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CAPITAL CITIES IN CIVIL WARS: THE LOCATIONAL DIMENSION OF SOVEREIGN AUTHORITY

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The Locational Dimension of Sovereign Authority

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Abstract

Civil wars are a feature of the modern political landscape and significant attention has been given to the increase in this type of conflict in recent years. This discussion centres on those civil wars that are primarily political in nature – conflicts that concern the supreme executive power in a given state. Although civil wars can have obvious winners and losers militarily, the judgment of international actors can often be decisive.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the way in which international actors decide who holds the sovereign authority of a state during civil wars and what is needed to 'win' such wars in the eyes of the international community. Existing theories stress effective control over territory or the political interests of the recognising states. However, my hypothesis is that states observe a rule of recognition that equates control of the capital city with possession of a state's sovereign authority. I examine four civil wars in order to test these three theories and in all four cases control of the capital city is shown to be necessary for recognition by other governments. Effective control and political expediency demonstrate less explanatory power.

The second part of the paper investigates the possible reasons why capital cities should be so significant in civil wars and considers the arguments for the special circumstances of the African state and for the economic significance of capital cities. However, it is the symbolic value of capital cities and, more importantly, the long-standing perspective in military history that views capitals as political and territorial proxies for states, that explain the recognition pattern in civil wars.

The conclusion argues that the merits of this practice of recognition should be debated, as should the 'de-certification' of capital cities as a way of changing the incentive structure of some civil wars.

Introduction

> [I]n any state, democratic or otherwise, there must be a man or a group of men ultimately responsible for the exercise of political authority. Since in a democracy that responsibility lies dormant in normal times, barely visible through the network of constitutional arrangements and legal rules, it is widely believed that it does not exist and that the supreme lawgiving and law-enforcing authority, which was formerly the responsibility of one man, the monarch, is now distributed among the different coordinate agencies of the government and that, in consequence, no one of them is supreme. Or else that authority is supposed to be vested in the people as a whole, who, of course, as such cannot act. Yet in times of crisis and war that ultimate responsibility asserts itself…

(Hans Morgenthau 2006: 332)

Identifying Hans Morgenthau's 'man or group of men responsible for the exercise of political authority' can be difficult in peace-time conditions. In times of war – and more specifically, in times of civil war – it represents an even more significant challenge. Such wars are a feature of the modern political environment; in fact, the incidence of conflict inside (as opposed to between) states increased between the middle and end of the last century (Uppsala Conflict Database). The potential explanations of this trend, however, are not the subject of this paper. Rather the focus is on the subset of civil wars in which Morgenthau's ultimate 'political authority' is at stake.

If an individual or group contests control over the state in an irregular manner, as is the case in a civil war, two issues become relevant: who is the legitimate governing authority within the state at any given time and how will the winner of the war ultimately be decided? In practice, the (tacit or express) recognition by other governments of one individual or another is often decisive in answering both of these questions. Thus, it is important to understand why states acknowledge certain entities as legitimate governments and not others. The hope is that unlocking this rule will prove useful in understanding the incentive structure of some civil wars.

The paper addresses the following question: How are the individuals 'responsible for the exercise of political authority' determined by outsiders in the context of a civil war? I begin by exploring the related concepts of sovereignty and sovereign authority (analogous to 'political authority') and examining existing explanations as to why certain individuals are recognised as holding a state's sovereign authority. I offer my own hypothesis that the crucial issue in civil war is the control of capital cities. In support of this I present key moments from four recent civil wars in which sovereign authority was at issue and conclude that control of the capital city was the pivotal issue in retaining or seizing state power. Lastly, I examine why the capital city was so significant in each of these conflicts and suggest that there is room for debate about the existing implicit rules of behaviour regarding the recognition of governments in the context of civil war.

Defining Sovereign Authority

Chris Brown has observed that 'Sovereignty is both a *juridical status* and a *political concept*' (emphasis in the original) (2001: 128). Juridical status is an absolute issue – a state is sovereign or it is not. However, for Brown, the political concept refers to 'a *bundle of powers and capacities* that can grow larger or smaller' (emphasis in the original) (2001: 128). For the sake of brevity and clarity, I refer to this bundle of powers as 'sovereign authority'. A survey of the full debate about what 'sovereignty' actually *means* is both outside the scope of this paper and not entirely relevant. Rather I will simply present the three most important definitional elements that inform the rest of this discussion, a discussion that has less to do with sovereignty than with sovereign authority. For my purposes, sovereignty is:

1. An *idea*, not a physical object or 'fact' (Hinsley 1986: 1);
2. An idea that 'attaches itself to territory' (Jackson 1990: 190);
3. An idea that implies two crucial points: equality with all other sovereign territorial entities and domestic autonomy; Stephen Krasner refers to these as 'international legal sovereignty' and 'Westphalian sovereignty', respectively (1999: 9)

It is important to note, as Krasner does, that these conceptualisations of sovereignty deal only with authority and legitimacy, not control (1999: 10). In the context of this paper, these

dimensions of sovereignty are most important because the right to exercise the powers associated with sovereign authority – the right that is at the heart of this analysis – is a function of *status*, not capacity. The differential effectiveness between sovereign authorities within states, a function of *capacity*, is not at issue.

The connection between sovereign status, sovereign authority and the individuals who actually possess that authority is best described by Morgenthau's quote at the beginning of this paper. The 'political authority' of which he speaks is synonymous with the term 'sovereign authority'. In the passage, Morgenthau identifies the crucial fact that *realisation* of the powers of sovereign authority always requires human agents ('holders' of sovereign authority). The first section of this paper is concerned with how those agents are determined in a non-constitutional or extra-legal contest, such as a civil war, when several individuals claim the right to hold and exercise sovereign authority in a single state.

