

The Origins of Transnational Alliances

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Rulers, Rebels, and Political Survival in the Congo Wars

The Second Congo War was “the biggest African war of modern times.”¹ Within weeks of its outbreak in August 1998, the war had drawn in the armed forces of eight African states. It began with a rebellion in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) that the rulers of Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi helped instigate in order to overthrow Congolese President Laurent-Désiré Kabila, whom they themselves had brought to power one year earlier in the First Congo War. Their plan was swiftly thwarted, however, when Zimbabwe, Angola, Namibia, Sudan, and Chad came to Kabila’s rescue, leading to a military stalemate that took five years to be resolved.²

The two Congo Wars were both intrastate and interstate conflicts; transnational alliances between Congolese rebels and neighboring rulers were their defining feature. International relations scholars often misunderstand these conflicts, conceiving of them simply as civil wars and missing their broader implications for the study of military alliances.³ Even though the vast majority

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1. David Shearer, “Africa’s Great War,” *Survival*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Summer 1999), p. 89.
2. For historical overviews, see Gérard Prunier, *Africa’s World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Filip Reyntjens, *The Great African War: Congo and Regional Geopolitics, 1996–2006* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); and Jason K. Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters: The Collapse of the Congo and the Great War of Africa* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011).
3. In a general survey of causes of war, Jack S. Levy and William R. Thompson refer to Congo in the context of civil wars, merely adding in an endnote that the wars had “an international component, and might be called ‘internationalized civil wars.’” The fact that the second war “expanded into what many have called ‘Africa’s World War’” is hidden in another endnote. See Levy and Thompson, *Causes of War* (Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 3, 22 n. 3, 203 n. 10. For two

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of contemporary wars takes place within rather than between states, many of them have transnational dimensions.⁴ Nearly half of all rebel groups listed in a global dataset on armed conflict since 1945 either allegedly or explicitly received material support from a foreign state.⁵ The importance of these alliances is most striking in post-Cold War sub-Saharan Africa: with one partial exception, every episode of internal armed conflict from 1990 to 2010 that reached the standard threshold of war—at least 1,000 battle-related deaths in a given year—featured external support to the rebel side from at least one African state.⁶

Stephen Walt, a leading alliance theorist, confessed in 2009 that he knew “next-to-nothing” about the Congo Wars, despite being “a full-time professional in the field of international relations and security studies” and despite teaching a course on the origins of modern wars at Harvard University.⁷ Although Walt and other scholars have applied their theories to interstate alliances in what used to be called the Third World, the deeply ingrained state-centrism of the alliance literature has led almost all of them to ignore relations between states and foreign rebel groups.⁸

exceptions that provide an international relations perspective, see Boaz Atzili, “When Good Fences Make Bad Neighbors: Fixed Borders, State Weakness, and International Conflict,” *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Winter 2006/07), pp. 139–173; and John F. Clark, “A Constructivist Account of the Congo Wars,” *African Security*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (September 2011), pp. 147–170. The most prominent international relations study on Congo focuses on peacekeeping in the period after the second war. See Séverine Autesserre, *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

4. See Human Security Centre, *Human Security Report 2005: War and Peace in the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 22–25; and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, “Transnational Dimensions of Civil War,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (May 2007), pp. 293–309.

5. See David E. Cunningham, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Idean Salehyan, “Non-State Actors in Civil Wars: A New Dataset,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 30, No. 5 (November 2013), p. 527.

6. Throughout the article, I use Africa(n) as shorthand for sub-Saharan Africa(n).

7. Stephen M. Walt, “Strategic Ethnocentrism,” *Foreign Policy*, September 14, 2009, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/09/14/strategic-ethnocentrism/>. His admission came in response to reading Howard W. French, “Kagame’s Hidden War in the Congo,” *New York Review of Books*, September 24, 2009, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2009/09/24/kagames-hidden-war-in-the-congo/>.

8. See Douglas Lemke, “African Lessons for International Relations Research,” *World Politics*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (October 2003), pp. 129–132. The literature on interstate alliances in the developing world includes Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987); Steven R. David, *Choosing Sides: Alignment and Realignment in the Third World* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Michael N. Barnett and Jack S. Levy, “Domestic Sources of Alliances and Alignments: The Case of Egypt, 1962–73,” *International Organization*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (Summer 1991), pp. 369–395; Jack S. Levy and Michael N. Barnett, “Alliance Formation, Domestic Political Economy, and Third World Security,” *Jerusalem Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (December 1992), pp. 19–40; Richard J. Harknett and Jeffrey A. VanDenBerg, “Alignment Theory and Interrelated Threats: Jordan and the Persian Gulf Crisis,” *Security Studies*,

Building on the work of these scholars, this article advances the argument that most African rulers form alliances with rebel groups in nearby states to mitigate the internal threats of coups d'état and rebellions.⁹ My focus on political survival as the fundamental cause of transnational alliance formation distinguishes the article from existing literature on external support for rebel groups, which provides relatively long lists of state motives, simply refers to an abstract policy dispute and then models the interstate bargaining implications of pro-rebel support, or conceives of such support as conflict delegation and then focuses on the characteristics of rebel agents.¹⁰

Jeffrey Checkel's 2013 critique of the literature on the transnational dimensions of civil war highlights that "specific causal mechanisms remain poorly understood," because much of the predominantly quantitative work fails to provide satisfactory evidence for the mechanisms posited to explain correlational findings.¹¹ This article takes up Checkel's suggestions for improving existing scholarship.¹² Theoretically, it connects insights from quantitative research to a well-established body of literature in international relations—alliance theory—and to the broader leader-centric approach in political science.¹³ Analytically and methodologically, it focuses on the causal mechanisms

Vol. 6, No. 3 (Spring 1997), pp. 112–153; F. Gregory Gause III, "Balancing What? Threat Perception and Alliance Choice in the Gulf," *Security Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Winter 2003/04), pp. 273–305; and Eric A. Miller and Arkady Toritsyn, "Bringing the Leader Back In: Internal Threats and Alignment Theory in the Commonwealth of Independent States," *Security Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (April/June 2005), pp. 325–363.

9. The importance of such "internal threats (with or without external backing)" is emphasized by David, *Choosing Sides*, p. 12.

10. For lists of state motives, see Daniel Byman et al., *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2001), pp. 23–40; Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, Idean Salehyan, and Kenneth Schultz, "Fighting at Home, Fighting Abroad: How Civil Wars Lead to International Disputes," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (August 2008), pp. 484–485; and Geraint Hughes, *My Enemy's Enemy: Proxy Warfare in International Politics* (Brighton, U.K.: Sussex Academic Press, 2012), pp. 20–32. On coercive bargaining models, see Kenneth A. Schultz, "The Enforcement Problem in Coercive Bargaining: Interstate Conflict over Rebel Support in Civil Wars," *International Organization*, Vol. 64, No. 2 (Spring 2010), pp. 281–312; and Navin A. Bapat, "Understanding State Sponsorship of Militant Groups," *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (January 2012), pp. 1–29. On delegation, see Idean Salehyan, "The Delegation of War to Rebel Organizations," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (June 2010), pp. 493–515; and Idean Salehyan, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and David E. Cunningham, "Explaining External Support for Insurgent Groups," *International Organization*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (October 2011), pp. 709–744.

11. Jeffrey T. Checkel, "Transnational Dynamics of Civil War," in Checkel, ed., *Transnational Dynamics of Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 9. For work that is mechanism based but does not address state sponsorship, see the contributions to *ibid.*; and Kristin M. Bakke, "Help Wanted? The Mixed Record of Foreign Fighters in Domestic Insurgencies," *International Security*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Spring 2014), pp. 150–187.

12. See Checkel, "Transnational Dynamics of Civil War," p. 4.

13. On the leader-centric approach, see Bruce Bueno de Mesquita et al., *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003); Suzanne Werner, David Davis, and Bruce Bueno

that link a ruler's struggle for political survival to the formation of transnational alliances, and assesses the observable implications of these mechanisms by process tracing alliance decisions in the two Congo Wars.

More specifically, I develop a strategic theory that highlights three mechanisms—transnational threat, resource opportunity, and transnational affinity. The first is linked to the internal threat of rebellion: if a ruler believes that a neighboring ruler's support to his domestic foes is imminent (or has already occurred), he is likely to respond by forming a preemptive (or retaliatory) alliance with that neighbor's armed opposition.¹⁴ The other two mechanisms are linked to the internal threat of a coup: if key members of a ruler's domestic support coalition have a strong interest in either the material benefits related to lootable natural resources in a nearby country or the nonmaterial benefits derived from supporting cross-border ethnic or ideological kin, a ruler is likely to ensure their continued allegiance by sponsoring rebel groups in the relevant country. The theory section uses anecdotal evidence from across Africa to illustrate the broader applicability of these arguments.

The empirical section then systematically evaluates the theory in the context of the two Congo Wars. Drawing on a wide range of sources (including interviews conducted in the region), it investigates the alliance decisions made by the rulers of Angola, Rwanda, Uganda, Sudan, and Zimbabwe. Two of them (Rwanda and Uganda) formed alliances with Congolese rebels in both wars; two others (Angola and Zimbabwe) switched from supporting rebels in the first war to siding with the Congolese ruler in the second war; and one (Sudan) consistently sided with Congolese rulers. The section leverages this variation in outcomes to show that the logic of the theory can easily be extended to explain why some rulers formed interstate alliances instead of transnational ones. Overall, I find that nine of the ten alliance decisions are best explained by concerns for political survival, with the tenth case providing support for both my theory and alternative explanations.

The remainder of this article proceeds in five sections. First, I define transnational alliances and discuss alternative terms such as "proxy alliances." Second, I lay out the core assumptions, scope conditions, and causal mechanisms of my strategic theory. Third, I sketch alternative explanations for why rulers form transnational alliances that go beyond political survival, including a

de Mesquita, "Dissolving Boundaries: Introduction," *International Studies Review*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (December 2003), pp. 1–7; Giacomo Chiozza and H.E. Goemans, *Leaders and International Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith, "Domestic Explanations of International Relations," *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 15 (2012), pp. 161–181.

14. I use the male pronoun because all rulers discussed in this article are men.

ruler's desire for regional influence. Fourth, I discuss the research design and analyze the five foreign rulers' alliance decisions in the Congo Wars. I conclude with implications for policy and future research.

Defining Transnational Alliances

The theoretical study of military alliances in international relations has a long legacy of ignoring nonstate actors.¹⁵ Alliances are typically defined as formal "agreements, treaties, or conventions among states pledging to coordinate their behavior and policies in the contingency of military conflict."¹⁶ Even according to one of the broadest existing definitions, "an alliance is a formal or informal arrangement for security cooperation between two or more sovereign states."¹⁷ This state-centrism has helped lend coherence to the research program on alliances, but it has also made it less relevant for the study of contemporary military conflicts, which almost always pit a state's security forces against a rebel group.¹⁸

Although some insights from the alliance literature have recently been applied to intrastate cooperation between warring groups in multiparty civil wars,¹⁹ there is very little research on cooperative relations between states and foreign rebel groups that explicitly builds on alliance theory.²⁰ This article therefore helps build an important bridge between the well-established alliance literature and the burgeoning literature on the transnational dimensions of civil war. In this context, the definition of alliances needs to be broadened to include formal or informal arrangements for security cooperation not only between sovereign states but also between states and nonstate armed groups from different states. The former can then be referred to as "interstate alliances," the latter as "transnational alliances."²¹

Some scholars consider external sponsorship of rebel groups as a substitute

15. See Douglas Lemke, "Balancing against Extinction: Alliance Politics among Non-State Actors," in Glenn Palmer, ed., *Causes and Consequences of International Conflict: Data, Methods, and Theory* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 186–187.

