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THE DETERMINANTS OF THE CONTINUATION OF CIVIL WAR

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The study of civil war has received a great impetus since the end of the Cold War. We seem to be able to grasp the diverse character of these wars much better now than two decades ago. However, there remain serious challenges. One of these challenges is the subject of this contribution. Carl von Clausewitz wrote in his seminal book that war is an instrument of politics. However, "the original political objects can greatly alter during the course of war and may finally change entirely *since they are influenced by events and their probable consequences*" (Clausewitz 1993, 104, italics in original). Scholars of civil war often mistake the causes of the onset of armed conflict with the factors which explain the continuation of war. Many studies seem to implicitly argue that when understanding its causes, we understand the continuation of war. The validity of political, ethnic, economic, demographic, and psychological factors, among others, to explain the outbreak of violence have been thoroughly explored and are dealt with in other chapters in this volume. Not only has the debate heavily focused on the causes of civil war, the explanations that have been brought forward rest heavily upon mono-causality. For example, the proponents of the so-called greed thesis have solely emphasized economic explanations based on quantified research on a highly aggregate level, from which they were subsequently forced to retract when detailed case studies were undertaken (Collier and Sambanis 2005).

The fact that the interaction between belligerents in the course of civil war is subject to change has only received limited attention.[1] War may break out for one set of issues but might continue for a completely different and changing set of reasons. As a result of interaction between the belligerents new reasons and stimuli for conflict develop. When the state targets the individuals involved in fighting civil wars, for example, there might be a shift from wider political and ideological concerns to more personal considerations. Revenge, propaganda, and recruitment requirements, group loyalty, and self-preservation can start to play a role. When specific means for fighting a civil war are curbed, for instance through weapon embargoes, methods and strategies can shift. These developments can significantly complicate the picture that civil war presents and do not necessarily make it easier to work towards resolution. What mechanisms are at play and what do we know about the determinants of the continuation of civil war?

These questions form a challenge, not only from a scholarly perspective but also from a practical angle. The reality today is that international intervention in conflict most often occurs after war has erupted, rather than as a conflict prevention mechanism. Furthermore, recent studies have shown that a large proportion of wars in today's international system end in an

indeterminate manner, in neither war nor peace. These wars have a high propensity to reignite again within a couple of years (Merz 2012). Even though the number of wars is declining (Human Security Report Project 2012), it is the category of civil conflict that demands further investigation. It is therefore of paramount importance to understand the highly changeable drivers of war. This contribution aims to discuss the existing insights into the dynamics of civil war, and highlight key questions and possible avenues for future research.

Perspectives on the continuation of civil war

At present, roughly four perspectives can be distinguished to explain the course of civil wars. First, a utilitarian or Clausewitzean approach sees the continuation of war as an extension of the overriding political and strategic logic of civil war (Clausewitz 1993). Several scholars have argued that insurgent behavior is guided by strategic thinking (Fumerton and Duyvesteyn 2009; Boyle 2012). The continuation of war, in this perspective, is a function of political will and capacity. Conflict persistence can be a result of the state either being unable or unwilling to stop the continuation of conflict and therefore allowing a conducive environment to persist for war. As Sebastian Merz writes, "there is a relatively broad consensus about the central cause of persistence; the weakness of the states where today's conflicts are taking place" (Merz 2012, 202; see also Herreros and Criado 2009; Davenport *et al.* 2006).

Second, there have been scholars, such as Stathis Kalyvas and Claire Metelits, who focus on explaining violence against civilians and look at the explanations of contested control and active rivalries between belligerents (Kalyvas 2006; Metelits 2009; Hultman 2010). Their main explanation is that violence, or increases in violence, are most likely to occur when there is a lack of control or there is a rivalry between warring parties over control of territory or populations. In his rich and elaborate study Kalyvas finds that an increase in the level of violence occurs most often when control over the population is lacking and there is a threat from an opposing party. By using force to establish control, compliant behavior and subsequently collaboration can be elicited. Metelits, looking specifically at the targeting of civilians in civil war, similarly finds that active rivalries between warring parties tend to come together with cruelty against non-combatants, in a larger attempt to enforce compliance from the rest of the population. Reed Wood has found that when insurgents are relatively capable of providing selective incentives, such as security, violence tends to be less compared to actors with fewer means at their disposal (Wood 2010).