There are several theoretical explanations for how and why some individuals hold the sovereign authority of a political community rather than others. The major theories explain its allocation to human agents as follows:
- By democratic principles;
- By institutional norms and behaviour;
- By measurements of effective control;
- By politically-driven recognition from other states

Although the first two theories are well-suited to explaining *constitutional* transfers of sovereign authority between individuals, they are ill-suited in explaining *non-constitutional* transfers because the latter expressly circumvent popular or 'normal' means. Furthermore, as Morgenthau suggests, even in democracies, the illusion that institutions or 'the people' hold sovereign authority is belied in times of crisis or war when the small group of genuine power-holders can be seen to act (2006: 332).

The continued recognition of weak and failing governments, combined with examples of the refusal to recognise governments that do meet 'effective control' criteria, leads Krasner to conclude that rules for recognising governments 'have never been consistently applied' (1999: 15). M.J. Peterson, although a champion of 'effective control', also acknowledges that the absence of an agreed-upon rule to observe 'effective control' strictly has opened up room for other political criteria, mainly the promotion of international value-laden agendas or the advancement of individual interests (1997: 51). In this view, recognition of sovereignty, while not arbitrary, has little or no connection to facts on the ground.

Hypothesis

While there are rules of behaviour that guide international recognition of the holders of sovereign authority, effective control and political expediency are not the pivotal issues. Instead, I argue that the main criterion international actors look for is control of the capital city – a test that reflects certain facts on the ground but does not require the majority of the state to be under control. This hypothesis that sovereign authority is linked to a particular point in space connects it thematically to the idea of sovereignty as a territorial phenomenon; but where sovereignty as a status is equally valid throughout a state's territory, my hypothesis suggests that sovereign authority is concentrated in a specific location.

The purpose of the next section is to present the basic facts of four civil wars. Civil wars, rather than coups, have been selected as the type of non-constitutional contest to survey because of their duration and geographical scope, as well as the fact that each contains several points at which sovereign authority is claimed or contested. By isolating these decisive moments within each civil war, it is possible to construct a significant set of data points around decisions about who holds sovereign authority at a given time.

Case Studies

These particular four civil wars were selected for several reasons. First, they are *political* civil wars in that the principal actors are contesting sovereign authority. Although in each case other motives, particularly personal financial gain, may be involved, acquiring state-level political power remained a principal objective for key individuals. Second, these political civil wars do not involve issues of secession; they deal with the sovereign authority of an existing state, not the establishment of a new sovereign entity. Since a comprehensive narrative for all four wars would far exceed the space available, each conflict is reduced to a sequence of key periods or moments when sovereign authority is most clearly at issue. An analysis of these key events is then offered.

Somalia: 1988-Present

1988-1990: War in the Hinterland
Somalia's civil war began in 1988 with the rebellion of the Somali National Movement in the north of the country. The head of state, Mohammed Siad Barre, experienced severe erosion of his power as an increasing number of factions contested control of the hinterland between 1988 and 1990. By 1989, however, he was already referred being to by detractors as the 'Mayor of Mogadishu' (Lewis 2002: 262; Simons 1995: 91).

1991-1992: War in Mogadishu
Late in December 1990, the United Somali Congress-Mogadishu wing, one of many clan-based anti-government factions, rose up against Barre and took control over most of the city. Mohammed Farah Aideed's USC-Ethiopia troops arrived in the capital after the uprising and were able to chase Barre and his remaining forces out of Mogadishu in late January 1991. The USC-Mogadishu faction declared Ali Mahdi Mohamed interim president of Somalia on 29 January without consulting either Aideed's group or the other armed movements that had contributed to Barre's downfall (Drysdale 2001: 29).

Neither Aideed nor the other faction leaders accepted this declaration. Throughout 1991 and early 1992, these faction leaders fought one another in Mogadishu, destroying much of the city (Brons 2001: 223; Duyvesteyn 2005: 47). In February 1992, Aideed attempted a major attack on Ali Mahdi's northern half of the city but suffered huge losses without improving his position (Duyvesteyn 2005: 47). The two sides signed a ceasefire agreement in March 1992 but Aideed and his faction still captured 'around two-thirds of Somalia between March and September 1992' (Duyvesteyn 2005: 47-8). By 1993, Aideed required visitors to refer to him as 'Mr. President' (Clarke and Gosende 2003: 147).

1992-1995: International Intervention
International intervention in Somalia was initially a response to the humanitarian crisis caused by the war. It began on a diplomatic level in 1992 but escalated to a massive militarised humanitarian mission led alternately by the UN and US. In an attempt to construct a political solution to the conflict, the UN organised a meeting in Addis Ababa in January 1993. The

faction leaders were allowed to play a major role at the meeting and a 74-member Transitional National Council (TNC) was agreed, in which they were included. In its charter, the TNC was explicitly declared to be the 'repository of Somali sovereignty' (Drysdale 2001: 126-8; Lewis 2002: 270-1) but the TNC never took shape and the security situation on the ground deteriorated. By 1995, all international presence in Somalia had been withdrawn.

2000-2002: The Arta Conference and the TNG
Numerous attempts were made to establish another 'repository' for sovereignty in Somalia. By 2000 many of the primary actors had changed, but the situation in the south of the country was still unsettled enough that Somalia's neighbours endorsed a conference in Arta, Djibouti,with the support of the UN, US and EU (Lewis 2002: 291-2). Though the conference membership was not representative of Somalia as a whole, it produced a charter establishing the Transitional National Government (TNG) and elected Abdiqassim Salad Hassan as president.

Significantly, an agreement was also made to establish the future capital of Somalia in Baidoa. However, Abdiqassim reneged on that point and attempted to establish the TNG in still-divided Mogadishu (Lewis 2002: 295; Drysdale 2001: xi). Although the TNG was recognised by the UN, the African Union and the Arab League, only a small handful of states followed suit, and it was never able to extend its authority beyond a few blocks of Mogadishu (Clarke and Gosende 2003: 129; Lewis 2002: 296; ICG 2004: 19).

