THE DEBATE ON WARLORDISM:
THE IMPORTANCE OF MILITARY LEGITIMACY

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Despite the careless use of the terms 'warlord' and 'warlordism' by the media, both have become increasingly popular among academics, even if some scholars object to their use.[1] This paper, drawing on direct field experience and the ongoing debate, aims on the one hand at reconciling different perspectives, which are often not necessarily at odds with each other, and on the other hand at proposing a definition of warlordism for the social sciences that is closer to the one used so far by historians and at the same time consistent with emerging evidence from the field.

Warlords in historiography

The etymology of the term 'warlord' in the English language is uncertain, but it seems to have started as a translation of '*Kriegsherr*', a term used to indicate German war leaders and, later, a title attributed to emperors. Whatever the origin, the term first found widespread academic use among sinologists to indicate the military rulers who abounded in China during the republican period. In the 1980s, mediaeval historians started applying the term to the history of Europe and Japan.[2] During the 1990s, historians of antiquity also started using the term to indicate a blurred category of local rulers who entertained an ambiguous relationship with the central government towards the end of the Roman Empire. The most advanced theorisation of such warlordism comes from Dick Whittaker,[3] who describes a process in which officers on active service were becoming increasingly powerful locally, through their attachment to the land in regions in which they served, while state control over the exercise of private patronage was becoming weaker. At the same time landlords were turning to militarism, as with the increasing concentration of property ownership came control of large numbers of dependants who could be mustered for military action. Whittaker sees in this process something very similar to what happened in China in 1911-1939, which in his interpretation was the product of two separate forces: the raising of local militias by the gentry (still remaining loyal to the Beijing government), and the breakdown of the Chinese army into personal armies of various generals. Not only did the two start to merge together, but the gentry and their networks, including local bureaucrats, turned out to be necessary to the warlords for extracting surpluses and securing control of the land, and with it the supply of soldiers. This would also explain why warlords had no radical political goals. In the case of the Roman Empire, the merging

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[1] See, for example, Daniel Compagnon, 'Somali armed movements', in C. Clapham (ed.), *African Guerrillas*, James Currey, Oxford, 1998, p. 83.
[2] See for example, on European history: A. P. Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men. Scotland AD 80-1000*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984; and Katherine Simms, *From Kings to Warlords. The Changing Political Structure of Gaelic Ireland in the Later Middle Ages*, Woodbridge: Boydell, 1987. On Japan, see G. Elison & B. L. Smith (eds), *Warlords, Artists and Commoners. Japan in the Sixteenth Century*, Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1981.
[3] Dick Whittacker, 'Landlords and warlords in the later roman empire', in John Rich and Graham Shipley (eds), *War and society in the Roman World*, London & New York: Routledge, 1993.

took place between the militarised rural gentry and the Germanic war-leaders (*Kriegsherren*) and their armies.[4]

If we explored the historiography of a number of countries afflicted by lasting turmoil, we might easily recognise that alternative terms might be in use to describe politico-military actors who have much in common with these warlords. A noteworthy example is that of *caudillismo* in Latin America, which is one of the most popular concepts among historians of the region and describes military strongmen leading private armies and using their military might to achieve power.[5]

A side effect of globalisation or a post-Cold War phenomenon?

The fact that historians are increasingly finding the concept of 'warlord' useful for the study of so many different periods, and therefore are re-evaluating and redefining a number of figures from the past, should already sound as a warning against assuming that the recent popularity of the term among political scientists and the public at large necessarily reflects a genuine upsurge in warlordism in conflict areas. The most popular interpretation of this alleged upsurge links it to the globalisation process, and it owes its popularity to the debate on 'new wars' and globalisation. The perfectly reasonable argument that warlords have to be able to "act financially and politically in the international system without interference from the state in which he is based",[6] is expanded to imply that globalisation played a key role in creating new opportunities for warlords to finance their own activities and therefore in making possible, if not causing, the upsurge in warlordism.[7] While it is certainly useful to draw attention towards the issue of the interaction of warlords with the international system, the impact of this aspect on the post-1990 environment might be overstated, especially since it predates contemporary globalisation. In the case of the Chinese warlords, for example, such interaction with the international system was already present, at least in the form of relations with neighbouring countries and with international criminal networks.[8] The involvement of the Burmese warlords/druglords/insurgents with international criminal warlords also predates the 1990s,[9] which is when globalisation is said to have taken off and the debate about it

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[4] The literature on Chinese warlordism is quite abundant. On the warlords-gentry coalition see Jerome Ch`en, *The military-gentry coalition: China under the warlords,* Toronto: University of Toronto-York University Joint Centre on Modern East Asia, 1979. For a review, see Edward McCord, *The Power of the Gun, the Emergence of Modern Chinese Warlordism*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

[5] As far as I know the connection between warlordism and *caudillismo* was first suggested by Michael Riekenberg, 'Warlords. Eine Probleskizze', *Comparativ*, 5/6 (1999), with particular reference to Mexico. For a discussion of the concept, see Michael Riekenberg, 'Caudillismus. Zu einem Grundbegriff der spanishen and hispanoamerikanischer Geschichte', *Neue Politische Literatur*, 40:2 (1995). On Mexico, see also Dudley Ankerson, *Agrarian warlord : Saturnino Cedillo and the Mexican revolution in San Luis Potosí*, DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1984.

[6] Mark Duffield, *Post-modern Conflict, Aid Policy and Humantarian Conditionality*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1997. The importance of globalisation and the 'chaos' deriving from it is stressed also in Philip G. Cerny, 'Neomedievalism, Civil War, and the New Security Dilemma: Globalisation as a Durable Disorder', *Civil Wars* 1:1 (Spring 1998), pp.36-64; and in Paul Jackson, 'Warlords as Alternative Forms of Governance', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 14:2 (2003), pp.133-134.

[7] See in particular John MacKinlay ('Globalisation and Insurgency', *Adelphi Paper* 352, London: IISS, 2002, pp.15-29), who is one of the few authors who illustrates in detail what trends might have favoured the emergence of warlordism and other criminalised insurgencies.

[8] On the trade of weapons in warlords' China, see Anthony B. Chan, *Arming the Chinese: the Western Armaments Trade in warlord China, 1920-1928*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982.

[9] Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt. Opium and Insurgency Since 1948*, Bangkok: White Lotus, 1994; and Martin Smith, *Burma, Insurgency and the Politicis of Ethnicity*, London: Zed Press, 1991, pp.314-315.

started; as does UNITA's smuggling of diamonds and other goods.[10] Another important issue is that it is not clear what impact the globalisation of crime had on countries whose borders have always been porous and whose financial systems remain comparatively primitive. It looks, therefore, rather problematic to explain any increase in warlordism through the growing globalisation. In fact, one of the most serious researchers on warlordism in Western Africa, William Reno, while stressing that commercial and smuggling networks played a crucial role in allowing the warlords of Western Africa to operate, does not argue that such networks developed specifically during the 1990s.[11] It would rather seem that opportunities for profiteering from international criminal networks were already in place long before the 1990s, when they actually started being exploited by non-state armed groups in a number of African countries. By focusing the attention on post-1990 developments, the risk is to ignore the considerable amount of literature available on these networks in earlier periods. The one real change in the early 1990s that is relevant was the collapse of border controls in the area of the former Soviet Union, and it clearly seems to have had an impact on conflicts within this area and in the neighbouring regions. Its global impact, however, remains more difficult to pin down. There might be a risk here of globalisation being used as a one-fits-all explanation for all sorts of trouble, removing the need for more wide-ranging research on the internal contradictions of those states which are weakening or collapsing.

