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Violent Conflict and State Fragility in Sub-Saharan Africa *Trends, Causes and Policy Options*

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Violent conflict and state fragility pose major challenges at the start of the 21st century. While the number of wars has fallen markedly since the mid 1990s, some 40-60 states worldwide are experiencing an erosion of the state's monopoly of force and the growing failure of public institutions to guarantee the rule of law or deliver core functions to the majority of their populations. This situation poses a direct threat to "human security" and is a major setback to progress towards the attainment of the Millennium Development. Sub-Saharan Africa is affected in particular. After the end of the Cold War, the region has suffered from an increasing incidence of violent conflicts. The hot spots of violence are located in sub-regional conflict complexes, in particular in the Horn of Africa, West Africa, and the Great Lakes Region. Over the last few years, however, positive trends can also be observed. Though the situation in the DRC and Sudan has remained deplorable, Sub-Saharan Africa according to a couple of quantitative studies was part of global trend towards less conflict and human suffering.

This contribution analyzes these trends and put them into perspective. Secondly, it will explore primary internal and external factors of violent conflict and state failure in Sub-Saharan Africa. Finally, it suggests options for the prevention of violent conflicts and venues for co-operative peace-building – focussing on the role of external actors.

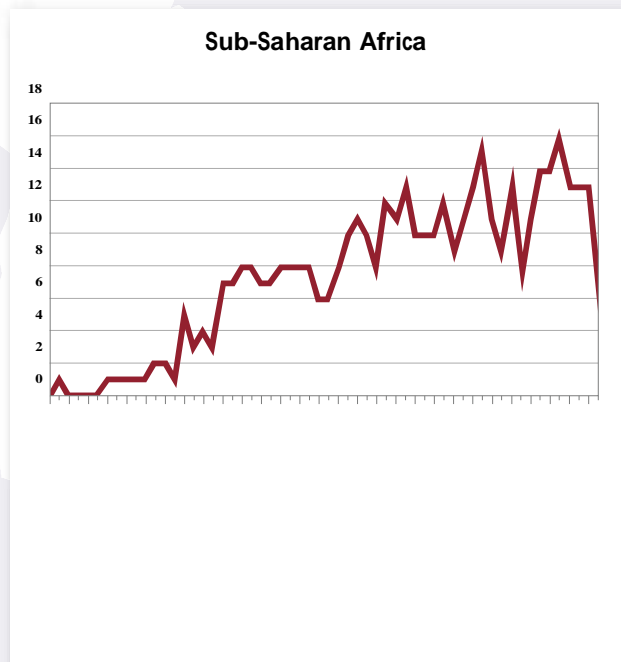
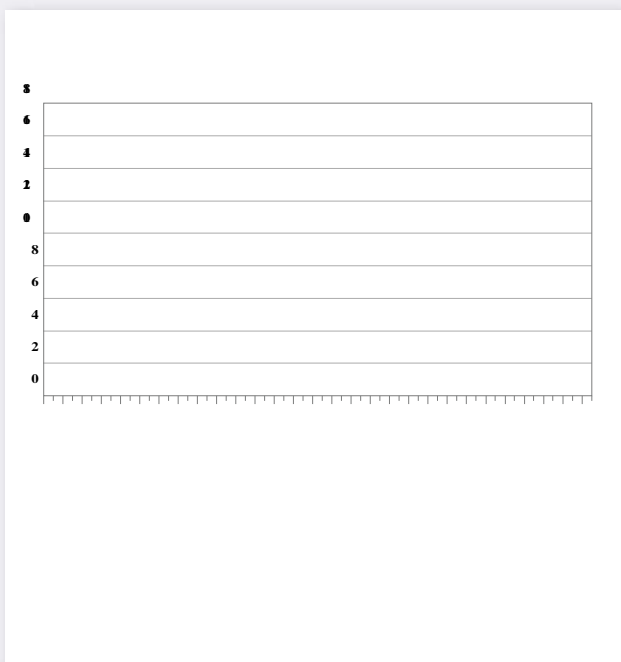
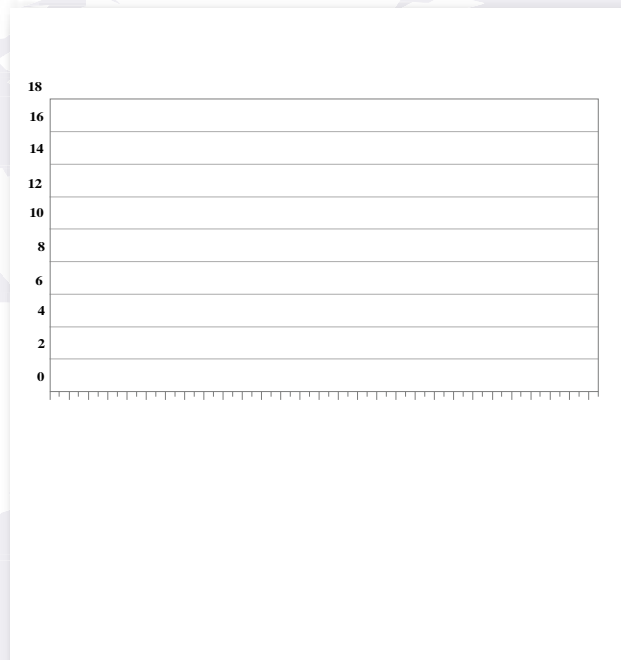
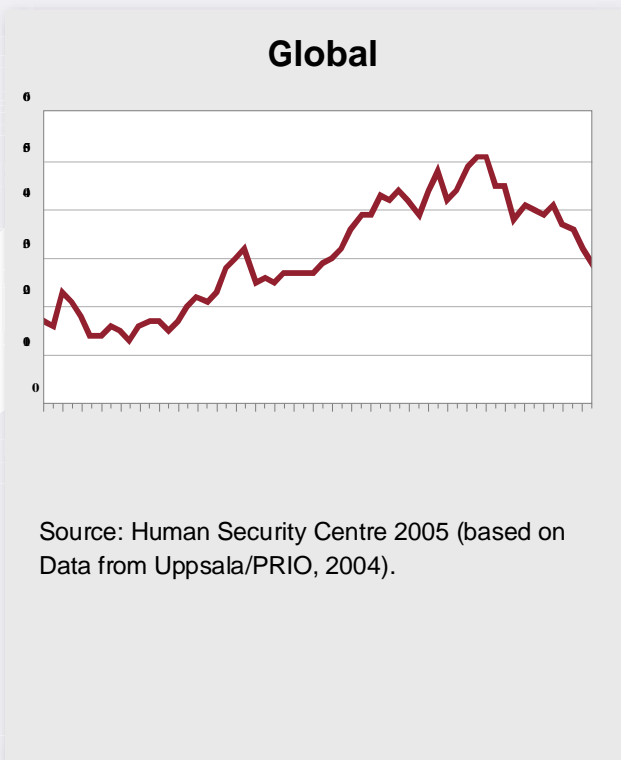
1. Conflicting contours of a fragmented world order