2002-2006: The Eldoret Conference and the TFG
The next effort at establishing a government began in Kenya in 2002. Although the final Charter of the conference, completed in 2004, affirms Mogadishu as the national capital, the first sitting of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) inside Somalia was delayed for almost two years because the elected president and the Speaker of the Parliament could not agree on where the TFG should meet (ICG 2004: 9). The president, Abdullahi Yusuf, set himself up in Jowhar, 90 km northwest of the capital, and the Speaker, Sharif Hassan Sheikh Aden returned to Mogadishu (Mitchell 2006). A compromise concluded in Yemen in January 2006 allowed the government to meet finally in Baidoa (Mitchell 2006). In that first session, the parliament voted to designate Baidoa the official temporary capital, but Speaker Aden maintained that Mogadishu should be secured so that the government can 'move to its legitimate headquarters' (UNSC 2006: 1; Associated Press Worldstream 2006).

Along with its sponsor, the UN, only Italy, Kenya and Ethiopia initially recognised the TFG; other states, notably the US, UK and the Nordic countries, withheld recognition, although small gestures were forthcoming when the Islamic Courts militia gained ground in Mogadishu and southern Somalia (ICG 2004: 19; UNSC 2006: 6). At the time of writing, the situation in Somalia was still in flux. Although some elements of the TFG are based in Mogadishu, they are completely reliant on Ethiopian troops and much of the city is 'no-man's land' (Hassan 2007).

Liberia: 1989-1996

January-August 1990: Invasion
On Christmas Eve in 1989, a small force of rebels entered Liberia from neighboring Côte d'Ivoire. That group was part of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) led by Charles Taylor. By July 1990, forces of the NPFL under Taylor and forces of the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL) under Prince Johnson had reached

the outskirts of the capital Monrovia (Duyvesteyn 2005: 28). On 27 July, Taylor declared himself president though it went unacknowledged (Huband 1998: 199).

The battle for Monrovia between Taylor's NPFL, Johnson's INPFL and the remnants of President Samuel Doe's Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) devastated the city throughout July and August 1990 (See Huband 1998 for a full account). The NPFL controlled the eastern outskirts; the INPFL controlled the north and west; and the AFL controlled the areas immediately surrounding the executive mansion (Duyvesteyn 2005: 29). As far as the rest of the country was concerned, it is estimated that Taylor controlled at least two-thirds of Liberia's territory as of mid-1990 (Duyvesteyn 2005: 29; Inegbedion 1994: 226).

August-November 1990: ECOMOG Intervention
Although Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire had aided Taylor prior to the initial invasion and continued to support him, other West African states – Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea, the Gambia, and Sierra Leone – decided to intervene. These states, all members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), contributed troops to a 'cease-fire' monitoring group (ECOMOG). These troops landed in Monrovia on 24 August 1990 and managed to secure central Monrovia against the NPFL and INPFL in a nine-kilometer radius from the port by early September 1990 (Duyvesteyn 2005: 30).

Between 27 August and 1 September 1990, a group of Liberian politicians, interest groups and religious leaders met in Banjul, the Gambia, to form an Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU). Dr Amos Sawyer, a lawyer and politician, was named president (Huband 1998: 198). The IGNU was supported by the countries backing ECOMOG but was also seen as a puppet, particularly of Nigeria (Ellis 1999: 14-5, 87-88). At this point, Samuel Doe (the incumbent head of state), Charles Taylor and Amos Sawyer all claimed the presidency. On 9 September 1990, Prince Johnson captured Doe at ECOMOG headquarters under uncertain circumstances and tortured him to death in a process that was documented on video. Johnson then declared himself president, though he also went unacknowledged (Ellis 1999: 11). ECOMOG forces successfully pushed the NPFL out of Monrovia by October 1990. In November, Taylor's principal backers, Libya and Burkina Faso, withdrew their support and forced Taylor to sign a ceasefire agreement (Huband 1990: 1). Taylor did not, however, agree to recognise Sawyer's government.

1990-1992: Greater Liberia and Operation Octopus
Unable to gain further backing for his claim to the presidency and deprived of the bulk of his financial aid, Taylor set up a parallel government in the area under his control that he called Greater Liberia. At its height, this area encompassed up to 90 percent of Liberian territory (Reno 1999: 92). Taylor established ministries, enforced a single currency, and set up his capital at Gbarnga. He received representatives from foreign governments and had extensive dealings with foreign companies (Ellis 1995: 171; Duyvesteyn 2005: 31; Reno 1998: 91-102).

Having amassed significant economic and military resources through his activities in 'Greater Liberia' and neighboring Sierra Leone and pressured on several fronts militarily, Taylor launched Operation Octopus in October 1992 – a comprehensive attack on Monrovia that caught ECOMOG forces off-guard (Duyvesteyn 2005: 32). The assault failed, however, and Taylor retreated.

1995-1996: Taylor in Monrovia
In 1995, possibly under pressure from military losses, and only after a change in leadership in Nigeria, Charles Taylor expressed a willingness to negotiate (Duyvesteyn 2005: 34). He entered Monrovia with ECOMOG's blessing as a member of a new Council of State (Ellis, 1999: 105). However, a third battle, engineered by Taylor, erupted in Monrovia in April 1996 (Ellis 1999: 108) and again he was unable to secure the city and eventually agreed to ECOMOG's deployment of troops throughout Liberia in preparation for national elections. On 19 July 1997, Taylor was elected president of Liberia by a wide margin (Ellis 1999: 109).

Chad: 1978-1982

1978-1980: The War in Ndjamena
The civil war in Chad was part of a larger regional conflict that included Libya and Sudan and began in 1963 (Burr and Collins 1999: 1; Foltz 1994: 15). By 1978, war had reached the capital, Ndjamena (Burr and Collins 1999: 128). Multiple international efforts to establish a governing authority failed. By 1980, the primary factions in the capital were the Forces Armées du Nord (FAN) under Hissene Habré and the militias collected under the Transitional Government of National Unity (GUNT) whose president was Goukouni Oueddei. Although both men were ostensibly members in the GUNT established in November 1979, factionalism had split the governing entity.

