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# Degrees of statehood*

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Abstract. This paper explores the relationship between statehood and the international system, with particular reference to the states of sub-Saharan Africa. It suggests, as the title implies, that statehood should be regarded as a relative concept; and that rather than distinguish sharply between entities that are, and are not, states, we should regard different entities as meeting the criteria for international statehood to a greater or lesser degree. Entities which we have been accustomed to regard as states, at least for the purposes of studying them in international relations, sometimes fail to exercise even the minimal responsibilities associated with state power, while those who control them do not behave in the way that is normally ascribed to the 'rulers' of states. Entities that are not accorded the status of states, such as guerrilla insurgencies or even voluntary organizations, may take on attributes that have customarily been associated with sovereign statehood. This conclusion carries at least a salutary warning against too readily ascribing the supposedly universal characteristics of states to peripheral areas of the modern global system, in which the categories in which we are accustomed to regard international politics have become blurred. More broadly, given the peculiar and privileged position of states in the conventional analysis of international relations, it may carry significant implications for the idea of international relations itself.

## Quasi-statehood and the negative sovereignty regime

Many of the differences between the organizations that formally count as 'states' in the management of the modern international system are already thoroughly familiar to students of international relations. The analysis of variance between states, initially concerned merely with the possession by states of greater or lesser 'capabilities' within a conception of statehood that was taken as given, has been extended with the emergence of post-colonial 'Third World' states to encompass the recognition of differences in kind between states. This recognition itself, however, has characteristically involved essentially teleological concepts such as 'state-building', which have analysed the international relations of emerging states in terms of an ideal of statehood, Western in derivation, which the governing elites of 'Third World' states sought to emulate, and which they might come more or less close to attaining. The work of Ayoob, largely Asian in its empirical referents, falls clearly into this mould.[1] In a more African-centred analysis, Robert Jackson discerned

* This paper draws on Clapham, *Africa and the International System: The Politics of State Survival* (Cambridge, 1996); I wish to acknowledge the assistance of the Economic and Social Research Council of the UK in awarding me the Senior Research Fellowship that made this study possible.

[1] See Mohammed Ayoob, *The Third World Security Predicament: State Making, Regional Conflict, and the International System* (Boulder, CO, 1995), esp. ch. 2, 'State Making and Third World Security'.



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qualitative differences between states, which at least implicitly challenged the assumption that such states were following (or even, perhaps, could follow) the state-building trajectory which was thus mapped out for them.[2] Jackson coined the phrase 'quasi-states' to describe those states which, despite the recognition of other states and international institutions within the global system, nonetheless often lacked 'substantial and credible statehood by the empirical criteria of classical positive international law'.[3] Established states enjoyed what Jackson described as 'positive sovereignty': they had governments which exercised effective dominion over their peoples and territories, and they were capable of defending themselves, on their own or with allies, against external threats. Over time, they generally built up a level of legitimacy which helped both to demarcate their peoples and territories from others and to assure the stability and effectiveness of their domestic political systems. The 'negative sovereignty' of the quasi-state, on the other hand, rested to a considerable extent on international recognition. Such states were usually incapable of defending themselves militarily against any industrialized state which possessed a modern arsenal. They frequently did not fully control their own territories. Their domestic political systems were weak and unstable. They existed ultimately because the dominant states of the global order had deemed that they should be permitted to do so.

Jackson's distinction between quasi-states and what one might (if condescendingly) call 'real' states was evidently overdrawn, though, writing at the very end of the Cold War, he could scarcely have been expected to anticipate how rapidly states such as Yugoslavia or even the mighty Soviet Union would fail to measure up to the requirements of positive sovereignty. In retrospect, it would be fairer to conclude that all states rely on some combination of external recognition and domestic power, even though the ingredients of the mix may vary sharply from one case to another. Fred Halliday has pointed out how states which apparently meet the most stringent requirements for positive sovereignty, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, actually depended to a considerable extent at critical moments of their formation on the role of the international system.[4] It is helpful to recognize, too, that in previous epochs quasi-states have been permitted to exist on the sufferance of the major powers, especially when it suited them to allow defenceless states to retain their independence as a means of regulating conflict between themselves. The Venetian Republic, and the government of Malta by the Knights of St John, continued for centuries until the changed strategic situation in Europe after the French Revolution led to their extinction. The independence of Belgium was from 1830 to 1914 guaranteed by the major powers. Quasi-statehood, if not on the scale attained after 1960, is actually a relatively familiar feature of the international order.

With the creation of a global capitalist economy, nonetheless, negative sovereignty provided a convenient formula for incorporating a vastly increased area of the world into an expanding international system. The first such formula, direct European colonialism, was only temporarily sustainable. It eventually aroused levels of indigenous opposition which the overstretched military and administrative resources

[2] Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-states: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World* (Cambridge, 1990).
[3] Ibid., p. 22.
[4] See Fred Halliday, *Rethinking International Relations* (London, 1994), pp. 3–4.