Another interpretation of the upsurge of warlordism attributes it to the end of the Cold War and the collapse of ideologies, which allowed warlords to proliferate and displace ideological and reformist guerrillas, who lost the support of international powers.[12] Given the current status of research on the subject, this interpretation seems to be more firmly grounded than that linking warlordism to globalisation. While it is certainly not true, as we have seen, that warlordism is anything new, the argument that it might characterise a new phase of internal conflict in the developing world, following the highly ideologised 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, is consistent with available evidence. The problem remains that the current stress on the revival of warlordism during the 1990s might well be overstated, given the paucity of efforts aimed at tracking warlordism in the conflicts of 1960-1990. Such overstatement could be reflecting, to some extent at least, a change of attitude among scholars trying to interpret what is happening in the world's civil wars, more than a real change on the ground.

Indeed, if we started re-examining the conflicts of 1960-1990 with a fresh mind, we might see warlords popping up quite frequently, even when it had been assumed that purely ideological or national conflicts were fought. In fact, in a number of studies concerning wars of the Cold War period the term 'warlord' and the concept of warlordism were already being used, if sometimes only implicitly. The applicability of the 'warlord' label to the protagonists of the conflict in Lebanon is somewhat controversial, as this tends to be done rather indiscriminately, but it might be appropriate in the case of at least some protagonists of that

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[10] Although the diamonds trade escalated from 1992, when UNITA seized major producing areas, it was already going on in the early 1980s, as was the trade in timber and ivory. See Robert R. Burke, *UNITA - A Case Study in Modern Insurgency*, Quantico, Virginia: Marine Corps Command and Staff College, 1984; Christian Dietrich, 'UNITA's diamond mining and exporting capacity', in Jakkie Cilliers and Christian Dietrich (eds), *Angola's War Economy*, Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2000; Jakkie Potgieter, '"Taking aid from the devil himself": UNITA's support structures', in Jakkie Cilliers and Christian Dietrich (eds), *Angola's War Economy*, Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2000; and R. Reeve & S. Ellis, 'An Insider's Account of the South African Security Forces' Role in the Ivory Trade', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 13 (1995), pp.227-243.
[11] See William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998.
[12] The most interesting formulation of this process is to my knowledge found in William Reno, 'The Politics of Insurgency in Collapsing States', *Development and Change*, 33:5 (2002), pp.837-858.

civil war.[13] The politico-military actors of the civil war in Chad have also been extensively described as warlords in the scholarly literature.[14] Depending on what definition of warlord is adopted, the druglords who populate the recent history of Burma could also fit in.[15]

More to the point, in quite a few conflicts of the pre-1990 period we can see traces of warlordism, even if few scholars have so far been bothered to identify its presence. Although not much scholarly work has been carried out on the war in the Yemen in 1962-1970, it appears obvious that the conflict was characterised by the strong role played by tribal chieftains who built up their position getting supplies from both sides and recruiting large private armies.[16] Within Eritrea there is now a tendency among some former participants to re-evaluate the history of the liberation war and use the conceptual framework of warlordism to benchmark its different phases, especially with regard to the tendency of field commanders to drift away from the insurgent leadership in the early years of the insurgency.[17] The emergence of warlordism in parts of Sudan during the 1980s is clearly documented in the literature, although with little explicit use of the term.[18]

We find traces of warlordism even among the classical case studies of cold war insurgencies. Jonas Savimbi of UNITA is a perfect example of some contradictions in the current usage of the concept of warlord.[19] Having been a 'cold warrior' until 1992, he suddenly became a warlord as Cuban and USSR support for the Angolan government ceased, without any obvious evidence that Savimbi himself changed his attitudes or his aims. Savimbi's case shows well how warlords, as well as ideological movements, could benefit from the support of foreign states. The Afghan case is another example, although not so obvious. Although it has been argued that warlordism in Afghanistan only emerged after the Soviet withdrawal, it can actually be traced back to the *jihad* period (1978-1992).[20]

In other words, the apparent upsurge of warlordism after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union could have been magnified not only by the lack of research into

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[13] See Elizabeth Picard, *Lebanon, a Shattered Country: Myths and Realites of the Wars in Lebanon,* New York: Holmes & Meier, 1996; and Kamal Dib, *Warlords and Merchants : the Lebanese Business and Political Establishment*, Reading: Ithaca Press, 2004.

[14] Mario J. Azevedo, *Roots of Violence, a History of War in Chad*, London: Routledge, 1998; and Robert Buijtenhuijs, *Le Frolinat et les guerres civiles du Tchad (1977-1984)*, Paris: Karthala, 1987, pp.320-325.

[15] On Khun Sa, see Alfred W. McCoy, 'Requiem for a Drug Lord: State and Commodity in the Career of Khun Sa', in Josiah Heyman (ed.), *States and Illegal Practices*, Oxford: Berg, 1999, pp.129-168. See also Lintner (1994); Ronald D. Renard, *The Burmese Connection. Illegal Drugs and the Making of the Golden Triangle*, Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1996; and Victor S. Kaufman, 'Trouble in the Golden Triangle: The United States, Taiwan and the 93rd Nationalist Division', *The China Quarterly*, 116 (June 2001), pp.440-456.

[16] See Fred Halliday, *Arabia without Sultans*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974, pp.116-118.

[17] 'Let's Not Give Room To "Warlordism" in Eritrea', Editorial published at http://www.nharnet.com, 28 October 2004.

[18] On Sudan, see Douglas H. Johnson, 'The Sudan's People Liberation Army and the Problem of Factionalism', in Clapham, Christopher (ed.), *African Guerrillas*, Oxford: James Currey, 1998; and Gerard Prunier, 'Sudan: An Exhausted Country', *News of the Nordic Africa Institute*, 2 (May 1999).

[19] Kirsti Stuvoy, 'War Economy and the Social Order of Insurgencies. An Analysis of the Internal Structure of UNITA's War Economy', *Research Unit of Wars, Armament and Development, Arbeitspapier* 3, Hamburg: Universität Hamburg - IPW, 2002; Dominic Johnson, 'Warlords außer Kontrolle. Angolas andauernde Tragödie und der Krieg in der Region', *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, 3 (1999), pp.336-343; and Michael Bollig, 'Zur Ökonomie des Krieges: Die Gewalt und die Geschäfte der afrikanischen Warlords', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, (9 January 2001).