By March 1980, Habré's FAN forces and Goukouni's GUNT forces were battling for control of Ndjamena (Burr and Collins 1999: 130). At the Organisation of African Unity's 1980 conference Habré's representative challenged Goukouni's right to Chad's seat, but was rebuffed. Goukouni, meanwhile, enlisted the support of Libya whose forces dislodged Habré from the capital in July 1980 (Burr and Collins 1999: 132-3).

1981-1987: Habré's Victory and After
Habré entered Chad from Sudan with his FAN in 1981 re-armed by the US and Libya's regional opponents (Burr and Collins 1999: 145; Foltz 1994: 19-20). Libyan forces withdrew from Ndjamena late in 1981 after a combination of international brinksmanship, effrontery, and poor communication (Burr and Collins 1999: 152-3). The OAU forces stationed in Ndjamena did nothing to deny Habré entry into the capital on 7 June 1982 (Burr and Collins 1999: 155-6). By October 1982, he was president of Chad and attended the Franco-African summit in Kinshasa (Burr and Collins 1999: 159). The UN accepted his representatives' credentials and his government received Chad's official invitation to the OAU summit in November 1982, although Qaddafi's protests stopped them from being seated until the 20th summit (El-Ayouty 1984: 330, 334). Despite the sense that the war ended in 1982, Habré's forces fought other factions for five more years on both southern and northern fronts. In the south, he did not establish control until 1986, in the north until mid-1987 (Foltz 1994: 20).

Zaire/Democratic Republic of Congo: 1996-1997

1996-1997: The Rebellion
By the mid-1990s, Mobutu Sese Seko's hold on Zaire was limited to only 'a few hundred kilometers outside Kinshasa, while the rest of the country operated through a web of complex power relations' (Dunn 2003: 140). The rebellion by the Alliance des Forces Démocratiques (AFDL) that finally brought down Mobutu coalesced in 1996 out of unrest in the eastern part of the country.

Although the various foreign governments supplying the AFDL with weapons and troops had their own (economic) agendas, there was also a political dimension to the 1996-97 war. By November 1996 Laurent-Désiré Kabila, the AFDL's nominal leader 'plucked out of relative obscurity by the Ugandan and Rwandan regimes' (Dunn 2003: 144) was leading the AFDL towards Kinshasa. On 17 May 1997, AFDL troops secured the capital without meeting significant resistance (de Villers and Tshonda 2004: 152). On 21 May, Kabila entered Kinshasa and proclaimed himself president (Hamilton 1997; Dunn 2003: 145).

May 1997: International Recognition
By 20 May, some countries had openly voiced tentative recognition of Kabila; among these were Germany, Japan, Italy, the US and France. Others recognised his sovereign status outright; this group included Rwanda, Burundi, South Africa and Libya (Toronto Star 1997). On 21 and 22 May, Congo-Brazzaville and the Presidency of the European Union, respectively, recognised the change of government in statements at the United Nations and the entry for the 1997 UN Yearbook reads: 'On 17 May, there was a change of regime in Zaire, following occupation by AFDL troops of the capital city of Kinshasa' (United Nations 1997: 78).

Civil War and Sovereign Authority

Effective Control and Civil Wars
M.J. Peterson singles out civil wars as a challenge for the 'effective control' doctrine, though perhaps not for the right reasons. While Peterson's concern is that it will be difficult to 'be confident a new government controls 'most' of the territory while a civil war rages', this is not as much of a problem as he suggests (1997: 36).

In the cases of Aideed in Somalia and Taylor in Liberia, an individual who claimed the presidency and who controlled the majority of the state's territory at the time of that claim was not recognised as the holder of sovereign authority. The facts on the ground were discernable, but the decision went against the logic of effective control. In both of these cases, entities that were at least partially recognised, the TNG and TFG of Somalia and the IGNU of Liberia, had only miniscule amounts of territory under their control. In Chad, Habré was recognised in advance of establishing control over the country, a process that would take a further five years. Only in Zaire/DRC, did Kabila's control appear to extend over more than half of the country. The failure of the 'effective control' test in three out of four cases suggests that it is not in fact the basis for determining the holders of sovereign authority in civil wars.

Political Expediency and Civil Wars
Political expediency is more difficult to test than 'effective control'. This is because political expediency is most apparent in outlier cases of extreme necessity, where recognition or non-recognition contravenes expectations or runs counter to widely observed reality. An example of the latter would be the long-delayed recognition of the blatantly effective PRC government in China. However, some conclusions about these cases can be drawn from an analysis of foreign assistance to combatants and outside sponsorship of new entities as holders of sovereign authority.

Neither of the regimes that came to power in the Chadian or Congolese cases did so unaided. The US and Libya's other regional opponents supported Habré, mainly out of concern for Libya's support of Goukouni (Foltz 1994: 19). Kabila was aided by Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi as well as having had US logistical support (Dunn 2003: 144). However, support is

only an indication of favour, not of recognition. Recognition was delayed until each rebel leader reached the capital and, in Habré's case, was not contingent on the effective control of territory. Thus, political preference shaped aid patterns but not recognition.

Moreover, when recognition could have been used as a tool to positively support a new entity put in place to hold sovereign authority, such as the TNG and TFG in Somalia and the IGNU in Liberia, states still withheld recognition, though direct sponsors did not. In the case of the TNG and TFG, the US and EU held back in order to judge each entity's capacity to govern and fulfill its transitional role (ICG 2004: 19). In the case of the IGNU, the US held out, despite the fact that the IGNU was Taylor's political rival and the US was set against Taylor (Ellis 1999: 14-15).