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of the colonial powers were capable of controlling, if at all, only at a domestically unacceptable cost. The colonial powers themselves were losing ground to other states, and could no longer maintain their previous claim to exclusive rights in territories which they had conquered during earlier eras of dominance. The recognition of the right to independence of such territories under tacit international protection served the interests of all of the major actors with access to the global arena that was notably represented by the United Nations. For the rulers of new states themselves, it opened up previously unavailable opportunities, which these rulers could band together to protect through such agencies as the Non-aligned Movement. For the superpowers, it helped to regulate their own global rivalry. The former colonial powers, which soon emerged as the major international protectors of their own former colonies, found that they still generally enjoyed preferential access to the territories which they had previously ruled, without the trouble of having to govern them.

Quasi-statehood understandably led the rulers of weak states to place an emphasis on sovereignty, which was critically important to them because they had so few other cards to play. The key criteria for absolute sovereignty—the maintenance of existing frontiers, the insistence on the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of states, and the claim to the state's right to regulate the management of its own domestic economy—were built into such documents as the Charter of the Organization of African Unity and the Charter of the Economic Rights and Duties of States.[5] Though Ayoob argues that Third World state elites have internalized the dominant values of the Westphalian system to an exceptional degree,[6] it would be more accurate to suggest that elites adopted these values as the result of an instrumental recognition of the amount that they could do to enhance their own power: respect for Westphalian norms has generally been notably lacking in their critique (eminently justified though it was) of apartheid in South Africa, in their attacks on industrial states for failing to live up to their moral conception of the international order, and even in their common though covert engagement in subverting the domestic political systems of their neighbours.

Understandably too, this emphasis on statehood has characterized much of the analysis of the Third World in academic international relations. For one thing, the activities of states, or more accurately of their rulers, were loud and visible; a mass of diplomatic gatherings provided them with ample opportunities for self-publicizing rhetoric on which their academic acolytes could draw. For another, international relations actually *was* important to these rulers, because their access to international resources played a critical role in their own survival strategies; some of them were even able to play off the global superpowers against one another, in order to strengthen their control over their domestic populations.[7] In addition to that, though, it is not difficult to discern, in the emphasis on statehood and sovereignty in much of the writing on the international relations of the Third World, a strong

[5] See G. J. Naldi, *Documents of the Organisation of African Unity* (London, 1992); for a sympathetic discussion of CERDS, see Caroline Thomas, *In Search of Security: The Third World in International Relations* (Brighton, 1987), pp. 64–70.

[6] Ayoob, *Third World Security Predicament*, p. 3.

[7] See Steven R. David, *Changing Sides: Alignment and Realignment in the Third World* (Baltimore, MD, 1991).

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moral commitment to the independence of these states, and to their juridical sovereignty as the means through which this had to be maintained.

This commitment has been most marked in quasi-academic analysis of the economic relations between Third World states and the international order, since it was in the economic sphere that the sovereignty of these states was most evidently challenged and therefore most needed to be defended. It is difficult to find any analysis of the role of the Third World within the global economy which does not at least implicitly rest on the assumption that the activities of transnational corporations and other international actors within the Third World are illegitimate, and that the attempts by Third World governments to control them are correspondingly legitimate. Implicit in this in turn is the assumption, often without much basis in domestic political processes or the observable behaviour of state elites, that the government represents the interests of the mass of the population of the state, and that the external agency is acting against these interests. This assumption has often reached its most strident expression in the condemnation of the 'structural adjustment programmes' (SAPs) imposed on African governments by the World Bank and other international financial institutions.[8] In the process, much of the analysis of African international relations has become an essentially ideological device for protecting African statehood and the interests of those who most benefited from it.

## The decline of quasi-statehood

The kind of quasi-statehood analysed by Jackson, and the negative sovereignty on which it rested, could however be only a temporary device for easing the passage of 'new states' into the international order. Over time, either such states would have to make good their claims to sovereignty, through the development of effective domestic economies and political institutions, or else the inadequacies of their statehood would be revealed. South-East Asia provides the clearest examples of states which succeeded in making this transition.[9] Although at independence, for example, Malaysia continued to rely on British military protection—both of its artificial frontiers against the threat from Indonesia and of its domestic political system against Communist subversion—it was soon able to dispense with this assistance. African states, on the other hand, found themselves increasingly drawn into the international arena, in a search for the resources to protect themselves against the consequences of domestic political and economic failure. Eventually, this was to—and, it could be argued, was bound to—subvert the idea of quasi-statehood.