[20] On the origins of warlordism in Afghanistan, see Antonio Giustozzi, 'Respectable Warlords? The Politics Of State-Building In Post-Taleban Afghanistan', *Crisis States Working Paper* 33, London: Crisis States Research Centre, LSE, 2003a, pp.4-5.

the existence of such networks in earlier times, but also by the assumption that warlords necessarily must fund their armies through involvement in criminal or other commercial activities. Of course, many warlords are indeed involved with international criminal networks, but it is not clear why this involvement should be an integral part of the definition. Indeed, Chinese warlords were often funded by foreign powers too, such as Japan or the Soviet Union. If this assumption is abandoned, documenting the alleged upsurge in warlordism in the 1990s and in the early years of the twenty-first century becomes harder, not because there would be fewer warlords after 1992, but because there would be many more before that date.

Usage of the term among political scientists

The term 'warlord' has been in vogue since the late 1980s among Africanists, who used it to indicate regional military rulers or armed politicians who did not display much political ideology nor reformist aims. The usage of the term spread so widely that it is now unlikely that the reader will fail to come across it in any study of internal conflict in Africa. As we have seen, if the popularity of the term 'warlord' is rapidly growing among political scientists it is in part because the way scholars look at conflicts has changed; but this popularity can also be taken as a sign of the growing awareness of the need to address some important issues in the analysis of armed conflict. At the same time, opinion is still rather divided about how exactly to define a 'warlord', not least because the term is now applied to situations as varied as Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and the Balkans. This is an issue of major importance, because depending on the definition different theoretical conclusions will be drawn. The temptation to describe any leader of militia (i.e. irregular armed forces) as a warlord should be resisted. The tendency to stretch the term too far can be found in much of the literature and it is potentially damaging, because it is likely to invalidate its heuristic potential and create confusion rather than provide a better understanding of internal conflict.

On at least a few key points there is substantial agreement among scholars on what a 'warlord' is:

1) he has full and autonomous control over a military force, which he can use at will;

2) he operates at sub-state level, in regions from which the state has withdrawn or has in any case lost its monopoly over violence;

3) he aims at benefiting as much as possible from state disorder, collapse or weakening;

4) he is a neopatrimonialist, that is he is only or primarily concerned with his own benefit and does not fight for a 'superior' cause, although he might claim to represent regional or sectarian interests;

5) he uses violence and coercion to maintain his power;

6) he relies on a hard core of supporters ('officers' or 'commanders'), but most of his troops are forcibly recruited, which helps to explain the inherently unstable and sometimes even flimsy nature of warlord polities;

7) he lacks interest in changing the nature of the state that he is trying to overthrow or replace, if indeed he is interested at all in seizing the state.

A definition which included all these points would be suitable to describe people like Charles Taylor, Farad Aideed, Jonas Savimbi, Ismail Khan, Rashid Dostum, and many others. There are, however, some contentious points, about which the opinion of scholars diverges. The

most widely disputed point is whether warlords are predominantly motivated by economic aims or, to be more explicit, by *financial greed*. The idea was first launched by David Keen,[21] and found support mainly among scholars studying African conflicts, especially if they have a background as economists.[22] However, some critical voices, such as Mats Berdal, emerged to point out how the interest of warlords in economic profit might also be related to their need to maintain armies and reward their followers, and therefore cannot be necessarily ascribed to pure financial greed.[23] Preliminary evidence from the Afghan case seems to support Berdal's view.[24] There are certainly actors in most civil wars who are trying to personally benefit financially from the conflict. Keen's argument that war confers legitimacy to actions that otherwise would be seen as crimes is a very good one,[25] and it explains why certain characters accumulated huge fortunes during civil wars; but it does not necessarily explain why civil wars have tended to last so long during the past three decades. At any given time during the course of the war some of these actors might have an interest in perpetuating the conflict. However, once fortunes are accumulated, war and the uncertainty of outcome which characterise it become a problem. The new rich become potential targets of enemies, as well of friends not endowed with such riches, and develop an interest in the stability that peace could bring about. Therefore their interest in peace offsets the interest in continuing war of other actors who have not yet succeeded in accumulating sufficiently large fortunes. It is true that the 'globalised' economy offers greater opportunities to safely invest away from the country in conflict,[26] therefore potentially removing any interest in restoring law and order in the country in conflict; but in any case the war profiteer is unlikely to be able to use the conflict-ridden country solely as a source of revenue. Considerations concerning the social status of the warlord or entrepreneur aside, a large amount of redistribution is needed to keep an army going. Too ruthless a profiteering on the part of the warlord is likely to have a very destabilising effect on the militiamen. Moreover, the accumulation of capital through war is likely to stabilise after an initial rapid increase, as war is unlikely to generate a virtuous economic cycle capable of sustaining ever greater returns. Its importance compared to the riches accumulated, and the potential return deriving from investing these, progressively decrease in importance, making peace a more attractive option.

Even leaving aside the issue of grievance, at the very least it should be argued that more research is needed to document the widespread and overwhelming drive towards personal enrichment among warlords, as opposed to the drive towards personal power. Interestingly economic literature on this topic seems to assume that greed can only be financial. Of course, greed for power is more difficult to measure, but nonetheless very real.

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[21] David Keen, 'The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil Wars', *Adelphi Paper* 320, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. See also Adekaye Adebajo & David Keen, 'Banquet for Warlords', *The World Today* (July 2000), pp.8-10.

[22] See, for example, Mats Berdal & David Malone (eds), *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars*, Boulder: Westview Press, 2000; and Paul Collier & Anke Hoeffler *Greed and grievance in civil war?*, Washington, DC: World Bank, 2001. Stefam Mair, 'The New World of Privatised Violence', *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft*, 2 (2003) refers more explicitly to warlords.

[23] Mats Berdal, 'How "New" are "New Wars"? Global Economic Change and the Study of Civil War', *Global Governance* (October 2003). For a more general critique of Collier's work, see Laurie Nathan, '"The Frightful Inadequacy of Most of the Statistics": A Critique of Collier and Hoeffler on Causes of Civil War', *Crisis States Discussion Paper*, 11, London: Crisis States Research Centre, LSE, 2005.

[24] See Antonio Giustozzi, 'From warlords to businessmen?', paper presented at the War Economies Expert Seminar, Plymouth, 17-19 June 2005a.

[25] Keen (1998) p.12.

[26] Dietrich Jung, 'Confronting a Paradox: The Political Economy of Intra-State Wars', in D. Jung (ed.), *Shadow Globalization, Ethnic Conflicts and New Wars: A Political Economy of Intra-State War*, London: Routledge, 2003, p.20.