1.1 Fewer wars and increased multilateral engagement

After the end of the Cold War, the number of wars around the world initially soared. According to the Research into the Causes of War Working Group (AKUF), Hamburg, there were 44 major armed conflicts in 1989, rising to 55 in 1992. From 1993, a steep decline occurred, with 27 countries being at war in 2004 and 28 in 2005 – the lowest level since. For the first time in a long time, Sub-Saharan Africa was no longer one of the two most war-prone regions. The trends observed by AKUF are confirmed by figures from the Human Security Centre (2005a, p. 1-3 and 23) which show that from 1992, the number of armed conflicts involving a government fell by 40 % 1964 [see Figure 1].

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Figure 1: Numbers of armed conflicts, 1946-2003



So what has caused this downward trend? One probable factor which is often under-rated is the increased engagement of the international community conflict-related activities over the last 15 years. Ferdowsi/Matthies (2003, p. 27) note that between 1988 and 1998, around 38 formal peace accords were signed which aimed to resolve violent conflicts in 33 countries. Similar findings are presented by the Human Security Centre (2005a, p. 153) in its *Human Security Report*. Approximately half of all the peace settlements negotiated between 1946 and 2003 have been signed since 1990; the average number of conflicts terminated per year in the 1990s was more than twice the average of all previous decades from 1946 onwards.

But is this a stable trend? This question arouses controversy. The *Human Security Report* (2005a, p. 8 and 153-155) presents an optimistic picture, underlining the upsurge in crisis prevention and management as well as post-conflict peacebuilding by the international community since the end of the Cold War. According to the Report:

- UN preventive diplomacy missions increased sixfold, from one in 1990 to six in 2002.
- UN peacemaking activities, i.e. those which seek to stop ongoing conflicts, also increased nearly fourfold over the same period, from four in 1990 to 15 in 2002.
- Like-minded governments are joining forces more and more often to support UN peacemaking and peacekeeping missions. Between 1990 and 2003, for example, the number of groups such as "Friends of the Secretary-General", "Contact Groups" and other mechanisms increased sevenfold, from four to 28.
- There is a much greater willingness to impose sanctions: the number of UN economic sanctions on regimes increased fivefold between 1990 and 2000.
- There has been a clear increase in prosecutions of perpetrators of grave human rights abuses, from zero in 1989. In 2004, 11 countries were prosecuting suspected perpetrators of grave human rights abuses. In addition to the establishment of the International Criminal Court, a further five ad hoc tribunals are in operation.
- The number of UN peacekeeping operations more than doubled between 1988 and 2004, from seven to 16. The nature of the operations has also changed: they have evolved into multidimensional missions which, in terms of their mandate and resources, are far more "robust" than 15 years ago. Indeed, many of today's operations are more akin to nation-building.