Third, there is the idea of war systems. David Keen and William Reno, among others have identified factors that contribute to the continuation of war through vested interests that thrive or are legitimated by a context of war (Keen 2012; Reno 2000). Just as war can serve political utilitarian and instrumental rationales, they identify a dynamic focused on predation and profit that thrives by the disorder of war. It forms at the same time a specific order of its own. The continuation of war itself constitutes one of the main interest of the participants involved.

Fourth, a non-utilitarian and alternative perspective has been presented by Max Abrahms (2008). He has tried to explain actor behavior in campaigns of political violence, in particular terrorism, through the lens of natural systems theory. Why do individuals engage in violence, and continue to engage in violent acts, even after its utility has expired? Puzzled by the fact that few campaigns of political violence ever achieve their stated aims and the limited evidence for ideological motivation of individual participants, Abrahms suggests that violence serves social solidarity-seeking purposes. Individuals engage in violence and continue to engage in violence because their family and friends do. In essence, violence serves the function of building social ties (Abrahms 2008; Argo 2009).

While interesting and valuable in and of themselves these perspectives have not clearly engaged in any significant exchange. Furthermore, they leave several important and key mechanisms unaddressed. Without aiming to be exhaustive, the perspectives that will be described below can be witnessed in many conflicts and are at the same time contingent on context. The mechanisms that will be discussed in turn below are (1) the role and nature of state actions and reactions over the course of conflict. This mechanism relates to the actors involved and it is important to distinguish here between state and non-state actors;[2] (2) changeable capabilities of the belligerents; and (3) the changing motivations of groups and individuals over the course of time.

The state and the continuation of war

Two important causal mechanisms can be distinguished that hold explanatory power for the continuation of conflict. While it has long been recognized that the role of the state is of paramount importance to understanding the outbreak of war, many scholars have found that the political space a state leaves for the expression of political discontent contributes to the shape and timing of the outbreak of violence (Gurr 1970; Skocpol 1979; Snyder 1976; Lichbach 1987). For the continuation of violence one observed causal mechanism is the provocation trap. An important theory developed by insurgents since the nineteenth century aims to play on the calculations of the political decision-makers by provoking violence from the state, which generally acts as a forceful recruiting mechanism for insurgent groups (Marighela 1974; Fanon 2004). It focuses on the first few stages of armed interaction. Very few non-state actor organizations are powerful enough to deal one destructive and decisive blow to the state to realize their aims. They rely to a large extent on the state giving in to the mechanism of provocation (Fromkin 1975). By attacking a weak spot of the opponent, for example its civilians, its infrastructure (functioning of the state), or its leadership (make-up of the state), the militants aim to provoke state violence (Neumann and Smith 2007). They benefit when the state starts to show its "ugly side," which confirms them in their claims that the state is illegitimate and needs to be undermined and replaced.

The second mechanism can be called the counter-measure imperative. The counter-measure imperative is the commonly observable chain of events after an attack against unarmed and unwitting targets. A public outcry occurs and political decision-makers feel forced to respond. Doing nothing is often not an option in terms of political capital and electoral consequences, at least in most democratic societies. James Fearon has called this "audience costs" in the context of international crises (Fearon 1994; Pierskalla 2010). Fearon's argument sees escalation as more likely in states where the audience costs for backing off in a crisis are high. Weakness in times of crisis can be political – or electoral – suicide. Therefore, there is a strong tendency to institute one stringent measure after another. Repression, the use of force and police action are just a few of the instruments that can be used (Duyvesteyn 2008). Gil Merom, in a study into counter-insurgency, raises the argument that in fact democracies are inherently weak in facing insurgents because the violence that he deems is required to combat the phenomenon is politically unacceptable (Merom 2003). This underlines the working of the counter-measure imperative and the preference for coercion and repression. These mechanisms trigger state violence both from a push and pull perspective and are very powerful to propel a struggle forward.