The idea of negative sovereignty always rested on the contradiction that states could retain their independence *of* the international system while remaining

[8] See, e.g., Bade Onimode, *The IMF, the World Bank and the African Debt* (London, 1989), for a work which expresses these assumptions.

[9] Recent literature in the field of 'development' has become increasingly concerned with accounting for the differences between regions of the world in which it has, and has not, been possible to create effective 'developmental states', capable of achieving the criteria for 'positive statehood', and using these to promote economic transformation. See *Third World Quarterly*, 17:4 (1996), special issue on 'The Developmental State?'.

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dependent *on* the international system. This dependence became evident as soon as African states were subjected to any substantial challenge, whether domestic or external. In the case of the East African states of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, it was illustrated by the need for British military intervention to rescue incumbent governments from the mutinies of 1964. In Nigeria, the federal government was able to defeat the attempted Biafran secession in the civil war of 1967–70, only as a result of the overwhelming support it received from outside states, notably including Britain and the USSR. In much of francophone Africa, the French protective presence was continuous. The states of the Horn, most damagingly of all, sought and obtained the patronage of the rival superpowers, in order to gain access to the weaponry that they needed both to control unruly domestic systems and to pursue their rivalries with one another.

As African regimes lost the popular support which they had generally enjoyed at independence, and refused to renew it at the price of risking their own incumbency, so the moral justification for quasi-statehood—that the states which it protected represented their own populations—was lost. In the process, quasi-statehood was converted into a mechanism by which those who controlled governments, regardless of the means by which they had attained power or by which they exercised it, claimed the right to external support with which to repress their own populations. For the outside states which provided this support, whether these were superpowers or former colonial rulers, sustaining African regimes became an internationalized equivalent of colonial indirect rule: indigenous rulers remained in power, as part of a pact which served the interests alike of themselves and of their external protectors. This formula could only be maintained, however, for as long as the domestic regimes within quasi-states were able to supply benefits to their protectors at a price which these were prepared to pay.

In practice, the formula was first challenged on the economic front, from the early 1980s onwards, once a combination of domestic mismanagement and external misfortune had left heavily indebted African states in dire need of rescue.[10] The packages that were then put together for virtually all sub-Saharan states outside the Southern African Customs Union, under the heading of SAPs, removed from states much of their control over their domestic economies, as the price for rescheduling their debt and providing sufficient aid to fulfil their immediate needs. The most important of the accompanying conditions normally involved the massive devaluation of the currency (which removed from states the surpluses which they had been able to extract through exchange rate manipulation), and the privatization of economic functions which had previously been monopolized by the state.[11] With this process, the scope of quasi-statehood was effectively restricted to the domestic political arena and the realm of declaratory foreign policy.

With the end of the Cold War, 'political conditionalities' were imposed on African states to complement the 'economic conditionalities' which had come with structural adjustment.[12] In many cases, and especially in the francophone states, incumbent

[10] There is no need to pass judgment here on whether the economic plight of African states was due primarily to internal or external causes; the fact of dependence was all that mattered.

[11] The normal content of SAPs has frequently been described; see, e.g., John Toye, 'Structural Adjustment: Context, Assumptions, Origins and Diversity', in R. van der Hoeven and F. van der Kraaij (eds.), *Structural Adjustment and Beyond in Sub-Saharan Africa* (London, 1994), ch. 3.

[12] See Clapham, *Africa and the International System*, ch. 8.

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regimes rapidly adopted multiparty constitutions and held elections, almost as soon as President Mitterrand had announced his (somewhat meretricious) conversion to African democracy at the La Baule francophone summit in June 1990. Only occasionally, and notably in Kenya and Malawi, was explicit economic pressure by creditor states needed in order to induce regimes to accept the new political dispensation; more often, the tacit withdrawal of external protection forced rulers into some accommodation with their own resurgent domestic oppositions. At the same time, human rights and 'good governance' provisions were introduced as conditions for future aid. Even the European Community, which had firmly rejected political conditionalities for EC aid in the 1980s, on the ground that these constituted an affront to the sovereignty of the African, Caribbean and Pacific states associated with it through the Lomé Conventions, accepted them without demur in November 1991. Given external supervision even of their domestic political arrangements, expressed through a multitude of election monitors and human rights activists, the mythology of quasi-statehood had been throughly undermined.

## The displacement of the state

Where did this leave African and other vulnerable states, in the light of their evident dependence on external support? For a start, there was a considerable degree of variance. In some cases, the holding of multiparty democratic elections brought to power new regimes which, with the legitimacy conferred by popular backing, were able to reclaim some of the immunity from external interference which newly elected governments had enjoyed immediately after independence. In others, such as Uganda and Ethiopia, the seizure of power by effectively organized insurgent movements with plausible projects for state reconstruction was greeted with sympathy by external backers. The French Government rapidly resumed support for client regimes in those parts of francophone Africa where its interests were greatest. The state's privileged access to the international system, which negative sovereignty had helped to protect, had nonetheless been severely weakened, and was to a varying degree displaced by other linkages through which other domestic actors could maintain independent and even rival external networks.