Sub-Saharan Africa has profited in particular from this trend. Of the 16 UN peace operation worldwide in March 2006, 6 were active in African countries south of the Sahara – amounting to 66,000 of the 88,000 peacekeepers worldwide [see Table 1].

Table 1: UN Peace Operations in Africa

Mission	<u>Established</u>	Total personnel
MONUC (DR Congo)	1999 -	20 016
UNMEE (Ethiopia & Eritrea)	2000 -	3 818
UNMIL (Liberia)	2003 -	18 022
UNOCI (Ivory Coast)	2004 -	8 583
ONUB (Burundi)	2004 -	4 845
UNMIS (Sudan)	2005 -	10 529
Total		65 813

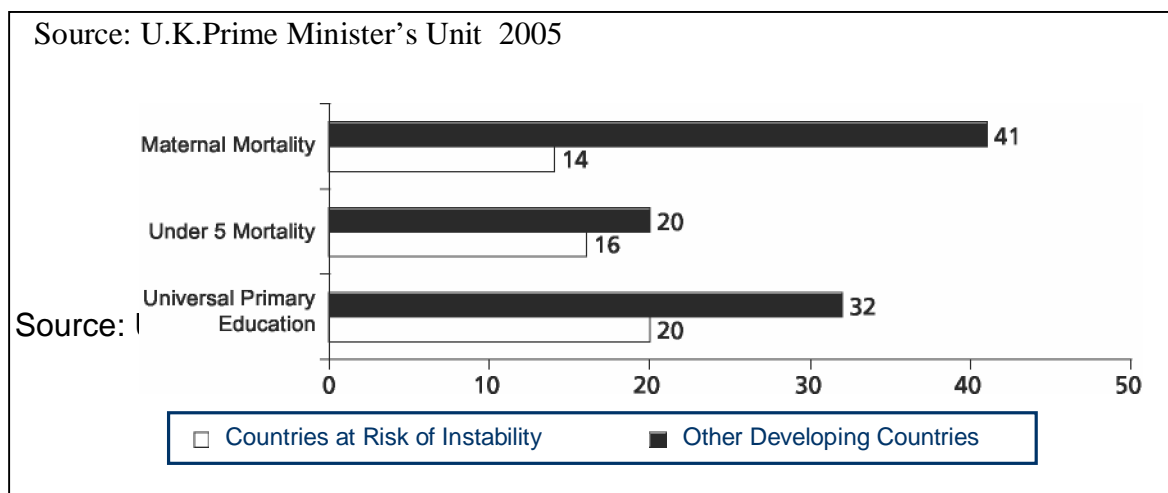
As at: 31 March 2006

Source: <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/bnote010101.pdf>, 05.05.2006

1.2 *Precarious statehood: a permanent feature of a fragmented world?*

The decline in the frequency of war that has been observed by various research projects contrasts sharply with the recent debate about state failure and state collapse. There is a widespread assumption in this new discourse on fragile states that the erosion and particularly the collapse of the state's monopoly of force are inevitably accompanied by an upsurge in the number of armed conflicts, posing an increasing risk to human security and causing regional and transnational spillover effects which can lead to global instability.