16. Christopher Sprecher and Volker Krause, "Alliances, Armed Conflict, and Cooperation: Theoretical Approaches and Empirical Evidence," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (July 2006), p. 363.

17. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, p. 12.

18. See Therése Pettersson and Peter Wallensteen, "Armed Conflicts, 1946–2014," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (July 2015), p. 537.

19. See Fotini Christia, *Alliance Formation in Civil Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Navin A. Bapat and Kanisha D. Bond, "Alliances between Militant Groups," *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (October 2012), pp. 793–824.

20. For an exception, see Erica D. Borghard and Mira Rapp-Hooper, "Hizbullah and the Iranian Nuclear Programme," *Survival*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (August/September 2013), pp. 85–106.

21. These adjectives draw on the typology of interactions in Joseph S. Nye and Robert O.

for the direct use of force against a common enemy, thus conceptualizing such support as either conflict delegation or proxy warfare.²² These scholars disagree, however, about whether sponsor-proxy relationships can be called alliances.²³ Although opponents rightly note that state-rebel cooperation is typically less formal and more secretive than interstate alliances, their argument that the expediency or opportunism involved in the former is qualitatively different is unconvincing.²⁴ Alliance theorists such as Hans Morgenthau have long argued that interstate alliances are “not a matter of principle but of expediency,” too.²⁵ Scholars also disagree about whether the term “proxy” should apply to conflicts in which states directly intervene alongside foreign rebels.²⁶ To avoid conceptual confusion, I thus prefer the broader term “transnational alliance,” which encompasses direct and indirect state involvement, to the more specific “proxy alliance.”

Table 1 highlights the ubiquity of transnational alliances in sub-Saharan Africa from 1990 to 2010. Twenty-one out of twenty-two episodes of intrastate war featured at least one transnational alliance. In four of them (including the Congo Wars), African states also sent in troops to support the rebel side. Overall, the table shows that intraregional security competition has been intense. Extraregional powers, by contrast, have generally considered Africa as strategically less important since the end of the Cold War.²⁷ By focusing on post-1989 Africa, this article therefore isolates intraregional as far as possible from extraregional security dynamics.

A Strategic Theory of Transnational Alliance Formation

Transnational alliances are formed when the ruler of one state and the leader of a rebel group from another state decide to cooperate in the security realm. In

Keohane, “Transnational Relations and World Politics: An Introduction,” *International Organization*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (June 1971), pp. 332–336.

22. See Salehyan, “The Delegation of War to Rebel Organizations,” p. 494; and Andrew Mumford, *Proxy Warfare* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), pp. 1–2.

23. The terms are conceptually distinguished from each other in Hughes, *My Enemy’s Enemy*, p. 12; and Mumford, *Proxy Warfare*, p. 16. By contrast, they are used synonymously in Dylan Craig, “Proxy War by African States, 1950–2010,” Ph.D. dissertation, American University, 2012; and Borghard and Rapp-Hooper, “Hizbullah and the Iranian Nuclear Programme.”

24. See Hughes, *My Enemy’s Enemy*, p. 12; and Mumford, *Proxy Warfare*, p. 16.

25. Hans J. Morgenthau, “Alliances in Theory and Practice,” in Arnold Wolfers, ed., *Alliance Policy in the Cold War* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins Press, 1959), p. 185.

26. See Hughes, *My Enemy’s Enemy*, pp. 1–2; and Mumford, *Proxy Warfare*, pp. 21–22.

27. See Crawford Young, “Deciphering Disorder in Africa: Is Identity the Key?” *World Politics*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (July 2002), p. 537; and Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 251.

Table 1. Intrastate Wars and Transnational Alliances in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1990–2010

War Episode	Transnational Alliances (troop support indicated by an asterisk)
Angola, 1990–94	UNITA—Congo (Rep.), South Africa, Togo, and Zaire
Angola, 1998–2001	UNITA—Togo and Zambia
Burundi, 2000–02	CNDD–FDD—DRC and Zimbabwe
Chad, 1990	MPS—Sudan
Chad, 2006	FUCD and UFDD—Sudan
Congo (Rep.), 1997–98	Sassou Nguesso’s Cobras—Angola*
DRC (Zaire), 1996–97	AFDL—Angola*, Rwanda*, Uganda*, Zambia, and Zimbabwe
DRC, 1998–2000	RCD(-G)—Rwanda* and Uganda*; MLC and RCD-K/ML—Uganda*
Ethiopia, 1990–91	EPLF and TPLF—Sudan
Liberia, 2003	LURD—Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea; MODEL—Côte d’Ivoire
Mozambique, 1990–91	Renamo—South Africa
Rwanda, 1990	RPF—Uganda
Rwanda, 1994	RPF—Uganda
Rwanda, 1998	FDLR—DRC
Rwanda, 2001	FDLR—DRC
Sierra Leone, 1998–99	RUF—Burkina Faso and Liberia
Somalia, 1990–92	None (Ethiopia’s support to the SNM ended in 1988)
Somalia, 2007–10	ARS/UIC and al-Shabaab—Eritrea
Sudan, 1990–92	SPLA—Ethiopia
Sudan, 1995–2006	SPLA—Ethiopia*, Eritrea*, and Uganda*; NDA—Eritrea and Ethiopia; JEM and SLA—Chad and Eritrea; NRF—Chad
Uganda, 1996	ADF and WNBLF—Sudan and Zaire; LRA—Sudan
Uganda, 2002–04	ADF and LRA—Sudan

SOURCES: UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset v.4-2012 for war episodes, including single years of minor armed conflict if they are situated between two war years (the Rwanda 2009 episode is omitted because the fighting took place in the DRC); and author’s data for transnational alliances. See Nils Petter Gleditsch et al., “Armed Conflict 1946–2001: A New Dataset,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 39, No. 5 (September 2002), pp. 615–637; and Henning Tamm, “The Dynamics of Transnational Alliances in Africa, 1990–2010: Governments, Rebel Groups, and Power Politics,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oxford, 2014.

NOTE: ADF: Allied Democratic Forces; AFDL: Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire; ARS/UIC: Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia/Union of Islamic Courts; CNDD–FDD: National Council for the Defense of Democracy—Forces for the Defense of Democracy; EPLF: Eritrean People’s Liberation Front; FDLR: Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda; FUCD: United Front for Democratic Change; JEM: Justice and Equality Movement; LRA: Lord’s Resistance Army; LURD: Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy; MLC: Movement for the Liberation of Congo; MODEL: Movement for Democracy in Liberia; MPS: Patriotic Salvation Movement; NDA: National Democratic Alliance; NRF: National Redemption Front; RCD(-G): Rally for Congolese Democracy (- Goma); RCD-K/ML: Rally for Congolese Democracy—Kisangani/Liberation Movement; Renamo: Mozambican National Resistance; RPF: Rwandan Patriotic Front; RUF: Revolutionary United Front; SLA: Sudanese Liberation Army; SNM: Somali National Movement; SPLA: Sudan People’s Liberation Army; TPLF: Tigray People’s Liberation Front; UFDD: Union of Forces for Democracy and Development; UNITA: National Union for the Total Independence of Angola; WNBLF: West Nile Bank Liberation Front.

material terms, such cooperation is typically asymmetric: a ruler provides more military resources to rebels than vice versa. The decision on the part of the ruler is therefore of primary importance—and it is the focus of the strategic theory developed in this section.²⁸ I first discuss the core assumptions and scope conditions of the theory; I then turn to delineating its three causal mechanisms: threat, opportunity, and affinity.

CORE ASSUMPTIONS AND SCOPE CONDITIONS

Building on Steven David's argument that explanations for alliance formation in the developing world should focus on "the leader of the state rather than the state itself,"²⁹ the theory addresses the strategic interactions of two nearby rulers with each other, their domestic support coalitions, and their domestic opposition groups. It also builds on the assumption that the basic preferences of rulers are, first, to hold on to office and, second, to maximize revenue while in office.³⁰ The assumption of revenue maximization is agnostic about a ruler's specific goals: be they "predatory" or "developmental" (i.e., oriented toward personal wealth or public goods), revenue is required to achieve them.³¹ I argue, however, that the first assumption alone—political survival—can account for most of the transnational alliances formed in sub-Saharan Africa after the Cold War.

The theory also assumes that rulers typically face uncertainty: they have incomplete information about the preferences of other actors. Given this assumption, a ruler's beliefs must be specified, as they become "critical to the choice of strategy and the outcome of the interaction."³² Each of the theory's mechanisms is driven by the belief of rulers that either their nearby counterpart or their domestic support coalition may turn on them.

The scope of the theory is limited. It focuses on rulers who worry about an irregular removal from office through coups and rebellions, and it thus has much less to say about rulers whose main domestic concern is to be removed

28. On strategic theory, see David A. Lake and Robert Powell, "International Relations: A Strategic-Choice Approach," in Lake and Powell, eds., *Strategic Choice and International Relations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 3–38.

29. Steven R. David, "Explaining Third World Alignment," *World Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (January 1991), p. 237.

30. See Bueno de Mesquita et al., *The Logic of Political Survival*, p. 21.

31. Margaret Levi, *Of Rule and Revenue* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 3; Bueno de Mesquita et al., *The Logic of Political Survival*, pp. 79–80; and Arthur A. Goldsmith, "Predatory versus Developmental Rule in Africa," *Democratization*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (June 2004), p. 88.

32. Lake and Powell, "International Relations," p. 11.

in a regular manner (e.g., by losing an election).³³ In other words, the theory is not directly applicable to rulers of consolidated democracies, whose political survival depends on a large electorate rather than a relatively narrow support coalition.³⁴

The theory does, however, apply to the great majority of African rulers—namely, those who continue to face the threat of irregular removal from office. From 1990 to 2014, thirty out of forty-three mainland sub-Saharan African states (70 percent) experienced at least one coup attempt or one year of internal armed conflict.³⁵ There were twenty-two successful coups in thirteen different states.³⁶ In addition, nine rulers from eight different states were overthrown by rebels; in eight of these cases, the rebels were in transnational alliances with nearby rulers.³⁷ Albeit not as immediate as military coups, rebellions thus also posed a serious threat—especially if they received external backing.

TRANSNATIONAL THREAT

Rulers who engage in coup-proofing are likely to form transnational alliances against nearby rulers in response to a transnational threat, which I define alternatively as a ruler's belief (1) that a nearby ruler is about to provide arms to

33. On the importance of this distinction, see H.E. Goemans, "Which Way Out? The Manner and Consequences of Losing Office," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 52, No. 6 (December 2008), pp. 771–794.

34. In favoring the term "support coalition" over the more specific "winning coalition," I follow James D. Morrow et al., "Retesting Selectorate Theory: Separating the Effects of W from Other Elements of Democracy," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 102, No. 3 (August 2008), p. 393.

35. See Jonathan M. Powell and Clayton L. Thyne, "Global Instances of Coups from 1950 to 2010: A New Dataset," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (March 2011), pp. 249–259, updated online, <http://www.jonathanmpowell.com/coup-detat-dataset.html>; and Pettersson and Wallensteen, "Armed Conflicts, 1946–2014." For contrasting trends, see Daniel N. Posner and Daniel J. Young, "The Institutionalization of Political Power in Africa," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (July 2007), pp. 126–140.