This process was most evident in the loss of the control over international economic transactions on which African states had relied in order to raise the revenues to maintain themselves. This control, of course, had never been absolute. It had been most evidently threatened by transnational companies, which in turn were supported by the governments of their home states, but which in practice were almost always able to negotiate a mutually acceptable division of the spoils with the governments of the states in which they operated. It was, however, more fundamentally undermined by informal markets, through which enterpreneurs could benefit from the artificial pricing structures imposed by governments by evading or subverting state control. Smuggling was only the most obvious form of this activity, which also extended to illicit currency dealing, shifts by farmers into crops with uncontrolled prices (as against those for which the state imposed punitively low official prices), and black market activities of every kind. Though the loss of state control was eventually formalized, amid loud complaints at the loss of sovereignty

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which this entailed, through the imposition of SAPs, the real loss of sovereignty had already taken place. SAPs could indeed be regarded as attempts to bring economic management back within the realm of government, at the cost of acknowledging the limitations on state action created by market forces which African states lacked the capacity to control.

The loss of state control over economic transactions was mirrored by equivalent processes in other fields. The imposition of multiparty electoral political systems, complete with their legions of election observers, has already been noted. This was preceded by greatly intensified international pressure over human rights issues, which gained strength as a result of the wide publicity accorded to the activities of three African heads of state in particular—Idi Amin in Uganda, Jean-Bédel Bokassa in the Central African Republic/Empire, and Francisco Macias Nguema in Equatorial Guinea—in the 1970s. Even though explicit sanctions against human rights violations had to await the end of the Cold War, this pressure was sufficient to induce African states to introduce their own cosmetic African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights in an attempt to disarm external criticism.[13] With the end of the Cold War, external demands for democratization were accompanied by measures designed to strengthen 'civil society' in African states, which in turn involved direct support for domestic human-rights-monitoring organizations and other groups which were independent of, and implicitly hostile to, incumbent regimes.

The most important role in undermining juridical sovereignty was, however, often played by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which, falling outside the realm of statehood in their own home societies, had little commitment to sovereignty in the African states in which they conducted their external activities. Characteristically emanating from Western 'civil society', and deeply imbued with its values (on which they depended not only for their moral *raison d'être*, but also for their funding), they necessarily sought to present those values as being of universal validity, and to use the power which they gained over African states in order to promote them. That power derived partly from the financial resources which they could bring to (or withhold from) African states in dire need of external aid, but also from their influence over the Western media, and consequently over Western governments and international institutions. In a continent which had virtually dropped out of sight as a source of substantial Western economic interests,[14] and which had lost most of such 'strategic' significance as it had once possessed with the end of the Cold War, essentially moral or civil society issues attained a disproportionate influence on Western policy. Africa came to be regarded, from the viewpoint of the outside world, as a source of 'problems', and consequently as an appropriate focus for charitable concern. This was indeed a reversion to a perception of Africa which had been widely held in Western Europe before the colonial era, and which had exercised a powerful influence over the colonial project itself. Where previously these 'problems' had legitimized the activities of the Christian missionary and the anti-slavery campaigner, they now included human rights, famine, large-scale civil

[13] For discussions of the African Charter, see Jackson, *Quasi-states*, pp. 154–9; and Claude E. Welch, 'The Organisation of African Unity and the Promotion of Human Rights', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 29 (1991), pp. 535–55.

[14] For a succinct outline, see Thomas M. Callaghy, 'Africa and the World Political Economy: Still Caught Between a Rock and a Hard Place', in John W. Harbeson and Donald Rothchild (eds.), *Africa in World Politics: Post-Cold War Challenges* (Boulder, CO, 1995), ch. 3.

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conflict, disease (and especially AIDS), and environmental issues such as the conservation of large mammals, and empowered those NGOs which had formed to promote these issues in Western societies.

Issues of this kind subverted the role of states as the managers of global transactions, and challenged the state-centric analysis of African international relations. In some cases, such as human rights and civil conflict, the state itself could readily be regarded as the source of the problem, and the solutions envisaged by external (and especially non-governmental) actors correspondingly involved limitations on the power of states, which in turn needed to be externally imposed and monitored. In other cases, notably that of environmental conservation, predominant ideologies in Western civil society viewed the state as an irrelevance or even an obstruction to the management of issues that were seen as belonging to the common heritage of humanity. Though environmental NGOs needed in practice to work with African governments over measures such as the control of 'poaching', they were exceptionally dismissive of governments' claims to control resources within their national territories, which were central to the idea of sovereignty.