Discontinuing civil war by not buying into the provocation trap and counter-measure imperative is extremely difficult, given the primary demands made of the state to uphold its monopoly of force and to protect its population. In the case of weak or failing states, doing nothing would often amount to paying the highest price of state collapse.

Capabilities and the continuation of war

Most studies looking into the dynamics or continuation of conflict see the increase or decrease in capabilities as an important explanatory factor for the continuation or discontinuation of civil war. Today, as in the recent past, bomb attacks form the most common means adopted by non-state actors engaged in political violence (Engene 2007, 118–19; Rosendorff and Sandler 2005, 179). Worryingly, the use of explosives has a tendency to increase in severity over time (Clauset *et al.* 2007, 79). There are two important mechanisms that occur frequently related to the means employed in civil wars. These are retaliation and retaliatory cycles and what is called substitution. These relate to the level and shape of violence respectively and will be discussed in turn.

From the perspective of the state, retaliation and the use of force are often employed with the intention to put an end to non-state actor violence and re-establish the monopoly of force. Martin van Creveld and Edward Luttwak, two eminent strategic thinkers, have argued separately that force against, and repression of, non-state actors works. In his seminal article "Give War a Chance," Luttwak detailed how meddling in wars in the manner intervening states tend to do makes resolution of armed conflict less likely (Luttwak 1999). Militants need to be countered with similar extreme violence, to "out-terrorize" them. Van Creveld has also spoken out in favor of the strong repressive approach, based mostly on historic evidence (van Creveld 2006; see also Herreros 2006). These ideas, however, take as a given the potential escalatory tendency of violent measures against non-state actors. Extreme repression might work if the existence of the enemy, rather than its use of violence, is perceived as the main problem. Apart from the suggestion that retaliation escalates the struggle, it has also been linked to the strengthening of internal group cohesion (Kegley 1990).

There is substantial debate whether non-state actors targeted by a government show compliance behavior after retaliatory violence, presuming of course that they present a target. Confirmation can be found in studies by Bryan Brophy-Baermann and John Conybeare, and Patricia Sullivan (Brophy-Baermann and Conybeare 1994; Sullivan 2007). For the case of Israeli retaliation after Palestinian attacks, Brophy-Baermann and Conybeare find that quantitatively retaliation does possess a de-escalatory effect. However, this is only a short-term effect and the policy does not act as a long-term deterrent for violence in this particular case. Also on the basis of database analysis, Patricia Sullivan has found that when regime change or territorial secession are at stake, military force can make a difference. Conversely, in confrontations involving the use of force to change the *behavior* of an opponent, violence is largely ineffective (Sullivan 2007).

Substitution has been identified as a second powerful mechanism to explain the continuation of war and the dynamic interaction between belligerents (Clauset *et al.* 2010). Substitution can occur in several different ways. Attacks can shift between targets, geographic locations and strategies (Arce M. and Sandler 2005; Enders 2004). An example of substitution in a spatial sense can be found in the attacks, purportedly by Hezbollah, on Jewish targets in Argentina in 1994 (Rosendorff and Sandler 2005). A substitution effect has also been found for the post 9/11 period. As Walter Enders and Todd Sandler conclude, since 9/11 there is a shift from hard to soft targets and from complex to logistically simple operations, i.e. bombing campaigns have increased (Enders and Sandler 2005). Attacks, such as in Bali, London, and Madrid, have also been linked to the hardening of American targets (Rosendorff and Sandler 2004).

The termination of civil war has in several studies been strongly linked to cutting off the capabilities and supplies of belligerents. Paul Staniland concludes that "the best offense is a fence" (Staniland 2006; see also Record 2007). When capabilities are compromised by cutting off the replenishment of men and material that are necessary to continue the struggle, wars wither down. This was, for example, the case in Malaya in the 1950s where the communist

insurgents became isolated because of effective controls to supply routes and food rationing (Thompson 1966).

