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17.586 Warlords, Terrorists, and Militias: Theorizing on Violent Non-State Actors  
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# Warlords



17.586 Week Two

# Violent Non State Actors

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- ▶ **Violent Non State Actors are Groups that:**
- ▶ Operate within and across state boundaries.
- ▶ They capitalize on state failure and existing identity cleavages to challenge state authority and the rule of law.
- ▶ Use violence in unconventional, asymmetric and indiscriminate operations to achieve their aims.
- ▶ They challenge our notions of how traditional concepts of deterrence, coercion and war fighting apply.
- ▶ As they gain access to resources and transnational networks they pose an increasing threat to neighboring states.
- ▶ Western governments not adequately prepared for the challenge.

# Somalia

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- ▶ December 1992: Operation Restore Hope: Bush senior had tried to bring food and order to a ravaged Somalia.
- ▶ Presence of 28,000 heavily armed US Marine Corps peacekeepers halted violence.
- ▶ Intended as humanitarian assistance, not meddling in war: a model of how to use military forces in the post Cold War era.
- ▶ Romantic Notion: Stop war and replace chaos with aid workers who would start the rebuilding process.
- ▶ Withdrawal in May 1993 and transition to UN peacekeeping force led to change on balance of power on the ground.
- ▶ UN aimed to: disarm clan militias; rehabilitate Somali political institutions; build secure environment throughout the country.
- ▶ But taming Somali warlords and clan militias required combat.
- ▶ Clinton sent Task Force Ranger to arrest Mohammad Fara Aidid a militiaman who attracted attention when famine appeared to result from fighting between his faction and that of his rival. He was involved in the Somali carnage that killed 24 and wounded 50 Pakistani peacekeepers.

# Soldiers Versus Warriors

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- ▶ Western warfare pitted against clan warfare:
  - ▶ Clear organization, chain of command and doctrine of combat for fighting war. Rules prescribe acceptable behavior.
  - ▶ No formal doctrine; dictated by cultural traditions and customs.
- ▶ Meanwhile, senior leadership in the Pentagon still saw states as the main actors in the international system and conventional military force as the way to address any threat.
- ▶ The Exception: Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Charles Krulak saw the imminent “rise of non-state actors.”
- ▶ He suggested that the US forces in the post Cold War World would not have to fight desert storms but rather conflicts that would look like Chechnya.
- ▶ Non-state armed groups: insurgents, terrorists, militias, warlords, criminal organizations.
- ▶ Unlike conventional war VNSA fight within states and transnationally in asymmetric and unconventional operations.

# Soldiers versus Warriors

## Military Capabilities

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### Analysis

- ▶ Two fundamental questions:
  - ▶ 1) Will hostile armed forces attack and if so where?
  - ▶ 2) What military capabilities will they bring to the battle and how will they use them?
- ▶ Order of Battle Components:
  - ▶ Primary: Composition; Disposition; Strength
  - ▶ Secondary: Tactics; Training; Effectiveness; Logistics
  - ▶ Tertiary: Biographic; Unit History; Uniforms; Insignia

### Adda Bozeman

- ▶ To understand violent non-state actors: **CULTURE MATTERS**; recognize the “otherness of others”
- ▶ 1) “There are different cultures in the world” with different modes of thinking, value systems and forms of political organization.”
- ▶ 2) Analysts and policy makers must be ready to recognize and analyze multiple distinct cultures as well as political systems that differ from one another significantly in their modes of rational and normative thought.”
- ▶ 3) The themes running through the histories of sub Saharan Africa the Middle East, India Southeast Asia and China converge on conflict and divisiveness as norm engendering realities. The evidence shows...that war, far from being perceived as immoral or abnormal is viewed positively.”
- ▶ 4) This broad concurrence of non Western traditions stands in marked contrast to the preferences registered in modern Western societies.

