Africans "have begun moving away from colonially designed juridical statehood to fashion empirical formulas that respond to the messiness of their current realities. Only time will reveal whether these new, flexible structures prove an effective response to . . . state weakness."

Sovereignty Reconsidered

LETITIA LAWSON AND DONALD ROTHCHILD

In the complex political and economic environment of twenty-first century Africa, new dynamics are at work reshaping the nature of sovereignty. Indeed, the Africa envisioned by the colonial powers in the nineteenth century is being transformed. In some countries, state elites continue efforts to consolidate their inherited institutions. This can be seen in South Africa, Botswana, Senegal, and Kenya, where, to varying degrees, elites are sustaining, and in some cases strengthening, inherited state structures to maintain the critical balance between the center and the periphery.

In other countries, such as Somalia and Nigeria, the weight of international and local demands outweighs the frail capacity of the political center, creating a vicious cycle of eroding institutional effectiveness and declining legitimacy. Leaders in nations such as Zimbabwe have tried to compensate for eroding capability and legitimacy with repression. When repression fails, as it did in Somalia during the 1990s, the periphery overwhelms the center.

In other cases, the erosion of the state and state sovereignty has been less dramatic, in part because international action has mediated the political center's loss of influence. The results of international efforts to reconstitute states and to find an appropriate balance between state elites and external and local forces remain unclear in such contested situations as Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Ivory Coast, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). But international initiative, whether regional or global, in some cases seems indispensable to restoring meaningful sovereignty.

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SOVEREIGNTY UNDER SIEGE

The state, in its domestic context, is both an autonomous institution comprised of officials who wield administrative and regulatory power, and a set of organizing principles that acts as a guide to legitimate elite action. In Africa, the state as an institutional actor has provided ineffective leadership throughout the continent's postcolonial history and has eroded rapidly since the end of the cold war. As a set of patrimonial organizing principles, the African state has also been declining in recent years, as elites prove increasingly unable or unwilling to support clientelist networks in the face of declining resources.

In the international sphere, a sovereign state seeks to advance its political and economic interests and to prevent or lessen threats from other states or nonstate groups. States normally are jealous about guarding their primacy in dealing with external actors. They take pains to deny regional or global organizations access to their own nonstate actors while thwarting opportunities for identity groups to air their grievances before the African Union (AU) or the United Nations.

In recent years, however, state sovereignty as a prerogative against foreign interference has grown weaker across Africa. Very rarely were African states compelled to respond to threats or military action against their citizens or territory during the cold war era. This changed in the 1990s, as the DRC, the Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, the Ivory Coast, and Eritrea all encountered violent interventions into their territories. And in February 2005, Togo experienced the first effective diplomatic intervention in Africa when the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), supported by the AU and the international community, reversed an extra-constitutional transition of authority from the late President Gnassingbé Eyadéma to his son Faure Gnassingbé.

Since the cold war's end, the development of regional governance and globalization has diminished state authority. Transnational institutions increasingly handle critical problems such as currency control, mineral smuggling, taxation, corporate mergers, communications, defense, border security, broadcasting, and environmental controls. Meanwhile, the electronic and information revolutions have achieved a global reach that is not effectively regulated by states in Africa or elsewhere. And the international movement of migrants, goods, capital, and services continues to undermine borders.

An emerging international individual rights regime has begun to limit the rights of sovereign states to act as they wish with their citizenry. Enlightened international norms are gaining acceptance for the notion that, if states misuse their power and harm their subjects, the international community has a right, even a duty, to intervene. This trend has resulted in the imposition of sanctions against regimes in Liberia, apartheid South Africa, and Sudan.

External demands for structural economic adjustment, measures to combat corruption, and democratization as preconditions for continued resource flows also have struck directly at the African state, both as an autonomous institutional actor and as a set of patrimonial organizing principles. To the extent that international financial institutions make economic policy, and international donors dictate political reform, state sovereignty is further eroded.

THE INSECURE STATE

In addition to the pressures from above—from sources such as regional organizations and the World Bank and International Monetary Fund—Africa's central governments also find their authority squeezed from below by substate and localized interests. These interests encompass a wide variety of domestic and international groups, including nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), professional bodies, labor groups, and human rights and environmental organizations. The most disruptive of these pressures arise from ethnic, religious, and subregional demands for territorial concessions; examples include the Republic of Somaliland, Biafra, Katanga, and Eritrea.