Of course, it is difficult to prove that the instance of withheld recognition in the case of new entities is not, in itself, politically expedient. However, taken in combination with the observation that even those parties given aid were only recognised after some level of achievement, it suggests that there is actually a threshold of performance that even allies and supporters demand before an individual's claim to hold sovereign authority is recognised. The test of political expediency does not reveal what that threshold is and proponents of this view would argue that there is no universal standard.

Control of the Capital City and Civil Wars
Earlier in this paper I advanced the hypothesis that control of the capital city is the test used by outside observers to acknowledge the holders of sovereign authority during civil wars. This is equivalent to the threshold that is suggested by an examination of the political expediency argument. To demonstrate that all four case studies support this hypothesis, two separate groups of actors must be considered. The first group consists of domestic actors, principally the lead combatants. The second consists of international actors – states and their representatives, international organisations and external intervention forces.

Somalia
Looking first at the domestic actors, it is clear that the lead combatants saw Mogadishu as the key to winning the war, first against Barre and then against one another. Aideed said as much when he asserted that in mid-1990 he had infiltrated officers into Mogadishu to prepare for the 'final bloody confrontation between the USC and Barre's forces' (Dualeh 1994: 172). In the battles that followed Barre's demise, Aideed and Ali Mahdi demonstrated what Isabelle Duyvesteyn calls a 'preoccupation with the capital' (2005: 113). Significantly, Anna Simons claims that even in 1989 Mogadishu residents 'understood that the international community was only likely to officially recognize whoever it was who successfully occupied the capital' (91).

International actors only confirmed the perception of those in Mogadishu that controlling the city was the key to being recognised as the holder of Somali sovereign authority. John Drysdale, a Somali specialist on the ground during the UN/US intervention gives the following assessment of the UN's mindset and its effects: 'The political dispute in Mogadishu was exacerbated by the United Nations' tenacious belief that the government seat for all Somalia must rise from the ruins of Mogadishu' (2001: x). Duyvesteyn agrees that by centering their operational headquarters and attention on Mogadishu, the intervening parties only reaffirmed the belief among the combatants that control of Mogadishu meant victory (2005: 113). The recent attempt to divorce the city of Mogadishu from its status as capital is an attempt to undermine this belief but it is not yet clear whether the attempt will succeed.

Liberia

As far as the principal combatants are concerned, the significance of Monrovia is evident from their tactics. The race to the capital between the NPFL and INPFL supports Duyvesteyn's view that each faction believed the capital, and the executive mansion in particular, were prizes that would confer 'legitimacy' on their possessors (2005: 30-1, 35). Only the holder of the capital, first the incumbent Doe and then the IGNU, succeeded in attracting some of that legitimating gloss. Others have noted how the city and the executive mansion were the principal objects of the war itself (Huband 1998: 167; Reno 1998: 92). Though the combatants tried to validate their claims in other ways (Taylor by conquering substantial territory and Prince Johnson by killing the President), neither managed to accomplish something that was widely regarded as being *decisive*.

The behaviour of the intervening states indicates that the capture of Monrovia would have been that 'something decisive'. William Reno states that ECOMOG's intervention, that kept Monrovia out of Taylor's hands, amounted to 'its denial of sovereign authority to Taylor' (1998: 93). Furthermore, being established in Monrovia, despite its puppet status, was sufficient to earn the IGNU recognition in some legal arenas (Reno 1998: 99; Ellis 1999: 14).

Chad

Less documentation exists on the attitudes of domestic actors in the Chadian conflict, but once again battle tactics are suggestive. In both of Habré's attempts to seize power he focused on Ndjamena and not the rest of the state. When he succeeded in capturing the city in 1982, it took considerably more time to bring the rest of the country under his control. His tactics suggest that he understood the capital was the decisive point, rather than the bulk of Chadian territory.

This assumption is reflected in the behaviour of international actors, particularly the OAU member states. As long as Goukouni (head of the GUNT) was able to hold some portion of the capital in 1980, these states would not accept Habré's challenge of Goukouni's right to represent Chad in the OAU. But as soon as Habré took the capital, the 'legalist', 'moderate' position, as Yassin El-Ayouty terms it, favoured the seating of Habré's representatives (1984: 330, 335).

Zaire/DRC

Jeffrey Herbst's analysis sums up the transfer of sovereign authority in Zaire/DRC neatly: 'Mobutu was recognised as the ruler of Zaire even though he controlled little more than Kinshasa and its environs for the last years of his rule and continued to be recognized as the leader while the forces of Laurent Kabila marched through the country in late 1996 and early 1997. Kabila was only recognised as the legitimate ruler when he captured Kinshasa on 17 May 1997' (2000: 110). The paper trail of recognition, tentative or otherwise, supports this conclusion that control over the capital city, both for the incumbent and the challenger, was pivotal in the war.

Summary of Findings

In all four cases, capital cities were essential objects of the war. The struggle for sovereign authority was in each case reduced to a struggle for the capital city. The experiences of Barre, Doe and Goukouni suggest that while challengers need to capture the whole city to 'win', incumbents need only hold a piece of it to maintain titular authority. Thus, the rules for determining the holders of sovereign authority are as follows:

- Control of the entire capital city constitutes a *necessary* condition for a new claimant to be acknowledged as holding sovereign authority;
- If one is an incumbent, partial control is acceptable

Holding the capital is not, however, an entirely *sufficient* condition. Three caveats remain:

- Overt puppet governments constitute a gray area for international actors because their level of genuine control over the city is questionable;
- International organisations and states may grant recognition to new 'sponsored' entities that have not established control over the capital;
- The international audience may still deny or delay recognition if political interests so demand

Taken together, these rules constitute a logic of sovereign authority that sees it vested in a place – the capital city. (Hereafter, this will be referred to as the 'locational logic of sovereign authority'.)

