Greed and grievance in civil war

DAVID KEEN

My initial idea for this article was to revisit the thorny question of whether 'greed' or 'grievance' can be regarded as the most important cause of civil war, contrasting in particular the approaches taken by Frances Stewart (who has often been seen as a proponent of the 'grievance' thesis) and Paul Collier (who has often been linked with the 'greed' argument).

Stewart argues that 'horizontal inequalities'—'inequalities in economic, social or political dimensions or cultural status between culturally defined groups'[1]—are a powerful cause of civil wars, and this strongly suggests an alignment with the 'grievance' camp. Collier has stated in his contribution to the book *Greed and grievance* that his results 'overwhelmingly point to the importance of economic agendas as opposed to grievance'. He adds that 'grievance-based explanations of civil war' are 'seriously wrong'.[2]

The contrast I have drawn between Stewart and Collier should be qualified in two ways. First, Stewart notes that greed can be a significant factor in civil wars, often interacting with grievances in complex ways. Indeed, her edited volumes with Valpy Fitzgerald included work (including my own) on economic agendas in wartime.[3] A second qualification is that Collier, in recent writings, has moved from an emphasis on greed as the key driving force of rebellion to an emphasis on the feasibility (or otherwise) of rebellion. It remains the case, however, that Stewart gives most of her attention to inequality and resulting grievances, while Collier continues to emphasize the economic or criminal agendas of rebels and to downplay grievance as a motive force behind rebellion and civil war.

Since my own work has often been linked with the 'greed' side of the argument,[4] it may be surprising for some to hear that I am much more sympathetic to Frances

[1] Frances Stewart, 'Horizontal inequalities and conflict: an introduction and some hypotheses', in Frances Stewart, ed., *Horizontal inequalities and conflict: understanding group violence in multiethnic societies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 3.

[2] Paul Collier, 'Doing well out of war: an economic perspective', in Mats Berdal and David Malone, eds, *Greed and grievance: economic agendas in civil wars* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner/International Peace Academy, 2000), p. 96.

[3] Frances Stewart and Valpy Fitzgerald, eds, *War and underdevelopment*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[4] See e.g. the discussions on war and famine in Sudan in David Keen, *The benefits of famine: a political economy of famine and relief in Southwestern Sudan, 1983–89* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994; republished by James Currey, Oxford, 2008), and more especially in David Keen, *The economic functions of violence in civil wars*, Adelphi Paper no. 319 (Oxford: Oxford University Press and International Institute for Strategic Studies 1998).

International Affairs **88**: 4 (2012) 757–777

Stewart's arguments than I am to Paul Collier's. In this article, I try to explain why. This leads me towards a fairly far-reaching and vigorous critique of Collier's work in particular, and an examination of why—for all its flaws—his analysis has proved so popular and so influential. It also leads me to an examination of why it is important that inequalities, politics and the state (all matters that are illuminated in Stewart's work) do not disappear from the international radar screen.

We know that Stewart's work on war has been widely read and influential in policy circles. Given my own contributions to the Stewart–Fitzgerald volumes, I am particularly pleased that this work has found an audience. However, the popularity of Paul Collier is at another level. His book *The bottom billion* is a publishing phenomenon and has been pretty consistently the best-selling book in development studies.[5] A search for 'Paul Collier' on Google revealed 1,410,000 hits (admittedly, some of these were for the professional snooker referee Paul Collier; but not too many).

Collier's work is held in high regard within parts of the UK Department for International Development, and he has also attracted a following among some NGO workers. *The bottom billion* was hailed by *The Economist* as 'a classic … crammed with statistical nuggets',[6] by George Soros as 'a pathbreaking work'[7] and by Niall Ferguson as 'an elegant edifice'.[8]

In this article, I suggest three main reasons why Collier's work has taken such a hold. The first is the impression—sometimes ill-founded—of 'newness'. The second is that it offers an attractive and numerically derived oversimplification that gives us the illusion of having understood a complex world while allowing us to overlook a range of difficult issues; essentially, this is analysis by *exclusion*, with a range of difficult but important issues being either ignored, assumed away or explicitly dismissed as irrelevant. The third reason why Collier's work has gained such a following, I suggest, is that it is *politically* convenient. The work represents a pretty far-reaching delegitimization of political violence that might threaten existing power structures; it provides an important alibi for a range of abusive states; and it chimes nicely with a neo-imperial zeitgeist that attributes various kinds of beneficial and healing powers to western military intervention and occupation.

Collier's work: some criticisms

Before turning in more detail to what I see as the main reasons for the popularity of Collier's work, we should consider the possibility that it caught on because it presents incisive, accurate and helpful analysis. I have to say that I reject this hypothesis.

I will concede that there are some reasonable propositions within Collier's large body of work. First, and perhaps most importantly, 'greed' (in the sense of

[5] Paul Collier, *The bottom billion: why the poorest countries are failing and what can be done about it* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
[6] 'How to help the poorest: springing the traps', *The Economist*, 2 Aug. 2007.
[7] Pre-publication endorsement.
[8] Niall Ferguson, 'The least among us', *The New York Times*, 1 July 2007.

International Affairs 88: 4, 2012

economic motivation) *is* an important factor propelling violence in a great many civil wars. In fact, the work by Collier and Hoeffler (along with more qualitative work) has fed into some productive initiatives to rein in war economies, including the Kimberley Process and the various UN 'Panel of Experts' reports on conflicts in Africa. Second, there is a welcome focus on accountability in the financial sphere, including scrutiny for international banks and the importance of financial transparency in natural resource extraction. Third, Collier's emphasis on the need for generous and prolonged aid in the decade after a civil war is welcome. Fourth, while peacekeeping missions in themselves may be insufficient to secure a peace (as was shown in Angola in 1992, for example), Collier's advocacy of increased numbers of peacekeepers seems generally constructive.[9] The disastrous consequences of withdrawing peacekeepers from Rwanda in 1994 are well known, as is the need for very large numbers of peacekeepers in large countries like Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Collier has certainly succeeded in provoking debate, and a number of cogent critiques of his work have been made, including those by William Easterly, Christopher Cramer, Laurie Nathan, and Karen Ballentine and Jake Sherman.[10] Easterly points out that to establish a poverty trap (as Collier purports to do) one would have to take the 'bottom' countries at some period in the past and show how they have subsequently developed, rather than taking today's bottom countries and showing that they developed poorly in the past; Cramer points to the limitations of viewing human behaviour in terms of economic motivation and individual rational choice; and Nathan emphasizes Collier's lack of interest in the nature and character of actually existing mass violence. For their part, Ballentine and Sherman show in some detail the complex relationship between greed and grievance.

In a summary of findings in chapter 13 of Frances Stewart's edited volume *Horizontal inequalities and conflict*, Stewart, Graham Brown and Arnim Langer note that the link between natural resources and conflict is well established. But they then highlight the problem of how this link is to be interpreted: jumping to the conclusion that it is evidence of 'rebel greed' may be misleading. As Stewart, Brown and Langer note, 'our research suggests that the conflict-inducing potential of natural resources is often mediated through their impact on HIs [horizontal inequalities], and that this can translate into both separatist struggles and local-level conflict'.[11] In his individual contribution to the volume, Graham Brown notes that the discovery of oil in Aceh was a major spur to separatism there, and

[9] Collier notes in Paul Collier, *Wars, guns and votes: democracy in dangerous places* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), p. 84: 'given the decision to commit troops, the more that were sent, the safer was the society … Places with many peacekeepers have a lower rate or reversion to conflict despite intrinsically being more at risk.'