Ethnoregional pressures for increased representation, autonomy, or self-determination have a long

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history, of course. Although the UN charter in principle recognizes the right to self-determination, UN members have, in most instances, viewed this right as limited by state sovereignty. States have a right to self-determination; substate actors do not. Thus, the UN membership accepted as legitimate the claim to self-determination made by African peoples against their European colonizers, but not the claim of ethnic communities for political autonomy from post-colonial states.

African leaders following independence were clearly determined to maintain the territorial boundaries they had inherited from the colonial powers and viewed separatism as destructive of national unity. But in the post–cold war era pressures from below have been growing and shifting.

This can be seen in the proliferation of local-international alliances in which local groups seek to affect change within their countries through international mechanisms while international actors seek change within nations by going around states. The Basarwa community of Botswana is working with the British-based NGO Survival International to block the Botswana government's program to relocate the Basarwa from the desert to areas where the government can more readily provide them with social services. Similarly, the World Bank explicitly works to bolster the capacity of civil society groups to make effective demands on the state. These efforts reduce the salience of state sovereignty.

So does the insecurity prevalent in much of Africa. When the state weakens to the point that it cannot or will not supply citizens with basic security, local communities' first recourse normally is to indigenous security mechanisms. But the success of these efforts under conditions of pervasive insecurity often proves unsatisfactory. In Somalia, security at the local level remains fragile. In Sierra Leone the Kamajors, traditional hunter/warriors, after some initial success in defending local communities, became absorbed into the struggle for resource control at the political center.

The ineffectiveness of both central and local efforts to provide security has generated a search for international alternatives. Sierra Leoneans, beginning in 2001, gratefully accepted a broad UN intervention into their internal affairs. Liberians found the will to establish a cease-fire after US Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz on July

27, 2003, declared that the United States would participate in an intervention force only if a cease-fire were agreed upon. Central Africans, citing the unreliability of state security forces, sought assistance in 2003 from peacekeepers associated with a regional organization, the Economic and Monetary Community of Central African States (CEMAC). In brief, local pressures for autonomy are increasingly balanced by desires for security—from whatever quarter it may come.

SPILLOVER EFFECTS

The fallout from state weakness would be serious enough if it were contained within a country's territorial boundaries. But weak states (states with low levels of legitimacy, a lack of social cohesion, and marked by frail public institutions) by definition have a limited ability to control their territory and maintain fixed borders.

The interdependence of regions becomes potentially threatening when people in uncontrolled areas engage in arms smuggling, attacks on security forces and civilians across borders, hostile radio broadcasts, alliances with coethnic groups in neighboring territories, and the prevention of the free movement of vital resources (such as oil or water) across frontiers. Adjacent areas can be used to launch terrorist violence or military attacks, gravely undermining the institutions and norms that promote cooperation between sovereign states.

In the weakest states, territory on both sides of the border may be uncontrolled, and borders may become largely irrelevant. Liberian warlord Charles Taylor took advantage of the weakness of neighboring states to move militia forces into Sierra Leone, Guinea, and the Ivory Coast, unleashing Liberia's destructive social, political, and military dynamics onto neighboring countries.

More generally, spillover effects from state weakness undermine the normative order on which the African state system is based. Developed by African leaders during and after the decolonization process, the continental system assumes legitimate states effectively ruled by governments acceptable to their populations. By dint of their control over activities taking place under their jurisdiction, such governments are in a position to enter into negotiations with their counterparts and to deliver on their agreements. With an assumed monopoly of force, a system of rules can emerge that is likely to prove predictable and enforceable.

However, to the extent a state is soft and unable to enforce its rules, it cannot ensure security internally or externally. The rules themselves lose authoritativeness, and doubts arise about the entire system of interstate order as a contagion of skepticism sweeps across the continent. The notion of states as a source of norms erodes along with the state structures themselves.

STATE EFFORTS TO COPE

What have African leaders done to respond to the erosion of statehood? In their efforts to deal with societal pressures, and particularly the pressures that can be unleashed by ethnic, religious, and subregional identity interests, Africa's leaders have had to make a fundamental choice between integral and pluralistic approaches. Each approach organizes institutions differently to cope with the challenges of security, group participation, and effective governance. Each involves different kinds of trade-offs under conditions of anemic state legitimacy and low economic resources.