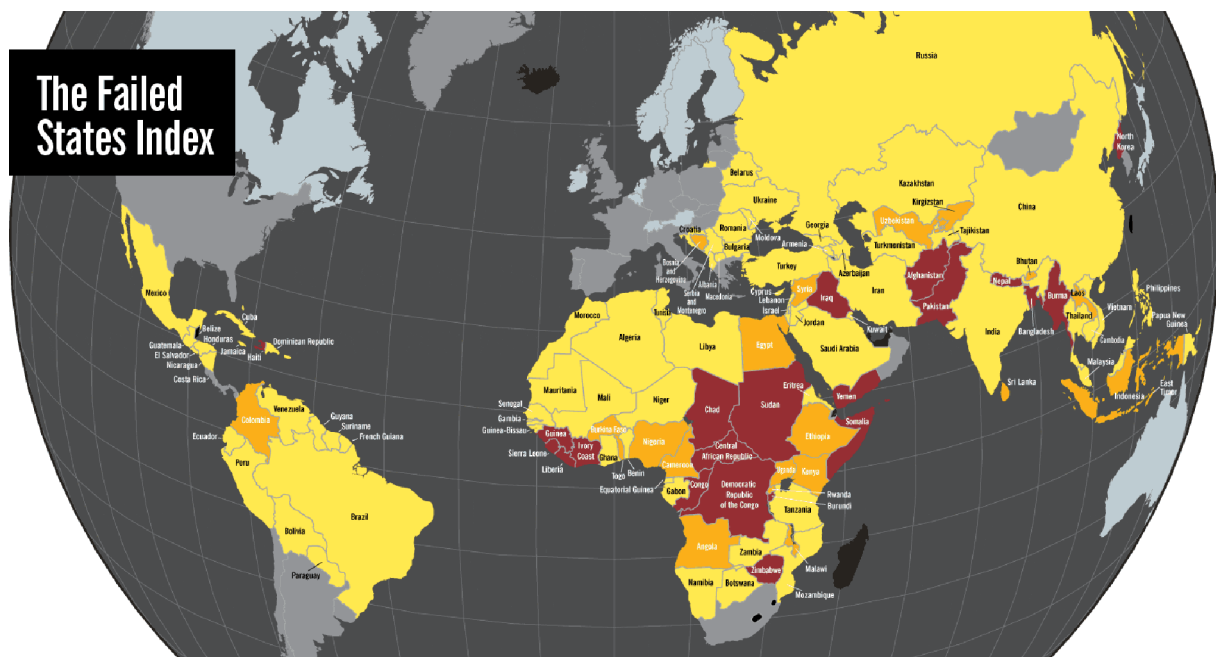
The UK's Department for International Development (DFID 2005) has produced a list of 46 countries which scored poorly or very poorly against key performance and development indicators and appeared in the World Bank Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA) ratings at least once between 1999 and 2003, and which can thus be described as "fragile". DFID compares the social conditions in fragile states with those of other poor countries and reveals alarming disparities. Per capita income in fragile states amounts to just half of that of the comparison group. Child mortality is two times higher and maternal mortality is actually three times greater than in other poor countries. Around one-third of the population is malnourished and a high proportion of the population suffers from malaria. Fragile states are most off-track in relation to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, and yet these 46 countries are home to 870 million people, i.e. 14% of the world's population [see Figure 2].

Figure 2: Percentage likelihood of MDGs being met

The Failed States Index is a very recent attempt to measure state failure and collapse. The FSI was developed by the Fund for Peace, an independent research institute, together with the respected academic journal *Foreign Policy* (Foreign Policy 2006; The Fund for Peace 2006). For each indicator of instability, tens of thousands of articles from global and regional sources were collected, analysed and evaluated and scores for each country were compiled using the Conflict Assessment System Tool (CAST) methodology and software. According to the State Failure Index project, "the resulting index provides a profile of the new world disorder of the 21st century". The problem of weak and failing states is far more serious than generally thought: around two billion people live in insecure states, with varying degrees of vulnerability to widespread civil conflict.

State failure and collapse occur in almost every region of the world. The list of the world's 60 most insecure states includes not only Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast, Iraq and Zimbabwe, the five countries which top the rankings, but also countries such as Bangladesh (ranking 19th), Sri Lanka (25), Egypt (31), Bosnia and Herzegovina (35) and Russia (43). Despite this geographical spread, the prevalence of Sub-Saharan African countries on the list is striking: among the 15 most at-risk countries, ten are located in this region. Many of them, including the African countries at the top of the rankings, but also Chad, Somalia, Guinea, Liberia, the Central African Republic and Burundi, have experienced extremely violent civil wars which claimed numerous lives [see Figure 3].

Figure 3: The Failed States Index



Red: Critical

Orange: In Danger

Yellow: Borderline

Dark Grey: Stable

Light Grey: Most Stable

* Country at war

Source: Foreign Policy 2006; The Fund for Peace 2006 (for the Failed States Index)

1	Sudan*
2	Dem. Rep. of Congo*
3	Ivory Coast*
4	Iraq*
5	Zimbabwe
6	Chad
7	Somalia*
8	Haiti*
9	Pakistan
10	Afghanistan*
11	Guinea
12	Liberia
13	Central African Republic
14	North Korea
15	Burundi*

How can these alarming findings be reconciled with the more encouraging message that the number of wars worldwide is decreasing? There are two possible explanations: firstly, the traditional definitions of war focus very narrowly on centrally directed forms of organised violence. This type of war is indeed becoming less prevalent – an encouraging sign. But the erosion of the state's monopoly of force and the growing failure of public institutions to perform core functions – trends which indirectly affect human security – are rarely, if ever, reflected in the statistics on armed conflict. A second explanation for the apparently contradictory messages is that the various rankings of fragile or failing states currently do not enable any clear trends to be discerned, but merely present an initial overview of the situation at the start of the 21st century. The mere fact that some sort of ranking has been attempted for the first time indicates that there is a growing awareness of the problem. But is there really a general trend towards a *new world disorder*? That has yet to be proved conclusively.