[10] See William Easterly, 'The burden of proof should be on interventionists—doubt is a superb reason for inaction', *Boston Review*, July–Aug. 2009; Christopher Cramer, 'Homo Economicus goes to war: methodological individualism, rational choice and the political economy of war', *World Development* 30: 11, 2002, pp. 1845–964; Laurie Nathan, '"The frightful inadequacy of most of the statistics": a critique of Collier and Hoeffler on causes of civil war', Crisis States Research Centre discussion paper no. 11 (London: London School of Economics, 2005); Karen Ballentine and Jake Sherman, *The political economy of armed conflict: beyond greed and grievance* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner; New York: International Peace Academy, 2003).

[11] Frances Stewart, Graham Brown and Arnim Langer, 'Major findings and conclusions on the relationship between horizontal inequalities and conflict', in Stewart, ed., *Horizontal inequalities and conflict*, p. 294.

that one element in this was resentment that relatively low educational levels were encouraging employers to hire Javanese outsiders for many of the better-paying jobs within the emerging oil and gas industry. Beyond Indonesia, oil also encouraged aspirations for regional autonomy—and even separation—in places as diverse as Sudan, Nigeria and Scotland.[12] But the complex grievances informing these aspirations to autonomy and separation cannot simply be dismissed as greed.

Collier's contention that inequality does not predict conflict was based on measuring *vertical inequality*—that is, inequality between individuals or households in a society. He concluded: 'Inequality, whether measured in terms of income or landownership, has no effect on the risk of conflict according to the data.'[13] But by looking at *horizontal inequalities*, or inequalities between groups, Stewart was able to form a better assessment of the role of inequalities in generating conflict. In an important chapter in the book *Horizontal inequalities and conflict*, Gudrun Ostby finds that, over the period 1986–2003, countries with severe social and economic horizontal inequalities (whether groups are defined by ethnicity, religion or region) had a significantly higher probability of the onset of conflict.[14] In the same book, Luca Mancini reported the findings from an econometric analysis of districts in Indonesia, observing: 'The results suggest that districts with larger intergroup differentials in child mortality rates in 1995 as well as districts where these inequalities widened between 1990 and 1995 tend to be those where deadly conflict occurred.'[15] Meanwhile, standard measures of *vertical* income inequality did not seem to predict communal violence in Indonesia. In separate work, Murshed and Gates found that in Nepal those districts with higher deprivation tended to have a greater intensity of Maoist rebellion.[16]

Although Stewart and her associates find that horizontal inequalities are a very significant cause of civil wars, they are also interested in cases where large horizontal inequalities, especially socio-economic inequalities, *have not* led to civil wars. In a limited way, one is reminded here of Collier's assertion that grievances are pretty universal but that only in some cases is rebellion feasible. For Collier, this question of feasibility basically comes down to a trial of strength between the state and potential rebels. However, Stewart and her associates adopt a more sophisticated approach that not only investigates the various grievances in different societies but also examines political variables that may impede, encourage or actively stimulate a rebellion.

For example, in their chapter in the Stewart volume on horizontal inequalities, Corinne Caumartin, George Gray Molina and Rosemary Thorp emphasize

[12] Michael Ross, 'What do we know about natural resources and civil war?', *Journal of Peace Research* 41: 3, 2004, pp. 337–56.
[13] Collier, 'Doing well out of war'.
[14] Gudrun Ostby, 'Inequalities, the political environment and civil conflict: evidence from 55 developing countries', in Stewart, ed., *Horizontal inequalities and conflict*, pp. 136–59.
[15] Luca Mancini, 'Horizontal inequality and communal violence: evidence from Indonesian districts', in Stewart, ed., *Horizontal inequalities and conflict*, p. 130.
[16] S. Mansood Murshed and Scott Gates, 'Spatial horizontal inequality and the Maoist insurgency in Nepal', July 2004, WIDER (World Institute for Development Economics Research), pp. 1–15, http://www.niaslinc.dk/gateway_to_asia/nordic_webpublications/x48346311.pdf, accessed 28 May 2012.

that ethnic mobilization and participation of indigenous groups in mainstream politics (notably in Ecuador and Bolivia) tended to discourage outright rebellion (in contrast to Guatemala and Peru, where indigenous groups were largely excluded from formal politics). Elsewhere in the same volume, Ostby's econometric analysis suggests that politically and economically inclusive government tends to reduce the risk of conflict.[17] Stewart, Brown and Langer observe: 'In our own country studies, both Ghana and Bolivia have high socioeconomic HIs [horizontal inequalities], yet have avoided substantial conflict.'[18] One conclusion of Stewart's major study, expressed in the chapter by Stewart, Brown and Langer, is that 'conflict is more likely where political and socioeconomic HIs are high and run in the same direction, or are consistent'. Langer notes that in Côte d'Ivoire there have been significant horizontal inequalities on a north–south basis, adding that it was the political exclusion of northern politicians from 1995 that ignited violent conflict.[19] Stewart, Brown and Langer note:

> Even in the presence of quite sharp socioeconomic HIs, people are unlikely to take to violent conflict if their own group leaders are politically included, and even less so if they are dominant politically … the political cooption of the leadership of disadvantaged minorities by the dominant group is often sufficient to prevent conflict without the necessity of undertaking policies to improve the socioeconomic position of these groups.[20]

In Nigeria, despite the growing separatist ambitions in the north today, political factors have tended to put some limits on conflict. Stewart et al. note that 'while northern political power has helped avoid major north–south confrontations, the northern part of the country has remained seriously deprived in socioeconomic terms'.[21]

In the section below, I explain some of my own criticisms of Collier's work. First, Collier's conclusions—though appearing on the surface very scientific because of the numbers and the algebra—sometimes rest on very shaky foundations. For example, in the work suggesting that 'greed' was a much more important cause of civil wars than 'grievance', the proxies for greed and grievance were very questionable. Lack of access to education is taken as a proxy for greed. But we know from many countries, including Sierra Leone, that a key grievance motivating many fighters has been lack of access to education.[22] In the recent paper 'Post-conflict risks' by Collier, Hoeffler and Måns Söderbom, low per capita income and slow economic growth are taken as proxies for the feasibility of rebellion—on the logic that they lower the recruitment cost of rebel troops—but they

[17] Ostby, 'Inequalities, the political environment and civil conflict'.
[18] Stewart et al., 'Major findings and conclusions on the relationship between horizontal inequalities and conflict'.
[19] Arnim Langer, 'Horizontal inequality and violent conflict: the case of Côte d'Ivoire', CRISE working paper no. 13 (Oxford: Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford University, 2004).
[20] Stewart et al., 'Major findings and conclusions on the relationship between horizontal inequalities and conflict', pp. 290–91.
[21] Stewart et al., 'Major findings and conclusions on the relationship between horizontal inequalities and conflict', p. 291.
[22] See e.g. David Keen, *Conflict and collusion in Sierra Leone* (Oxford: James Currey, 2005).

International Affairs 88: 4, 2012

might equally or better be seen as proxies for grievance.[23] Of course, if you change the meaning of the proxies, you get a completely different conclusion.