## Insurgency and the idea of statehood

Further critical issues in the idea of sovereignty have arisen from the role of insurgent movements. Insurgencies are in effect 'quasi-states' themselves: they do not figure in international relations simply—in the way that opposition political parties do, for example—as organizations seeking to take over state power from incumbent regimes; they also act like states in important respects. Their role in the international system is significant, both in practice and at the conceptual level, and has received far less than its due.[15]

For a start, insurgent movements frequently meet many if not all of the criteria which are normally used to distinguish states. Militarily effective movements meet the most basic criterion for statehood, which is physical control over territory and population. For several years before its capture of Asmara in May 1991, for example, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) controlled the greater part of the territory of Eritrea, gradually restricting the Ethiopian Government forces to the area immediately around Asmara, and governing a very substantial proportion of the total population. Movements such as UNITA in Angola, or the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) have likewise controlled large areas (in the NPFL's case, by far the greater part of the national territory outside the capital) for a period of several years. Negative sovereignty, in Jackson's sense, was closely associated with control over the capital city, reflecting the conventions of diplomacy

[15] Published material on the international relations of insurgent movements has concentrated largely on 'liberation movements', and especially those formed to contest white minority rule in southern Africa; see, in particular, Stephen Ellis and Tsepo Sechaba, *Comrades against Apartheid: The ANC and the South African Communist Party in Exile* (London, 1992); Colin Leys and John Saul (eds.), *Namibia's Liberation Struggle: The Two-edged Sword* (London, 1995); and W. Cyrus Reed, 'International Politics and National Liberation: ZANU and the Politics of Contested Sovereignty in Zimbabwe', *African Studies Review*, 36 (1993), pp. 31–59. I have made preliminary attempts to fill the gap with respect to other African insurgencies: see Clapham, *Africa and the International System*, ch. 9; and Christopher Clapham, 'The International Relations of Africa's Guerrilla Movements', *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 3 (1995), pp. 81–91.

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as a kind of international board game, in which control of the capital counted as having 'won'. Given the emphasis in Maoist guerrilla strategies on surrounding the city from the countryside, and given also that Third World cities (and especially capitals) frequently act as the consumers of economic resources which are largely produced in the countryside, these conventions can be extremely misleading as guides to the actual location of both military and economic power. During the final months of his incumbency, as the various opposition factions took over control of the rest of the country, President Siad Barre of Somalia was derisively but accurately referred to as 'the Mayor of Mogadishu'.

Control of the countryside often brings with it control of the economic surplus, and engagement in the international economy to which that surplus is largely directed. Insurgencies are thus closely associated with control over informal markets. The management of these markets evidently depends on the productive capabilities of the regions under insurgent control, with a high value being placed on commodities which are both profitable and easily transported. The international trade in narcotics has thus provided a very attractive source of insurgent fund-raising, notably in parts of South-East Asia and Latin America, since this is a trade in which *not* being a formally recognized state confers substantial market advantages. Both in Angola and in the West African states of Liberia and Sierra Leone, control over the diamond trade has been a critical part of the insurgent economy.[16]

Insurgent movements, however, do not engage only in illicit economic activities such as narcotics or diamond smuggling. They are equally involved in international economic transactions which have normally been regarded as the realm of states. The best-documented case is the NPFL in Liberia, which after conquering almost all of the national territory outside Monrovia (which was held by an international military force operating under the aegis of the Economic Community of West African States) declared its own statehood with its capital at Gbarnga, and a territory denominated Greater Liberia which extended into eastern Sierra Leone. Despite remaining unrecognized by any other state, the NPFL entered into concession agreements with major international companies, for the export of iron ore, rubber and tropical timber, royalties on which were paid to the NPFL.[17] UNITA in Angola evidently operated in rather similar fashion, especially through South African companies, though these appear to have worked through middlemen rather than entered into formal agreements in their own name.

Insurgents likewise figure as recipients of international aid, especially that disbursed through NGOs. Though NGOs operated in territory controlled by the Biafran regime during the Nigerian civil war, and on the insurgent side in other civil conflicts such as the war in Afghanistan, the clearest examples come from the Horn of Africa. The EPLF in particular developed close relationships with a number of aid agencies in order to secure relief food and medicines for the people of areas under its control, which could equally be used for the support of its military forces; the same, of course, happened on the government side. The EPLF led the way for several other African insurgent movements in establishing its own relief organization, the Eritrean Relief Agency (ERA), which served precisely the same functions

[16] See Paul Richards, 'Rebellion in Liberia and Sierra Leone: A Crisis of Youth?', in Oliver Furley (ed.), *Conflict in Africa* (London, 1995).