36. There were three coups each in Guinea-Bissau, Niger, and Sierra Leone; two each in Lesotho, Mali, and Mauritania; and one each in Burkina Faso, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Guinea, Nigeria, and Togo. See Powell and Thyne, "Global Instances of Coups from 1950 to 2010." In contrast to Powell and Thyne, I do not count the conflicts in Rwanda in 1994 and the Central African Republic (CAR) in 2003 as coups, but as rebellions (see next footnote).

37. The deposed rulers comprise Hissène Habré (Chad); Samuel Doe (Liberia); Siad Barre (Somalia); Mengistu Haile Mariam (Ethiopia); Théodore Sindikubwabo (Rwanda); Mobutu Sese Seko (Zaire); Pascal Lissouba (Congo-Brazzaville); and Ange-Félix Patassé and François Bozizé (both CAR). Barre's is the only case in which there is no evidence of external support for the rebel side (author's dataset). For several of these cases, foreign support is incorrectly coded as absent in the Archigos dataset (version 4.0). See Henk E. Goemans, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Giacomo Chiozza, "Introducing Archigos: A Dataset of Political Leaders," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (March 2009), pp. 269–283.

domestic opposition groups, or (2) that such interference has recently occurred.³⁸ Alliance formation is preemptive in the first case, retaliatory in the second.³⁹

Before discussing preemption in more detail, it is important to explain why rulers would rely on foreign rebels instead of—or in addition to—using their own militaries to counter transnational threats. The main answer lies in the primacy of coup-proofing, which systematically undermines military effectiveness.⁴⁰ Military coups have historically led far more often to a ruler's removal from office than rebellions (with or without foreign support).⁴¹ In the hope of preventing coups from within their support coalitions, rulers engage in tactics such as stacking the military with loyal coethnics rather than making promotions based on merit; shuffling or purging high-ranking officers; dividing the military into rival branches; and creating special paramilitary forces.⁴² Rulers would counteract such tactics if they were to address transnational threats by strengthening their own military. Therefore, it is safer for them to provide arms to foreign rebels.⁴³

Rulers who themselves came to power through rebellion are more likely to have relatively effective militaries, which are thus more likely to be capable of responding to transnational threats with direct intervention across borders. Even for these rulers, however, joining forces with foreign rebels is attractive—for two reasons. First, rebel groups can act as force multipliers because they

38. By focusing on changes in beliefs while holding preferences constant, my notion of threat avoids the conceptual problems plaguing Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, pp. 21–25. See Jeffrey A. Frieden, "Actors and Preferences in International Relations," in Lake and Powell, *Strategic Choice and International Relations*, pp. 50–51.

39. Of the "five broad reasons why foreign states may support rebel groups" discussed in Gleditsch, Salehyan, and Schultz, "Fighting at Home, Fighting Abroad," pp. 484–485, two ("proxy wars" and "tit-for-tat") partly overlap with this threat mechanism. In contrast to my theory, however, the authors fail to provide an overarching explanation for how their "broad reasons" fit together.

40. See James T. Quinlivan, "Coup-Proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East," *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Fall 1999), pp. 155–158; Herbert M. Howe, *Ambiguous Order: Military Forces in African States* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2001), chap. 2; and Ulrich Pilster and Tobias Böhmelt, "Coup-Proofing and Military Effectiveness in Interstate Wars, 1967–99," *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (September 2011), pp. 331–350.

41. See Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza, "Introducing Archigos," p. 275. On Africa specifically, see Philip Roessler, "The Enemy Within: Personal Rule, Coups, and Civil War in Africa," *World Politics*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (April 2011), p. 308.

42. See Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 534–536; and Aaron Belkin and Evan Schofer, "Toward a Structural Understanding of Coup Risk," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 47, No. 5 (October 2003), p. 596.

43. For a similar argument about the links between internal and external threats, "with external rivals fomenting internal opposition or aiding domestic insurrection," see Harknett and VanDenBerg, "Alignment Theory and Interrelated Threats," p. 123. Despite this observation, Harknett and VanDenBerg's theory addresses only interstate alignments.

have “specialized knowledge about local populations, terrain, and targets.”⁴⁴ Second, given that aggression by states has come to be seen as unacceptable, the cover of civil war makes it easier for nearby rulers to avoid international sanctions.⁴⁵

Similar to preemptive war, the preemptive formation of an alliance with another ruler’s internal enemies is meant “to seize the initiative, in the belief that the first mover gains an important advantage and [that] a first move by the opponent is imminent.”⁴⁶ Most transnational alliances are formed against neighboring rulers. In these cases, the main first-move advantage lies in strengthening neighboring rebels who operate near border areas, thus creating a buffer zone that makes it more difficult for the other ruler to send arms across the border.

Further below, I indirectly suggest that the mistrust that drives preemptive transnational alliance formation is often warranted; that is, rulers correctly assume that another ruler has aggressive intentions, which result from resource opportunities or transnational affinities. In other cases, however, preemption and retaliation are the tragic result of what I call an “interference dilemma.” The interstate security dilemma literature assumes that mistrust between survival-seeking rulers leads each to accumulate power in the form of military assets, resulting in arms races with the potential to escalate to war.⁴⁷ By contrast, if coup-proofing is the primary concern of two nearby rulers, growing mutual mistrust will instead result in tit-for-tat support to the other’s opposition groups.

The interference dilemma can be illustrated by the interactions between Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir and Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni. Allegations of mutual interference existed from the very beginning of Bashir’s

44. Salehyan, “The Delegation of War to Rebel Organizations,” p. 509. Similarly, the aggregation of military capabilities is often seen as the purpose of interstate alliances. For critical discussions, see Nora Bensahel, “International Alliances and Military Effectiveness: Fighting alongside Allies and Partners,” in Risa A. Brooks and Elizabeth A. Stanley, eds., *Creating Military Power: The Sources of Military Effectiveness* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp. 186–206; and Patricia A. Weitsman, *Waging War: Alliances, Coalitions, and Institutions of Interstate Violence* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2014).

45. See Mark W. Zacher, “The Territorial Integrity Norm: International Boundaries and the Use of Force,” *International Organization*, Vol. 55, No. 2 (Spring 2001), pp. 215–250; and William Reno, *Warfare in Independent Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 21–24.

46. Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 40 n. 18.

47. See Robert Jervis, “Cooperation under the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (January 1978), p. 167; Charles L. Glaser, “The Security Dilemma Revisited,” *World Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (October 1997), pp. 175–177; and Andrew H. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 29–31.

tenure in 1989, but it is not fully clear who made the first move. According to French historian Gérard Prunier, Bashir mistakenly believed that Museveni was a personal friend and supporter of John Garang—the leader of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), which operated near the Ugandan border—and thus decided to support anti-Museveni rebels.⁴⁸ What is clear is that tit-for-tat support escalated around 1994, when Bashir’s regime, which was dominated by the National Islamic Front (NIF), began to work closely with the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). Although this alliance has been described as “a strange coalition indeed, between a movement preaching the Ten Commandments and one proclaiming a state based on Islamist principles,”⁴⁹ it made perfect sense from a strategic perspective: the LRA’s stronghold in northern Uganda bordered areas of southern Sudan over which Bashir and Garang were fighting.

RESOURCE OPPORTUNITY

In personalist regimes, which have long dominated sub-Saharan Africa, rulers provide opportunities for enrichment to their domestic support coalition in exchange for its continued allegiance.⁵⁰ Such opportunities may be found not only at home but also in nearby states—for example, when rulers form alliances with rebel groups that operate in areas containing lootable (i.e., precious, easily transportable) natural resources, especially alluvial gems and minerals.⁵¹

The idea that natural resources lead external actors to get involved in internal armed conflicts has been called the “greedy outsiders mechanism.”⁵² But even though military officers and other key backers may have economic mo-

48. See Gérard Prunier, “Rebel Movements and Proxy Warfare: Uganda, Sudan, and the Congo (1986–99),” *African Affairs*, July 2004, pp. 364–365. By contrast, in “Uganda: Straining at the Edges,” *Africa Confidential*, October 26, 1990, p. 6, it is suggested that Museveni supported the SPLA from at least 1989 onward, leading Bashir to retaliate.

49. Ruddy Doom and Koen Vlassenroot, “Kony’s Message: A New Koine? The Lord’s Resistance Army in Northern Uganda,” *African Affairs*, January 1999, p. 28.

50. See Bueno de Mesquita et al., *The Logic of Political Survival*, pp. 19, 102–103; and Nicolas van de Walle, *African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis, 1979–99* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 119–121.

51. On the notion of lootability, see Philippe Le Billon, “The Political Ecology of War: Natural Resources and Armed Conflicts,” *Political Geography*, Vol. 20, No. 5 (June 2001), pp. 561–584; and Michael Ross, “A Closer Look at Oil, Diamonds, and Civil War,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 9 (2006), pp. 265–300. For a quantitative analysis that links lootable resources to third-party involvement on the rebel side, see Michael G. Findley and Josiah F. Marineau, “Lootable Resources and Third-Party Intervention into Civil Wars,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, Vol. 32, No. 5 (November 2015), pp. 465–486.

52. Macartan Humphreys, “Natural Resources, Conflict, and Conflict Resolution: Uncovering the Mechanisms,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (August 2005), p. 511.

tives, the reason that a ruler allows or even encourages them to exploit resources in collaboration with foreign rebels often has much less to do with greed than with political survival: "To control the military and prevent *coups*, Africa's leaders have often found it necessary to buy off the officer corps by bringing it into the patrimonial network."⁵³

In the context of transnational alliance formation, a resource opportunity exists if the expected private benefits of exploiting natural resources in a foreign rebel group's area of operations outweigh the expected private costs of supporting that group.⁵⁴ The term "private" here refers to the ruler and his support coalition. This is particularly important in the case of costs: whereas the benefits from resource-driven alliances typically go to a select few and thus are private goods, the military expenditure involved in supporting allies constitutes public costs.⁵⁵ One of the potential private costs for the ruler is that targeted rulers are likely to retaliate, thus increasing the likelihood or severity of rebellion at home. The bigger the threat of a coup in the absence of alliance formation, the more likely the ruler is to accept this trade-off, as the threat of rebellion is typically more distant than that of a coup.⁵⁶

Resource opportunities played an important role in transnational alliances linked to conflicts in Angola, Côte d'Ivoire, the DRC, Guinea, Liberia, Senegal, and Sierra Leone.⁵⁷ Liberian President Charles Taylor's involvement with the

53. Chris Dietrich, "The Commercialisation of Military Deployment in Africa," *African Security Review*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2000), p. 7 (italics in the original). The greed interpretation highlights what I specify above as the ruler's second preference (revenue maximization), whereas Dietrich's argument suggests that the first preference (political survival) is of greater importance.

54. Opportunities play a prominent role in Randall L. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Summer 1994), pp. 72–107. Focusing on European great power politics from the fifteenth to the twentieth century, Schweller conceives of opportunities broadly as "the prospect of making gains" (p. 93), especially through territorial expansion. In contrast to my argument, Schweller's does not focus on domestic concerns.