A second criticism is that some of Collier's very confident conclusions seem to me to be not only wrong but also quite obviously wrong. One of his assertions is that when it comes to a particular country's risk of civil war, small countries face particular problems. Thus, 'the countries of the bottom billion are mostly too small to be states … Small is ugly as far as public goods are concerned.'[24] The main problem with small countries is that they lack 'economies of scale in security',[25] Collier says. In contrast with these struggling small countries, Collier asserts confidently, 'even the big poor countries are now pretty safe'.[26] That would certainly be good news for the people of Sudan and the DRC if it were true. But the persistence of violence on a massive scale in these countries clearly suggests otherwise. And before we rush to embrace large size as a recipe for peace, we might also want to consider the disastrous civil wars in Nigeria, Ethiopia and Angola, to say nothing of the large-scale violence in Algeria and South Africa. Conversely, before we rush to dismiss small states as unviable and a source of civil war, we should consider the relatively peaceful paths of Botswana, Mauritius, Ghana and Gambia, among many others. Yet Collier concludes, a little breathlessly:

> One of the most exhilarating consequences of building a model is that it enables the researcher to simulate alternative scenarios. We had to establish some principle to guide the merger sequence: for example, should Kenya first merge with Uganda or with Tanzania? … A seven-state structure for Africa [at decolonization] would, on our analysis, have been considerably safer than the present structure.[27]

This passage suggests an alarming belief that the world can and should be shaped in accordance with the calculations made by Collier and his team. It is almost as if we are back to the days when powerful white men in Europe drew lines on a map to decide the boundaries of African colonies.

That observation leads me to a third criticism: Collier is overconfident in drawing grand policy recommendations from the analysis of his data. If the sweeping nature of the conclusions in some of Collier's econometric papers (for example, that this or that is the recipe for preventing war) can be quite breathtaking, it can also be dangerous. A 2006 paper by Collier and Hoeffler suggests that high military spending in a postwar period may predict renewed conflict.[28] Correspondingly, as Collier puts it in his article 'Post-conflict recovery', 'a post-conflict government should aim to downsize the military rapidly and substantially'.[29] This sounds reasonable enough if we do not think about it too hard. But we

[23] Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler and Måns Söderbom, 'Post-conflict risks' (Oxford: Centre for the Study of African Economies, Oxford University, 2006).
[24] Collier, *Wars, guns and votes*, pp. 190–91.
[25] Collier, *Wars, guns and votes*, p. 136.
[26] Collier, *Wars, guns and votes*, p. 7.
[27] Collier, *Wars, guns and votes*, pp. 197–8.
[28] Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, 'Military expenditure in post-conflict societies', *Economics of Governance* 7: 1, 2006, pp. 89–107.
[29] Paul Collier, 'Post-conflict recovery: how should strategies be distinctive?', *Journal of African Economies* 18 (suppl. 1), 2009, pp. 99–131.

know—from Human Rights Watch, for example—that one significant factor in the 1994 Rwandan genocide was violence carried out by soldiers who feared they were going to be rapidly demobilized after the 1993 Arusha peace agreement. We know, too, that when Sierra Leone's vicious civil war reignited in 1997, it was because of a *coup d'état* staged, in part, by soldiers who were angered about the rapid downsizing of the Sierra Leonean military.[30] And we also know—to give a third example—that when the Iraqi military was summarily dismissed in 2003 after the US-led invasion, the sacked soldiers became a key resource for the insurgency. Of course, we do not need to go to the other extreme and claim that large and enduring militaries are a *good* thing; there are many reasons to believe they are not. But we do need to be very careful about the speed of dismantling them and the circumstances in which they are dismantled.

A fourth criticism is that internal contradictions in Collier's arguments tend to be rather swept under the carpet. Take the suggestion that high military spending in a postwar period predicts renewed conflict (as high spending is interpreted as sending a signal to rebels that the government plans to renege on a peace agreement). There is no acknowledgement that this finding, if true, is a major blow to the theory that conflicts happen when they are feasible. After all—and particularly if we are thinking within Collier's framework—a strong and well-funded military would logically be expected to make a rebellion less feasible, for as Collier puts it: 'Whether rebellion is easy or difficult basically comes down to whether rebels have access to guns and money, and whether the state is effective in opposing them.'[31]

I have some other criticisms, but these are perhaps best incorporated into the section that follows, where I try to suggest some reasons why Collier's work has gained such a substantial following.

Why has Collier's work been so popular?

The claim of terra incognita

How, then, are we to explain the popularity of Collier's analysis? The first reason, I suggest, is the author's success in projecting a sense of newness. In *Wars, guns and votes* there are several references—perhaps joking, but I'm not sure—to the presidents who will be reading the book. The impression of a grand audience is matched by the impression of grand intellectual breakthroughs. At various points, there is a sense of excitement that Collier is revealing the results of studies not yet published. Most strikingly, Collier notes:

> As you read *Wars, Guns and Votes*, you may be struck by how fast the research frontier is moving. I get that sense morning by morning as I walk to work wondering whether, during the previous evening, Pedro, or Anke, or Dominic, or Lisa, or Benedikt, or Marguerite has cracked whatever problem we had crashed into by the time I left for home.[32]

[30] See Lansana Gberie, 'The May 25 coup d'état in Sierra Leone: a militariat revolt?', *Africa Development* 22: 3–4, 2007, pp. 149–70. See also Lansana Gberie, *A dirty war in West Africa: the R.U.F. and the destruction of Sierra Leone* (London: Hurst, 2005); Keen, *Conflict and collusion in Sierra Leone*.

[31] Collier, *Wars, guns and votes*, p. 139.

[32] Collier, *Wars, guns and votes*, p. 3.

International Affairs 88: 4, 2012

The prospect of such major and daily breakthroughs spearheaded by young researchers deploying their numbers in the sleepy streets of Oxford is perhaps a frightening one for those on the receiving end of the consequent recommendations, but let that pass. On page 20 of *Wars, guns and votes*, Collier notes:

> You might expect that the relationship between democracy and political violence would be settled academic territory. But somewhat to my surprise I found that it was not. It was, in fact, about as close to terra incognita as modern social science gets: I could not find a single published paper. I teamed up with Dominic Rohner, a young Swiss researcher, and got to work.[33]

Certainly, Collier is taking a more numerical approach than most earlier workers in the field. But there is no mention here of pathbreaking work (including statistical analysis) by Snyder and Mansfield on the dangers that conflict will be spurred by democratization,[34] or of the important work by Michael Mann on this theme,[35] or of work by Roland Paris that highlighted the dangers of rushing to elections in a post-conflict setting,[36] or of work by Michael Ignatieff on the temptations of playing the 'ethnic card' during elections,[37] or, for that matter, of the work by Frances Stewart and Meghan O'Sullivan which showed how democratic institutions can foment conflict in sharply divided societies.[38] If this is *terra incognita*, I would not like to see a crowded intellectual field.

Collier, Hoeffler and Söderbom suggest that the 'current policy model' emphasizing the need for democracy as a tool of conflict resolution rests on an implicit (and, in their view, erroneous) theory of conflict that gives precedence to motivation, grievances and political exclusion.[39] Their finding that holding elections does not protect against renewed conflict is thus presented as another blow to the 'grievance' school. However, other scholars have already highlighted that there are many reasons why holding elections might precipitate conflict in the context of a grievance-led rebellion. One of these is the threat to entrenched elites who may resort to mass violence to head off democratization, as was the case in Rwanda in 1994. The ability of elites to defer democratization in this way has been a critical factor in many countries. As Stewart notes, drawing on the example of Sri Lanka in particular, attempts to remedy inequalities can sometimes be as dangerous as the inequalities themselves—particularly when these attempts promote a backlash.

[33] Collier, *Wars, guns and votes*, p. 20.