The integral approach, which links unitary government with individual rights, concentrates power at the political center in an effort to contain identity-group conflict and to encourage effective rule. This strategy avoids measures calculated to balance political power, viewing these as undesirable restraints on the central government's capacity for effective action. The emphasis is on respect for rules and norms that provide for political participation in elections and in legal systems as individuals, not as members of groups.

In 1993, for example, Mozambique's president, Joaquim Chissano, resisted the introduction of a power-sharing system in his country after civil war, fearing that formal institutions for balancing representation would result in too rigid a relationship between the ruling party and the opposition. Centralization of power is calculated to facilitate decisive governance, but it is sometimes rash and unwise, and sometimes results in repression or exploitation of minorities.

The pluralistic tendency has wide appeal to conflict managers because it helps to resolve the problem of balanced participation by group representatives in key government institutions. Examples of power-sharing systems include Burundi and the DRC. The peace agreement between the government of Sudan and southern insurgents signed on December 31, 2004, also features power sharing. Pluralistic institutions can take various forms, including inclusive decision-making (for example, allocating executive and legislative positions among major identity

groups), partitioned decision-making (autonomy arrangements and federalism), and predetermined decision-making (institutionalized formulas for revenue sharing). By protecting the interests of weaker groups through inclusion, autonomous power, or constitutional safeguards, the pluralist approach enables identity group leaders to defend their constituents' concerns at the center of the governmental process.

Although pluralistic institutions seem a rational response to the challenge of fair representation, in practice they may prove an insufficient guarantor of minority well-being. Problems of political stability arise because the weaker parties remain uncertain about the majority coalition's preparedness to deliver on its promises of power dispersion that it made at the bargaining table. Uncertainty about the credibility of commitments can give rise, as in Angola in the 1990s, to defections by the weaker party. Rising collective fear may provoke a breakdown in pluralistic institutions, with their expectations of moderate political behavior.

Paradoxically, power-sharing institutions, which are put in operation to ease minority fears about their security, may contribute to their insecurity. In addition, because of the way in which they balance and spread decision-making authority, pluralist institutions may weaken state capacity for leadership by causing immobility and ineffective governance.

In practice, hybrid alternatives incorporating both majoritarianism and power sharing have in several cases helped political leaders cope with the challenges of security, representation, and effective governance. Majoritarian regimes, for instance, have made use of the proportionality principle in Namibia and South Africa and conceded cultural and social protections in Algeria and again in South Africa. As long as cooperation is preferred to domination, there is no need to assume that a centralized state will result in majoritarian tyranny.

But whatever the structural design—integral, pluralistic, or hybrid—each assumes and requires state capacity: that is, institutions capable of implementing and upholding whichever set of rules is adopted. When crafted in an environment of extreme state weakness, no strategy is likely to succeed without independent fortification of state institutions. Without the presence of an effectual state, minority interests become more vulnerable to hostile elements in their neighborhoods, and everyone becomes more exposed to generalized insecurity.

ENTER THE UNITED NATIONS

When internal strategies fail to provide a stable basis for governance in African nations, external actors increasingly have been called on to back regime reconstitution, normally in the wake of violent conflict. International interventions, like strategies initiated by state elites, have focused on regime alternatives. But, whereas state elites prefer integral designs that promise to maximize their control, international conflict managers generally prefer pluralist power-sharing arrangements that promise to replace conflict with cooperation. These arrangements almost always are legitimized by internationally supervised, liberal elections. Thus, hybrid solutions also are common in external efforts to cope with state weakness.

The United Nations first deployed peacekeepers to Africa in response to state collapse. Propping up the state and its sovereignty was an explicit mandate in Congo between 1960 and 1964. After several negotiated power-sharing arrangements failed to ensure political stability, the state mantle fell to a military government with strong external backing. The integral approach prevailed in theory; in practice cold war patronage provided the principal stabilizing force. Indeed, the cold war international regime combined with the norm of juridical sovereignty to stabilize state sovereignty in Africa for three decades, before UN troops returned to supervise an orderly process of decolonization and power transfer in Namibia.

The great power shifts that attended the end of the cold war reduced surrogate conflicts, thus creating opportunities for ending civil wars, but they also removed the international supports that had underwritten individual states and the African state system. Those states that had leaned most heavily on great power backing faltered, while elsewhere state elites scrambled to construct new strategies of survival in a dramatically changing world.