Related to this issue is another matter of debate, which is whether warlords have necessarily to be *predatory and parasitic*. This point is made by many,[27] and it goes hand in hand with the assertion that warlords do not have any interest in providing services and public goods;[28] but it has recently been contradicted by a number of studies on some Chinese warlords, which showed how the provision of welfare or even upholding 'progressive' ideas were not incompatible with warlordism.[29] It should also be considered that it is rather controversial to state that relying on sources of revenue such as taxation or customs by non-state actors can be described as a criminal activity, especially once a state has collapsed or has withdrawn from a certain area of the country. Evidence emerging from my field work in Afghanistan also confirms that a more nuanced approach is needed and that too rigid a characterisation of warlords as pure predators is often contradicted by evidence, especially if this is meant in opposition to state-controlling elites which are instead assumed not to be predatory. For example, it appears obvious that in Afghanistan at least some warlords tried to institutionalise what used to be looting and plundering and transform it into something more akin to a regular taxation. In this sense they therefore resemble Mancur Olson's stationary bandits, although I would reject the definition as bandits as misleading. In such cases it could be argued that warlords are not necessarily worse predators than states themselves, not only because they may provide a few social services and infrastructure, but most of all because security from external threats, which in some cases warlords genuinely offer, is also a very important service. Forms of patronage, such as the creation of redundant militia units, can also be seen as services by sections of the population (a sort of unemployment benefit) and therefore contribute some legitimacy to the warlords, possibly more effectively than some low-quality education or health system.[30] At least from a heuristic point of view, it looks more appropriate to think in terms of a confrontation of different forces, all intent on raising revenue and all defending/promoting some particular alignment of social groups or coalition of individuals,[31] rather than write some of the players (the warlords) off as 'bandits' and 'criminals'.

The issue of the predatory character of warlords leads us to the problem of the local or partial *legitimacy* of the warlord. While most authors would maintain that warlords do not have any legitimacy and that greed far outweighs grievance among their motivations, others point out that a warlord might often have a genuine local constituency, possibly developed only for opportunistic reasons but nonetheless real. This is implicit in Susan Woodward's argument that a warlord might "seek popular allegiance on the basis of the fear and insecurity generated by the absence of reliable authorities".[32] Colin Darch goes even further when he states that

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[27] See John MacKinlay, 'Defining warlords', *International Peacekeeping*, 7:1 (2000), p.49; J. A. G. Roberts, 'Warlordism in China', *Review of African Political Economy*, 16:45/46 (Summer 1989), pp.26-34; Riekenberg (1999); and Bollig (2001).

[28] Christopher Clapham, 'I signori della Guerra in Africa', in Maria Cristina Ercolessi (ed.), *I signori della guerra*, Napoli: L'ancora del mediterraneo, 2002; and 'Introduction: analysing African insurgencies', in C. Clapham (ed.), *African guerrillas*, James Currey, Oxford, 1998.

[29] Winston Hsieh, 'The Ideas and Ideals of a Warlord: Ch'en Chiung-ming (1878-1933)', *Papers on China*, 16 (1962), pp.198-252; Alfred H. Y. Lin, 'Building and Funding a Warlord Regime. The Experience of Chen Jitang in Guangdong, 1929-1936', *Modern China*, 28:2 (April 2002), pp.177-212; and 'Warlord, Social Welfare and Philanthropy. The Case of Guangzhou Under Chen Jitang, 1929-1936', *Modern China*, 30:2, (April 2004), pp.151-198.

[30] This point is made most convincingly by Reno (2002), pp.840-841.

[31] This argument is developed in Timothy Raeymaekers, 'Collapse Or Order? Questioning State Collapse In Africa', *Conflict Research Group Working Paper* 1, Gent: University of Gent, 2005, at www.psw.ugent.be/crg/publications/ working%20paper/QuestioningStateCollapse.pdf.

[32] Susan L. Woodward, 'Failed States. Warlordism and "Tribal" Warfare', *The Naval War College Review* (Spring 1999).

being "legitimate local rulers, either by tradition or by appointment" is part of the definition of a warlord.[33] However, the issue of the legitimacy of warlords probably cannot be resolved without distinguishing different types of legitimacy.

Another point of contention is whether a warlord necessarily controls a well defined *territorial base*. McCord, for example, argues that this is not necessarily true;[34] but Battera is of the opposite opinion.[35] While there is no doubt that military-political actors have been operating without a fixed territorial base in both China and Africa,[36] the question remains whether these should be defined as warlords. Battera has a point when he argues that the lack of a territorial base would prevent the warlord from collecting taxes, but it would still be possible to have access to other sources of revenue. A stronger argument against the 'roaming warlords' would be that it looks unlikely that a relatively organised military force, capable of guaranteeing security of groups of the population, might be maintained without a stable territorial base. Olivier Roy made a point recently that without a least an "embrional" administrative capability, a warlord would not be able to raise and maintain war-fighting armies.[37] A similar point is implicit in the view that war-fighting capabilities are a requisite for being a warlord.[38] It could be added that it would be opportune to justify the adoption of the term '*war*lord' with reference to some effective war-fighting capabilities. There are more important reasons why territorially organised warlords should be conceptually isolated from other sub-state politico-military actors. Military leaders operate according to a logic which belongs to war more than politics, even when they actually play politics, and it is necessary to keep this in mind when their actions are analysed.[39] For the time being it may suffice to add that offering some form of protection to the population is very useful for the warlord to gain some form of legitimisation, which is not necessarily contradicted by the fact that many so-called warlords seem rather busy terrorising local inhabitants. After all, this is what states have been doing for a long time.

A view which is shared by most authors, but with which I do not agree, is that the warlord does not aim to *conquer the state*, but rather to perpetuate the state of war and state desegregation.[40] While it is accurate to say that warlords are not as devoted to conquering state power as ideological movements are, most of them probably would not mind such an achievement. The statement that warlords do not seek to institutionalise their position is not

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[33] Colin Darch, 'Are there warlords in provincial Mozambique? Questions of the social base of MNR banditry', *Review of African Political Economy*, 45/46 (1989), pp.34-49.

[34] See McCord (1993), pp.324-325, fn.110.

[35] Federico Battera, 'Le incertezze della deriva warlordista. L'importanza della dimensione locale nei conflitti contemporanei in Africa', paper presented at the Annual Conference of SISP (*Societá Italiana di Scienza Politica*), Septembern 2004, p.3.

[36] On China see McCord (1993), pp.324-325, fn.110. On Africa, the most obvious example is that of Sierra Leone.

[37] Olivier Roy, 'Afghanistan: la difficile reconstruction d'un Etat', *Cahiers de Chaillot*, 73, Paris: Institut d'Etudes de Securité, 2004, p.34.

[38] James E. Sheridan, *Chinese Warlord: The Career of Feng Yu-hsiang*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966, p.1; Hussein M. Adam, 'Somalia: militarism, warlordism or democracy?' , *Review of African Political Economy*, 54 (1992), p.21.

[39] A strong case for the need to analyse war (and hence military leaders) according to its own logic, which is distinct from political logic (or, for that matter, from the logic of political economy), is made by Stathis N. Kalyvas, 'The Sociology of Civil Wars: Warfare and Armed Groups', unpublished paper, n.d., at http://www.armedgroups.org/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=26.