[34] Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder found that during the 170 years from 1811 to 1980, the danger of war (external and internal) was greatest when states were moving rapidly towards democracy. They argued that elites, when threatened by democratic change, have frequently mobilized support through nationalist appeals, and have typically found that once populations have been mobilized they are difficult to demobilize. See Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder, 'Democratization and the danger of war', *International Security* 20: 1, Summer 1995, pp. 5–38; also Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder, *Electing to fight: why emerging democracies go to war* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

[35] Michael Mann, *The dark side of democracy: explaining ethnic cleansing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[36] Roland Paris, *At war's end: building peace after civil conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[37] Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and belonging: journeys into the new nationalism* (London: BBC Books and Chatto & Windus, 1993).

[38] Frances Stewart and Meghan O'Sullivan, 'Democracy, conflict and development: three cases', working paper no. 15 (Oxford: Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford, 1998).

[39] Collier et al., 'Post-conflict risks', p. 6.

If Collier's work on democratization was not quite *terra incognita*, the same is true of his emphasis on economic agendas in civil wars. When Collier advanced the idea that greed is an important driver in civil wars, we heard almost nothing about the large body of qualitative work on the economic beneficiaries of conflict which preceded his econometric work with Hoeffler. I did find a reference to my own work, *The benefits of famine*, in a 1995 article by Collier that floated the idea of war yielding benefits, suggesting perhaps that the qualitative work on war's beneficiaries had some influence in the early days. However, in neither *The bottom billion* nor *War, guns and votes* is there any reference to important work on the political economy of war by Mark Duffield, Alex de Waal, William Reno, Stephen Ellis or Mary Kaldor. I do not get a sense from many journalists' reviews that they are aware of the rich body of scholarship on the dangers of rapid democratization or the wide-ranging work on the political economy of war.[40] More generally, Collier's work tends to be very self-referential. For example, in one paper by Paul Collier there are 16 references, eleven of which are to Collier himself and his collaborators.

The attractions of simplification

A second important reason for the popularity of Collier's work, I suggest, is that it represents an attractive oversimplification. Many academics still struggle to express themselves in a manner that is accessible to policy-makers and a wider public; Collier represents a major and instructive exception. He is a good speaker and his books are in many ways well written. He goes to unusual lengths—particularly for an economist—to avoid jargon. He avoids footnotes or endnotes, which he describes as 'the grim apparatus of professional scholarship'.[41] The confidence is impressive—and the allure of certainty in uncertain times is not to be underestimated.[42] During the 2004 US presidential campaign, John Kerry said of George W. Bush that the important thing was not to be certain but to be right; and yet, as we know, Bush won the election. For Hannah Arendt, the important thing for leaders wishing to attract a following was not to be right but to be certain.[43]

Here is an interesting example of a sweeping statement from Collier that somehow seems to take away the need for empirical enquiry (at least in its more qualitative forms): 'Future civil wars will take the form of a government pitted against a private extralegal military grouping. They will variously be called rebels, terrorists, freedom fighters, or gangsters, but their essential character will be the same.'[44]

[40] See e.g. Jonathan Kay, 'Jonathan Kay on Paul Collier's "War, guns and votes": democracy may not be such a great thing after all', *National Post*, 6 April 2009, http://gatesofvienna.blogspot.co.uk/2009/04/gates-of-vienna-news-feed-462009.html#15035, accessed 28 May 2012.

[41] Collier, *The bottom billion*, p. xii.

[42] Hannah Arendt, *The origins of totalitarianism* (New York: Harvest Books, 1973; first publ. 1951).

[43] There is a danger that we revere science in the sense of revering numbers and technology while simultaneously failing to value rigorous standards of evidence.

[44] Collier, *Wars, guns and votes*, p. 122.

International Affairs 88: 4, 2012

In his contribution to the book *Greed and grievance*, a chapter called 'Doing well out of war', Collier went so far as to say there was no point in asking rebels why they rebelled, since they would always say it was because of grievances. But if you stop listening to those actively involved in a war, you have—in my view—already lost your chance of intervening helpfully. And whereas in the greed/grievance contributions Collier and Hoeffler emphasized that there was no need to listen to rebels' accounts of their motivations, in the course of their more recent emphasis on 'feasibility' they actually went further, holding motivation (of any kind) to be irrelevant to any useful understanding. Since rebels are not deemed worth speaking to and grievances are considered largely irrelevant to understanding conflict, the answers to questions about that conflict seem now to lie not in the wisdom of Darfur, for example, but in the wisdom of Oxford and the sophistication of Washington.

My unease here is not lessened when Paul Collier states that the so-called bottom billion inhabit a world of 'civil war, plague, ignorance'.[45] Foucault asked which speaking subjects one might wish to disqualify in the insistence that a particular approach—whether Marxism or psychoanalysis—was a 'science'; it is worth asking the same question about Collier's work, which seems to exclude a great many dissenting voices while incorporating many of the magic ingredients of 'science' with great aplomb. I am reminded that in an article in *Foreign Affairs* in early 2007, Tony Blair referred to 'Islamist terrorists' and stressed the importance of 'telling them that their attitude toward the United States is absurd, that their concept of governance is pre-feudal, that their positions on women and other faiths are reactionary'.[46] It was also essential to reject 'their false sense of grievance against the West'. Yet calling a grievance 'false' does not make it go away; it only exacerbates it. (I cannot resist my favourite Shylock quote here: 'Thou call'dst me dog before thou hadst a cause / But since I am a dog, beware my fangs').[47]

Collier's error in dismissing the importance of grievances in civil wars, in my view, is compounded by a tendency to dismiss the grievances of intellectuals and aid workers who might object to his analysis. Indeed, both have at times been loosely subsumed within his 'greed' template. As Collier puts it in *Wars, guns and votes*: 'Essentially, academics fight a zero-sum game over reputation in which the fast route to success is to demolish some prominent piece of work. You can rest assured that droves of academics on the make are hacking away at the propositions in this book.'[48] Thus, grievances have once again been neatly dismissed as greed.

Although Collier has significant knowledge of Africa and has written extensively on individual countries, it is quite possible to do a regression analysis of the kind that Collier and Hoeffler favour without knowing or saying anything sensible about any individual society or its history. This does not in itself invalidate the

[45] Collier, *The bottom billion*, p. 3.
[46] Tony Blair, 'A battle for global values', *Foreign Affairs* 86: 1, Jan.–Feb. 2007, pp. 79–90.
[47] On the role of shaming in inducing violence, see James Gilligan, *Violence: reflections on our deadliest epidemic* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 1999); also David Keen, *Useful enemies: when waging wars is more important than winning them* (London: Yale University Press, 2012).
[48] Collier, *Wars, guns and votes*, p. 235.

exercise, but it does suggest a need for great caution. One way of proceeding with caution is to test the data against good case-studies. To be fair, Paul Collier did team up with Nicholas Sambanis to produce a book called *Understanding civil war* that included significant case-study material.[49] But the case-study approach is remarkably threadbare in both *The bottom billion* and *Wars, guns and votes*. There is one brief case-study in the latter—on Côte d'Ivoire. But this does not involve a serious attempt to synthesize different points of view, for as Collier notes: 'In what follows I have relied heavily on the expertise of Jennifer Widner, a political scientist at Princeton' (none of whose work, incidentally, is cited in the book's rudimentary bibliography).[50]

Still, there are always the numbers. But where do they come from? Databases in poor and conflict-ridden countries are notoriously unreliable, so a large measure of caution is advisable. But gaps in the data rarely seem to deter Collier. On page 123 of *Wars, guns and votes*, he confides:

> We realized that we could use a fancy statistical program that fills in the blanks of missing data by randomly assigning a range of different numbers. I had always been resistant to using make-believe numbers, but the advantage of this approach was that it filled in each missing number with several different possibilities, one at a time. Using these numbers in turn, you could then see how robust the results were to the possibility that the missing number would have taken these values.[51]

Am I alone in hearing alarm bells at this point?[52] Today, academics and government officials are under strong pressure to come up with numbers and 'indicators' which can show that their activities—and any proposed policy action—are worthwhile (and worth the money). Some of Collier's more far-fetched and overconfident conclusions and recommendations seem to be based on remarkably flimsy foundations. Yet this has not impeded their 'uptake'. A timely warning is surely in order of the dangers of being in thrall to quantitative approaches whose scientific basis may be more apparent than real.