An explosion of UN "peacekeeping" hit Africa in the 1990s. In Somalia, the United Nations attempted to establish a secure environment for humanitarian assistance in the absence of state authority, then assumed responsibility for stabilizing the country. After militia forces attacked UN personnel in June 1993, the mandate was expanded to

Sierra Leone has become something of a model for international involvement in Africa.

include the establishment of "effective authority" for the UN mission "throughout Somalia." This initial move toward what might be considered neo-trusteeship was cut short when the mandate was again revised in February 1994 to exclude the use of coercive methods. The UN peacekeepers withdrew a year later, having accomplished little beyond the narrower humanitarian goals.

The UN undertook more traditional missions in support of postconflict regime transitions in Mozambique, Rwanda, and Angola. These efforts produced one success (Mozambique), one failure (Angola), and one unmitigated disaster (Rwanda). Following a similar template, each intervention was charged with monitoring a cease-fire; supporting disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of combatants (DDR); and overseeing a regime transition. A key explanatory factor for success or failure was DDR. In Angola and Mozambique, insurgent leaders balked when it became clear that they would not win presidential elections. In Angola, DDR was so far behind schedule at the time of the election that guerrilla leader Jonas Savimbi found it easy to return to war. In Mozambique, elections were pushed back until DDR had been completed so that when former guerrilla leader Afonso Dhlakama balked, he found himself in a much weaker position. Regional and international pressure (as well as some additional side payments) kept him involved in the peace process.

The availability of readily exploitable natural resources in the context of weak states and global markets also appears to have played a role in the fate of state-building interventions. Divorced from his cold war sponsors, Savimbi had recourse to diamonds to keep his operations going profitably; Mozambique offered no such rewarding alternative.

THE RWANDA EFFECT AND LIBERIA

In Rwanda, the fallout from failed international mediation-peacekeeping efforts contributed significantly to the end of the African elite pact on state sovereignty. Since independence, mutual commitment to upholding the sanctity of inherited borders had delegitimized secession and relieved overburdened states of the need to actually control all of their territory. No longer can this be assumed. The Rwanda story is well known, but what it tells us about the efficacy and potential dangers of internationally driven power-sharing schemes is worth restating. Under intense diplomatic, political, and economic pressure, the Rwandan government agreed to a generous power-sharing deal with a rebel group that it accorded no legitimacy. In the

absence of elite consensus, this solution could only be as strong as the institutions that sustained it in the face of resistance.

In Rwanda, state institutions were inadequate to contain the extremist tendencies among the hard-line Hutu leadership that precluded implementation of the power-sharing agreement with the Tutsi rebels. The fallout from this has been devastating not only for Rwanda, but also for its neighbors. The norm of state sovereignty limited a neighboring state's ability to respond to what started as an internal security matter but quickly became a major regional security threat.

As a result, the Rwandan massacres that spilled over into Congo a decade ago have undermined the norm of state sovereignty significantly. Neighboring countries have invaded Congolese territory in pursuit of their own security and economic interests. Elsewhere, state sovereignty has been challenged by subregional organizations seeking to resolve internal conflicts and preempt spillover and regional destabilization.

The ECOWAS intervention in Liberia (1990–1997) marked the first time a subregional organization undertook peacekeeping. It was also the first time the UN had approved peacekeeping activities by another international organization, and, with the establishment of the UN Observer Mission in Liberia in 1993, the first time the UN had cooperated with a peacekeeping operation organized by another international organization.

ECOWAS did not suffer from what Richard Betts has called "the delusion of impartial intervention." Its primary goal in Liberia was to deny sovereign power to the rebels led by the warlord Charles Taylor. ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) forces were drawn deeply into the Liberian conflict, taking large-scale military action and forming alliances with some local factions against others. ECOMOG displayed the will to engage in peacemaking and to take casualties in pursuit of its objectives, but ultimately it lacked the capabilities necessary for full success.

In the end, ECOWAS and the international community oversaw an election that brought Taylor to power, and with 75 percent of the vote. After seven years of "peacekeeping," Liberians learned that only warlords could bring peace to their country. State institutions were not rebuilt as part of the power-sharing formula, and President Taylor's governance strategies displayed significant continuities with his previous warlord activities. The political, economic, and social dynamics that unfolded in the Liberian hinterland during the ECOMOG years

remained to haunt Liberia and its immediate neighbors, spilling across borders and continuing to threaten regional stability.