[40] See for example Ken Menkhaus, 'Warlordism and the War on Terrorism', *Foreign Policy in Focus* (26 December 2001).

correct even in the African case,[41] let alone in the Afghan one. In Afghanistan, warlords have been trying hard to become appointed as ministers and governors, and in Africa at least some of them have clearly tried to obtain legitimisation by seeking to win presidential elections (Taylor and Savimbi). Their troops' lack of ideological commitment is more important in explaining why warlords rarely succeed in winning wars, rather than the supposed lack of interest of the warlords themselves, since it weakens the capabilities of their armies. There are, moreover, a few examples of warlords who did win wars, or nearly so, such as Taylor in Liberia and the Shura-i Nezar group in Afghanistan, as well as the warlords who helped propel Rakhmonov to power in Tajikistan. Savimbi's determination to conquer Luanda should not be put in doubt, even if he failed to achieve his aim. The misunderstanding about the warlords' attitude towards winning or ending wars derives from the usage of the terms as a characterisation or caricature of individuals, rather than as an analytical ideal type. Often 'real' warlords were in fact very apt at transforming into politicians (see Taylor in Liberia), businessmen, generals, etcetera, and can often make an even better living out of a peace achieved on their own terms. After all, politicians and businessmen have access to sources of revenue and to criminal networks as much as warlords do, but they do not risk their lives and status as much.

A new typology: warlords and entrepreneurs

At least some of the contentious issues highlighted above could be resolved or clarified by splitting non-state military-political actors into different types, rather than unifying them under the single label of 'warlords'. As more research on warlordism becomes available, it appears increasingly clear that the concept of warlord is unsuited to cover all of these actors.[42] However, rather than getting rid of the warlord label altogether, it might be more useful to systematise the use of different definitions for the various types of actors involved in civil conflict. The main concern of this paper is to isolate legitimate military leaders from other non-state, non-ideological politico-military actors.

One of the differences between legitimate and non-legitimate military leaders is that the former have the support of at least one established social group, i.e. military commanders (and maybe troops). Such support, in turn, guarantees to the warlords at least some autonomous structures and organisation (i.e. not tribal nor subject to control by traditional authorities), which are instrumental in maintaining territorial control. As a result, among other things they are able to provide security to at least part of the population of a relatively large area, or to exercise control over it by force. We could therefore define a warlord as a non-state politico-military actor who has military legitimacy,[43] but little or no political legitimacy. This definition, whose merits will be discussed below, leaves aside a lot of other non-state military-political actors, whom we will call 'entrepreneurs'. At least three types of entrepreneurs can be found in the literature, sometimes overlapping.

The term 'conflict entrepreneurs' already enjoys a certain popularity and is defined as:

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[41] Alice Hills, 'Warlords, Militia and Conflict in Contemporary Africa: a Re-examination of Terms', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 8:1 (1997).

[42] On this see Compagnon (1998); and Christopher Clapham, 'Rethinking African States', *African Security Review*, 10:3 (2001).

[43] I use the term with the meaning adopted by such authors as Kelly DeVries, 'Harold Godwinson in Wales: Military Legitimacy in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in Richard P. Abels and Bernard S. Bachrach (eds), *The Normans and Their Adversaries at War: Essays in Memory of C. Warren Holliste*, Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2001; and Mary B. Anderson & Mark Duffield, 'Doing the right thing?', *New Routes*, 3:3 (1998).

an individual who takes the necessary and deliberate steps to ignite a violent conflict by utilising a specific situation or in order to gain something through the exploitation of new power relationships.[44]

'Entrepreneurs of violence' do not seem to differ very much from conflict entrepreneurs.[45] The term which I propose to use here, 'military-political entrepreneurs', has only been used occasionally so far, although it is clearly derived from the more common 'political entrepreneur', whose exact meaning is still a matter of debate. Military-political entrepreneurs could, however, be provisorily described as individuals who are willing to take a gamble and invest resources in exploiting or creating an opportunity to gain influence and/or power through the use, among other things, of military force. The main advantage of this term, as opposed to conflict entrepreneurs, is that it highlights the political ambitions of these actors.

The "legitimate local rulers" mentioned by Susan Woodward include characters such as tribal leaders or traditional notables, but are also increasingly drawn from the ranks of the 'entrepreneurs'. These are not traditional tribal or clan leaders, but "ambitious modern politicians, former army officers, civil servants, members of parliament, merchants or university professors";[46] and owe their position not to any military role that they might have played, or to the traditional influence exercised by their family, but to their political skills in emerging as representatives of the local population from among a larger number of elders and notables. Even if they have militias under their command, their ability to use them is far from being as unrestrained as in the case of a genuine warlord. Tribal traditions and the need to play by the rules mean that these 'legitimate local rulers'/political entrepreneurs still have to consult other elders and notables before starting some military adventure, and in many cases they will not be able to mobilise at will. However, at the same time they differ substantially from traditional, pre-modern local rulers, in that they have a much better knowledge of the external world, of what opportunities exist to exploit and dangers to avoid, and of how to manipulate foreign governments and the international community. They are also likely to have access to financial resources well beyond those available to the landlord class, from which their more traditional counterparts are likely to come. The latter are today the older generation of tribal and clan leaders, who still play a role in some circumstances, albeit rapidly fading away, being replaced by political entrepreneurs who are much stronger competitors in the current environment. Examples of these military-political entrepreneurs who succeed in legitimising themselves by seizing control of tribal structures include some of the strongmen who controlled southern and eastern Afghanistan after the fall of the Taleban, men like Gul Agha Shirzai of Kandahar or Abd-el Qader of Nangrahar. They have at least the support of their own tribe or clan, if of nobody else. A land which offers many examples of such clan-based military-political entrepreneurs is Somalia, where the leaders of several factions had a considerable degree of local legitimacy within their own clan.[47] Of course not all military-political entrepreneurs mobilise support along clan lines. The case of Sierra Leone

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[44] The term was originally used by Espen Barth Eide, 'Conflict entrepreneurship: On the art of waging civil war', *PRIO Report*, 4 (1997), pp.41-69. The quotation is from Espen Barth Eide, *Between Rationalism and Reflectivism – Constructivist Security Theory and the Collapse of Yugoslavia*, Hovedfag-thesis, Institute of Political Science, University of Oslo, 1998, p.75.

[45] The term is found in Peter Lock, 'From the Economics of War to Economies of Peace. The dynamics of shadow globalisation and the diffusion of armed violence as an obstacle to build peace', Text presented at the Hamburg Winterschool on Crisis Prevention and Peace Support, 18 November 2002, at http://www.peter-lock.de/txt/winterschool.html, who also used the term politico-military entrepreneurs extensively.

[46] On this see Compagnon (1998), p.83.