# The Emergence and Significance of Warlordism

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- ▶ Fragmenting states: devolution of power from center to periphery.
- ▶ Emergence of militarized sub-national groupings in societies without effective political institutions.
- ▶ National leaders and state administrative machines threatened by local and regional strong men.
- ▶ Government has no control over parts of the country: armed gangs and militias struggling for political and economic influence.
- ▶ As physical security decreases, localized protection becomes necessary.
- ▶ It is in these conditions that the patronage of a powerful individual becomes important.
- ▶ Breakdown of military activity in favor of informal conduct where military authority becomes personalized around a single political leader.

# What makes a Warlord

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- ▶ Warlords combine charisma with opportunism and have access to resources.
- ▶ They almost always have some form of professional military or at least extensive paramilitary experience.
- ▶ They are able to exploit existing identity cleavages, most often capitalizing on socio-economic disparities along ethnic and/or regional lines.
- ▶ Through membership in their private armies, they are able to offer a sense of belonging.
- ▶ Their private armies rarely wear uniforms or display rank, making it difficult to distinguish them from civilians.
- ▶ Warlords pursue tactical alliances based on control over some type of economic activity that will generate revenue.
- ▶ When government cooptation is not sufficiently profitable, warlords turn to overt criminal behaviors like plundering.

# Warlords

## Chinese Warlords

- ▶ 1911-late 1920s : Chinese provincial military governors entrusted with all civil military powers at the time of the revolution.
- ▶ By 1916 they operated in the vacuum left by the dissolution of imperial rule.
- ▶ Mobilized a following around the loyalty of subordinate officers and troops rather than on the basis of ideological appeals.
- ▶ Military force became the source of all effective political action.
- ▶ Over 1300 warlords fought over 140 provincial and interprovincial wars between 1912-1928.
- ▶ Territorial jurisdiction became a defining characteristic of Chinese warlordism.
- ▶ The most powerful controlled several of China's 28 provinces.
- ▶ Chinese warlords needed order because of the size of the geographical area they claimed. Administered territories, levied taxes.
- ▶ By 1925 Feng Yu-Hsiang controlled a population of nearly 10 million in an area larger than France, Belgium, Holland, Italy and Denmark combined;

## Sub-Saharan Africa Warlords

- ▶ Emergence of more recent cases of warlord conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa also a result of weak statehood.
- ▶ Unlike China, where following was a result of prestige, in Africa it was derived from more **localized followings**.
- ▶ While Chinese warlords had a **bureaucratic expression** of their desire for civil order, no African warlord has sought to institutionalize his position in this manner.
- ▶ Chinese Warlords had as large an army as 700,000 troops and territory provided military base, source of recruitment, food supplies and revenue. African warlords, though they may command whole clans or tribes have not reached such numbers in terms of **size**.

# The Warlord and Global Order

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- ▶ 6 types of warlords
  - ▶ 1) Local warlord:
    - ▶ Defends the integrity of a community without wishing to overcome the state.
  - ▶ 2) Warlord of enlarged locality at the frontiers:
    - ▶ Sustained by informal dealings with neighboring states.
  - ▶ 3) Warlord of international crime:
    - ▶ Resists the state not for a narrow material advantage but for a wider agenda.
  - ▶ 4) Client warlord:
    - ▶ Act as instrument of other states. Warlords are more used than using.
  - ▶ 5) Warlord who is partisan or resistance leaders:
    - ▶ Resisting the state/modernization etc.
  - ▶ 6) Warlord that becomes liberation leader:
    - ▶ Seeks to overthrow or capture the state.
  - ▶ Typology is not mutually exclusive. Can be overlapping and not necessarily helpful as some actors may fall under all categories such as Afghan mujahedin leaders.
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- ▶ When is a warlord not a warlord? When he is pro-western

# Warlord Competition

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- ▶ Takes model on firm competition and adjusts it to reflect warlord politics.
- ▶ Firms compete over prices.
- ▶ Warlords instead compete over rents – oil, diamonds, drugs, foreign aid – as well as over ‘taxation’ of their subjects by being sufficiently strong to deter and, if necessary, fight their competitors.
- ▶ Rents increase the intensity of competition among warlords and as a result ‘crowd out’ some of the production as productive resources and population are diverted toward the unproductive competition for rents.
- ▶ Because warlord competition takes place through the use of force or the threat of the use of force, more competition typically leads to lower material welfare as resources are wasted on unproductive arming and fighting.
- ▶ Greater competition also leads to less predictability, and greater difficulties in communication, negotiation, and settlement.
- ▶ This is in contrast to ordinary economic models, in which typically greater competition leads to higher material welfare.