55. On public and private goods, see Bueno de Mesquita et al., *The Logic of Political Survival*, pp. 407–409.

56. See Roessler, "The Enemy Within," p. 303.

57. On Angola, see United Nations (UN) Security Council, "Report of the Panel of Experts on Violations of Security Council Sanctions against UNITA," S/2000/203 (New York: UN, March 10, 2000), paras. 18–35. On Côte d'Ivoire, see International Crisis Group, "Tackling Liberia: The Eye of the Regional Storm," Africa Report No. 62 (Freetown/Brussels: International Crisis Group, April 30, 2003), pp. 19–20. On Guinea, see Lansana Gberie, "Destabilizing Guinea: Diamonds, Charles Taylor, and the Potential for Wider Humanitarian Catastrophe," Diamonds and Human Security Project, Occasional Paper No. 1 (Ottawa: Partnership Africa Canada, October 2001), pp. 3–4. On Liberia, see Stephen Ellis, "Liberia's Warlord Insurgency," in Christopher Clapham, ed., *African Guerrillas* (Oxford: James Currey, 1998), pp. 164–166. On Senegal, see Martin Evans, "Ni paix ni guerre: The Political Economy of Low-Level Conflict in the Casamance," HPG Background Paper (London: Overseas Development Institute, February 2003), pp. 5, 9–10, 13. Sierra Leone and the DRC are discussed further below.

Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone is a prominent example in which it is nearly impossible to distinguish personal greed from the political need “to manage unruly associates.”⁵⁸ At the time, a United Nations report noted that Taylor “and a small coterie of officials and private businessmen around him are in control of a covert sanctions-busting apparatus that includes international criminal activity and the arming of the RUF in Sierra Leone.”⁵⁹ This apparatus was “fed by the smuggling of diamonds and the extraction of natural resources in both Liberia and areas under rebel control in Sierra Leone.”⁶⁰ By providing such opportunities for enrichment, Taylor ensured the allegiance of his support coalition.

TRANSNATIONAL AFFINITY

The resource opportunity mechanism is based on the idea that a ruler can effectively buy off support coalition members who would otherwise consider staging a coup. But what if key backers care more about nonmaterial issues, such as ideology or ethnic kinship, than about wealth? In his study of foreign involvement in ethnic conflicts, Stephen Saideman argues that rulers who face intense domestic pressure “will certainly give assistance to those with whom their supporters share ethnic ties.”⁶¹ Building on this argument, I suggest more broadly that, to mitigate the threat of a coup, a ruler is likely to form an alliance with a nearby rebel group if there is a strong transnational affinity—that is, shared ideological commitments or ethnic ties—between that group and key members of the ruler’s support coalition.

Sudan’s transnational alliances with Islamist rebel groups in Eritrea and Ethiopia, which began around 1993 and led to retaliation from both states, provide good examples of ideological affinities.⁶² President Bashir and other “military officers who held formal executive offices of state were pragmatists who did not want to expose Sudan to the dangers of an adventurist foreign policy,”

58. William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1998), p. 29.

59. UN Security Council, “Report of the Panel of Experts Appointed Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1306 (2000), Paragraph 19, in Relation to Sierra Leone,” S/2000/1195 (New York: UN, December 20, 2000), para. 212.

60. *Ibid.*

61. Stephen M. Saideman, *The Ties That Divide: Ethnic Politics, Foreign Policy, and International Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 8. Similarly, see David Carment, Patrick James, and Zeynep Taydas, *Who Intervenes? Ethnic Conflict and Interstate Crisis* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), pp. 20–22.

62. See Lionel Cliffe, “Regional Dimensions of Conflict in the Horn of Africa,” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (February 1999), pp. 96–100; and Alex de Waal, “The Politics of Destabilisation in the Horn, 1989–2001,” in de Waal, ed., *Islamism and Its Enemies in the Horn of Africa* (London: Hurst, 2004), pp. 201–207.

whereas “the leadership of the NIF under Hassan al Turabi was in favour of an ideologically driven, regionally aggressive policy.”⁶³ The NIF’s position prevailed largely because Bashir could not afford to antagonize Turabi’s Islamists, who—according to a U.S. State Department report—“effectively controlled the Government.”⁶⁴

The importance of ethnic affinities is illustrated by Chad’s transnational alliance with Sudanese rebels in neighboring Darfur. In May 2004, President Idriss Déby faced a coup attempt that was reportedly caused by the plotters’ frustration with Déby’s unwillingness to support their Zaghawa coethnics across the border. “[T]o retain his presidential seat he capitulated to almost all the mutineers’ demands,” appointing individuals with close ties to the Darfurian rebels to senior government positions and providing the rebels with material support.⁶⁵

Alternative Explanations for Transnational Alliances

The strategic theory advanced in the previous section suggests that rulers form transnational alliances to safeguard against internal threats to their political survival from their support coalition and from opposition groups. Existing work on state sponsorship of rebel groups and on intervention more broadly provides little in the way of well-developed theoretical explanations that could be considered alternatives to this theory. Patrick Regan concedes that, despite more than a decade of research on interventions into civil wars, “we know next to nothing about the goals of the interveners.”⁶⁶ By assuming only that an intervention reflects the desire for conflict management or geopolitical manipulation, “researchers have tended to avoid the attribution of more specific goals to the intervention.”⁶⁷ Similarly, one of the most prominent studies of

63. De Waal, “The Politics of Destabilisation in the Horn, 1989–2001,” p. 182.

64. U.S. Department of State, “Sudan Human Rights Practices, 1993” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, January 31, 1994), http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/ERC/democracy/1993_hrp_report/93hrp_report_africa/Sudan.html, cited in J. Millard Burr and Robert O. Collins, *Revolutionary Sudan: Hasan al-Turabi and the Islamist State, 1989–2000* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2003), p. 131.

65. Gérard Prunier, *Darfur: A 21st Century Genocide*, 3rd ed. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 115. On the appointments, see *ibid.*, p. 220 n. 102. Déby’s previous attempts to fight the rebels are described in Jérôme Tubiana, *The Chad-Sudan Proxy War and the “Darfurization” of Chad: Myths and Reality* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2008), pp. 26–28.

66. Patrick M. Regan, “Interventions into Civil Wars: A Retrospective Survey with Prospective Ideas,” *Civil Wars*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (December 2010), p. 470.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 468. A more recent exception is Aysegul Aydin, *Foreign Powers and Intervention in Armed Conflicts* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2012). At least with regard to rulers facing the threat of irregular removal from office, however, Aydin’s focus on defending economic

state sponsorship simply notes that the “specific goals that states hope to achieve by supporting rebels may vary.”⁶⁸

Albeit theoretically underdeveloped, the lists of state sponsors’ motives that some scholars have compiled do provide several potential alternatives to my theory’s relatively narrow concern with political survival (and with the revenue required to ensure it).⁶⁹ The clearest alternatives are those that focus on regional influence and prestige,⁷⁰ at least if one assumes that these objectives have intrinsic benefits for rulers.⁷¹ Put differently, status-seeking represents a foreign policy goal that goes beyond—and may stand in tension with—survival-seeking.⁷²

To avoid confirmation bias,⁷³ the case studies on the Congo Wars also consider whether transnational alliances were motivated by ethnicity or political ideology without clearly being linked to political survival.⁷⁴ Given space constraints, however, I discuss alternative explanations only if they feature prominently in the existing literature on these wars.

Transnational Alliance Formation in the Congo Wars

This section assesses the explanatory power of my strategic theory of transnational alliance formation in the context of the Congo Wars. Taking into account alternative explanations, I evaluate whether the theory can explain why the rulers of Angola, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda, and Zimbabwe chose to support one side or the other in the two wars. The focus is therefore on these rulers’ in-

interests abroad overlaps too much with the opportunity mechanism of my theory for it to serve as a distinct alternative explanation.

68. Salehyan, Gleditsch, and Cunningham, “Explaining External Support for Insurgent Groups,” p. 712.

69. See Byman et al., *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements*, pp. 23–40; Gleditsch, Salehyan, and Schultz, “Fighting at Home, Fighting Abroad,” pp. 484–485; and Hughes, *My Enemy’s Enemy*, pp. 20–32.

70. See Byman et al., *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements*, pp. 23–24, 36; and Hughes, *My Enemy’s Enemy*, p. 31.

71. See Richard Ned Lebow, *Why Nations Fight: Past and Future Motives for War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 16; and Deborah Welch Larson, T.V. Paul, and William C. Wohlforth, “Status and World Order,” in Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth, eds., *Status in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 17.

72. See Lebow, *Why Nations Fight*, pp. 75–77.

73. See Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005), pp. 217–218; and Elisabeth Jean Wood, “Transnational Dynamics of Civil War: Where Do We Go from Here?” in Checkel, *Transnational Dynamics of Civil War*, p. 243.

74. See Byman et al., *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements*, pp. 37, 39; Gleditsch, Salehyan, and Schultz, “Fighting at Home, Fighting Abroad,” p. 485; and Hughes, *My Enemy’s Enemy*, pp. 25–26.

Table 2. Overview of the Case Studies on the Congo Wars

	First War: Mobutu vs. AFDL		Second War: Kabila vs. RCD, MLC	
	Allied to	Main Explanation(s)	Allied to	Main Explanation(s)
Kagame (Rwanda)	rebels	threat	rebels	threat
Museveni (Uganda)	rebels	threat	rebels	threat, opportunity
Bashir (Sudan)	ruler	threat (from Museveni via AFDL)	ruler	threat (from Museveni via RCD, MLC)
Dos Santos (Angola)	rebels	threat	ruler	threat (from Kagame and Museveni via RCD)
Mugabe (Zimbabwe)	rebels	opportunity, ideology, influence	ruler	opportunity (via Kabila)

NOTE: AFDL: Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire; MLC: Movement for the Liberation of Congo; RCD: Rally for Congolese Democracy.

ternal threats and on their strategic interactions with their Congolese counterparts, rather than on state weakness or other permissive conditions for conflict in Congo per se, which have already received sufficient attention elsewhere.⁷⁵ I first discuss the research design; then I investigate each of the foreign rulers' alliance decisions.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Studying the alliance decisions of five foreign rulers in the two Congo Wars enables me to leverage both “cross-ruler” and “within-ruler” variation in outcomes—as shown in table 2, which also summarizes the findings. In both wars, Rwanda’s Paul Kagame and Uganda’s Yoweri Museveni formed transnational alliances with Congolese rebels while Sudan’s Omar al-Bashir sided with Congolese rulers. By contrast, Angola’s José Eduardo dos Santos and Zimbabwe’s Robert Mugabe sided with the rebels in the first war and then continued to support Laurent-Désiré Kabila, the rebel-turned-ruler, in the second war.

In addition to the methodological benefit of diversity in outcomes, the five rulers also represent the most important regional players in the Congo Wars. Kagame, dos Santos, and—to a lesser extent—Museveni were instrumental in enabling Kabila to overthrow Mobutu Sese Seko in the first war, while Mugabe

75. See Atzili, “When Good Fences Make Bad Neighbors,” pp. 156–163.

and dos Santos saved Kabila from imminent defeat in the second war. In contrast to these four rulers, Bashir did not send troops to Congo, but his air force bombed rebel positions in the second war, and his support to Ugandan rebels based in Congo was critical to Museveni's involvement in both wars.⁷⁶

By addressing why some foreign rulers supported the rebels and others their Congolese counterparts, the research design of this article improves on two existing theoretical studies on the regional causes of the Congo Wars. Boaz Atzili focuses on the effects of fixed borders and tests two hypotheses: first, that "[r]efugee movements, insurgencies, and kin connections across international borders can cause civil conflicts [. . .] to spill over their borders and become international conflicts," and second, that "[s]tate weakness promotes the possibility of international conflict by creating opportunities for neighbors to intervene to exploit the weak states economically or politically."⁷⁷ Atzili's theory and the strategic theory presented above thus share a concern with threats and opportunities as causes of intervention into civil war, but they differ in that Atzili's "conflict spillover" argument cannot explain why some neighbors intervene on the ruler's side and others on the side of the rebels.⁷⁸ In fact, Atzili explicitly conceives of conflicts—rather than interventions—as his units of analysis.⁷⁹

Similarly, John Clark's constructivist account of the Congo Wars focuses on how the regional norm of nonintervention was weakened prior to the wars, which explains only why foreign rulers intervened on the rebel side, not why some of them intervened in support of Congo's rulers.⁸⁰ In contrast to Atzili's and Clark's explanations, my strategic theory explains why nearby rulers did or did not side with the rebels, and its logic is easily extended to explain why some nearby rulers instead allied with Congo's rulers. The threat mechanism explains Bashir's and dos Santos's support: it was not the Congolese ruler but

76. The less important cases of external involvement not analyzed here include Eritrean, Ethiopian, Tanzanian, and Zambian support for rebels in the first war; Burundian support for rebels in both wars; and Chadian, Libyan, and Namibian support for Kabila in the second war. Some of these minor cases had more to do with solidarity among allied rulers than with immediate concerns about political survival. See Prunier, *Africa's World War*, pp. 67–68, 192–193, 198, 204, 289–290; and Reyntjens, *The Great African War*, pp. 61, 65–66, 198.