[17] William Reno, 'Foreign Firms and the Financing of Charles Taylor's NPFL', *Liberian Studies Journal*, 18 (1993), pp. 175–88.

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as the equivalent government organization, and at the same time helped to insulate Western NGOs from the charge of providing direct support for a rebel army; in fact, ERA was an agency of the EPLF, in just the same way that the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) was an agency of the Ethiopian Government. In addition to supplies in kind, NGOs provided it with cash for local purchases of food, which by accounting for purchases at official (and overvalued) rates of exchange, while hard currencies were exchanged at much more favourable free market rates, could be made to yield a useful surplus.[18] NGOs characteristically provide a great many other services for insurgent movements, notably in the field of external publicity and communications.

Insurgent movements have varying, but important and sometimes formal, diplomatic relations with external states. They have their foreign policies and diplomatic services, in just the same way that states do; indeed, given the importance of external relations for the achievement of their military and political goals, these foreign policies are often more intensely (and indeed competently) conducted than those of formally constituted states. If international recognition is to be regarded as an essential element of statehood, insurgent movements may well enjoy it to a greater degree than the governments against which they are fighting. 'Liberation insurgencies' in particular, directed against colonial or white minority rule, have enjoyed a high level of international recognition, within a global order which has regarded them as more 'legitimate' than the governments which they opposed. They have had formal diplomatic missions accredited to a large number of states.[19] The South West Africa People's Organization was recognized by the United Nations as the 'sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people', at a time when Namibian territory was entirely controlled by South Africa. Polisario in Western Sahara was recognized by a majority of African states as the government of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, at a time when its territory was claimed and occupied by Morocco. Other movements have had diplomatic missions in all but name. Their 'foreign ministries' have normally been established in the capital of a sympathetic host state, where they could gain access to diplomats accredited to it: Western states would, for example, normally deal with the EPLF through their embassies in Khartoum, and with the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) through their embassies in Addis Ababa. In other cases, the host state was far removed from the scene of conflict: the MNR/Renamo in Mozambique, for instance, conducted much of its diplomacy from Nairobi.

The diplomatic standing of insurgencies was enormously enhanced, first by the 'Second Cold War', and subsequently by the collapse of the Soviet Union. If, as has already been suggested, juridical sovereignty rests on a tacit acceptance by major powers of limits on conflict between themselves, then it may be undermined by the disappearance either of these conflict-limiting conventions, or else more radically of the conflict itself. The Second Cold War threatened juridical statehood in the first way, the end of the Cold War in the second. Insurgent movements have almost always benefited from the support provided by the international opponents of the

[18] See William DeMars, 'Tactics of Protection: International Human Rights Organizations in the Ethiopian Conflict, 1980–1986', in Eileen McCarthy-Arnolds et al. (eds.), *Africa, Human Rights and the International System* (Westport, CT, 1994), ch.5.

[19] See Scott Thomas, *The Diplomacy of Liberation: The International Relations of the African National Congress of South Africa, 1960–1985* (London, 1995), for the foreign representation of the ANC.

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states against which they were fighting, whether in the context of Cold War, post-colonial or simply regional rivalries. With the collapse of the US-supported regimes in Vietnam and Cambodia in 1975, and the outbreak of civil war in Angola later in the same year, this support became increasingly overt. Subsequent upheavals, including the Ogaden War of 1977–8, the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua and the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, reinforced this trend. The barely concealed US backing for UNITA in Angola, for example, was publicly acknowledged at the highest level when President Reagan received Jonas Savimbi in January 1986. As long as the bipolar system remained in existence, however, the conventions of juridical statehood continued to impose certain limits on external intervention. Most critically, the principle of juridical statehood helped to define whoever held power in the capital as the 'government' of the state concerned, and correspondingly to define the insurgent movements as 'rebels'. This in turn gave the 'government' greatly enhanced access to external aid: it could enter into public alliances, extending on occasion to the commitment of troops in its defence by its allies or patron, whereas the 'rebels' could gain only limited assistance.

With the end of the Cold War, the definition of civil conflict in the Third World was transformed. Instead of regarding one party as representing the state, and the others as opposing it, external mediators came to conceive all the parties as subsisting on a more or less equal footing; their function in turn was no longer to protect those who could claim (under the rules of 'negative sovereignty') to represent the state, but rather to achieve a political settlement through recognition of all the competing parties, and the articulation of some constitutional structure which would encompass them. In the process, the international standing of insurgents was greatly enhanced, and that of governments correspondingly diminished. Attempted settlements in Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Liberia and elsewhere placed all the competing parties round the same table, regardless of their claims to statehood. In Somalia, none of the parties could make any plausible claim to statehood anyhow. In Mozambique, when Renamo threatened at the last moment to withdraw from elections, which were due to take place in October 1994 as part of an internationally mediated settlement, British aid minister Lynda Chalker travelled deep into Renamo-held territory in order to persuade its leader, Afonso Dhlakama, to participate. A few years earlier, such an act would have been diplomatically inconceivable.