[47] See Compagnon (1998). See also MacKinlay (2002), pp.54-66.

is a good example of the use of a vulgarised version of radical ideologies to mobilise support among alienated youth.[48]

An issue which arises at this point concerns the role of violence and conflict entrepreneurs who are not interested much in political aims, but have more immediate, short-term aims, such as financial greed or revenge. It is actually far from easy to identify any such actor among the key players of contemporary conflicts. Certainly some might have been acting behind the scenes, encouraging more politically-minded actors in the hope to reap some financial or other benefit. As such, they are more likely to be financiers than actors involved in the first person. One could cite the example of the traders who allegedly financed the Taleban movement in its early days, with the aim of restoring security on the roads and therefore improve the profitability of their businesses.[49] However, when terms like 'conflict entrepreneurs' are used, they are mainly meant to indicate actors who want to create a situation of permanent violence and chaos for their own (non-political) gain, rather then supporting an armed movement in order to restore peace. The existence of such characters has not been demonstrated yet. It is not clear whether beneficiaries of instability in Western Africa, such as diamond traders, actually invested in the continuation of the war, other than accepting to trade with insurgent groups. Some authors argue that the RUF's leadership itself had no interest in politics and was only motivated by greed,[50] therefore qualifying as entrepreneurs of violence, but this view is disputed by others.[51] It is not clear what influence the traders, smugglers and financiers who thrive in the shadow of factions involved in civil conflict have over the leadership of such factions. It would be necessary to demonstrate that they are able to push for a prolongation of a conflict, but this has not emerged yet from field research.

Summing up, a typology of contemporary military-political actors could be the one shown in Table 1. Having separate categories helps to reconcile data collected in the field with existing theories of the emergence of internal conflicts. The greed/grievance dichotomy, for example, would appear to portray the behaviour of the conflict/violence entrepreneurs more than of the warlords or politico-military entrepreneurs. Preliminary evidence from field research suggests that warlords tend to subordinate the gathering of resources to predominantly political aims. One good reason might be that because of the specific requirements of war-making that characterise warlords and military-political entrepreneurs, as opposed to conflict and violence engineering, which can be practiced from remote locations or without direct participation, the lives of the former are subjected to high risks. Their chances of getting killed or arrested, or of being forced to flee, are indeed too high for personal enrichment to be a driving factor and the main aim of their activities. Even more important is probably the fact that political concerns are an inevitable by-product in the establishment of big organisations.

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[48] I. Abdullah & P. Muana, 'The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone', in C. Clapham (ed.), *African Guerrillas*, James Currey, Oxford, 1998.

[49] See Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2000, p.27.

[50] Ian Smillie *et al.*, *The Heart Of The Matter: Sierra Leone, Diamonds & Human Security*, Ottawa: Partnership Africa Canada, 2000.

[51] Abdullah & Muana (1998), p.192, who describe the RUF as "an armed movement with a political objective". See also Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War Youth & Resources in Sierra Leone*, Oxford: James Currey, 1996.

Table 1: Typology

Type	Description	Examples
Non-political violence/conflict entrepreneurs	financiers acting behind the scene or leaders of violent movements motivated only by greed	?
Traditional local rulers	tribal leaders who mobilise support from within their own clan or tribe	Bacha Khan Zadran, Paktia, Afghanistan
Clan-based military-political entrepreneurs	modern political or military actors who seize control of tribal or clan structures	Gul Agha Shirzai, Kandahar, Afghanistan; Abd-al Qader, Nangarhar, Afghanistan; most of Somalia's factional leaders
Non-clan based military-political entrepreneurs	modern political or military actors who seize control of political groups or idelogies to mobilise support	Sierra Leone's RUF
Warlords	military commanders who have the loyalty of the military class and enter politics either because "orphan" of a state or as the result of an evolutionary process	Ismail Khan, Rashid Dostum, Mohammed Mohaqqeq and others in Afghanistan; the Chinese warlords; Safarali Kenjayev, Ghaffar Mirzoev and others in Tajikistan

The resilience of warlords

Distinguishing warlords and entrepreneurs also helps understanding why some non-state, non ideological politico-military actors are more resilient than others. Because of the structures that they have to put in place, warlords are in many cases able to provide at least one service to at least part of the population: that is, security.[52] In a Hobbesian environment, the fact that a local ruler might be killing, looting and raping in the neighbouring villages is not necessarily seen as a problem by the inhabitants of a village that benefits from the protection of that ruler. Moreover, a significant part of the population might actually benefit in other ways from the activities of the warlord, for example by participating in the looting. The existence of a social base of support – that is, military officers, local commanders, militia leaders, military notables and the like – also contributes to making warlords more resilient than entrepreneurs, who may have even less to offer to the population in general and whose support is often limited to a narrow circle of acolytes or of uprooted individuals, devoid of their own social base.[53] The control exercised by the military class over territory is an asset which is prized even by its former enemies, a fact which explains why Chinese warlords were incorporated into the

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[52] Jackson (2003), pp.133-134. See also Battera (2004) and Hills (1997).
[53] See Giustozzi (2003a) for the example of Afghanistan.

political factions, including the Communist party, and why the Taleban recruited many local and provincial commanders into their ranks, after having defeated the warlords to whom they had been subordinated. In the case of Afghanistan, the military class co-opted by the Taleban switched sides again in 2001 and allowed the former warlords to regain control.

The resilience of warlords (in distinction to entrepreneurs) and their long-standing popularity among the military class is explained by the services which they are able to provide: first and foremost, 'military leadership'. This is a rare quality, and in a context of violent competition between groups a skilful military leader enjoys a competitive advantage. The US Army defines military leadership as "the art of direct and indirect influence and the skill of creating the conditions for organizational success to accomplish missions effectively".[54] Military leadership, therefore, has to be carefully distinguished from mere headship. There is much debate in military studies literature with regard to what military leadership exactly is. Qualities that are often mentioned as contributing to military leadership include integrity, courage, loyalty, selflessness, self-discipline, dedication, knowledge, intellect, perseverance, decisiveness and ability to discipline subordinates. Many of these are unlikely to be found in any warlord, and indeed few human beings would have them all, but any military commander who managed to show at least some of these would have an edge over rivals who did not. In practice, especially in a non-bureaucratic environment (in the Weberian sense), a commander has to win battles in order to establish and demonstrate his military leadership. There is more to it, however. The ability to manage relatively large military organisations, their logistics and supply, is not easily gained. It takes many years to form a general, or even longer for a guerrilla leader to develop such skills in the field. Things get even more complicated when military organisations are in fact loose coalitions of local strongmen, former army officers, petty warlords, etcetera. The chaos which spread throughout northern Afghanistan after Abdul Malik replaced Rashid Dostum in a coup in 1997 is a case in point. The military class which had supported the coup soon came to regret Dostum's departure. Even if Malik was more educated, he did not have the ability to keep together the proto-feudal system organised by Dostum.