77. Atzili, "When Good Fences Make Bad Neighbors," pp. 145–146.

78. Atzili suggests that rulers of weak states "lack the capacity" to resettle refugees or disarm foreign rebels in their sanctuary. See *ibid.*, p. 152. He fails to consider whether they actively support such rebels or are believed to do so. If capacity were the main issue, neighbors would be at least as likely to ally with the ruler as with his enemies.

79. See *ibid.*, p. 141.

80. See Clark, "A Constructivist Account of the Congo Wars," pp. 153–163.

the rulers siding with his enemies who threatened Bashir in the first and both Bashir and dos Santos in the second war. The opportunity mechanism explains Mugabe's support: it was not the rebels' area of operations but the territory under Kabila's control that provided Mugabe with resource opportunities in the second war. To flesh out these assertions, I now turn to process tracing the ten alliance decisions in roughly chronological order.

KAGAME, THE AFDL, AND THE ORIGINS OF THE FIRST CONGO WAR

Paul Kagame's critical role in bringing together the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL) in 1996 is directly attributable to the transnational threat his regime faced from Rwandan rebels who were based across the border in eastern Zaire and received support from Zaire's President Mobutu Sese Seko.⁸¹ The antagonism between the two rulers dated back to Mobutu's involvement in the war that brought Kagame to power.⁸² In 1990 Kagame's Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) invaded Rwanda from Uganda. The group was largely composed of Tutsi refugees who had fought on the side of Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM) in the Ugandan civil war from 1981 to 1986. While Museveni—now as Ugandan president—backed the RPF, Mobutu sent troops to support the Hutu-dominated regime of his close ally Juvénal Habyarimana.⁸³ A fragile peace brokered in 1993 ended when Habyarimana's plane was shot down in April 1994. In the subsequent genocide against the Tutsi, an estimated 800,000 people were murdered.⁸⁴

When the RPF seized control of the capital, Kigali, in July 1994, roughly 1.5 million Hutu fled to Zaire. Around 850,000 people settled in five enormous refugee camps in North Kivu and 650,000 in thirty smaller camps in South Kivu. Among them were tens of thousands of combatants who had served in the Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR) or in the Interahamwe militia, the main perpetrators of the genocide.⁸⁵ These ex-FAR/Interahamwe "quickly re-established administrative control" over the Hutu refugees; for the next two

81. From October 1971 to May 1997, the DRC was called Zaire.

82. Formally, Kagame was vice president and minister of defense from 1994 to 2000, but it was an open secret that he was Rwanda's de facto ruler, with President Pasteur Bizimungu, a Hutu, serving as a figurehead. See Robert E. Gribbin, *In the Aftermath of Genocide: The U.S. Role in Rwanda* (New York: iUniverse, 2005), p. 152.

83. See Gérard Prunier, "The Rwandan Patriotic Front," in Clapham, *African Guerrillas*, pp. 119–133; and Shally B. Gachuruzi, "The Role of Zaire in the Rwandese Conflict," in Howard Adelman and Astri Suhrke, eds., *The Path of a Genocide: The Rwanda Crisis from Uganda to Zaire* (London: Transaction, 1999), pp. 58–59.

84. See Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters*, pp. 14–15.

85. See Prunier, *Africa's World War*, pp. 24–25.

years, they “ruled over significant parts of eastern Zaire and pursued an active insurgency inside Rwanda.”⁸⁶

Mobutu’s support was “an essential factor” for the ex-FAR/Interahamwe’s revival.⁸⁷ Zairian officials helped the rebels in numerous ways, from facilitating weapons procurement to setting up training camps along the border with Rwanda.⁸⁸ This assistance enabled the rebels not only to reorganize their forces but also to train new recruits from among the refugee population. In early 1995, they together numbered around 50,000.⁸⁹ By comparison, Kagame’s Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) had roughly 45,000 troops at the time.⁹⁰

In March 1996, Kagame spoke to U.S. Ambassador Robert Gribbin about his concerns regarding Mobutu’s involvement. He told Gribbin “that if Zaire continued to support the ex-FAR/*Interahamwe* against Rwanda, Rwanda in turn could find anti-Mobutu elements to support,” adding “that if the international community could not help improve security in the region, the RPA might be compelled to act alone.”⁹¹ At the time, Kagame had already begun to assemble the AFDL, bringing together Zairian Tutsi, including the Banyamulenge of South Kivu, and long-term opponents of Mobutu, such as Laurent-Désiré Kabila.⁹² In October 1996, when Kagame’s army and the AFDL attacked the refugee camps in Zaire and seized control of major towns on the border,⁹³ Kabila found himself “in charge of making a foreign invasion look like a national rebellion.”⁹⁴

The conclusion that the transnational threat constituted through the cooperation between Mobutu and the ex-FAR/Interahamwe was the principal cause of Kagame’s involvement in the First Congo War is widely shared in the literature, and it was confirmed in my interviews with senior Rwandan officials and a former AFDL representative.⁹⁵ Transnational ethnic affinities help explain the prominent role of Zairian Tutsi in the AFDL, but they were of sec-

86. Wm. Cyrus Reed, “Guerrillas in the Midst: The Former Government of Rwanda and the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire in Eastern Zaire,” in Clapham, *African Guerrillas*, p. 134.

87. Prunier, *Africa’s World War*, p. 28.

88. See Human Rights Watch, *Rwanda/Zaire: Rearming with Impunity—International Support for the Perpetrators of the Rwandan Genocide* (New York: Human Rights Watch, May 1995), pp. 9–14.

89. See *ibid.*, p. 3.

90. See Rick Orth, “Rwanda’s Hutu Extremist Genocidal Insurgency: An Eyewitness Perspective,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Spring 2001), p. 108 n. 67.

91. Gribbin, *In the Aftermath of Genocide*, pp. 144–145 (italics in the original).

92. See Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters*, pp. 86–89.

93. See Reyntjens, *The Great African War*, pp. 48–55.

94. Prunier, *Africa’s World War*, p. 115.

95. See *ibid.*, pp. 67, 73; Reyntjens, *The Great African War*, p. 51; Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters*, p. 55; author interview with Brig. Gen. Frank Rusagara, London, June 2011; author inter-

ondary importance for Kagame's decision to form a transnational alliance against Mobutu.⁹⁶

BASHIR'S CONTINUED ALLIANCE WITH MOBUTU

During the First Congo War, Sudan's President Bashir was the only neighboring ruler actively involved on Mobutu's side. Bashir's decision to oppose the AFDL is easily explained in the context of his ongoing proxy war with Ugandan President Museveni (via the LRA), used above as an illustration of the interference dilemma. As the proxy war escalated in 1994, Bashir managed to obtain Mobutu's permission to transport supplies for the LRA through northeastern Zaire, thus bypassing areas in southern Sudan controlled by the Ugandan-backed SPLA, Bashir's main domestic foe.⁹⁷ One year later, Mobutu reportedly also allowed a Sudanese military expedition to directly attack the SPLA from Zairian territory.⁹⁸

In addition, Sudan's security services helped reorganize former Idi Amin loyalists into the West Nile Bank Liberation Front (WNBLF), which was formed in November 1994 in a Zairian town near the Ugandan border and subsequently launched incursions into northwestern Uganda.⁹⁹ In collaboration with Mobutu, Bashir also provided military support to the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), formed in eastern Zaire in September 1995 as a merger of several smaller anti-Museveni groups.¹⁰⁰

Given that the AFDL and Kagame were allied with Museveni (see below), Bashir considered them his enemies, making their enemies—Mobutu and the ex-FAR/Interahamwe—his friends.¹⁰¹ Accordingly, the Sudanese regime provided some supplies to the Rwandan rebels and later incorporated many of those who fled to Sudan into its armed forces.¹⁰² In the final analysis, however, the war between the AFDL and Mobutu was a sideshow for Bashir, important

views with Ambassador Zeno Mutimura and Ombudsman Tito Rutaremara, Kigali, August 2011; and author interview with Emmanuel Kamanzi, Goma, July 2011.

96. See Jason Stearns et al., *Banyamulenge: Insurgency and Exclusion in the Mountains of South Kivu* (London: Rift Valley Institute, 2013), pp. 19–22.

97. See Prunier, "Rebel Movements and Proxy Warfare," p. 367.

98. See Burr and Collins, *Revolutionary Sudan*, p. 162.

99. See Prunier, "Rebel Movements and Proxy Warfare," p. 367; and Christopher R. Day, "The Fates of Rebels: Insurgencies in Uganda," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (July 2011), p. 451.

100. See Kristof Titeca and Koen Vlassenroot, "Rebels without Borders in the Rwenzori Borderland? A Biography of the Allied Democratic Forces," *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (February 2012), pp. 159, 165–166; and Prunier, "Rebel Movements and Proxy Warfare," pp. 369–374.

101. See Reyntjens, *The Great African War*, pp. 43–44.

102. See Prunier, "Rebel Movements and Proxy Warfare," pp. 372, 377.

only to the extent that it could help him counter the transnational threat from the SPLA and Museveni. This explains why Bashir did not commit more significant resources in support of Mobutu once it became clear that the Zairian ruler's days were numbered.

MUSEVENI AND THE AFDL

Uganda's President Museveni played a key role in the creation of the AFDL, introducing Kabila to Kagame.¹⁰³ Uganda was much less heavily involved in the First Congo War than Rwanda, however. While Kagame's army fought alongside the AFDL, Ugandan support was initially limited to providing some artillery as well as military trainers and advisers.¹⁰⁴ The Ugandan army entered eastern Zaire in larger numbers only in late November 1996, in retaliation for a cross-border attack by the ADF.¹⁰⁵

Museveni's alliance with the AFDL was primarily motivated by transnational threats emanating from Zaire, while resource opportunities and the desire for regional influence were secondary factors. In terms of threats, Mobutu and Museveni had been involved in tit-for-tat support to smaller rebel groups since the late 1980s.¹⁰⁶ From 1994 to 1996, two larger anti-Museveni groups emerged in Zaire: the WNBLF and the ADF, which—as discussed above—were sponsored by both Mobutu and Sudanese President Bashir. Museveni thus correctly believed that Bashir, “in collaboration with Mobutu,” was using eastern Zaire to “create a second front” against his regime—the first was in northwestern Uganda (via the LRA and the WNBLF), the second in the country's southwest (via the ADF).¹⁰⁷ This threat was the main reason for Museveni's intervention on the side of Kabila's AFDL.¹⁰⁸

In terms of opportunities, eastern Zaire's resource wealth was well known,

103. See Museveni's statement, “Background to the Situation in the Great Lakes Region,” Harare, August 8, 1998, reprinted in “Congo Rebels Were Museveni's Idea,” *Monitor* (Kampala), June 1, 1999.