Changing issues of contention and the continuation of war

The highly versatile motivations that can be at play during the course of a civil war can be analyzed in terms of content, their changeable overall number, but also their prevalence within the different tiers or sections of non-state actor organizations. During war the number of issues of contention tends to increase as a result of interaction. Also, foot soldiers often have different motivations from the official policy line of the leadership. Personal motivations of revenge and hatred seem to grow in importance over the course of civil war. In general three main categories of motivational factors have been identified to explain violent political opposition: strategic/ideational; organizational/ behavioral; and psychological/relational. Furthermore, a category of cultural and contextual factors can be added as a fourth category. These four categories will be discussed in turn.

Strategic/ideational

Stathis Kalyvas has noted "a clear epistemic bias in favor of the assumption that most conflicts are motivated by grand ideological concerns" (Kalyvas 2004, 173). The evidence produced so far, however, points out that there is at least an interplay between strategic concerns and more worldly considerations, such as personal betterment and gain, friendship and family ties, and survival, which inspire individuals to participate in armed conflict. Several possible mechanisms might be at play.

First, it is possible that there is a shift during the course of civil war from strategic and ideological frames towards other more personal ones. Starting out with ideological concerns the struggle might become redefined in terms of survival and vengeance and group dynamics may take over. Based on insights from interstate war it has been concluded that ideological motivation played a role at the start of war but the maintenance of a high level of ideological fervor and hatred for the enemy turned out to be difficult (Mueller 2004). Close reliance on others in stressful situations creates a bond, which is difficult to maintain on purely ideological terms.

Scholarly insights have placed emphasis on the interaction between individuals, the development of groups, and group dynamics; "Interactions among members of the group may be more important in determining behavior than the psychological predisposition of individual members" or ideological concerns (Crenshaw 1981, 393). Rather than ideological idealism, "the motivations of 'ordinary people' caught in the whirlwind of violence and war tend to be mundane rather than heroic: to save one's job, house or family, for instance" (Kalyvas 2004, 174; see also Kalyvas 2006).

Second, it is also possible that ideology increases in importance during the course of the struggle due to outside pressure to define the terms of the conflict. Outside pressure can cause ideological justification. Reinterpretations afterwards tend to be framed in ideological terms (see also discussion in Kalyvas 2004). Furthermore, ideological inspiration is not always consistent. Shifts in ideological content have occurred; the Kurdish PKK has moved from Marxist revolution to allowing more religiously inspired ideas in its public vocabulary. Hezbollah, conversely, has downplayed its religious roots during the course of its existence to attract a wider constituency (Duyvesteyn 2004).

Third, ideology could also play a role for the group elite, while the rank and file is driven by more personal issues (Chenoweth *et al.* 2009). Kalyvas has demonstrated that there is a center– periphery distinction that is useful to explain violence in civil war; the center being preoccupied with ideological considerations and the periphery with more localized ones (Kalyvas 2006; see also Kilcullen 2009). Local grievances can be adopted by pragmatic ideologues or political

entrepreneurs to propel their struggle forward, which would substantiate this perspective on escalation (Wood 2003; Kriger 1992). For example, in the conflict in Liberia, which started in 1991, the rebel leader Charles Taylor deliberately picked a backward region to start his uprising, calculating – correctly – that the rural resentment against the dictatorial regime in Monrovia would propel his struggle forward (Duyvesteyn 2005).

In sum, there is no agreement in the literature on the role of strategic and ideational factors, their development over time and their possible links with the continuation of civil war. Contrary to the common tendency to distinguish conflicts based on their ideological agenda, purely ideological labels seem to serve little purpose. Neither practically nor scientifically do they possess uniform explanatory value. Armed struggle over a longer period of time cannot be sustained based on exclusively ideological terms. Rather, family, friends, opportunity and vengeance come to the fore as powerful motors behind the continuation of war.

Organizational and behavioral factors

Organizational aspects form another set of propositions to explain the continuation of civil war. This is a central idea in rational choice theory (Olson 1994). Continued existence is a primary and overriding concern for small groups. The internal dynamics and requirements of organizational survival might drive the struggle forward rather than ideological or strategic concerns.