Even leaving aside the (at least relative) services like coordination, planning and management that a warlord often provides, from the point of view of the members of an army, a militia, or any armed group, being able to rely on a skilled military leader is a major advantage. First of all their chances of staying alive would improve, but there would be other advantages too. Winning battles means more opportunity for looting, for example, or expansion of territorial control and hence a greater tax base.[55] The greed of the lower ranks, however, should not be confused with the aims of the warlord. Because the latter is in charge of a relatively large and established organisation, he is likely to be more politically minded than his subordinates, certainly than the troops. The survival of a large organisation requires a political attitude, even when ideology is not involved at all. If we define politics as the process of gaining or maintaining support for common action, managing any large organisation is a very political enterprise indeed. In a sense, the historical origins of the state (and hence of politics) might often be found in the survival instinct of large military organisations and their leaders.

This point about military leadership brings us back to the importance of legitimacy for warlords. On the one hand, political legitimacy is important in defining a warlord, because he does not have it. If a warlord succeeded in legitimising his political power, he would no

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[54] Charles F. Hawkins 'Toward A Theory Of Military Leadership', The Military Conflict Institute, n.d., at http://www.militaryconflict.org/leader.htm.
[55] The greed of the lower ranks is eloquently shown in Keen (1998).

longer be considered a warlord, but a king, or a president, or at least a political leader. But in order to understand the dynamics which lead to the emergence of warlordism and drive its development is that it is equally important to stress that a warlord does have a different (or rather partial) type of legitimacy, that is 'military legitimacy'. This could be defined as having demonstrated military leadership and enjoying support among a number of military commanders (vassals, smaller warlords, etcetera), who recognise the role of commander-in-chief of the warlord. In many cases military leadership would also be recognised by the population at large as a useful quality and earn the warlord some wider support, but not full political legitimacy.

On the basis of this stress on military legitimacy, I would argue that a number of players in contemporary conflicts cannot be appropriately described as warlords. For example, as argued before, Sierra Leone's RUF do not qualify as an example of warlordism, but rather of military-political entrepreneurship or, to use another type of classification, of a 'lumpen insurgency'.[56] Among other considerations, the RUF rarely if ever fought real battles and never had any military legitimacy deriving from military leadership.[57] If anything, it resembled extremist guerrilla movements like Cambodia's Khmer Rouge.

An updated definition of warlord

On the basis of all that has been said above, a more appropriate definition of a warlord should incorporate the following points:

1) he is recognised as a legitimate and maybe even charismatic military leader, because of his ability to provide important services to subordinate commanders, such as leadership, coordination, logistics and possibly others including foreign relations;

2) as such, he needs to periodically wage successful military campaigns in order to maintain his legitimacy and justify his role;

3) he has full and autonomous control over a military force, which he can use at will;

4) he exercises political power over part of the territory of a state, where central authority has either collapsed or has weakened;

5) he uses violence to maintain his power;

6) as a result, he has little or no political legitimacy;

7) he displays a neopatrimonialist attitude towards the polity that he is running, where therefore institutionalisation is weak or absent;

8) he is only or primarily concerned with his own benefit and does not fight for a 'superior' cause, although he might claim to represent regional or sectarian interests;

9) as a result, he lacks interest in changing the nature of the state that he is trying to overthrow or that has already been overthrown, and indeed his leadership role is not dependent on eventually seizing state power.

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[56] This would a grown up version of politicised criminal gangs as theyr are found for example in Nigeria. See MacKinlay (2002), pp.44-54.

[57] This point was also made by Abdullah & Muana (1998), p.191.

Origins of warlordism: processes of disintegration

Having defined warlordism more accurately, we can proceed to tentatively identify the processes which lead to warlordism. The most common warlordism-generating process is, of course, the weakening or disintegration of the security and political institutions of a state, especially if such a state is strongly regionalised, either because of its large size, or difficult geography, or complex ethnic/religious make-up. Within this process of weakening of the state, a typical instance in which warlordism arises is when political power collapses, but the military forces on which it rested survive, at least in part. In this case we could speak of 'orphan' warlords, who used to be former regional commanders of the central state army and faced with a political crisis at the centre opted to set up their own fiefdoms. This is mostly reactive warlordism, although it could certainly happen that would-be warlords, motivated by some grievance against the central government, such as the fear of their own coming dismissal, might see their opportunity in the weakening of central state power and decide to seize slices of it. A typical example of orphan warlordism is Afghanistan in 1992, at least in the case of the northern part of the country. White Russian generals after 1917 could be another.

Would-be warlords, however, do not necessarily wait for central state power to collapse before making their claim to absolute power at the regional level. Recruiting private militias to deal with insurgencies is a practice that found a strong favour throughout the 1980s, if not earlier, and there is evidence that this led to the formation of mafias and other similar 'interest groups', even in states which are normally perceived as quite strong, such as Turkey.[58] In a number of cases, where the state was not strong to start with, it can lead to the formation of warlordism or something like it. The case of Sudan comes to mind here, both with reference to the war in the South,[59] and to Darfur. Other examples include Afghanistan again, where militias started 'misbehaving' long before 1992,[60] and Tajikistan during and after the civil war.[61]

Warlordism, on the other hand, is not always the direct outcome of an internal crisis of the state. It might be an indirect outcome, such as when non-state political organisations, such as armed movements, experience a weakening of the hold of the central leadership over its field commanders, who might then develop into warlords. In this sense one could speak of a trend towards warlordism within many internal conflicts, even when the emergence of warlords has not taken place yet or is still at a very early stage, as was the case in Eritrea. Again a trend towards warlordism among insurgent organisations has been recently reported by the UN in Darfur and confirmed by some analysts.[62] Afghanistan, of course, has experienced this type of warlordism, too, as the *jihadi* parties saw their hold over field commanders decline, especially after 1992. Yet another example is Chad, where Frolinat, which started itself as a merger of

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[58] See, for example, Karl Vick, 'In Kurdish Turkey, a New Enemy', *Washington Post*, (31 October 2002).

[59] See Alex de Waal, 'Some Comments on Militias in Contemporary Sudan', in M. Daly and A. A. Sikainga (eds) *Civil War in the Sudan*, London: Taurus, 1994; and M. A. Salih & Sharif Harir, 'Tribal militias. The Genesis of National Disintegration', in Sharif Hariri and Terje Tvedt (eds), *Short-cut to decay. The Case of Sudan*, Uppsala: Nordiska Institute of African Studies, 1984, pp.186-203, pp.186-203.

[60] See Antonio Giustozzi *War, Politics and Society in Afghanistan, 1978-92*, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2000, pp.198-231.

[61] See Thomas Dorenwendt, 'Tadschikistan: die Transformationen des Bürgerkrieges', *Orient*, 38:2 (1997); and Kirill Nourzhanov, , 'Saviours of the nation or robber barons? Warlord politics in Tajikistan', *Central Asian Survey*, 24:2 (June 2005), pp.109-130.