104. Author interviews with former AFDL members, Bukavu and Goma, July 2011; Reyntjens, *The Great African War*, pp. 58–59; and Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters*, p. 120.

105. See Dan Fahey, “Rethinking the Resource Curse: Natural Resources and Polywar in the Ituri District, Democratic Republic of the Congo,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2011, pp. 86–87.

106. See Prunier, “Rebel Movements and Proxy Warfare,” pp. 368–369.

107. Testimony by Museveni, August 16, 2001, quoted in Republic of Uganda, “Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations into Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth in the Democratic Republic of Congo 2001 (May 2001–November 2002): Transcript,” June 2002, p. 546. On file with the author.

108. See Prunier, *Africa's World War*, pp. 121, 132. This view is also held by Ugandan journalists who covered the war. Author interviews with Emmy Allio, Grace Matsiko, and Andrew Mwenda, Kampala, March 2012.

as was the fact that its army had largely disintegrated by the mid-1990s. In the case of the First Congo War, however, there is no conclusive evidence for the idea that Museveni's involvement was driven by the need to provide key military officers with opportunities for enrichment. On the other hand, the possibility that this concern played a secondary role should not be discarded. Museveni "always sought to use the army to build his personal (less so the NRM's [i.e., his party's]) political base,"¹⁰⁹ and his military had already developed a reputation for high-level corruption.¹¹⁰

According to Ugandan political analysts, Museveni also envisioned a regional economic bloc that would unleash Zaire's potential, and he liked to think of himself as the region's power broker.¹¹¹ Although it is difficult to evaluate exactly how much this desire for influence mattered in Museveni's decision, there is no evidence to suggest that it equaled the importance of the much more pressing security concerns.¹¹²

DOS SANTOS AND THE AFDL

Angolan President dos Santos initially remained neutral when the AFDL emerged in eastern Zaire in late 1996. In early December, he met Zaire's prime minister and apparently agreed that Luanda would prevent the Katangan Tigers—an anti-Mobutu group that had been in Angola since 1964 and had been partly integrated into the army¹¹³—from crossing into Zaire. In return, Kinshasa would prevent the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) from using rear bases, thus ending the rebels' ability to export diamonds and receive arms via Zairian territory.¹¹⁴ Dos Santos's ruling party had been in indirect confrontation with Mobutu ever since the Angolan war of independence.¹¹⁵ When the subsequent civil conflict lost its Cold War

109. Andrew Mwenda, "Personalizing Power in Uganda," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (July 2007), p. 29.

110. See Sandrine Perrot, "Entrepreneurs de l'insécurité: La face cachée de l'armée ougandaise" [Entrepreneurs of insecurity: The hidden face of the Ugandan army], *Politique africaine*, October 1999, pp. 60–71.

111. Author interviews with political analysts, Kampala, March 2012.

112. See Ogenga Otunnu, "Uganda as a Regional Actor in the Zairian War," in Howard Adelman and Govind C. Rao, eds., *War and Peace in Zaire/Congo: Analyzing and Evaluating Intervention, 1996–1997* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 2004), pp. 50–51.

113. See Miles Larmer, "Of Local Identities and Transnational Conflict: The Katangese Gendarmes and Central-Southern Africa's Forty-Years War, 1960–99," in Nir Arielli and Bruce Collins, eds., *Transnational Soldiers: Foreign Military Enlistment in the Modern Era* (Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 160–178.

114. See Reyntjens, *The Great African War*, p. 62.

115. See Thomas Turner, "Angola's Role in the Congo War," in John F. Clark, ed., *The African Stakes of the Congo War* (Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 78–80.

dimension in the early 1990s, Angola began to fluctuate between war and peace, and Zaire became UNITA's most important sponsor.¹¹⁶

Despite the noninterference agreement between dos Santos and Zaire's prime minister, several of Mobutu's close associates kept selling arms to UNITA.¹¹⁷ In retaliation, dos Santos sent representatives to Rwanda for operational planning at the end of December 1996. His new objective was clear: Kinshasa had to be taken so that UNITA would lose its ability to operate via southwestern Zaire.¹¹⁸ In mid-February 1997, Angola flew 2,000 to 3,000 Katangan Tigers to Kigali, from where they entered Zaire in support of the AFDL. In late April, the Angolan army even got directly involved, entering southwestern Zaire and confronting UNITA troops—who had fought on Mobutu's behalf on several occasions—in the last major battle of the First Congo War.¹¹⁹

There is a clear scholarly consensus that the transnational threat constituted by the links between Mobutu's regime and UNITA was the cause of Angola's retaliatory support for the AFDL.¹²⁰ For 1996, the strength of regime and rebel forces was estimated at 97,000 and 62,000, respectively, highlighting the enormous military threat posed by UNITA.¹²¹

MUGABE AND THE AFDL

President Mugabe's Zimbabwe was the only noncontiguous state that played a significant military role in both Congo Wars. Although details on the timing and type of support in the first war remain contested, it is widely believed that Mugabe provided military assistance to the AFDL well before it seized Kinshasa on May 17, 1997.¹²² There was no transnational threat that could explain this support: Mugabe did not face an internal rebellion, and Mobutu did not harbor Zimbabwean opposition groups. By contrast, resource opportunities were an important factor. Coupled with regional influence-seeking, trans-

116. See Tony Hodges, *Angola: Anatomy of an Oil State* (Oxford: James Currey, 2004), pp. 6–20; and Human Rights Watch, *Angola: Arms Trade and Violations of the Laws of War since the 1992 Elections* (New York: Human Rights Watch, November 1994), pp. 53–55.

117. See Turner, "Angola's Role in the Congo War," p. 81.

118. See Reyntjens, *The Great African War*, p. 63.

119. See *ibid.*

120. See Turner, "Angola's Role in the Congo War," p. 75; Prunier, *Africa's World War*, p. 131; Reyntjens, *The Great African War*, pp. 62–63; and Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters*, p. 53.

121. See International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1996/97* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1997), p. 242.

122. Reyntjens, *The Great African War*, pp. 65–66, and others rely on South African and/or Zimbabwean newspaper reports that differ on details. See "Zimbabwe Supplied Planes, Men, and Weapons to Kabila's Rebels," *Sunday Independent* (Johannesburg), July 13, 1997; and "Zim Arms Used to Topple Mobutu," *Zimbabwe Independent* (Harare), August 22, 1997.

national ideological affinities also mattered, but they were not directly related to Mugabe's political survival.

Since coming to power in 1980, Mugabe has relied on "a subtle blend of intimidation and patronage" to ensure the loyalty of his domestic support coalition.¹²³ At the time of the First Congo War, he faced not only growing macroeconomic difficulties but also increasing demands from veterans of the liberation war as well as "economic grievances" among the army and police, which together constituted "a potential security threat."¹²⁴ There was thus an increased need to provide opportunities for enrichment. The lucrative contracts that the state-owned Zimbabwe Defence Industries won shortly after Kabila's takeover suggest that Mugabe's support to the AFDL came in exchange for the promise of future opportunities.¹²⁵ According to a news agency report from July 1997, the "motives for Zimbabwe's involvement are likely to be more economic than political."¹²⁶

On the other hand, scholars and newspaper reports also highlight the role of ideology and influence. Mugabe was said to despise Mobutu, considering him "a puppet of Western imperialism."¹²⁷ By contrast, Kabila's AFDL projected the image of a national liberation movement, which was well received by Mugabe's ruling party.¹²⁸ Such ideological affinities likely interacted with Mugabe's personal ego and his desire for regional influence.¹²⁹ Whether these factors were more or less important than resource opportunities is difficult to ascertain. Mugabe's involvement in the first war is thus the only case out of ten that may not be best explained by my strategic theory.

KAGAME, THE RCD, AND THE ORIGINS OF THE SECOND CONGO WAR

In August 1998, less than fifteen months after the AFDL and Rwandan forces together seized Kinshasa, a second war broke out in eastern Congo, this time pitting Congo's new president Kabila against the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD), a rebel group once again created under Kagame's supervi-

123. Daniel Compagnon, *Predictable Tragedy: Robert Mugabe and the Collapse of Zimbabwe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), p. 5.

124. Norma Kriger, "Zimbabwe's War Veterans and the Ruling Party: Continuities in Political Dynamics," in Staffan Darnolf and Liisa Laakso, eds., *Twenty Years of Independence in Zimbabwe: From Liberation to Authoritarianism* (Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 119.

125. See Prunier, *Africa's World War*, pp. 191–192.

126. "Zimbabwe Supplied Arms and Troops to Kabila's Rebels: Report," Agence France-Presse (Johannesburg), July 13, 1997.

127. "Zim Arms Used to Topple Mobutu."

128. See "Zimbabwe's Ruling Party Hails Kabila for Victories over Mobutu," Agence France-Presse (Harare), April 19, 1997.

129. See Compagnon, *Predictable Tragedy*, p. 213.

sion and heavily supported by his army. Why did the former allies Kabila and Kagame turn into enemies in this relatively short span of time? The answer lies in the interference dilemma that Kabila faced vis-à-vis Kagame, which was inextricably linked to the tumultuous relations between him and the Congolese Tutsi in his support coalition.¹³⁰ It culminated in Kabila's preemptive transnational alliance with the ex-FAR/Interahamwe, which led Kagame to retaliate by sponsoring the RCD.

After the AFDL took power in Kinshasa, its Rwandan sponsors tried to control Kabila's regime by placing either themselves or Congolese Tutsi—whom they considered their most trustworthy allies—in key positions.¹³¹ For instance, Kabila's main bodyguard and his presidential guard commander were Rwandan nationals, while his personal secretary and the foreign minister were Congolese Tutsi.¹³² Perhaps most stunningly, James Kabarebe, Rwanda's key commander in the first war, became chief of staff of the Congolese army.¹³³ Kabila, however, soon began to use his executive authority to replace, arrest, or otherwise marginalize several Congolese Tutsi. This led some of them to consider a coup against Kabila as early as November 1997, but their Rwandan interlocutors initially opposed that idea.¹³⁴

Meanwhile, in eastern Congo, local militias turned against the new government and began to cooperate with ex-FAR/Interahamwe forces who, having escaped the brutal campaign of the Rwandan army during the first war, were still using rear bases in eastern Congo to attack Rwanda.¹³⁵ At times, it appeared that “non-Tutsi elements” within Congo's army were also complicit with these rebels, leading Kagame to mistrust Kabila.¹³⁶

The tensions between the two rulers escalated between May and August 1998. Around May, Kabila secretly started to provide the ex-FAR/

130. For an excellent account of the period from May 1997 to July 1998, see Philip Roessler and Harry Verhoeven, “Hobbes Revisited: The Commitment Problem, Trust, and Preemption,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Seattle, Washington, September 1–4, 2011, pp. 33–46. Their account, however, is based on a theoretical argument about internal security dilemmas that does not fully capture transnational threats. See Roessler, “The Enemy Within,” pp. 311–312.

131. Author interview with Jean-Baptiste Sondji (health minister under Kabila), Kinshasa, July 9, 2011.

132. See Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters*, p. 177; and Gauthier De Villers et al., *République démocratique du Congo: Chronique politique d'un entre-deux-guerres (Octobre 1996–Juillet 1998)* [Democratic Republic of Congo: Political chronicle of the interwar period (October 1996–July 1998)] (Tervuren: Institut Africain, 1999), pp. 50, 52, 79, 86.