Apart from continuation of the organization, several other organizational prerequisites for action need to be present, and continue to be present, to explain violent behavior; political entrepreneurs need to overcome the free-rider problem by offering selective incentives to potential supporters and militants willing to use violence. Jeff Goodwin and Theda Skocpol have concluded that to build a support base for the non-state actor, their alternative provision of social goods rather than ideology forms the main attraction (Goodwin and Skocpol 1989). Selective incentives can include status incentives but also material incentives. One of those incentives, the desire for a social contract between ruler and ruled, has explanatory value for the conflict in Afghanistan, according to Peter Dahl Thruelsen (2010; see also Angstrom 2010). The desire for order and control can be seen as a motor that drives civil war, rather than only form the outcome of violent political action.

Resources, in particular clandestine financing, can be seen as causes of the continuation of armed strife. Jeremy Weinstein (2007) has defined the opportunistic insurgency as one particular type of irregular war. Similarly, John Mueller (2004) has put forward that most conflicts at the turn of the millennium have been criminal in nature. The links between the criminal underworld and non-state actors involved in civil war have traditionally been strong and often form an enabling factor. Material incentives, promoting participation in rebellion, form one of the main explanations for the continuation of violence in Eastern Congo (Prunier 2009). Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy Weinstein have found that it formed an important but not overriding factor in the war in Sierra Leone (Humphreys and Weinstein 2008; Peters and Richards 1998). These arguments fit in the larger discussion about war systems of Keen and Reno, discussed above. The debate about these organizational drivers, so far, has not answered the questions whether there is change over time, differences in geographical context, or the level of organization in which they might play out.

Psychological and relational factors

Existing social psychology literature has shed light on small group behavior and motivational factors. Shifts towards more militancy, revenge, and survival have been observed in violent non-state groups. Propaganda and recruitment considerations, group loyalty and kinship ties, and the

psychology of shame have been brought forward. First, propaganda and recruitment requirements can at a certain point start to dominate the dynamics of the struggle. When continued engagement is the only option left for the militants, confirming your existence might be a logical goal of violent action.

Second, there has been an extensive debate about ethnicity as an explanatory factor for the outbreak of violence. Ethnic and kinship relations can also be a driving force for continued violence. In the case of African wars, Jean Paul Azam has argued that, "The ethnic group is the natural component of a rebellion against the state, as the many links that exist among its members provide an efficient way of overcoming the free-rider problems involved in mobilizing a rebellion or insurgency" (Azam 2001, 431). Exposure to violence can reinforce ethnic and kinship identity (Brown 1993). Over the course of armed conflict, it can become increasingly driven by in-group–out-group dynamics and hardened identities. Examples are the civil wars in Lebanon in the 1980s, the Bosnian war in the early 1990s and Iraq after the 2003 American invasion. However, as Fotini Christia has recently found, when trying to explain alliance formation between warring factions during the course of war, identity has very little predictive value. It is not ethnic, clan, nor tribal affiliation that explain the creation of warring coalitions. Rather, pragmatism and power politics best explain the lining up and splitting of warring parties during civil war (Christia 2012).

Third, David Keen has argued that a psychology of shame is useful to explain violence and atrocities in particular in the civil war in Sierra Leone (Keen 2005). He has described how violence was made possible by a "shameless environment" and facilitated by a fear or threat of shame. Rebels were divorced from normal society, lived in their own rebel world in which committing brutality was highly rewarded and reluctance to engage in violence severely punished. An environment was willfully created in which shamelessness could thrive.

There is evidence that psychological and relational factors grow in importance over the course of time (della Porta 1995). This is an important indication of an escalatory relationship between the psychological dimension and increased violence in civil war. However, while it grew in importance, it remains unclear whether there are links with specific contexts, time frames, or levels of organization.