# Warlord War versus Armed Peace

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- ▶ Conflict distributes resources inefficiently, and therefore the adversaries could instead negotiate for a peaceful, and more efficient, division of the contestable resources.
- ▶ Factors that favor armed peace include:
  - ▶ The degree to which war is destructive (war cost).
  - ▶ The risk aversion of the warlords.
- ▶ However, despite the variety of incentives that may exist for armed peace, we still observe not just arming but overt conflict as well.
- ▶ War can be induced by:
  - ▶ Risk seeking behavior.
  - ▶ Lack of information: misperceptions, misunderstandings, absence of communication channels.
  - ▶ And counter-intuitively by a long value attached to the future by the adversaries.

# Warlord Competition

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- ▶ **Risk seeking behavior:**
  - ▶ If destruction were not too high, the adversaries would prefer to take the risk of war over the sure bet of dividing up the surplus. While this can be a factor, attributing a phenomenon to a preferential parameter should probably be a last resort.
- ▶ **Incomplete Information:**
  - ▶ Adversaries may not know the exact size of the rents and the level of production; the number of their adversaries and their preferences; the exact nature of the contest success function that determines the disposition of the surplus; and, in the case of negotiation and settlement, they are supposed to share a norm about how to divide up the surplus.
  - ▶ Incomplete information in at least one of the above dimensions makes it perfectly possible to have equilibria in which overt conflict is the outcome despite the presence of incentives to negotiate and settle.
- ▶ **Shadow of the Future: Argument for pre-emptive strike.**
  - ▶ It has become a rather common belief in economics and political science that in repeated interactions conflict typically yields to cooperation as adversaries value the future more highly. i.e. it encourages long-term relationships and the development of a live-and-let-live attitude between the adversaries.
  - ▶ However, a warlord by pursuing war now could weaken his adversaries permanently or even possibly eliminate them and become 'king' well into the future. Therefore, a warlord who values the future highly could indeed take the chance of war instead of pursuing negotiation, despite the short-term benefits of negotiation, because the expected long-run profits could be higher in the event that the opponents become permanently weakened or eliminated.

# The paradox of Warlord Democracy

- ▶ Political theorists have denied the possibility of democratic government arising out of the chaos of civil war, instead prescribing an intermediate stage of one-man rule by a Prince, Leviathan, or a military dictator.
- ▶ Based on recent empirical evidence of post-civil war democratization Wantchekon argues that democracy can arise directly from anarchy.
- ▶ Indeed, vicious African and Central American warring factions that obviously have no normative commitment to democratic ideals have created democracies. Democracy came about in an environment in which there is no political culture of tolerance, the state institutions have badly failed or even collapsed, the civil society is weak, and political actors profoundly distrust each other.
- ▶ He finds that nearly 40% of all civil wars that took place from 1945 to 1993 resulted in an improvement in the level of democracy.
- ▶ Predatory warring factions choose the citizenry and democratic procedures over a dictator when (1) their economic interests depend on productive investment by the citizens, (2) citizens' political preferences ensure that power allocation will be less biased under democracy than under a Leviathan, and (3) there is an external agency (e.g., the United Nations) that mediates and supervises joint disarmament and state-building.
- ▶ If warring factions do what is in their best interests, then democracy will become the natural outcome of civil wars, provided that there is military stalemate and the factions are economically dependent on citizens' productive investments.

# For this Week's Readings:

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## History/Anthropology

- ▶ Specificity
- ▶ Explanatory Power
- ▶ Micro-level
- ▶ Inductive

## Political Science/Economics

- ▶ Generality
- ▶ Generalizability
- ▶ Macro-level
- ▶ Deductive