One thing is clear: despite a decline in armed conflict, a significant number of developing countries is characterised by a high level of fragility. Does this fragile statehood "merely" impact on the affected societies' conditions of life, or is it also likely to trigger a resurgence of armed conflicts? More research is required to answer this question.

2. Causes of war and state failure

What are the causes of war and state failure in Sub-Saharan Africa? Empirical research has pointed out the relevance of two major factor bundles: (1) poverty and the existence of "lootable resources"; (2) political instability and democratization processes; (3) the legacy of former wars.

2.1 Poverty and "lootable resources"

Recent studies have reaffirmed the link between poverty and armed conflict, in relation to both the outbreak and the duration of wars. For example, Collier/Hoeffler (2002) found that in countries with a per capita income of US\$ 250, the probability of a war breaking out within five years is around 15%, whereas with a per capita income

of US\$ 5000, the probability is less than 1%. Similar conclusions are drawn by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which notes a correlation between the risk of conflict and a low ranking in the Human Development Index (HDI).

Researchers from the World Bank, such as Paul Collier and his colleagues, point out that this is because the state in poor countries has weak capacities and is unable to guarantee the security of its citizens. In such cases, it is not only the suffering of the general population which could trigger a rebellion, but also the combination of abuse of power/mismanagement and the emergence of "greedy" rebels who, in poor countries, have especially good prospects of breaking down the state's monopoly of force and recruiting supporters.

But according to Paul Collier et al., an even more significant risk factor than low per capita income is the availability of "lootable resources" such as diamonds, high-grade timber, oil, coltan or the raw materials which are the source of opium and cocaine. Rather than being a blessing for development, their existence creates a "resource curse" in many cases. And indeed, the "new wars" are less about ideological differences or political ambitions than opportunities for self-enrichment. The wars which erupted in the 1990s in Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone are good examples.

2.2 Political instability and democratisation processes

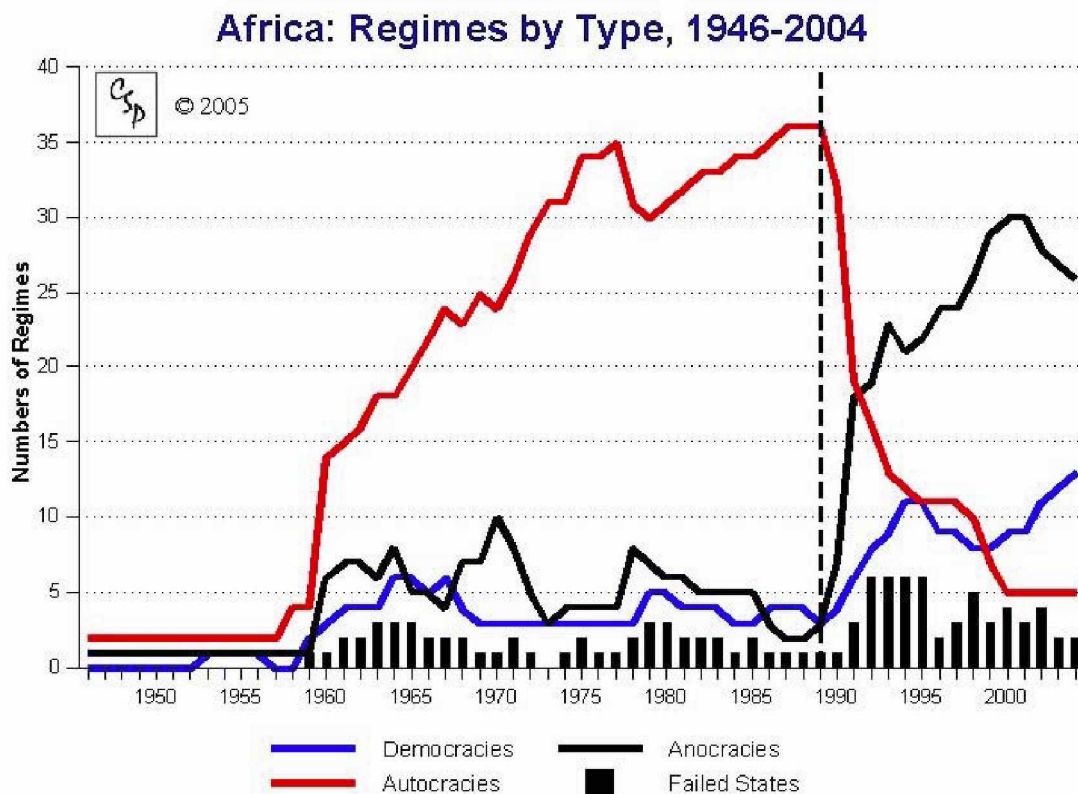
A key determinant of whether states achieve internal consolidation and manage processes of social change with relatively little violence is their system of governance. This is the main message from the State Failure Task Force (2003) – a major research programme at the University of Maryland, headed by Ted Robert Gurr and Monty Marshall, and now renamed the Political Instability Task Force. The programme studied 136 cases of serious state failure spanning the period 1955-1998. From more than 1300 variables, the project identified 75 core indicators – demographic, social, economic, environmental and political – most closely associated with state failure.