Cultural and contextual factors

Culture has also been awarded great importance in explaining conflict (Keegan 1993; Bozeman 1992; Porter 2009). Many scholars of war have attempted to assign cultural considerations their proper place in analyses of war. Among others, Charles Tilly has suggested that there are repertoires of contention and violence and pre-existing histories of violent exchange that can shape and define a struggle (Tilly 2003). In a quantified analysis, Leonard Weinberg and William Lee Eubank have found that culture does influence non-state actor violence; collectivist, as opposed to individualist, cultures stand out for attacks on out-groups and foreigners, and indiscriminate violence (Weinberg and Eubank 1994). The creation and proliferation of rebel culture was an enabling factor for the atrocities committed, for example, in Sierra Leone (Mitton 2012). Few studies, however, see culture as driving the continuation of war. Rather, it is more often seen as a contributor to, or facilitator of, violence.

What has been awarded great importance are local and contextual factors. Non-state actors can and have opportunistically incorporated local grievances to facilitate their struggle (Kalyvas 2006; Weinstein 2007; Kilcullen 2009; Duyvesteyn 2005; Kalyvas 2003). In the case of the conflict in Afghanistan, Barakat and Zyck go one step further, they argue that: "the generic insurgency … is a rhetorical rather than operational construct" (2010, 197). More than one

third of all violent attacks nationwide (and more than half in the South [of Afghanistan ID]) attributed to the insurgency involve local power tussles between communities and tribes – not Taliban members or insurgents – which perceive themselves as marginalized in the distribution of political power, land, water, and other government-controlled resources.

(ibid.)

In other words, the fighters "[seek] safety, sovereignty, masculinity, and although widely overlooked, a strong bargaining chip through which to enter rather than topple the Afghan government" (Barakat and Zyck 2010, 198).

While important, so far, to understand the driving forces of civil war, there is little evidence that these cultural and contextual factors possess independent potential to drive war forward. Rather, it is suggested in the discussion here that they are linked with the other motivational categories of strategic and psychological dispositions. If cultural and contextual factors do play a role, the question is when and how.

The discussion about causal links up to this point raises several pressing issues; first, some factors are mutually exclusive. Personal survival strategies exclude the possibility of increasing ideological content of the struggle. This problem cannot be brushed aside by claiming that multiple motivating factors can all play a role at once, as does, for example, the study by Humphreys and Weinstein of the case of Sierra Leone. They find "support for all the competing theories, suggesting that the rivalry between them is artificial and that theoretical work has insufficiently explored the interaction of various recruitment strategies" (Humphreys and Weinstein 2008, 436). The challenge is to explain what plays a role when and how. Thomas Marks has argued, it is "not an either/or proposition as concerns the role of ideology and grievances. If a movement has only the first, it invariably remains small and becomes a band of terrorists. If it has only the second, it survives as rebellion" (Marks 2004, 126). Important consequences should be gauged from the combination of these factors in time frames and contexts. While the study by Humphreys and Weinstein fails to detail the development of the issues over time but instead notices it as one major research challenge; "the debate now needs to shift from battles over the supremacy of particular theories to a converted analysis of the conditions under which distinct strategies of recruitment are pursued by different groups at different times" (Humphreys and Weinstein 2008, 453).

A second issue that needs to be addressed is the weight attached to the issues and their variation over time. Andrew Mack pointed to the issue of strategic weight attached to the issues of contention. The disparity in strategic weight can explain strong power defeats in irregular war (Mack 1975). When survival is at stake, high costs will be incurred. When war is not about survival but forms a peripheral interest, the stronger side presents a vulnerability that can be exploited by the weaker side. Playing on public opinion, raising the cost in manpower and expenses, form ways to attain a withdrawal from the battlefield. This argument is particularly strong in cases of intervention by Western states in ongoing wars. Does it hold for state–non-state interaction in the case of civil wars? Do personal survival and political survival hold equal strategic weight?

Third, these factors can both be a consequence of the action of one or more of the actors and at the same time a cause for further violence. For instance, the use of violence out of revenge is the result of previous action in which comrades were killed. There is a feedback loop; an exchange of armed action can produce an escalation spiral. Few of the issues of contention possess an ingrained propensity to escalate. Most hold escalatory power in particular circumstances and seem to act as facilitators for escalation.