CAR TROUBLE

The last UN mission to have been completed, a little-noticed stabilization effort in the Central African Republic (CAR), began as an informal initiative of regional countries and was succeeded by a formal subregional intervention. This country was not engaged in international conflict, nor was it in transition from civil war. The CAR state was collapsing, with elected President Ange-Félix Patassé having lost control over security and his security forces. Following a succession of army mutinies, a Franco-African summit asked the presidents of Gabon, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Mali to mediate a truce between loyal and dissident army factions in December 1996. Within a month a peace agreement had been signed and, at President Patassé's request, an inter-African force had been organized. Eight hundred troops were deployed to Bangui, the capital, in February 1997, with substantial French logistical and financial support. Following the precedent in Liberia, the UN retroactively authorized the inter-African force under the UN charter.

After France announced its intention to withdraw from the CAR, the UN Mission to the Central African Republic (MINURCA) was established in March 1998 and deployed the following month. MINURCA's mandate was devoted to bolstering basic state security functions (assisting in enhancing security and stability, maintaining law and order, building policing capacity, and organizing legislative elections). To the extent that a state is defined by its monopoly on the legitimate use of force within a territory, the UN assumed the role of a state. MINURCA as such represented a milestone in the evolution of international involvement to sustain both statehood and sovereignty, even if still in the interest of regime consolidation.

As the UN withdrew its peacekeepers in early 2000, Secretary General Kofi Annan advised the CAR government "to do its utmost to build on the gains made during MINURCA's presence." But this was not to be. In the years that followed, President Patassé called in Libyan forces and then Congolese rebels to defend him from his own security forces. In December 2002, CEMAC—the Economic and

Monetary Community of Central African States—deployed yet another peacekeeping mission to Bangui with a mandate to protect President Patassé, restructure the army, and now to secure the border with Chad as well. Despite this effort, a sacked Army chief, Francois Bozize, finally overthrew Patassé in March 2003. In response, CEMAC's mandate was expanded to include defense of all provincial towns and major transportation routes and patrol of the north, even though the mission had only 380 troops. Bozize, on his way to likely victory in a presidential election in May 2005, has made only limited gains in restoring state structures.

International peacekeeping operations can reinforce basic state capabilities long enough to oversee a regime transition, but they had never even attempted to fortify basic state institutions until MINURCA. If existing institutional capacity is already adequate, success is possible, as in Namibia; if not, solutions will quickly unravel, as in the CAR; in the total absence of state institutions, such external interventions can gain little if any traction, as in Somalia. Regime construction, even when relatively successful, is not likely to contribute directly to strengthening basic state institutions in the short to medium term. The weaker the initial state, the more unsettling regime solutions are likely to prove. This lesson was finally learned in Sierra Leone.

The Africa envisioned by the colonial powers in the nineteenth century is being transformed.

BEYOND COPING

A UN mission in Sierra Leone was established in July 1998 to support ECOMOG in that country, just as the United Nations had attempted in Liberia. After the February 1999 elections in Nigeria, President Olusegun Obasanjo announced that Nigerian troops, which formed the backbone of ECOMOG, would withdraw from Sierra Leone, in accordance with his campaign pledge. The UN-brokered Lomé Accords, the most cynical of power-sharing arrangements, were signed in July 1999. They sought to end the conflict over diamond wealth in Sierra Leone by making rebel leader Foday Sankoh the minister of mines and granting full amnesty to all rebels.

In October, the UN mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) was formed, with a mandate to replace ECOMOG forces and oversee implementation of the accords. In February 2000, under conditions of widespread insecurity, the mandate was widened. The UN assumed responsibility for security at key locations, including government buildings in Freetown, the capital, and DDR sites. The mission also committed itself to helping Sierra Leone law enforcement authorities in the discharge of their duties.

In early May 2000, several UN soldiers were killed and hundreds taken hostage by a maverick militia group known as the West Side Boys. UN Secretary General Annan appealed to the United States and Britain for assistance, but both declined to deploy troops. The situation seemed ominous. With 8,700 UN peacekeepers dispersed throughout the country, a repeat of the speedy withdrawal from Rwanda in the face of escalating violence would have been difficult, and it would likely have undermined the credibility of UN peacekeeping around the world.

The United States pressured Nigeria and ECOMOG to return to Sierra Leone, and dispatched US Special Forces to Nigeria to conduct training for the operation. On May 6, 2000, Britain dispatched a battalion of paratroops and five warships to Sierra Leone to evacuate noncombatants. As British forces secured the capital and airport for evacuation of British citizens and other foreign nationals, the general security situation improved markedly. The British troops began to cooperate on security efforts with the United Nations and the Sierra Leone government; the British operation thus expanded into a general intervention in support of the state.