As a result, first, of the emergence of effective insurgent movements capable of sustaining prolonged opposition to African governments and, second, of the increasing absorption of these movements into international politics, the dividing line between 'states' and 'non-states' has become so blurred as to be virtually imperceptible. Only the most formal definitions of statehood still served to make the distinction: the lines on maps still run where they did, regardless of whether they correspond to any actual distribution of power on either side of them; membership of the United Nations and other international organizations is still normally assigned to the nominees of those who control the capitals of the states defined by such maps. But the assumption that such maps and such nominees represent 'states' rests only on the legalism that continues to pervade the practice of international relations. It often has little if any connection with the actual power relations which must be at the core of any political analysis, whether domestic or international.

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**The 'privatization' of state power**

Not only have other international actors such as insurgent movements come to behave increasingly like states: states for their part, or those who represent them, may behave like insurgencies. Central to the idea of statehood has been its *public* character. States have come to achieve the status that they have been accorded in international diplomacy as a result of their claim that they are not merely the private 'estates' of their individual owners, but act collectively on behalf of their citizens. This claim to representation has been accepted under the rules of sovereignty, no matter how bitterly it has been contested by many of those citizens themselves. Not only their recognition by the international system, but their domestic legitimacy, their right to tax or coerce their inhabitants, and the role of public institutions such as the military or the civil bureaucracy rest on this claim. In parts of Africa, at least, the management of the ostensibly public powers of internationally recognized states has been so radically privatized as to render statehood an entirely inapposite formula for understanding either their domestic politics or their external relations.

The privatization of power is in one sense most evidently represented by rulers such as Idi Amin in Uganda or Jean-Bédel Bokassa in the Central African Republic (and briefly Empire), who converted their states into personal fiefdoms, which in turn were ruled with considerable brutality. This did not, however, seriously affect their conduct of external relations, and their regimes were sustained by international support—in one case largely from France, in the other from Libya and other states—until the actions of their rulers provoked external intervention to remove them. This idea of a private state has been conceptualized by William Reno as what he defines as 'shadow statehood'.[20] Shadow states are political entities, including formally constituted states, which are ruled through the exploitation and control of informal markets, without or behind the facade provided by formal state institutions. For the rulers of shadow states, the public character of statehood is an obstruction. On the one hand, it may impose constraints on the ruler's exercise of power: an army constituted according to the forms of military professionalism is far more of a danger than an essentially private force controlled by the president's son or brother. On the other, it limits his access to resources: state employees such as teachers or health workers, for instance, consume revenues while doing little or nothing to sustain the ruler's power. In these circumstances, particularly as state revenues are threatened by structural adjustment schemes, and formal state institutions are brought under the aegis of 'good governance', it may profit the ruler to maintain power instead through a network of personal contacts, both domestic and international.

Consider, for example, the agreement signed in March 1976 between President Mobutu of Zaire and the West German Orbital Transport & Raketen AG (OTRAG), which gave OTRAG rights amounting to private sovereignty over 150,000 square kilometres of Zairean territory, including 'the right to possess and use the territory without restriction for the purpose of launching missiles into the atmosphere and into space . . . and to take all measures which, in the opinion of

[20] See William Reno, *Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone* (Cambridge, 1995).

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OTRAG, are related directly, indirectly or otherwise.'[21] The agreement was not made public, and external pressure compelled its cancellation once details of it emerged, but it can only have been entered into on the basis of substantial payments to Mobutu in person. The dumping of toxic waste, on the basis of secret agreements between African rulers and foreign companies, involving personal payments to the ruler concerned, provides another example of the private management of states; enough such cases have come to light to indicate that there are likely to be others which have been successfully concealed.[22] Narcotics provide a third. In Sierra Leone, successive rulers, whether governing the state 'officially' from Freetown or through insurgent movements, have depended on extracting a surplus from the illicit trade in diamonds.[23] The government's ability to profit from this trade has in turn been protected by the recruitment of a private army, supplied by the South African security corporation, Executive Outcomes; I have seen no analysis of the relationship between Executive Outcomes and South African diamond interests, but it would be naive to suppose that there is none.