133. See Roessler and Verhoeven, “Hobbes Revisited,” p. 34.

134. Author interview with Moïse Nyarugabo (Kabila's personal secretary), Kinshasa, August 18, 2014.

135. See Prunier, *Africa's World War*, pp. 174–175; and Reyntjens, *The Great African War*, pp. 173–174.

136. Reyntjens, *The Great African War*, p. 146.

Interahamwe with supplies and logistical support. In the context of a large-scale insurgency launched by the ex-FAR/Interahamwe in Rwanda's north-western prefectures, Kabila's support for these *génocidaires* constituted a serious transnational threat to Kagame's regime.¹³⁷ That same month, fearful of a coup, Kabila also purged his presidential guard of all Rwandans.¹³⁸ Finally, in July, he replaced Kabarebe with a brother-in-law and asked all foreign troops to leave the country.¹³⁹ On August 2, only six days after being expelled, Kagame's army retaliated by reinvading eastern Congo and instigating the creation of the RCD, with Congolese Tutsi in key positions.

U.S. Ambassador Gribbin notes in his memoirs that he considered Kagame's security rationale legitimate, but he also points to a secondary factor for Rwanda's reinvasion: "[W]ell-connected Rwandans in the private sector could seize opportunities to do business or otherwise to accumulate wealth."¹⁴⁰ Similarly, Prunier links the interest in "economic opportunities in the Congo" directly to "the infighting within the RPF."¹⁴¹ In mid-1998, Kayumba Nyamwasa, who had been named army chief of staff at the beginning of the year, reportedly came "close to trying a military coup" against Kagame.¹⁴² Therefore, Prunier suggests, a short and successful war in Congo was considered "a nice way out of that tension and an occasion for all to get their share of the spoils."¹⁴³

From Kagame's perspective, in other words, the resource opportunities linked to an alliance against Kabila provided a means to ensure his personal political survival. This factor, however, as well as the "ethnic solidarity" and "political triumphalism" evoked by Timothy Longman,¹⁴⁴ played a less significant role than the transnational threat constituted by Kabila's alliance with the ex-FAR/Interahamwe.

MUSEVENI, THE RCD, AND THE MLC

The Ugandan army came to play a major role in the second war, invading northeastern Congo in August 1998 and supporting first the RCD, then also the Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC). The breakdown of relations

137. See Orth, "Rwanda's Hutu Extremist Genocidal Insurgency," pp. 88–96.

138. See Roessler and Verhoeven, "Hobbes Revisited," pp. 40–42.

139. See Reyntjens, *The Great African War*, p. 169.

140. *Ibid.*, pp. 282–283.

141. Prunier, *Africa's World War*, p. 195.

142. *Ibid.*

143. *Ibid.*

144. Timothy Longman, "The Complex Reasons for Rwanda's Engagement in Congo," in Clark, *The African Stakes of the Congo War*, pp. 130, 137. By contrast, Reyntjens, *The Great African War*, pp. 204–205; and Stearns et al., *Banyamulenge*, pp. 21–24, show that the Rwandans primarily instrumentalized their Congolese coethnics.

between Kabila and Museveni was closely related to the mistrust between Kabila and Kagame. Gen. Jeje Odongo, appointed Uganda's commander of the army in 1998, believes that the "parting of ways" was directly linked to Kabila's decision to turn on Rwanda. Given the historical "friendship" between Kagame and Museveni, providing support to rebel groups opposed to the former meant, "by extension," also supporting those opposed to the latter.¹⁴⁵ At the time, this reasoning went both ways—Museveni considered the ex-FAR/Interahamwe an enemy of Uganda, as evident in an official government statement: "Uganda's worst fears had materialised; President Kabila had followed in President Mobutu's footsteps by allying his government with Uganda's enemies—the anti-Uganda insurgents, the ex-FAR and Interahamwe, and the Government of Sudan."¹⁴⁶

Although it is not fully clear whether Kabila's collaboration with Sudanese President Bashir began prior to the outbreak of the war, it appears that, throughout 1997 and 1998, Bashir continued to supply the ADF and other Ugandan rebel groups based in northeastern Congo with arms through air-drops originating from Juba in southern Sudan.¹⁴⁷ Not least due to this support, the Ugandan army operations inside Congo during that period failed to neutralize the ADF.¹⁴⁸ The rebels even launched a series of deadly attacks in western Uganda from June to August 1998,¹⁴⁹ providing circumstantial evidence for Uganda's claim that the increased "frequency, intensity, and destructiveness of cross-border attacks" was "a direct result" of an agreement between Kabila and Bashir in May 1998.¹⁵⁰

In addition to these transnational threats, Museveni's alliance with Congolese rebel groups was motivated by resource opportunities. In its April 2001 report, a United Nations Panel of Experts claims that even if Uganda's political leadership may have had "security and political reasons" for entering the second war, "some top army officials clearly had a hidden agenda: economic and financial objectives."¹⁵¹ Dan Fahey's meticulously researched dissertation shows that resource opportunities were indeed a major factor for

145. Author interview with Gen. Jeje Odongo, Kampala, March 7, 2012.

146. *Armed Activities on the Territory of Congo (Democratic Republic of the Congo v. Uganda)*, Counter-Memorial Submitted by the Republic of Uganda, April 21, 2001, International Court of Justice, para. 39.

147. See Prunier, *Africa's World War*, p. 196.

148. See Titeca and Vlassenroot, "Rebels without Borders in the Rwenzori Borderland?" p. 159.

149. See *Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo (Democratic Republic of the Congo v. Uganda)*, Judgement, December 19, 2005, International Court of Justice, para. 132.

150. *Armed Activities on the Territory of Congo (Democratic Republic of the Congo v. Uganda)*, Counter-Memorial Submitted by the Republic of Uganda, para. 39.

151. UN Security Council, "Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural

Uganda's involvement right from the start.¹⁵² Fahey concludes that "the political and economic interests of President Museveni's key regime supporters contributed to his decision to immediately join the Rwandan-led 'rebellion' in Congo. Museveni's patrimonial system in Uganda required him to consider the desires of his family members (e.g., Salim Saleh), senior army officers, and regime insiders who, during the interbellum, openly sought access to natural resources and markets in Congo."¹⁵³

Given Museveni's decision in September 1998 to build up the MLC as an alternative to the RCD, it is likely that Museveni also had a motive that went beyond political survival—namely, "to be part of the game and not to abandon the entire Congolese theatre to Kigali."¹⁵⁴ It is highly unlikely, however, that this desire for regional influence was independent of, or more important than, the transnational threats and resource opportunities emphasized above.

BASHIR'S ALLIANCE WITH KABILA

Before turning to the critical role of Zimbabwe and Angola in saving Kabila from imminent defeat in August 1998, a brief analysis of Sudanese President Bashir's alliance with Congolese President Kabila is in order, as it relates directly to Ugandan involvement on the rebel side. Bashir's support to Kabila during the second war was more significant than that for Mobutu during the first war, and it was once again the result of the transnational threat constituted by Ugandan President Museveni's alliance with Bashir's primary enemy, the SPLA.¹⁵⁵

Diplomatic and military sources suggest that, by early September 1998, Bashir's regime was flying military supplies from southern Sudan to Kabila's army in northeastern Congo.¹⁵⁶ That same month, the Sudanese army accused "Ugandan enemy troops" of supporting SPLA attacks in Sudan.¹⁵⁷ There can be no doubt that Bashir's support to both Kabila and Ugandan reb-

Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo," S/2001/357 (New York: UN, April 12, 2001), para. 28.

152. Fahey, "Rethinking the Resource Curse," chap. 4.

153. *Ibid.*, p. 136. See also John F. Clark, "Explaining Ugandan Intervention in Congo: Evidence and Interpretations," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (June 2001), p. 282.

154. Reyntjens, *The Great African War*, p. 196.

155. See Prunier, *Africa's World War*, p. 192. On daily bombings of Congolese rebel and Ugandan army positions by Sudan's air force in support of Kabila's counteroffensive in January 1999, see *ibid.*, p. 207.

156. "Update No. 498 for Central and Eastern Africa," *Integrated Regional Information Networks*, Nairobi, September 9, 1998.

157. "Update No. 503 for Central and Eastern Africa," *Integrated Regional Information Networks*, Nairobi, September 16, 1998.

els based in Congo was motivated by the transnational threat that Bashir faced from Museveni and his rebel allies—the SPLA, MLC, and RCD—in the border triangle.¹⁵⁸

MUGABE'S CONTINUED ALLIANCE WITH KABILA

When Kabila requested support from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in August 1998, Zimbabwe's President Mugabe emerged as Kabila's most adamant supporter. On August 19, Zimbabwean soldiers arrived in Kinshasa, soon followed by Angolan and Namibian troops. Together they pushed back an RCD and Rwandan expeditionary force that had launched an audacious airlift from eastern Congo to the Atlantic coast and was now closing in on Kinshasa.¹⁵⁹ Throughout the war, the Zimbabwean contingent was by far the biggest among Kabila's allies, increasing from initially 6,000 up to 16,000 troops in 2001.¹⁶⁰ Mugabe's main motive for supporting Kabila was to protect and expand the resource opportunities offered to Zimbabwe toward the end of the first war, with the desire for regional influence playing a secondary role.¹⁶¹

Zimbabwe's military involvement in the Second Congo War came at a huge public cost—\$200 million in the first two years alone¹⁶²—but it also delivered enormous private benefits for Mugabe's support coalition.¹⁶³ Desperate for help, Kabila was willing to make extraordinary concessions, especially with regard to the exploitation of natural resources in the territory under his control. Among those in Zimbabwe's ruling elite who most benefited from these resource opportunities were the army commander, the defense minister, and a former national security minister.¹⁶⁴ In the context of an increasingly difficult economic and political situation at home, "the mineral trade in the DRC offered lucrative possibilities for rewarding loyal officers."¹⁶⁵ The intervention

158. See Prunier, "Rebel Movements and Proxy Warfare," pp. 380–381.

159. See Prunier, *Africa's World War*, pp. 181–186; and Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters*, pp. 188–190. The DRC had joined SADC in 1997.

160. See Martin R. Rupiya, "A Political and Military Review of Zimbabwe's Involvement in the Second Congo War," in Clark, *The African Stakes of the Congo War*, pp. 100–101.

161. On "Mugabe's desire to protect Zimbabwean investments" and the "chance to expand Zimbabwe's commercial interests," respectively, see Lynne Duke, "Up in Arms in Southern Africa," *Washington Post*, October 5, 1998; and Robert Block, "General Partners: Zimbabwe's Elite Turn Strife in Nearby Congo into a Quest for Riches," *Wall Street Journal*, October 9, 1998.

162. See Sandra J. MacLean, "Mugabe at War: The Political Economy of Conflict in Zimbabwe," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (June 2002), p. 522.

163. See Reyntjens, *The Great African War*, pp. 202–203; and Compagnon, *Predictable Tragedy*, p. 98.

164. See UN Security Council, "Final Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo," S/2002/1146 (New York: UN Security Council, October 15, 2002), paras. 27–28.