Although deriving these rules of behaviour from a small selection of cases may seem overly ambitious, a key point to emphasise is that while these rules apply to the behaviour of *international* actors, their influence can be seen in the conduct of war by *domestic* actors. Battle tactics and anecdotal evidence suggest that the leading combatants assumed that international behaviour would follow the rules above, thus shaping their strategies for 'winning' the war. Such a shared level of understanding between individuals in different countries at different times would be highly unlikely if international behaviour was perceived as being a) random, b) based on effective control, or c) based on political expediency. Thus, these rules are sufficiently well-understood to constitute an expected norm of behaviour in the international community. The next section explores the possible explanations for this norm that, while not explicitly articulated, has a profound effect on the conduct of some civil wars.

The Significance of Capital Cities

The previous section identified a behavioural norm that operates amongst international actors, the locational logic of sovereign authority – a set of rules that determines who holds sovereign authority at any given time for a country undergoing civil war. The purpose of this section is to consider a second question: why is this logic operative?

Following a brief clarification of the concept of a capital city, this section focuses on several possible explanations for the locational logic of sovereign authority: African exceptionalism, the functional and symbolic value of capital cities generally, and the views of military strategists that have historically highlighted the importance of capital cities in times of war.

Understanding Capital Cities
Scholars have conceptualised capital cities in a variety of ways and a consensus definition is difficult to come by. For the purposes of this analysis, the capital city is understood as the seat of the executive organs of the political unit (Weigert et al. 1957: 143; Nolan 2002: 236). There are a small number of exceptions to this characterisation (e.g. The Netherlands) but it is widely applicable. This definition is also intentionally ambiguous on a key point: the constitutive relationship between the government and the city. While it is often presumed that

the presence of the government, specifically the executive, 'makes' the capital, the case studies have demonstrated that the capital can also 'make' the government.

The Question of African Exceptionalism
Since all four of the civil war case studies took place in Africa, it is important to question the general applicability of the locational logic of sovereign authority. In *States and Power in Africa*, Jeffrey Herbst identifies the significance of capital cities in African politics. He argues that the rulers of African states at independence defined their status in terms of controlling their capital cities because of the unique geographic, demographic and political circumstances that they faced. Specifically, their countries had large, inaccessible hinterlands, low population densities, and fixed borders (2000: 109-112). As evidence, Herbst points to the OAU Charter. He believes that the Charter implies that 'if an African government is in control of the capital city, then it has the legitimate right to the full protection offered by the modern understanding of sovereignty' because the Charter contains provisions that preserve colonial borders and prohibit interference in the domestic matters of another state (2000: 110). This is the foundation of his analysis of the Zaire/DRC situation cited in the earlier overview of that conflict.

William Foltz identifies one of several 'uncodified rules of procedure' adopted by African rulers to deal with conflict inside and outside the OAU as: 'whatever faction controls the capital…should be recognized so long as it continues to control the capital' (1991: 359). Both Foltz's 'uncodified rule' and Herbst's interpretation of the OAU Charter are obviously consistent with the behavioural pattern identified in the previous section. However, both Foltz and Herbst articulate this as an *African* norm designed to cope with *African* circumstances – in short, an example of African exceptionalism.

What explains the willingness then of the United Nations, European Union, United States, and other states to respond positively to the locational logic of sovereign authority? Herbst argues that the international community supports this African way of doing things because it is the 'easiest indication of political presence for outsiders to discern' (2000: 111). He traces this willingness back to an understanding of Africa's unique circumstances that was in evidence at the Berlin West Africa Conference (1884-1885). Herbst argues that the concept of 'effective control' specified at the conference entailed no more than an administrative city – a capital – because the geography and demography of Africa, combined with the practical needs of the imperial powers, dis-incentivised greater levels of influence on the ground (2000: 111). Although Herbst allows that other regions of the world have similar demographic and geographic characteristics to Africa, he does not extend the locational logic of sovereign authority to them.

However, there is evidence that this logic is not unique to Africa. Latin American capital cities have been viewed in much the same way since independence. David J. Meyers observes that in most of Latin America, 'loss of control over the location from which the president exercised power usually led to loss of control over the country' (2002: 2). It would also be a mistake to see this logic as a postcolonial phenomenon. Research on China during the early 1900s suggests after the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1912, when political power within the country devolved into the hands of 'warlords' for practical purposes, Peking 'came to be the symbol of political unification and conferred legitimacy on those who occupied it' (Ch'I 1976: 191). Principally, the advantage of controlling Peking was sovereign authority, not extensive governing capacity because, as Edward McCord observes, there was 'foreign power consensus' at this time 'recognizing only Beijing [Peking] as the seat of China's

national government' (1993: 8). This recognition enabled the holder of power in Peking to take out foreign loans and collect customs revenues – two limited, but significant, markers of sovereign authority (McCord, 1993: 8-9). But at the same time, central directives from the ruling group in Peking to the warlords in the provinces went ignored (Ch'i 1976: 191).

Thus, although the logic of equating control of the capital with sovereign authority can be demonstrated amply in Africa, it is inaccurate to label it as either an African or a postcolonial phenomenon. Rather, it appears that a broader norm is at work – one whose origins stem from a more common point of reference than the difficulties of colonial administration, remote hinterlands, or low population densities.

The Functional Significance of Capital Cities
Since capitals are a universal feature of states, the explanation for their significance may lie in the literature that explores the general relationship between these cities and their states. Some authors stress a classificatory approach to capital/state relations, often derived from the cities' historical roles (Hamdan 1964: 239-245; Glassner and Fahrer 2004: 104-5; Spate 1942: 627). But more useful here are those approaches that focus on features of commonality in the *functions* of these cities.

Broadly speaking, scholars have observed that the concentration of political and other types of power (commercial, financial, demographic, etc.) seems to be a feature of capital cities (Glassner and Fahrer 2004: 102-3; Rapoport 1993: 46; Hall 1993: 69-70). Many capitals are also primate cities – the largest and most significant cities within their states by far – a phenomenon particularly common in Africa and Latin America (Clarke 1971: 35-7; Christopher 1985: 57; Myers 2002: 2-3). Capitals thus perform an agglomerating function for all types of resources. This then creates the perception that the capital is a 'prize' of significance because it contains all or the majority of the underlying productive value of the state. In essence, the capital is a *proxy* for the state's *productive assets*. Fundamentally however, the productive value of the capital relies on the continued existence of essential physical and human infrastructure. Bridges, ports, airstrips, lines of communication (roads, telephones, etc.), and buildings make possible the activities that set the capital apart.