What we are observing here is not merely 'corruption', but the dissolution of the idea of statehood which has underpinned the study of international relations. In its place, we are looking at a state of affairs which much more closely resembles the relationship between the Western world and the disparate statelets and societies of tropical Africa in the years preceding their formal incorporation into the global system with the advent of colonialism. Just as the activities of Western NGOs mirror those of missionaries and anti-slavery campaigners in the pre-colonial era, so do those of OTRAG and Executive Outcomes reproduce the Africa of the slave-traders themselves. Reports of Lebanese diamond-dealers operating across the border from Zaire into Angola, protected by personal bodyguards and carrying modern 'trade goods' in the form of video recorders and other products of the industrial economies, recall the earliest days of Africa's encounter with Western capitalism.[24]

As in pre-colonial Africa, this encounter is mediated on the African side by actors with widely disparate relationships with their own societies, and equally varying forms and levels of power at their disposal. At one extreme, where a combination of domestic authority structures, economic resources and external recognition and assistance permit the maintenance of reasonably effective states, viable governments can enter into conventional state-to-state relations with their external equivalents. At the other, a territory such as Somalia possesses none of the attributes of statehood. Their dispersed population, deeply egalitarian (among men) social ethos, and lack of economic resources have more than compensated for ethnic and cultural homogeneity to inhibit the formation of any lasting common political authority among the Somalis since long before the advent of colonial rule; such unity as was achieved amounted to no more than the ability of the occasional exceptional leader to muster

[21] See Crawford Young and Thomas Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairean State* (Madison, WI, 1985), pp. 387–8.

[22] See Reno, *Corruption and State Politics*, pp. 137–8; Samuel O. Atteh, 'Political Economy of Environmental Degradation: The Dumping of Toxic Waste in Africa', *International Studies* (New Delhi), 30 (1993), pp. 277–98; Phil O'Keefe, 'Toxic Terrorism', *Review of African Political Economy*, 42 (1988), pp. 84–90.

[23] Reno, *Corruption and State Politics*.

[24] F. De Boeck, 'Postcolonialism, Power and Identity: Local and Global Perspectives from Zaire', in Richard Werbner and Terence Ranger (eds.), *Postcolonial Identities in Africa* (London, 1996), ch. 3.

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temporary support for a common cause. With the collapse of the project of Somali unification, the normal condition of pre-colonial anarchy was restored; attempts by foreign states to help construct a state from the top down, through the lavish provision of military aid, merely exacerbated the problem, and caused massive human suffering into the bargain.

## Conclusion

Since the end of the Cold War, the frequent inability of the governments of formally recognized states to control the territories ascribed to them, and the much more limited number of cases in which any recognized form of government has collapsed altogether, have increasingly imposed themselves on the consciousness of the international system. The common reaction, at the levels both of diplomatic practice and of intellectual analysis, has been to reassert the primacy of statehood. Such cases have been treated as 'collapsed states', in which 'legitimate authority' needed to be restored;[25] or as 'failed states' which had to be 'saved', if need be through some form of United Nations 'conservatorship',[26] even though the very considerable difficulties of this project also had to be recognized.[27] Such aspirations reflect not only a diplomatic and intellectual preoccupation with the particular forms of political organization to which the international system has become accustomed, but also a normative concern for the consequences of collapse. Even though a number of states have done massive damage to their peoples, there has been little in the experience of failed states to cast doubt on the proposition that statehood remains an essential prerequisite for order, representation and the improvement of human welfare within the present international order.

The study of international relations in Africa (and indeed elsewhere) must nonetheless take account of the fact that states are not the building-blocks from which the subject is constructed. States, like other political institutions, are not to be taken for granted. They are themselves engaged in a struggle for survival—perhaps on behalf of their populations, often merely on behalf of those who seek or claim to control them—in which they may succeed or fail. Leaving aside the question whether states are a desirable form of political organization, we still need to address the question whether they are a universally achievable one. States are expensive to maintain, both in economic terms and in terms of the demands which they make on the organization, identity and obedience of their populations. Their capacity to survive depends not only on their ability to defend themselves militarily against other states or rebel movements seeking to gain state power, but on their ability to extract the economic resources needed to maintain their differentiated administrative structures, and on the ability of those structures to deliver enough to the populations that they control to retain their continuing acquiescence. In some parts of the world, and indeed of Africa, this is more difficult to achieve than in others. State

[25] I. William Zartman (ed.), *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority* (Boulder, CO, 1995).
[26] Gerald B. Helman and Steven R. Ratner, 'Saving Failed States', *Foreign Policy*, 89 (1992/3), pp. 3–20.
[27] See Walter Clarke and Jeffrey Herbst (eds.), *Learning from Somalia: The Lessons of Armed Humanitarian Intervention* (Boulder, CO, 1997).

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collapse is by no means a universal phenomenon in the continent, and some African states have shown a remarkable capacity, not only for survival, but for revival from apparently terminal decay. The new post-Cold War global order, of which Africa forms an exceptional but particularly interesting part, is not, however, crisply divided into entities which do and do not count as 'states'. It consists instead of a mass of power structures which, regardless of formal designation, enjoy greater or lesser degrees of statehood.

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