A politically convenient perspective

This brings me to the third reason, in my view, why Collier's analysis has gained such a following: namely, that it is politically convenient, not least because of the various exclusions it entails. In many ways, the analysis fits very neatly with the neo-liberal interventionist zeitgeist emanating from the United States in particular.

Three main problems are notable here. First, as Mark Duffield has observed, the 'greed' discourse in its purest form has the effect of delegitimizing various

[49] Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis, eds, *Understanding civil war: evidence and analysis* (Washington DC: World Bank, 2005).
[50] Collier, *Wars, guns and votes*, p. 156.
[51] Collier, *Wars, guns and votes*, p. 123.
[52] I do not discount the possibility that I have failed to grasp the complexity and sophistication of the econometrician's art.

International Affairs 88: 4, 2012

kinds of political violence.[53] And since there is apparently no interest in understanding grievances or listening to rebellious groups, there is clearly a risk of delegitimizing protest in general. The idea that inequality is irrelevant in understanding conflict—challenged successfully by Stewart and her associates, as we have seen—seems rather convenient for supporters of economic liberalization.

Second, the idea that understanding of civil wars is to be gained by studying rebels rather than states takes the focus away from some pretty abusive states and some pretty abusive government armies. No doubt this is not Collier's intention, but the focus on *rebels* is nevertheless dangerous. Interestingly, many of the states whose abuses have generally been ignored or downplayed—across a range of work that goes much wider than Collier's alone—turn out, as Mahmood Mamdani points out, to have had a strong affiliation to the United States.[54] Britain and the US have shared many blind-spots in relation to recent conflicts in Africa. One of the most notable examples here is the conflict in northern Uganda, which saw the forcible relocation of the Acholi population in the north; another is the quietude of London and Washington in relation to Uganda's meddling in the DRC and in Sudan.[55] The Rwandan government's interference in the DRC was also very damaging, if initially understandable in that perpetrators of genocide had retreated there.[56] Collier proposes that, 'in the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Nations would hold a share of sovereignty on behalf of the neighbours, tasked with minimizing the shared costs inflicted on the neighbours'.[57] Isn't this a bit backwards, considering the huge costs inflicted *on the DRC* by its neighbours? The argument is indicative of some major blind-spots, of which Collier's work is only one example.[58]

The third and in some ways the most worrying element in Collier's analysis that renders it politically convenient is his support for military intervention in quite a wide range of circumstances.

Let me say a little more, first of all, about the dangers in delegitimizing violent protest and sidelining grievances. Collier states in bold terms:

If the feasibility hypothesis is right it has a powerful implication: violent conflict cannot be prevented by addressing the problems that are likely to motivate it; it can only be prevented

[53] Mark Duffield, *Global governance and the new wars: the merging of development and security* (London: Zed, 2001).

[54] Mahmood Mamdani, *Saviors and survivors: Darfur, politics and the War on Terror* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007).

[55] Chris Dolan, *Social torture: the case of northern Uganda, 1986–2006* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009); on the abuses of the Ugandan army in Sudan, see Mareike Schomerus, '"They forget what they came for": Uganda's army in Sudan', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 6: 1, 2012, pp. 124–53.

[56] UN Panel of Experts, *Report of the Panel of Experts on the illegal exploitation of natural resources and other forms of wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2001* (letter dated 12 April 2001 from the Secretary General to the President of the Security Council); UN Panel of Experts, *Final report of the Panel of Experts on the illegal exploitation of natural resources and other forms of wealth of the Democratic Republic of Congo*, 16 Oct. 2002, S/2002/1146, pp. 1–57.

[57] Collier, *Wars, guns, and votes*, p. 224.

[58] See e.g. Neil Cooper, 'State collapse as business: the role of conflict trade and the emerging control agenda', *Development and Change* 33: 5, 2002, pp. 935–55; Filip Reyntjens, 'Rwanda, ten years on: from genocide to dictatorship', *African Affairs* 103: 411, 2004, pp. 177–210. See also Nicholas Stockton, 'In defence of humanitarianism', *Disaster* 22: 4, 1998, pp. 352–60; Kisangani Emizet, 'The massacre of refugees in the Congo: a case of UN peacekeeping failure and international law', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 38: 3, 2000, pp. 163–202.

International Affairs 88: 4, 2012

by making it more difficult. Whether rebellion is easy or difficult basically comes down to whether rebels have access to guns and money, and whether the state is effective in opposing them.[59]

To me, this seems pretty close to signing up to an agenda of supporting counter-insurgency. It is worth considering this approach alongside recent work by Mark Duffield. Duffield refers to 'the reproblematization of political violence in the global South: that is, from being acceptable during the Cold War, and often justified in national liberation terms, to becoming universally unacceptable today'.[60] He adds: 'The main intellectual thrust of this reproblematization is contained in the *new war* discourse that grew to dominance from the early 1990s … Civil war was reinterpreted in terms of irrationality, the breakdown of order, deliberate violations of human rights, the growth of criminality and the erosion of aggregate self-reliance.'[61] Thus, the 'greed' hypothesis risks becoming part of that project of turning any kind of political violence into a legitimate reason for strong state repression. Public alarm around terrorism only confirmed that trend, as Duffield observes:

> Having comprehensively displaced earlier solidarist positions by the mid 1990s, this process of delegitimation was formally confirmed, as it were, in Britain's 2000 Terrorism Act. For the first time—and before 9/11—the Act proscribed a named list of mainly Middle Eastern and Asian political groups as terrorist organizations. A decade earlier many of the same groups would have been regarded as legitimate organizations struggling for self-determination or against religious or cultural oppression.[62]

Meanwhile, Duffield notes that since the mid-1990s the main form of UN humanitarian intervention in ongoing war has shifted away from *negotiated access*—that is, reaching agreement with warring parties on the conditions for reaching civilians. As Duffield stresses, this model—adopted in Sudan, Ethiopia, Angola, Mozambique and Bosnia, for example—gave implicit recognition to rebels and other non-state political actors.[63] By contrast, the *integrated mission*, which has become the norm in recent years, 'represents a relative closure of political space'. Rather than recognizing non-state actors, it 'closes ranks around support for the peace process. In places like Haiti, Burundi, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone and East Timor, for example, the UN is now prepared to take sides in support of the recognized transitional government—even to the extent of militarily confronting "spoilers" trying to undermine the transition process.'[64] This approach resonates, Duffield adds, with more visible instances of regime change in, for example, Afghanistan and Iraq.[65]

All this takes us some distance from a direct discussion of Collier's work. But it provides important context for Collier's persistent refusal to take rebel grievances

[59] Collier, *Wars, guns, and votes*, p. 139.
[60] Mark Duffield, 'Global civil war: the non-insured, international containment and post-interventionary society', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21: 2, 2008, p. 157.
[61] Duffield, 'Global civil war', p. 157.
[62] Duffield, 'Global civil war', p. 157.
[63] Duffield, 'Global civil war'.
[64] Duffield, 'Global civil war', p. 160.
[65] Duffield, 'Global civil war', pp. 159–60.