When developing the global model, the study found that the strongest influence on the risk of state failure was regime type. The model distinguishes between full democracies, states in transition (which it terms "partial democracies") and autocracies. Strikingly, the authors found the odds of conflict and state failure to be seven times as high for partial democracies as they were for full democracies or, indeed, autocracies. A noticeable increase in the number of democratic regimes between 1985 and 1994 could be observed. Other risks factors which roughly doubled the odds of state failure were low levels of material well-being, low trade openness, and "bad neighbourhood" effects such as the prevalence of armed conflicts in bordering countries.

Besides the global model, the Marshall/Gurr team (2005) also developed a regional model for the crisis-torn continent of Africa, which is especially vulnerable to conflict and state failure [see Figure 4]. According to Marshall/Gurr, only 19 of 44 countries here were successful in establishing a stable state system in the transition from colonial to local administration. Additionally, two states which have emerged somewhat more recently from control by other African states – Namibia from South Africa and Eritrea from Ethiopia – have also successfully established stable states. Of the 25 countries where stable states were not established immediately, 12 cases of state formation instability involved only regime instability and 12 involved both regime instability and armed conflict. Only one – Mozambique – was characterised by protracted armed conflict without the occurrence of any regime instability events.

As with the global model, the strongest influence on the risk of state failure in Africa is regime type. Almost all the partial democracies failed within the first five years, and even in (apparently) full democracies, the probability of crisis was five times higher than it was for autocracies. This is especially significant given that in sub-Saharan Africa – unlike other regions of the world – there has been a clear rise in the number of partial democracies over the past decade and a fall in the number of autocracies at the same time [see Figure 5]. Functioning democracies exist in around 10 countries. The researchers conclude that several attempts at democratisation seem to be required. In addition to the indicators identified in the global model, ethnic discrimination, unbalanced development (a high rate of urbanisation with low per capita income) and leaders who are inexperienced or have remained too long in office are other risk factors in Africa.

Figure 5: Africa: Regimes by Type, 1946-2004



Source: <http://members.aol.com/cspgcm/AfricaConflictTrendsMGM2005us.pdf>

3. Policy options for external actors

Fragile states in Sub-Saharan Africa are highly vulnerable to crises and, over the medium term, pose a threat to human security – challenges which the international community has not yet adequately addressed. What are the key entry points for dealing with these challenges?

3.1 *Development aid: dollops or drip-feed?*

Even under the most difficult conditions, external actors must try to maintain a development presence, either directly or indirectly, in fragile and crisis-torn states (the principle being to "stay engaged, but differently"). In the development policy debate in particular, improving socio-economic conditions is often viewed as a key entry point for reducing the risk of conflict in poor countries. But this is not necessarily an argument in favour of radically increasing development assistance. The fact is that the misuse of external funding to shore up illegitimate or even dictatorial regimes poses a risk which must not be under-rated, especially in conflict-prone and unstable situations. This abuse was especially severe in Nigeria: dictator Sani Abacha and his family are estimated to have looted between US\$ 4 and US\$ 6 billion from the Nigerian state during a period in which the international community provided US\$ 1.1 billion of development assistance (UK Prime Minister's Strategy Unit 2005, p. 107).

Some quantitative studies show that development assistance is especially effective if it is dovetailed with reform-oriented policies. Increasing the level of aid only makes sense if it is linked to conditionality. This does not need to span the full good governance "wish list", but can focus on minimum criteria of "good-enough governance", especially the rule of law and financial accountability (UK Prime Minister's Strategy Unit 2005, p. 83-89). Development policy measures in African crisis states should therefore aim, first and foremost, to help guarantee a minimum level of public security and the proper and legal control of government action, and should also tackle corruption and poverty effectively. High priority should also be given to ensuring a functioning judiciary and guaranteeing property rights and the performance of core administrative functions, thereby helping to curb the formation of criminal economies.