In September 2000, the West Side Boys took 11 British troops hostage. In sharp contrast to earlier UN efforts to deal with hostage taking, British forces immediately launched a rescue mission. Two of the hostages were killed, along with virtually all the militia forces involved. This event was a turning point for the international intervention, for it was clear that the British meant business. Resistance receded. UN troops began deploying into previously rebel-held territory in March 2001, to be joined in May by British-trained contingents of the Sierra Leone Army. That same month UNAMSIL's mandate was revised to include "the establishment and consolidation of state authority throughout the territory of Sierra Leone." By the end of 2001, the war was over and disarmament completed. The nation held a presidential election

in 2002, and in September 2004, the Sierra Leone government reassumed countrywide security primacy from UNAMSIL.

LEARNING FROM SIERRA LEONE

The international community seems finally to have recognized that if it is going to be a force for peace and democracy in Africa's weakest states, it has to engage in state building. While the long-term prospects of this effort are far from assured, Sierra Leone has become something of a model for international involvement in Africa. In this model, small contingents of special forces from major powers lend quiet but credible and effective force to back up the United Nations' state-support activities, all of which is legitimized by the participation of subregional organizations such as ECOWAS. Although some scholars have begun pushing "neo-trusteeship" or "shared sovereignty" as an effective response to state collapse, it remains to be seen whether external actors can really build states for others.

The 2003 intervention in Liberia was clearly influenced by Sierra Leone, with the UN mission, ECOWAS, and US Special Forces attempting to re-create the accidental balance of strengths that emerged in Sierra Leone. In the Ivory Coast, the French took the initial lead (as they had in the CAR), and later were joined by ECOWAS forces and finally a UN operation. Current UN missions, drawing on the Sierra Leone experience, also have been given stronger mandates and more expansive rules of engagement.

In addition to support for the implementation of cease-fires in Liberia, the Ivory Coast, Burundi, and the DRC, UN missions have been given mandates to support governments, in cooperation with the appropriate regional organization or interested parties. These operations are helping governments in restructuring police forces, forming and/or restructuring militaries, reestablishing national authority throughout countries, consolidating government institutions, and preparing for national elections. In short, the mission today is state (re)formation.

THE FUTURE OF SOVEREIGNTY

Sovereignty and statehood are in flux in Africa. International, subregional, national, and local experimentation in response to the erosion of sovereignty and statehood may well take African countries in different directions. Somalia, for example, has settled into a more peaceful condition of statelessness in the past decade. Once its cities were looted and humanitarian supplies dried up, warlords and their militia carved out fiefdoms for themselves. Borders remain on the map, although Ethiopian troops cross them freely, and Somali groups aspire to create a community that includes Somali populations in the Ogaden province of Ethiopia. Somalia's seat in the UN General Assembly remains empty, but it remains. Somalia as such has neither unifying state institutions nor fixed borders, but it retains a theoretical sovereignty in waiting.

In Sierra Leone, it remains to be seen if the state's reassumed authority over internal security will hold up when UNAMSIL departs. In the Ivory Coast, the peace process has been declared over, but what will follow also remains unknown. Rebel groups in the country's west have toyed publicly with the idea of secession. If they do declare independence, it would constitute the first serious challenge to state authority and territorial integrity since the attempted secession of Biafra from Nigeria in 1966. (Both Eritrea and Somaliland claim separate existences from the colonial era.) The outcome of the war that would inevitably follow would send a strong message across the continent.

More positive messages are also being dispatched from West Africa, however. Following the attempted transfer of power from Togo's late President Eyadéma to his son in February 2005, ECOWAS ignored state sovereignty and demanded a return to constitutionality. When its demand was not met, it imposed sanctions, including the expulsion of Togo from the organization. With the illegal transfer of power now successfully reversed (mostly), ECOWAS has assumed responsibility for monitoring preparations for what could be Togo's first free and fair presidential election in April. Here again, the outcome, whatever it turns out to be, will be influential well beyond Togo.

Clearly, Africans are reconsidering sovereignty. They have begun moving away from colonially designed juridical statehood to fashion empirical formulas that respond to the messiness of their current realities. Only time will reveal whether these new, flexible structures prove an effective response to a political environment in which state weakness poses severe challenges. ■