it. The greatest danger of many low-intensity wars is that they could reproduce themselves indefinitely. Some of the most stimulating works on European state-building have pointed out the contribution of wars to this historical process, and particularly the changing calculations as wars became more costly, bankers calculated the benefits of lending to finance wars against the losses from trade, while populations negotiated with princes their availability to fight and to be taxed.[25] There is no guarantee that African states will develop in this way. There is only a reassurance that wars, being human creations, do not last for ever. And the knowledge that something better can come out of them.

25. Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 900-1992* (revised edn, Oxford, 1992).