Fourth and perhaps most importantly, there have been very few attempts to link the individual disposition of the fighter and the strategic goals of the leadership. Kieran Mitton, in his study of the

Sierra Leonean Revolutionary United Front, is one of the few who briefly attempts such an exercise (Mitton 2012). He concludes that the existence of rebel culture in which the individual committing atrocities was highly praised, served the purposes of the leadership. The latter benefitted when recruitment and the creation of a reliable constituency fell short; "seemingly irrational violence of young combatants interacted with the rational aims of cynical leaders" (Mitton 2012, 119).

Despite many implicit claims to the contrary, in explaining the causes of the continuation of war, the motivations or issues of contention do not seem to hold direct causal relevance to explain the continuation of civil war. Rather, they could be seen as enablers or facilitators for a direct causal relationship between spikes in violence caused by catalysts such as provocation, the counter-measure imperative, retaliation, revenge, and strategic substitution mechanisms.

What could be concluded at this point about the possible termination of civil war focusing on actor interests and motivations? Force can be used importantly to destroy, coerce, deter, and contain (Smith 2006; Duyvesteyn 2010). All these uses, however, have repercussions for individual and group motivation to continue to engage in war. This is, in a nutshell, the challenge for those devising strategy; how to balance means, ways, and ends and calculate effect and consequence on the belligerents, as a group and individually.

Conclusion

Due to constraints of space, this contribution is necessarily incomplete. However, there are a number of observations that can be made. While the field of civil war studies has made tremendous progress over the past two decades there remain a number of important blind spots. The one that has been addressed here is too little attention for the determinants of the continuation of war. Significant studies into several aspects of violence during the course of civil war notwithstanding, a structural attempt, incorporating all the levels of strategy – the belligerents, their capabilities, interests, and motivations – has not been undertaken. The discussion in this chapter has tried to highlight where our knowledge lies and which important questions still remain unanswered. Topics that were not covered here but deserve to be included in any future discussion would be the involvement of third parties (Walter 2002), the internal workings of non-state actors and actor legitimacy in the continuation of civil war.

A second blind spot is the latent state bias of many studies into civil war. As Monica Toft has recently shown, it pays to look at things from the rebel side; peace is more durable and democracy has a better chance when rebels win a civil war (Toft 2010). What, if anything, this review has brought forward is that the state, paradoxically, often tends to create its own enemies. By responding to challenges by its violent political opposition, the state gives shape to more problems than it resolves; by driving the insurgents underground, by debilitating their capabilities and by affecting the motivations for which they fight, they compound the rather small political challenge these actors initially posed. Thinking that punishment might go unanswered, and that the opponent would not substitute one mode or type of target for another, have been often-made costly mistakes, which many states have discovered the hard way.

Clausewitz argued two centuries ago that war is the product of political will and military capability. When trying to explain the observable escalation and de-escalation of violence during the course of civil war we see that political will in a narrow sense, as avoiding audience costs and buying into the provocation of a weaker opponent, does hold explanatory power, even more so compared to grand ideological frames. From the perspective of the non-state actor the mechanisms of revenge and strategic substitution are important to understand the continued engagement in civil war. Pressing questions relate to diverging interests and motivations during the course of time, between different tiers of the organizations and geographic locations. Of course, when we know what the causes of the

continuation of civil war are, intervention can possibly become much more targeted. With a current trend of a declining number of civil wars, this would at least form a promising prospect.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1   A quantitative study by Bleaney and Dimico has recently argued that on an aggregate, i.e. national, level, there is no statistical significance for distinguishing the onset from the continuation of war (Bleaney and Dimico 2011, 145–55). This present chapter begs to differ based on qualitative studies.
2   There are indications that non-state civil wars, in which the state does not play a role but only non-state actors are engaged, are on the increase (Human Security Report Project 2012). This review will, however, focus on the state and non-state actor dynamics. Research into non-state wars is very limited and would present an important future research challenge.

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