However, whilst capitals seem to retain their status as a 'prize', the battles for control over them are highly destructive to the very foundations of productive value. In Mogadishu, Monrovia and Ndjamena, fighting destroyed much of the physical infrastructure that distinguished these sites from their hinterlands. Roads, buildings, water and electricity supplies, ports and airports were all negatively affected by conflict (on Mogadishu: ICG 2004: 9; Clarke and Gosende 2003: 139-40; Lewis 2002: 298, World Bank Online 2005: 2-3; on Monrovia: Polgreen 2006; 'Liberia Emergency Infrastructure Project' 2006: 2-3; on Ndjamena: Burr and Collins 1999: 156-7). Large numbers of people also fled both Mogadishu and Monrovia (Africa Watch and Physicians for Human Rights 1992; Ellis 1999: 115).

Thus, destruction of the built environment and the infrastructure of capitals, as well as the dislocation of their population, seems to have been an acceptable price to pay for gaining control over them. Therefore, the importance of these cities cannot be derived principally from these elements.

The Symbolic Significance of Capital Cities
Properly speaking, symbolism could fall under the heading of a 'function' of capital cities. In the most dramatic sense, some cities involve an *axis mundi*, a point of cosmological significance linking the physical and existential universes (Rapoport 1993: 45). But on a more mundane level, '[c]apital cities embody national symbols and myths which act as symbolic resources for entities which can draw on them' (Paquet 1993: 271-2). Michiel Wagenaar argues that 19th century European planners aspired to 'a capital that served as an open-air museum of the nation' (2001: 350). In addition to 'museum' the capital can also function as a 'binding agent' (Glassner and Fahrer 2004: 103). Although usually mentioned in the context of federal states, Hussein Ali Dualeh claims: 'The capital city in any African country, has its cohesive powers on its people. You destroy the capital with its national assets and binding spirit, and you destroy the whole country' (1994: 36-7). This perspective also creates a proxy relationship: the capital is the proxy for the state's *values and history*, rather than its *productive assets*.

Like the other functional capacities of capitals, symbolic elements that rely on the built environment or structural layout can be substantially destroyed in war. However, there is an anthropological perspective that suggests that particular sites can demonstrate a 'condensation of values' such that, if they are particularly significant, 'the actual structures are less important than the permanent and enduring mental blueprint' of the site itself (Kuper 2003: 258, 259). Hilda Kuper's 'mental blueprint' could account for the importance of capital cities even after the structures that distinguished them are gone. It would explain how the site of the city could retain its relationship with respect to the state as a proxy for values and history despite the destruction of the built environment.

In three of the four cases, the capital cities were substantially ruined. However, I.M. Lewis makes an observation about Mogadishu in the context of the Arta conference that substantiates Kuper's premise: 'In passing, it is interesting to note the symbolic significance of Mogadishu as the centre of sovereignty for those Southern Somali politicians, sentiments shared by the Italians who seem to have difficulty of conceiving of a Somali state without Mogadishu as its capital' (2002: 295). Two parties closely tied to Mogadishu - Southern Somalis and Italians (who were responsible for Somalia's administration before 1960) - cannot let the idea of Mogadishu as the capital go despite the fact that 'such limited sense of the city as a public space and common resource as may have existed in the past had disappeared completely' (Lewis 2002: 297).

While this type of analysis may provide a possible explanation for why the capital city retains significance for *domestic* actors during and after civil wars in spite of its destruction, it is difficult to see how the particular appeal of certain sites translates for *international* observers. Apart from their shared appreciation that capital city sites *generally* are capable of retaining symbolic value, there is no reason why the 'enduring mental blueprint' should suffice to explain the behaviour of international actors.

Capital Cities: War and Victory
The difficulty in triangulating a satisfactory understanding of why capital cities are so significant is captured well by Anthony Sutcliffe: 'If the capital city is an almost universal phenomenon, we may at first feel justified in looking for a common feature or features, including even physical characteristics. This search, however, will be largely fruitless, for capitals vary just as much as other towns and cities' (1993: 195).

But Sutcliffe does see a point of similarity: 'Perhaps their only common feature is perceptual, in that each capital city is usually seen by detached observers as in some sense representative of its state and its characteristics' (1993: 195). It has just been shown that capitals can be proxies for certain core aspects of their states. However, these capital-state relationships are vulnerable and domestically-oriented. Sutcliffe's insight is that outside observers also draw on a proxy relationship, but between the capital and the state *as a whole*. This relationship is most evident in military history, which suggests that the understanding of *victory* in (land-based) war was linked to an appreciation of the representative nature of capitals such that their capture was equated with the capture of the entire state.

Amos Rapoport sees a broad historical pattern when he notes, 'It is significant that capitals were always chief targets for invading armies…They were sacked, burned, ploughed under, salted and renamed' (1993: 38). Gideon Sjoberg, in his analysis of pre-industrial cities, concurs: 'Capital cities have historically been vulnerable to attack, for they are the prime target of any invading army. The surrender of the capital and the sovereign is tantamount to the society's collapse' (1960: 246).

These generalisations can be investigated in more detail by examining the works of military strategists. Friedrich von Bernhardi, writing in 1912, asserts that:

> Military history always shows anew, by its examples, the importance of the capital for the conduct of war. The fact that Hannibal was unable to capture Rome deprived him of the palm of ultimate victory; and Napoleon chose nearly always the hostile capital as the main point of his strategic attack, which had for its object crushing the hostile State by its capture. (qtd. in Handel 2001: 392).