International Affairs 88: 4, 2012

seriously. Sometimes Collier's statements on rebellion are very sweeping: for example, 'only a small minority of any society are psychopathic, but these people are likely to be in the front of the queue for rebellion'.[66] Sometimes he is more geographically specific. Considering the recent catastrophe in Sudan's Darfur region, Collier notes that when Darfur's rebels saw the political settlement in the south (which gave southern rebels a 50 per cent share of oil revenues), they wanted some of those benefits. In practice, he observes, rebellion in Darfur brought catastrophic consequences for the people of the region. His conclusion: 'Either the rebel leadership radically misjudged the consequences of its actions, or it was not genuinely motivated by the welfare of the people of Darfur.'[67] But the motivations behind rebellion in Darfur are far more complicated than this.[68] While Collier does describe the government as 'awful' and 'murderous', his interpretation of rebel behaviour is certainly an oversimplification.

The case of Sudan, in fact, shows the importance of understanding not just the grievances that have fuelled rebellion but also the grievances that have fuelled abusive counter-insurgency.[69] From the 1970s, patterns of growth in Sudan have favoured mechanized and semi-mechanized agriculture (with much of the production being for export). This growth was quite consistent with widespread poverty, and there were large regional disparities in income and access to services. Large quantities of grain were exported during famines, and many farmers and pastoralists were excluded—often with a thin veneer of legal justification—from land they had traditionally used.[70] In respect of north–south tensions, ideology played a key role in the conflict, interacting with material motives in complex ways. Meanwhile, grievances fed not only into rebellion by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA)—as when many Nuba were attracted to the SPLA—but also into an abusive counter-insurgency that western governments initially supported. The civil war of 1983–2005 became particularly vicious when Khartoum attempted to divert the grievances of western Sudanese pastoralists (specifically, the Baggara) by encouraging them to attack southern Sudanese—and to benefit from access to grazing land and cattle, and from the hyper-exploitation of southern Sudanese labour.[71] The grievances of various Arab groups have also fuelled the participation of Janjaweed in abusive counter-insurgency more recently in Darfur.[72]

Even where greed is powerfully fuelling violence, we need to ask about the origins of that 'greed'. In my experience, that leads us quickly to a variety of grievances. Where selfish and ruthless behaviour becomes prominent, what are

[66] Collier, *Wars, guns, and votes,* p. 135.
[67] Collier, *Wars, guns and votes,* p. 135.
[68] See, notably, Douglas Johnson, *The root causes of Sudan's civil wars* (Oxford: James Currey, 2003).
[69] Keen, *The benefits of famine*; Mamdani, *Saviors and survivors*.
[70] Johnson, *The root causes of Sudan's civil wars*; Paul de Wit, 'Legality and legitimacy: a study on access to land, pasture and water', Food and Agriculture Organization, Rome, June 2001, http://www.cmi.no/sudan/doc/?id=908, accessed May 28 2012. On regional disparities, see World Bank/Government of Sudan, *Sudan: stabilization and reconstruction. Country economic memorandum* (Washington DC), vol. 1, 30 June 2003, main text, report no. 24620-SU, vol. 2, table A1.4, p. 3.
[71] Keen, *The benefits of famine*.
[72] See e.g. Mamdani, *Saviors and survivors*.

International Affairs 88: 4, 2012

the causes of this selfishness and ruthlessness? To the extent that violence is seen by participants as rational, what were the conditions—and grievances—that led to that view? As Stewart emphasizes, we need to understand the various ways in which 'greed' and grievance interact.[73] We need a dynamic model in which we consider not only the role of grievance in promoting greed but also the role of greed in promoting more grievances, for example when predation and war exacerbate inequalities. To a large extent, both 'greed' and 'grievance' may stem from other, perhaps more fundamental motivations, such as the desire for security, respect or even some measure of care.[74] In Sierra Leone, a local aid worker explained to me in 1995 how he had secured his food-store and prevented the store guards from defecting to the rebels or government army; he said he did it by paying them a small wage but also by providing some medical care and food, and spending time with them, knowing their names: 'Trust and confidence—it's not much money they want. But when they know you have no trust or care for them, all they want to do is make money on the side.'[75]

Where widespread grievances are ignored, a peace agreement may simply paper over deep fissures in a society, sowing the seeds for future conflict. The dangers of reinventing the causes of a war are illustrated in Sierra Leone. For example, Joseph Hanlon notes that in postwar Sierra Leone, 'IMF spending caps prevent the essential expansion of education, and require civil service salaries to be so low that civil servants need additional income'.[76] The danger is that liberalization, having contributed to the crisis, is simply dusted down and put forward as a 'solution'. Policies of liberalization that were pushed by the international financial institutions in the 1980s and 1990s actually seem to have fuelled conflict in a number of ways: by encouraging devaluation and inflation; by creating private oligopolies; by reducing state services; by encouraging corruption when state salaries were eroded; and by taking attention away from soldiers' abuses under the military government of 1992–6, a government that was actually praised and rewarded for its 'financial orthodoxy' and liberalization agenda while rebels took all the blame.[77]

Despite these dangers, the temptation to ignore the complexity of grievances is persistent. In 2007 a report on the peace process in Northern Ireland was issued by the Portland Trust, a British foundation that describes its mission as 'encouraging peace and stability between Palestinians and Israelis through economic development'. The report was influential in British government circles and was cited approvingly in the subsequent report by Ed Balls and Jon Cunliffe recommending a path to peace between Israelis and Palestinians through the economic development of the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The Portland Trust report's summary stated:

[73] Stewart and Fitzgerald, eds, *War and underdevelopment*; also Mats Berdal and David Keen, 'Violence and economic agendas in civil wars: some policy implications', *Millennium* 26: 3, 1997, pp. 795–818; Ballentine and Sherman, eds, *The political economy of armed conflict*.

[74] Adam Philips, 'Insatiable creatures', *Guardian*, 8 Aug. 2009.

[75] Keen, *Conflict and collusion in Sierra Leone* (see esp. Conclusion).

[76] Joseph Hanlon, 'Is the international community helping to recreate the preconditions for war in Sierra Leone?', *Round Table* 94: 381, Sept. 2005, p. 461.

[77] Keen, *Conflict and collusion in Sierra Leone*.

International Affairs 88: 4, 2012

The importance of economics in conflict resolution is that it sets aside the question of motive, or grievance, of historical rights and wrongs, and focuses instead on the question of economic opportunity: what conditions—economic conditions in particular—have made the conflict possible? For if these conditions can be removed, progress to end the conflict might be made, just as surely as if the motives had been removed.[78]

I do not myself see any way of reducing conflict other than through tackling motives, though clearly addressing economic conditions may do this to a degree. Although Collier is not cited in this instance, the Portland Trust statement is clearly in line with his argument. Is it not particularly convenient, in the context of Israel and the Palestinians, to set aside motivations, 'historical rights and wrongs', and place one's faith—as was done at the time of the 1993 Oslo accords, with rather unimpressive results[79]—in 'economic development' as a way of solving the problem (while conveniently not confronting Israel)?[80]

Within a framework that stresses the importance of weakening, defeating and delegitimizing rebels, recent events in Sri Lanka (not discussed by Collier, as far as I know) might look quite satisfactory. But such a framework would dangerously ignore, in my view, not only all the civilian casualties and indeed rebel casualties that have been associated with the counter-insurgency, but also the fact that underlying grievances behind the rebellion have simply not been addressed. In fact, with some 290,000 Tamils at one point in internment camps, it was difficult to see any attempt on the government's part to convince the Tamils that they were being treated as equal citizens—to put it very mildly. If there was on the whole an unwillingness to meet Tamil aspirations before this devastating defeat, how much less willingness will there be now? An attempt to deal with Tamil discontent through a military-led development push in the north is not going to be an adequate response.