165. MacLean, "Mugabe at War," p. 523.

on Kabila's side thus represented "a sop to the military, an attempt to ensure its allegiance to Mugabe."¹⁶⁶

By contrast, some scholars suggest that economic motives came to the fore only later in the conflict, and that Mugabe's initial decision to support Kabila once again had more to do with a desire for regional influence. In particular, Mugabe is said to have wanted to assert himself as the main regional leader within SADC, thus upstaging South African President Nelson Mandela.¹⁶⁷ Although this motive likely played a secondary role, it is highly doubtful that Mugabe would have committed thousands of troops to Congo in the absence of previous investments and an expectation of additional resource opportunities.¹⁶⁸

DOS SANTOS'S CONTINUED ALLIANCE WITH KABILA

Angolan President dos Santos hesitated to take sides in the Second Congo War for more than two weeks, but once he did, the intervention of Angolan troops, fighter-bombers, and attack helicopters played a key role in saving Kabila from the RCD and Rwandan expeditionary force that had been airlifted to western Congo.¹⁶⁹ In April 1999, dos Santos, Mugabe, Namibian President Sam Nujoma, and Kabila formalized their interstate alliances by signing a defense pact in Luanda.¹⁷⁰ Although dos Santos committed far fewer soldiers to Congo than did Zimbabwe, the specter of Angolan air power continued to limit the extent of rebel offensives throughout the war.¹⁷¹

Scholars widely agree that, similar to his involvement in the first war, dos Santos's intervention on Kabila's side was a result of the transnational threat constituted by UNITA and its (potential) external backers.¹⁷² In early August 1998, the renewed eruption of civil war in Angola seemed inevitable, and dos Santos's "greatest concern" was "Kabila's rickety regime."¹⁷³ Dos Santos feared that growing instability in the DRC would enable UNITA to

166. Ibid. See also Compagnon, *Predictable Tragedy*, pp. 219–220.

167. See Michael Nest, "Ambitions, Profits, and Loss: Zimbabwean Economic Involvement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo," *African Affairs*, July 2001, p. 470; Rupiya, "A Political and Military Review of Zimbabwe's Involvement in the Second Congo War," pp. 96–97; and Compagnon, *Predictable Tragedy*, p. 213.

168. See Prunier, *Africa's World War*, pp. 191–192, 217–218; and Reyntjens, *The Great African War*, pp. 202–203.

169. See Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters*, p. 197.

170. See Iden Wetherell, "Mugabe Forms New Defence Pact," *Mail & Guardian* (Johannesburg), April 16, 1999.

171. See Prunier, *Africa's World War*, p. 238.

172. See *ibid.*, pp. 187–190; Reyntjens, *The Great African War*, pp. 201–202; Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters*, p. 192; and Turner, "Angola's Role in the Congo War," pp. 85–86.

173. "Angola: War Drums Sounding," *Africa Confidential*, August 7, 1998, p. 2.

bring in supplies through western Congo, and there were several indications that, prior to the outbreak of the Second Congo War, Kabila's opponents had developed relations both with UNITA and with separatists fighting for the independence of Cabinda, an oil-rich Angolan exclave that lies between Congo-Brazzaville and Congo-Kinshasa. More specifically, RCD Vice President Arthur Zahidi Ngoma had met a secessionist leader in Paris in July 1998; UNITA Vice President Antonio Dembo and several former Mobutu generals with close links to UNITA had reportedly been received in Rwanda; and UNITA President Jonas Savimbi himself had been seen in Uganda.¹⁷⁴

Given these links, dos Santos had good reasons to feel threatened by the prospect of a new regime in Kinshasa led by the RCD and beholden to Rwanda and Uganda. By contrast, the decision to save Kabila from imminent defeat promised greater control over Congolese territory, given that Kabila's military dependence on Angola was assumed to ensure his cooperation against UNITA.¹⁷⁵

SUMMARY OF CASES

The ten case studies of foreign rulers' alliance decisions in the two Congo Wars provide substantial support for the strategic theory of transnational alliance formation developed in this article. In six cases, foreign rulers sided with Congolese rebels: Kagame, Museveni, dos Santos, and Mugabe supported the AFDL in the first war; Kagame and Museveni sponsored the RCD (and, in Museveni's case, also the MLC) in the second war. For five out of these six decisions, transnational threats offer the most convincing explanation—combined with resource opportunities in the case of Museveni's decision in the second war (see the overview in table 2). Mugabe's support for the AFDL is the only decision in which motives beyond political survival provide one of the main explanations; but even here, evidence suggests that resource opportunities were at least as important as political ideology and the desire for regional influence.

In the four other cases, foreign rulers sided with their Congolese counterparts: Bashir supported Mobutu in the first war; Bashir, dos Santos, and Mugabe backed Kabila in the second war. These decisions can all be explained by extending the logic of my strategic theory. For three of them (Bashir's involvement in both wars and dos Santos's alliance with Kabila in the second

174. See Turner, "Angola's Role in the Congo War," p. 85; Prunier, *Africa's World War*, p. 189; and Reyntjens, *The Great African War*, p. 202.

175. See Prunier, *Africa's World War*, p. 190.

war), indirect transnational threats offer the best explanation. In the fourth case (Mugabe's involvement in the second war), resource opportunities were arguably of greatest importance.

In short, the strategic theory alone best explains nine of the ten cases, with alternative explanations playing a major role in only one case. As a secondary factor, however, influence-seeking appears to have played a role in three additional cases—both of Museveni's decisions, as well as Mugabe's second decision. Transnational ethnic affinities contributed to Kagame's decisions, but they were less important than Atzili's earlier analysis suggests.¹⁷⁶

Conclusion

The main argument of this article is that most African rulers form alliances with rebel groups abroad to alleviate threats to their political survival at home. By conceiving of security cooperation between rulers and foreign rebels as transnational alliances, the article connects the recent scholarly interest in the transnational dimensions of civil war to the much older literature on military alliances in international relations. In the early 1990s, Michael Barnett, Jack Levy, and Steven David challenged realist alliance formation theories that focus on external threats to states, suggesting instead that—at least in what was then called the Third World—interstate alliances were primarily determined by internal threats to rulers.¹⁷⁷ The strategic theory developed above extends this basic idea to transnational alliances and specifies three causal mechanisms that link the threats of coups and rebellions to the formation of alliances with foreign rebel groups. The application of this theory to the five most important foreign rulers involved in the two Congo Wars shows that it offers powerful and parsimonious explanations for why these rulers sided either with their counterparts or with Congolese rebels. The article thus makes contributions to the study of civil war and military alliances in general, as well as to the study of the Congo Wars in particular.

While the article focuses on the formation of transnational alliances, it also provides conceptual and theoretical foundations for future research on the management and termination of transnational alliances. Here, too, it will be useful to take into account existing work on interstate alliances and to ask to what extent findings from that literature are relevant in a transnational con-

176. See Atzili, "When Good Fences Make Bad Neighbors," pp. 167–168.

177. See Barnett and Levy, "Domestic Sources of Alliances and Alignments," p. 378; and David, *Choosing Sides*, p. 12.

text.¹⁷⁸ This turn to alliance dynamics will require a greater focus on the preferences and actions of rebel allies, taking them seriously as actors in their own right rather than as pawns of foreign states.¹⁷⁹ Recent research suggests that neither the literature on interstate alliance politics nor that on conflict delegation, which applies insights from principal-agent theory, can fully account for the particular dynamics of transnational alliances.¹⁸⁰

Future research should also pay greater attention to cross-regional differences. A closer look at the Uppsala Conflict Data Program's External Support Data, which covers the period from 1975 to 2009, suggests that mutual interference between neighboring states—in the sense of tit-for-tat support to rebel groups—is rare outside of Africa: the dataset reveals fifteen such cases in Africa, but only one in the Middle East and two in Asia.¹⁸¹ It thus appears that the interference dilemma highlighted by my theory's transnational threat mechanism applies mainly to African rulers. Similarly, Philip Roessler finds that his coup-proofing theory of civil war, driven by the idea of an internal security dilemma between a ruler and ethnic rivals within the ruler's support coalition, works primarily in Africa.¹⁸² There seems to be something unique not only about the threats that African rulers face but also about how these rulers respond to them in both their domestic and foreign policies. Further research is required to establish the extent to which the origins of transnational alliances in Africa differ from those in other regions. A good place to start would be the ongoing Syrian conflict, in which transnational alliances—between President Bashar al-Assad and the Lebanese Hezbollah on the one side, and a panoply of states and Syrian rebels on the other—play a critical role. Did

178. On interstate alliance management, see Glenn H. Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), part 2. On termination, see Brett Ashley Leeds and Burcu Savun, "Terminating Alliances: Why Do States Abrogate Agreements?" *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 69, No. 4 (November 2007), pp. 1118–1132.

179. See Reyko Huang, "Rebel Diplomacy in Civil War," *International Security*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Spring 2016), pp. 89–126.

180. See Henning Tamm, "The Dynamics of Transnational Alliances in Africa, 1990–2010: Governments, Rebel Groups, and Power Politics," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oxford, 2014; and Erica D. Borghard, "Of Power and Proxies: A Theory of Influence," paper presented at the annual convention of the International Studies Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, February 18–21, 2015.

181. See Stina Höglbladh, Therése Pettersson, and Lotta Themnér, "External Support in Armed Conflict, 1975–2009: Presenting New Data," paper presented at the annual convention of the International Studies Association, Montréal, Canada, March 16–19, 2011. The criteria I use for identifying cases of mutual interference are (1) a clear temporal link, and (2) a causal link suggested by the secondary literature. The three non-African cases are Afghanistan and Pakistan; Afghanistan and Uzbekistan; and Iran and Iraq.

182. See Roessler, "The Enemy Within," pp. 338–339.

Middle Eastern rulers choose sides based on “larger regional ambitions,”¹⁸³ or were at least some of their alliance decisions driven by concerns about internal threats to their political survival?

The findings of this article also have policy implications. How to prevent, or at least help end, transnational alliances is a question of particular policy relevance, as external support to rebel groups has been found to both prolong and intensify civil wars.¹⁸⁴ In this regard, two implications follow from my theory. First, to prevent or alleviate the mistrust that drives interference dilemmas, third-party actors could help neighboring rulers send each other reassuring “costly signals” about their benign intentions¹⁸⁵—for instance, by monitoring mutual commitments to police each other’s exiled opposition.¹⁸⁶ Second, to increase the private costs of supporting foreign rebels and thus undermine resource opportunities, third-party actors could strengthen existing efforts to monitor sources of rebel group funding and link these efforts to credible threats of targeted sanctions against foreign rulers and members of their support coalitions.¹⁸⁷ Both steps would help avoid the externalization of internal threats.

183. Emile Hokayem, “Iran, the Gulf States, and the Syrian Civil War,” *Survival*, Vol. 56, No. 6 (December 2014/January 2015), p. 59.

184. See David E. Cunningham, “Blocking Resolution: How External States Can Prolong Civil Wars,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (March 2010), pp. 115–127; and Lindsay Heger and Idean Salehyan, “Ruthless Rulers: Coalition Size and the Severity of Civil Conflict,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (June 2007), p. 396.

185. See Andrew H. Kydd, “Sheep in Sheep’s Clothing: Why Security Seekers Do Not Fight Each Other,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Autumn 1997), pp. 139–147. For a more skeptical perspective, see Evan Braden Montgomery, “Breaking Out of the Security Dilemma: Realism, Reassurance, and the Problem of Uncertainty,” *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Fall 2006), pp. 151–185.

186. See Cliffe, “Regional Dimensions of Conflict in the Horn of Africa,” pp. 106–107.

187. On existing efforts, see Philippe Le Billon, *Wars of Plunder: Conflicts, Profits, and the Politics of Resources* (London: Hurst, 2012), pp. 163–170.