[62] See *Justice Africa*, 15 November 2004, at http://www.justiceafrica.org/octnov04.htm; International Crisis Group, 'Darfur, the Failure to Protect', *Africa Report*, 89 (2005); and IRIN, 'Anarchy and Warlordism Possible in Darfur, UN Rep Warns', *IRIN* (8 November 2004).

different groups, disintegrated into multiple factions.[63] Liberia seems to represent a mixed process of warlord generation, with both 'orphan' former military officers and splintering commanders of the original insurgent force setting up their own groups. At least some of the actors in the Liberian civil war might fit better the definition of entrepreneurs.[64]

In these types of processes leading to warlordism, what we find is a problem of command and control of armed forces or groups, faced by both central governments and ideological or purpose oriented non-state armed movements. Having originated as fragments of the military structure of a state or an insurgent organisation has important implications when we compare warlords to entrepreneurs. It is often during their apprenticeship as officers or commanders within larger and politically more legitimate organisations that warlords earn their military legitimacy. Hence, compared to warlords, entrepreneurs are much more likely to be newcomers to the world of organised violence. An analysis trying to understand why warlordism arises might in such cases be better focused not so much on the individual character of the warlords and their motivations, but on the reasons which led to states disintegrating or handing over control of parts of the national territory to private militias.

Distinguishing between warlords according to their origins can be very relevant to the analysis of their behaviour and aims. Reno repeatedly stressed the point in his work that West African warlords (and military-political entrepreneurs) are often former members or collaborators of the old state elite who are trying to maintain or increase their influence through 'non-conventional' means, once the old system becomes increasingly inefficient in building at least a degree of consensus.[65]

Warlordism as a process of consolidation from the bottom up

Warlordism, however, is not necessarily the outcome of a process of disintegration. It might as well result from the emergence of first among equals out of a group of commanders and small military strongmen, in a situation where the state has collapsed, as part of an "attempt to re-establish stability within anarchy".[66] In such a situation, where violence (using Ernest Gellner's formula) is "pervasive, mandatory and normative",[67] warlords can represent an element of order, as opposed to the Hobbesian chaos where hundreds or even thousands of small military actors all fight their own war. It might also result from the process of consolidation and growth of an initially small group, able to mobilise international support and to recruit along ethnic, tribal or clan lines. Compared to the warlordism that emerges from the disintegration of a state, these are likely to be much longer processes. From a historical perspective, warlords of this kind can be seen as part of a process that we could call that of 'originary accumulation of power', which ultimately might lead to the formation of a state once a 'critical mass of power' is achieved. If it is true that agrarian societies are characterised by the logic of the elimination of rival "specialists in coercion",[68] warlords represent a first stage in this process. Because warlords enjoy legitimacy among a class of lesser military commanders, who in turn control small pockets of territory and the local population, they do

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[63] Azevedo (1998) and Buijtenhuijs (1987), pp.320-325.

[64] See Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy*, London: Hurst & Co., 1999.

[65] See among other works Reno (2002). On the ambiguous relationship between warlords and central government in Afghanistan, see Antonio Giustozzi, 'Good state vs. Bad Warlords?', *Crisis State Working Paper* 51, Crisis States Research Centre, LSE, 2003b.

[66] Jackson (2003), p.147.

[67] Ernest Gellner, 'War and society', in Ernest Gellner, *Anthropology and Politics*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, p.160.

[68] Gellner (1996), p.162.

not need to conquer the state to be able to maintain or develop more sophisticated structures. If the central state has indeed disintegrated, such warlords' structures might develop to the point of starting to deserve the definition of 'proto-state'. Because the accumulation of power carried out by the warlords pertains essentially to military power, warlords as such are normally unable to achieve the critical mass required by the formation of a state, but again warlords could evolve into something more sophisticated. Legitimisation is described by Gellner as a process meant to attract loyalty and therefore stabilise a polity.[69] Once military domination is consolidated, the enlightened warlord can try to legitimise his rule in a number of ways. Over time, this might lead to a process of "courtisation of warriors", as spelt out by Norbert Elias, which he describes as one of the most decisive transitions in the civilising process.[70] Examples of such a process of emergence of warlords from chaos can also be found in Afghanistan, where several warlords emerged progressively among a wide array of local commanders. Savimbi in Angola is a good example of a warlord building up his power from a very low initial base, thanks, among other things, to international support.

Reserving the definition of warlord for actors who are legitimate military leaders helps our understanding of the different potential of various types of non-state, non ideological politico-military actors. In a sense, warlords are at the upper end of the category in terms of sophistication and complexity and are more susceptible to playing a role in a process of political development. Elsewhere I have tried to show that there is evidence that warlords are often capable of evolving.[71] From a historical perspective some of them might be able to develop proto-states, which in turn could even evolve into more or less solid state structures. Compared to the warlords, entrepreneurs are more a sort of manipulator who have limited autonomous power and therefore tend to fade away more easily. After all, historically the transition from feudal systems towards the monopolisation of military power was one of the first steps, and possibly the most important, towards the formation of states. Leaving aside military-ideological actors, who are beyond the scope of this paper, warlords are more likely to succeed in establishing a monopoly, because they rely on at least some organisation and structure, whereas entrepreneurs rarely do. In other words, warlords are more susceptible to evolving into statemakers than entrepreneurs are. In contemporary times, where state making is constrained by international rules and by the ability of big powers to interfere in every corner of the globe, warlords can still at least evolve into stakeholders within states being re-established as such, or new states built on the foundations of pre-existing ones. Moreover, one would certainly agree with P. Jackson that "the study of government could be enhanced by the study of warlords".[72]

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[69] Gellner (1996), p.166.

[70] Norbert Elias, *The civilising process*, *volume 2: State formation and Civilisation*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1982, pp.258ff. On the potential for the development of warlords into 'democratic' players, see also Leonard Wantchekon, 'The Paradox of "Warlord" Democracy: A Theoretical Investigation', *American Political Science Review*, 98 (2004) pp.17-33, who however fails to mention actual warlords.

[71] See Antonio Giustozzi, 'The Ethnicisation of an Afghan Faction: Junbesh-i-Milli from its Origins to the Presidential Elections (2004)', *Crisis States Working Papers* 67, London: Crisis States Research Centre, LSE, 2005.

[72] Jackson (2003).

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The aim of the Crisis States Programme (CSP) at DESTIN's Development Research Centre is to provide new understanding of the causes of crisis and breakdown in the developing world and the processes of avoiding or overcoming them. We want to know why some political systems and communities, in what can be called the "fragile states" found in many of the poor and middle income countries, have broken down even to the point of violent conflict while others have not. Our work asks whether processes of globalisation have precipitated or helped to avoid crisis and social breakdown.

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In Colombia:
IEPRI, Universidad Nacional de Colombia
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Research Objectives

- We will assess how constellations of power at local, national and global levels drive processes of institutional change, collapse and reconstruction and in doing so will challenge simplistic paradigms about the beneficial effects of economic and political liberalisation.

- We will examine the effects of international interventions promoting democratic reform, human rights and market competition on the 'conflict management capacity' and production and distributional systems of existing polities.

- We will analyse how communities have responded to crisis, and the incentives and moral frameworks that have led either toward violent or non-violent outcomes.

- We will examine what kinds of formal and informal institutional arrangements poor communities have constructed to deal with economic survival and local order.

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