The second convenient (and, I suggest, politically convenient) exclusion in Collier's work centres on states—in particular, their *reaction* to rebellion. Importantly, if you have no interest in grievances, then you will have no interest in the grievances that arise from abusive counter-insurgency (which may include military intervention by outsiders). The importance of the *counter*-insurgency, by contrast, was emphasized in Graham Brown's comparative work on East Asia in Stewart's *Horizontal inequalities and conflict*. Brown observed that strong regional and ethnic inequalities informed separatist struggles in Aceh, southern Thailand and the Mindanao region of the Philippines, but that in the state of Sabah in Malaysia there was no strong separatist movement. The difference, he found, lay in the actions of the respective states at times of heightened tension. In the first three cases, state actions were perceived as directly discriminatory against marginalized groups, whereas in Sabah the central government in Malaysia made substantial political concessions to the marginalized group. In Aceh, Brown observes,

[78] Portland Trust, 'Economics in peacemaking: lessons from Northern Ireland' (London, May 2007), pp. 1–47.
[79] See esp. Markus Bouillon, 'The failure of big business: on the socio-economic reality of the Middle East peace process', *Mediterranean Politics* 9: 1, Spring 2004, pp. 1–28.
[80] For a fuller discussion of this point, see David Keen, 'Economic initiatives to tackle conflict: bringing politics back in', occasional paper no. 9, Crisis States Research Centre (London: London School of Economics, May 2009).

International Affairs 88: 4, 2012

the first insurgency in 1977 lacked widespread support … But the Indonesian military response was substantial and draconian. Following its experiences in East Timor and other trouble spots, the Indonesian military stamped down on Aceh, including the assassination of suspected GAM [Free Aceh Movement] activists and forced mobilization of civilians. The oppressive and repressive Indonesian military reaction is largely credited for the drastic increase in support experienced by GAM following its re-emergence in 1989.[81]

Brown concludes from his comparative study that while regional and ethnic inequalities create the potential for violence, 'the turn to violence is largely dependent upon the state itself and, in particular, the way in which it responds to protest and nonviolent mobilization'.[82] Stewart, Brown and Langer note that 'highly repressive regimes can prevent conflict (for example, the New Order regime in Indonesia was effective in preventing communal conflict in much of the country)'.[83] But:

An aggressive state can also fuel and sustain a conflict. In Guatemala, and in Indonesia with respect to separatist conflicts, the harsh and aggressive state reaction to rebellion sustained conflict for many years, causing deaths on a massive scale and provoking further rebellion … In Indonesia, the viciousness of the Indonesian armed forces' response to the original, small-scale Acehnese rebellion boosted support for the movement when it re-emerged.[84]

Collier justifies his focus on rebels by saying that it is rebels' actions that determine whether or not there is a civil war. But he also says he is interested in how a small rebellion turns into a large one.[85] Indeed, he stresses that it is very difficult for a small rebellion to turn into a large one—principally because of the 'collective action problem': the incentive for individuals to avoid the physical dangers of rebelling while still perhaps hoping to 'free ride' on the eventual political benefits of rebellion. But if Collier is really interested in the circumstances that influence whether a small rebellion turns into a large one, he needs to interest himself more in the actions of the state. The state's reaction to an initial rebellion—not least the nature of the counter-insurgency—is crucial. Sudan and Sierra Leone offer two examples.[86]

The current abuses by the DRC army, including widespread sexual violence, highlight the importance of refocusing attention on official violence, and not least on the role of soldiers' grievances in fuelling that violence. In general, we need to be profoundly aware of all the horrendous violence that is habitually obscured, encouraged and legitimized when we demonize particular groups of rebels—and this may include the abuse and neglect of civilians who are associated with them,

[81] Graham Brown, 'Horizontal inequalities and separatism in Southeast Asia: a comparative perspective', in Stewart, ed., *Horizontal inequalities and conflict*, p. 279.
[82] Brown, 'Horizontal inequalities and separatism in Southeast Asia', p. 281.
[83] Stewart et al., 'Major findings and conclusions on the relationship between horizontal inequalities and conflict', p. 295.
[84] Stewart et al., 'Major findings and conclusions on the relationship between horizontal inequalities and conflict', p. 295.
[85] Collier, 'Doing well out of war'.
[86] See also Keen, *The benefits of famine*; Keen, *Conflict and collusion in Sierra Leone*. Heavy-handed state repression has also fuelled rebellion in northern Nigeria and Somalia (see e.g. Ken Menkhaus, 'Stabilisation and humanitarian access in a collapsed state: the Somali case', *Disasters* 34: S3, 2010, pp. S320–41.

International Affairs 88: 4, 2012

as Christine Messiant showed powerfully in the case of civilians in UNITA areas of Angola and as we have seen in in Sri Lanka.[87]

The third element in Collier's analysis that would appear to be politically convenient (and dangerous) is the encouragement it lends to western military intervention (not least when a military coup displaces a legitimate government). Noting that 'in low-income societies democracy is dangerous, and in high-income societies dictatorship is dangerous',[88] Collier adds: 'individually, the governments of the bottom billion have too much sovereignty, not too little'.[89] There is, he says, 'some evidence' that AIDS originated 'during a civil war',[90] while Al-Qaeda terrorists have been helped by weak states and civil wars in Afghanistan and Somalia.[91] In this context, bolstering the state becomes a priority and some drastic international interference would seem, on the face of it, to be needed. But what kind of state is to be bolstered, what kinds of violence are to be deemed legitimate, and which groups living in 'rebel' or 'terrorist' areas are going to pay the price?[92] The victims of such statebuilding are hardly considered by Collier. Further, it is worth remembering that many of the relevant rebel groups—easily demonized within a 'statebuilding' framework—were recently operating within the state themselves (the Ba'athists in Iraq, the Taliban in Afghanistan, Al-Shabaab in Somalia) but have been rather 'neatly' turned into rebels through international military intervention. Collier does not seem to have much to say about the rights and wrongs of these processes, but he suggests that the US government's priority in the Middle East has been exporting democracy.[93] In general, he is among those who see development as, in part at least, a security issue—and this is in line with a trend noted by Duffield: 'politicians frequently assert that, in an interdependent world, unless stability exists abroad, it is unlikely to exist at home'.[94] Duffield adds:

> the statistical decline in civil war is actually an inversely expanding zone of international pacification. Occupation is the corollary of containment and the externalization of the West's sovereign frontier. Within the past decade what could be called a *post-interventionary*