This reasoning is also evident in the military strategy of 18th and 19th centuries. Antoine-Henri Jomini, a general in the armies of both Napoleon and Tsar Alexander I, wrote in the context of interstate war that: 'In strategy, the object of the campaign determines the objective point. If this aim be offensive, the point will be the possession of the hostile capital… In a war of invasion the capital is, ordinarily, the objective point' (qtd. in Handel 2001: 57). Furthermore, 'In the defensive, the objective point…is that which is to be defended. The capital, being considered the seat of power becomes the principal objective point of the defense' (qtd. in Handel 2001: 58).

In *On War*, Carl von Clausewitz argues that control of the capital can in fact suffice to defeat the enemy, depending on the strength of the opposition's army (1976: 595):

> The conquest of the whole of the enemy's territory is not always necessary. If Paris had been taken in 1792 the war against the Revolution would almost certainly for the time being have been brought to an end. There was no need even for the French armies to have been defeated first, for they were not in those days particularly powerful. In 1814, on the other hand, even the capture of Paris would not have ended matters if Bonaparte had still a sizeable army behind him. But as in fact his army had been largely eliminated, the capture of Paris settled everything in 1814 and again in 1815. Again, if in 1812 Bonaparte had managed, before or after taking Moscow, to smash the Russian army…the fact that he held the capital would probably have meant that he could make peace in spite of the enormous area still unoccupied.

Clausewitz generally ranks the enemy's army first in order of importance when considering the vital 'centers of gravity' in war. The capital is second (Handel 2001: 61). However, in the special case of *civil war*, Clausewitz names the capital the primary centre of gravity (Clausewitz 1976: 596).

Thus, these strategists demonstrate an understanding of war and victory that equates conquering the state with conquering certain 'centers of gravity'. These centers of gravity function as proxies for the state itself. Thus, in civil war (and interstate war in some cases), the capital city is not just a proxy for the productive assets of the state or for its values and history, but for the state *in its entirety as a territorial political entity*.

While these European writings are not definitive proof of a *global* understanding of this relationship, it does establish an underlying assumption that would explain the locational logic of sovereign authority and its operation at the international level. However, further research outside the scope of this paper would be needed to trace the roots of this assumption back in time and across multiple geographies to determine the extent of its applicability. For now, I will conclude that it is an assumption that is sufficiently widespread to explain the international behavioural norm identified earlier as the locational logic of sovereign authority.

Areas for Further Study

The purpose of this paper has been to draw attention to the existing rules of behaviour that govern the allocation of sovereign authority to human agents and to investigate the source of those rules. Evidence from the case studies supported the hypothesis that international actors condition an entity's recognition as the holder of sovereign authority on control of the capital city. This practice among international actors derives in large part from concepts of war and victory that stretch back into the historical record. It is further supported by some level of symbolic significance in the cities themselves, which transcends their built environments.

The paper in some ways is only a thumbnail sketch rather than an in-depth analysis. In order to identify a general principle, much of the nuanced significance of the individual cases was excluded. A larger study would include a deeper analysis of these cases as well as additional ones and, by assessing how widely the locational logic of sovereign authority has been applied recently, might lead to a better estimation of its overall value in the workings of inter-state relations and civil war. Another valuable exercise would be to trace the roots of the locational dimension of sovereign authority in order to understand better the circumstances in which it was originally developed. It may well be that present behaviour is being governed by a logic whose initial conditions are no longer extant.

Wider Implications
Although I have argued that the locational logic of sovereign authority is a phenomenon of civil wars generally, states that have experienced civil war recently share some characteristics. In the case of *political* civil war, these states are often 'weak' in that the institutionalisation of many processes, including the transfer of power, has not taken place. The fact that other states behave as though seizure of the capital city is a legitimate means of transferring power may in fact prohibit the institutionalisation of non-violent power transfer by providing an 'exit' option for anyone dissatisfied with constitutional mechanisms. Thus, even in the absence of outright war, awareness of the locational logic of sovereign authority is in itself destabilising. Since this logic can have such a profound effect on the fate of weak states, in both war- and peace-time, it is vital to consider whether it is a decision-making tool worth keeping. Because the underlying reasons for this practice are based on *ideas* – particularly a pre-modern

understanding of war and victory – and not physical constraints, it is possible that the behaviour itself could be changed.

Changing this particular (implicit) practice is worth debating openly. In addition to the effect on weak states just described, the locational logic of sovereign authority contradicts, or at least undermines, value-laden international projects, such as promoting 'good governance' or 'global justice'. Even from a pragmatic perspective, this logic is problematic because it has created expectations about the international community's behaviour such that deviation on political grounds is seen as aberrant.

A debate about the merits of the locational logic of sovereign authority might also illuminate ways to change the pattern of some civil wars. This analysis has shown that civil wars wreak havoc on capital cities because they are a territorial manifestation of the political objective of war – sovereign authority. By removing the territorial object – that is, by removing the designation of 'capital' from a city in times of civil war – it is possible that the incentive for fighting over these sites could be reduced. De-certification of a capital city would only remove its appeal as a political object – it would not change any economic or demographic attractions. However, the hope would be that any actors with primarily political aims would be dissuaded from waging war against the capital as a requirement for success.

A further step might be to condition the recognition of any new authority on the election of a new government and establishment of a new capital. This would clarify the constitutive relationship – the government would always make the capital. The optimistic conclusion is that such measures, if made explicit and if adhered to by the international community, would discourage protracted civil wars of the kind seen in Liberia and Somalia. Of course, coups, wars of secession, and non-political conflict would remain unaddressed by such measures.

A critique of the proposal above is that removal of the territorial political object would cause civil wars to approach a Clausewitzian extreme because all territory would acquire equal significance and thus be contested as fiercely as capitals are now. At this time, I do not pretend to know which argument is more persuasive but the potential for redesigning the incentive structure of some forms of warfare make the debate worth having.

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