3.2 *Reducing external vulnerability*

A further entry point consists of measures which help reduce the external vulnerability of (potential) crisis countries and prevent governments and rebels from massively exploiting natural and financial resources for personal gain. Fragile states are generally embedded in a regional security complex in which mutual stabilisation and destabilisation and numerous transnational spillover effects all play a role. In particular, (transnational) refugee flows are a key factor in "regionalising" political violence and are often accompanied by competition for scarce resources, crime, arms and drug trafficking. In order to avoid a re-starting of armed conflict, strengthening the regional components of global governance must be given high priority. Providing targeted support for regional and subregional organisations is an important entry point and is currently being pursued vigorously for the African continent in particular.

Poor and resource-poor countries are not only susceptible to political and military influences; they are also vulnerable to socio-economic shocks. An "international policy package" for fragile states must therefore also include an instrument to cushion shocks in the international commodity and financial markets.

3.3 *Tackling the "resource curse"*

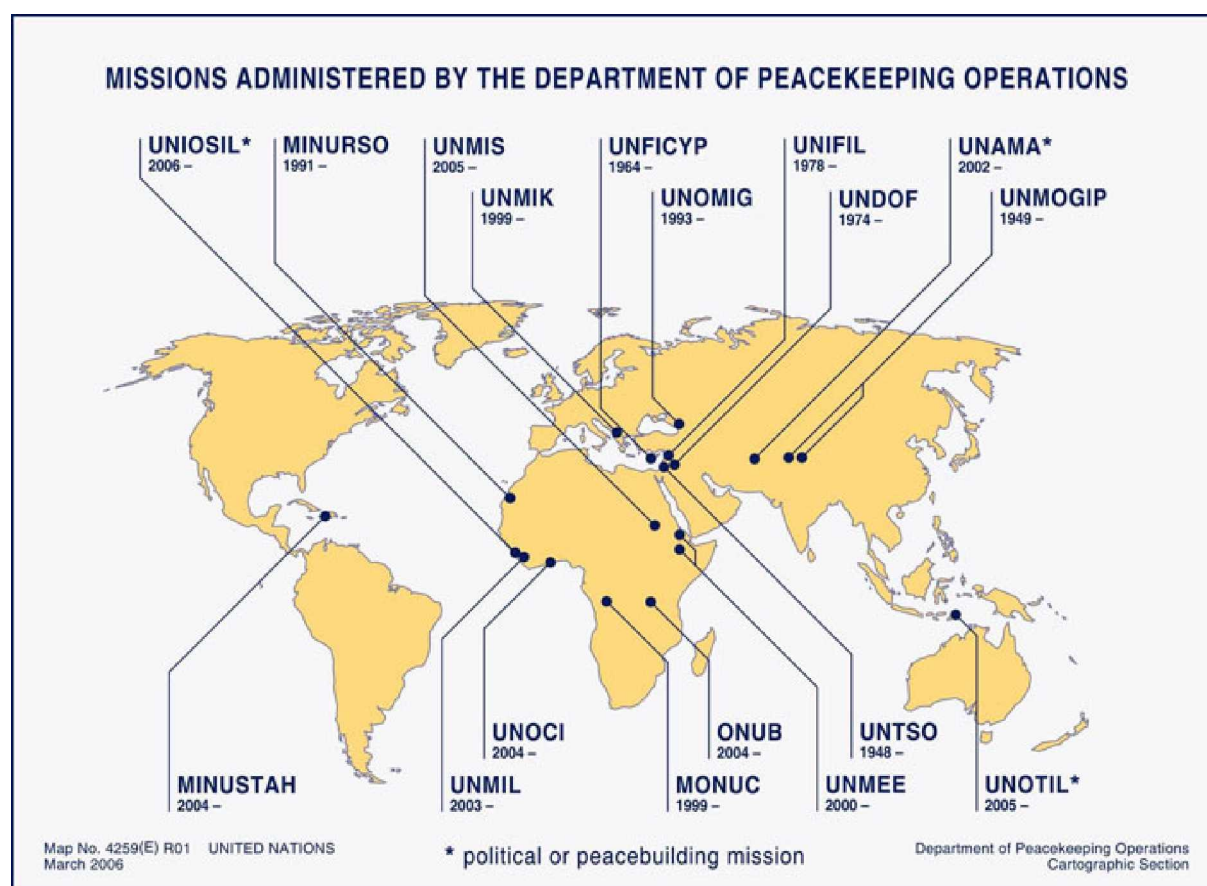
Transparent management of natural resources can do much to limit the misuse of financial resources and their misappropriation by violent actors for personal gain. NGOs such as Global Witness have repeatedly criticised the hidden payments made by extractive industry companies to governments in developing and transition countries and are pushing for measures to curb the illegal trade in high-value natural resources, especially by promoting transparency and accountability. Initial successes have been achieved with the Kimberley Process, a joint government, industry and civil society initiative; the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme imposes extensive requirements on participants to certify that shipments of rough diamonds are free from conflict diamonds. This approach could be extended to other resources such as coltan or high-grade timber; similar ideas are being mooted for the narcotics trade (Collier/Hoeffler 2004). A further entry point is to improve government accountability for the management of revenues from the oil, gas and mining industries. The *Publish What You Pay* campaign launched by Global Witness and George Soros aims to promote this principle.