[87] Christine Messiant, 'Angola: woe to the vanquished', in Fabrice Weissman, ed., *In the shadow of 'just wars': violence, politics and humanitarian action* (London: Hurst, 2004).
[88] Collier, *Wars, guns and votes*, p. 132.
[89] Collier, *Wars, guns and votes*, p. 199.
[90] Collier, *Wars, guns and votes*, p. 138.
[91] Collier, *Wars, guns and votes*, pp. 138–9.
[92] Menkhaus, 'Stabilisation and humanitarian access in a collapsed state'; Weissman, ed., *In the shadow of 'just wars'*; Antonio Donini, 'Afghanistan: humanitarianism unraveled?', briefing paper (Somerville, MA: Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, 2010).
[93] Collier, *The bottom billion*, p. 42.
[94] Duffield, 'Global civil war', p. 152, citing Blair, 'This is a battle with only one outcome: our victory', *Guardian*, 3 Oct. 2001. Duffield notes further: 'Since the end of the Cold War, the radical interdependence of world events has placed a renewed emphasis on the need for social cohesion at home while, at the same time, urging a fresh wave of intervention abroad to reconstruct weak and fragile states, or remove rogue ones. What is at stake in this war is the West's ability to contain and manage international poverty while maintaining the ability of mass society to live and consume beyond its means. Supported by the massed ranks of career politicians and big business, there is a real possibility that this disastrous formula for sharing the world with others will be defended to the death' (Duffield, 'Global civil war', p. 162). Duffield says international interventions have been relatively effective in halving the number of ongoing wars in the world (Duffield, 'Global civil war'); however, 'as Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq suggest, more difficult is winning the peace' (Duffield, 'Global civil war', p. 158). It is a case of suppression or containment of conflict, rather than resolution (Duffield, 'Global civil war', p. 159).

society has emerged in the global borderland. Within such societies, pacifying low-intensity insurgency is a long-term policing problem for the international community.[95]

Collier's penchant for military intervention and his emphasis on the need for strong states and weak rebels should be seen in this context. Worryingly, Collier also thinks that military coups can be a useful policy instrument. Thus: 'To date, coups have been unguided missiles that have usually hit the wrong target. Rather than be eliminated, perhaps they need a guidance system.'[96]

Collier suggests abandoning aid as the carrot to encourage good conduct in elections and substituting 'security' as a more appropriate carrot. Further (and note the confident tone of the first sentence in particular):

> The international community is going to provide a guidance system that transforms the missile of the coup d'état into an effective domestic restraint on misgovernance. Key members of the international community would make a common commitment that should a government that has committed itself to international standards of elections be ousted by a coup d'état, they would ensure that the government was reinstated, by military intervention if necessary.[97]

Such a coup is deemed by Collier a legitimate reason for military intervention. Further:

> If the government decides to break its commitment by stealing the election, then the ball goes back into the court of the international community. It must decide how to respond. It can, if it chooses, publicly declare that the government has breached the standards for conducting a democratic election and withdraw the commitment to put down a coup.[98]

A brief summary would seem to be: if we don't like a coup, we will carry out a military intervention; if we don't like an election, we will encourage a coup. Although at times Collier seems hostile to coups, he states in strong terms that 'coups need to be harnessed, not eliminated: [that is] the core proposal of this book'.[99] But this is very dangerous ground indeed. For one thing, the record of African military coups in ushering in stable democracies is not an impressive one.[100]

If international military intervention is to be so liberally recommended, moreover, who will carry it out? Collier states: 'Only a few nations have the required military logistics for rapid deployment of sufficient force: America, France, and Britain.'[101] He stresses the need for a *deus ex machina* that will 'introduce accountability' to the states of the bottom billion.[102] Neighbouring countries are to be excluded from Collier's security system on the grounds that they 'are not a natural political grouping' and that they have their own interests, which may not

[95] Duffield, 'Global civil war', p. 159.
[96] Collier, *Wars, guns and votes*, p. 154.
[97] Collier, *Wars, guns and votes*, p. 204.
[98] Collier, *Wars, guns and votes*, p. 205.
[99] Collier, *Wars, guns and votes*, p. 227.
[100] See, notably, Andrew C. Miller, 'Debunking the myth of the "good" coup d'etat in Africa', *African Studies Quarterly* 12: 2, Winter 2011, pp. 45–70.
[101] Collier, *Wars, guns and votes*, p. 211.
[102] Collier, *Wars, guns and votes*, p. 187. In theatre, a *deus ex machina* has long been regarded as a pretty inept plot device—an essentially implausible resolution of a complex situation.

International Affairs 88: 4, 2012

be legitimate. But do not the three countries that are said to be the only ones with the capacity to intervene militarily—Britain, the United States and France—have their own interests, some of which may also be unhelpful? Again, history is not encouraging here. Was it not a (democratic) US government that helped to oust President Salvador Allende from Chile? What about France's damaging historical role in Rwanda and Africa more generally? For the most part, there is a deafening silence in Collier's work on the manifold ways in which major western powers have damaged developing countries in the post-colonial era. As with counter-insurgencies, international 'saviours' are just not subjected to any serious political scrutiny.

Sierra Leone is Collier's principal example of a beneficial military intervention. He notes that the British 'flew in overnight to check the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) forces that were set on occupying the capital, Freetown. The British forces held off the RUF on the outskirts of the capital at a little place called Waterloo.'[103] While the British did indeed play an important part in protecting Freetown, the arrival of British troops needs to be seen in conjunction with a much wider set of processes that helped to bring peace to Sierra Leone (processes on which Collier is largely silent). The British forces were mostly supporting UN and government forces; Guinean forces (in conjunction with Sierra Leonean civil defence forces) were more important in weakening the rebels; and changes in the national army and in the UN forces were also extremely significant.[104] Particularly since 'lessons' about the utility of military intervention have been taken from Sierra Leone and applied to Afghanistan, it is important to get the full story here. Otherwise, we will continue dangerously to present western military intervention as some kind of panacea.

Concluding remarks

Collier's almost exclusive focus on rebels during wartime is unhelpful. In my view, one cannot understand a war—and this applies not only to civil wars but also to the so-called 'war on terror'—without understanding the diverse functions of warfare for actors within the counter-insurgency (or counterterror operations). These functions may be political, economic and psychological—just as they may be for the rebels. If we are going to be successful in reining in conflicts in Africa, for example, we need to recognize that defeating the rebels may be very low down the list of priorities for various actors within the counter-insurgency, just as defeating the terrorists may be quite low down the list of priorities for the very diverse actors who, at least nominally, form part of the counterterrorism effort.[105] It is this complexity of priorities that helps to explain the predominance, very often, of tactics that are predictably counterproductive from a military point of view—such as attacking civilians or even selling weapons to rebels. In many ways, this pattern of warfare represents a mutation of the way government officials

[103] Collier, *Wars, guns and votes*, p. 89.
[104] Keen, *Conflict and collusion in Sierra Leone*.
[105] Keen, *Useful enemies*.

in weak states may collaborate with smugglers in peacetime. In both situations, rebuilding the morale and livelihoods of government actors is likely to be a crucial policy intervention.

In the context of a civil war—and the DRC is a case in point—we need urgently to understand the intensity of some of the grievances within military organizations and how these have fed into atrocities. More generally, where greed has gained a hold, what grievances have made people so violently greedy? These grievances may continue to fuel violence in a postwar period. Emphasizing rebel greed as the driver for war performs a damaging double exclusion, excluding not only grievances but government actors, whether western on in-country. Many parts of Collier's work seem to suggest that it is now unnecessary to investigate either rebel motivation or the society that produced, and responds to, rebellion. In a complex and confusing world, I suspect that this is part of the attraction.

Frances Stewart, by contrast, has not hesitated to convey the complexity of conflict, the importance of the state and the counter-insurgency in shaping the evolution of conflict, the diverse roles of grievances and inequality, and the factors that may prevent sharp horizontal inequalities from spilling over (in some cases) into large-scale violence. In my experience at least, Stewart has consistently encouraged her collaborators to develop detailed understandings of the relevant societies and to pursue their own intellectual interests in the context of a broader comparative project that keeps a very open mind about the likely findings. The results are not always neat—but they are all the better for that.

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