The *Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative* (EITI) pursues a similar objective. The EITI was launched by UK Prime Minister Tony Blair at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in September 2002. It aims to develop a framework to promote transparency in the payments by transnational extractive industry companies to governments in the developing countries, as these funds are all too often siphoned off for personal gain. Key challenges which should be addressed sooner rather than later include closing down tax havens, curbing money-laundering and controlling natural resource and arms trafficking from crisis regions through more stringent controls on relevant financial transactions. The OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions is a good example of how the international community can address the problem of bribery through criminalisation (effective, proportionate and dissuasive criminal penalties).

3.4 *The military and the "Responsibility to Protect"*

In some situations, state failure must be countered by military means. Since the end of the East-West conflict – despite a number of major failures and setbacks (notably Somalia, the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda) – multilateral peace operations have evolved into an important tool which can be deployed to help de-escalate conflicts and stabilise transitional situations that are characterised by mistrust and the influence of violent actors. The number of UN peacekeeping operations more than doubled between 1988 and 2006 – from seven to 15. In March 2006, the United Nations' peace operations across the world comprised over 88,000 personnel, 66,000 of which were dislocated in Sub-Saharan Africa [see Figure 5]. In terms of their mandate and resources, these operations are far more "robust" than 15 years ago; indeed, many of them are more akin to *state-building*. Nonetheless, they are still under-resourced: the eight major "multidimensional" peace support operations launched since October 1999 were collectively understaffed by 14% below the mandated level (UK Prime Minister's Strategy Unit 2005, p. 150).

Figure 5: UN peacekeeping operations March 2006



Mission	<u>Established</u>	Total personnel
UNTSO (Middle East)	1948 -	397
UNMOGIP (India/Pakistan)	1949 -	119
UNFICYP (Cyprus)	1964 -	1 057
UNDOF (Golan Heights)	1974 -	1 185
UNIFIL (Lebanon)	1978 -	2 382
MINURSO (Western Sahara)	1991 -	463
UNOMIG (Georgia)	1993 -	426
UNMIK (Kosovo)	1999 -	5 378
MONUC (DR Congo)	1999 -	20 016
UNMEE (Ethiopia & Eritrea)	2000 -	3 818
UNMIL (Liberia)	2003 -	18 022
UNOCI (Ivory Coast)	2004 -	8 583
MINUSSTAH (Haiti)	2004 -	11 077
ONUB (Burundi)	2004 -	4 845
UNMIS (Sudan)	2005 -	10 529
Total		88 297

As at: 31 March 2006

Source: <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/bnote010101.pdf>, 05.05.2006

A critical situation arises if a fragile state slides into violence and collapse, posing a large-scale threat to the "human security" of its citizens (e.g. through genocide, "ethnic cleansing" or humanitarian emergencies). Under which circumstances is it appropriate for the international community to take coercive – and in particular military – action against a state for the purpose of protecting people at risk? This question has been the subject of intense debate over the last 15 years. The International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) has formulated a comprehensive position on this issue which has now been incorporated into the outcome document of the Millennium +5 Summit, held in New York in 2005. The report, entitled *The Responsibility to Protect* (ICISS 2001), calls for a redefinition of the concept of state sovereignty, moving away from the conventional understanding of sovereignty as a country's right to non-interference in its internal affairs and towards an affirmation of sovereignty as responsibility – specifically, the primary responsibility of each individual state to protect its populations, based on a social contract between the state and citizens. When major harm to civilians is occurring, and the state in question is unable or unwilling to end the harm, or is itself the perpetrator, thereby endangering human security, this responsibility must be borne by the broader community of states, which must take appropriate action, starting with civilian measures, and then – if these are unsuccessful – resorting to military intervention which is justified in order to protect the populations. These measures should preferably be endorsed by the country concerned, but under certain circumstances, coercive measures are justified, if large-scale loss of life or ethnic cleansing, actual or apprehended, is the product of deliberate state action, state neglect or inability to act. Such intervention, particularly military intervention, also entails a responsibility to rebuild, i.e. to support the reconstruction of the affected country's public, social and economic structures. The UN Peacebuilding Commission established in December 2005 could provide a new institutional framework to improve coordination between the many different international actors working in this area. This new body will coordinate activities of the members of the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) as well as representatives of the major financials along with troop contributors and relevant international financial institutions.

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