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## CHAPTER 8

# Military Intervention

AFTER IRAQ IT IS DIFFICULT to arouse much support for military intervention. For me this chapter is the toughest in the book because I want to persuade you that external military intervention has an important place in helping the societies of the bottom billion, and that these countries' own military forces are more often part of the problem than a substitute for external forces.

### What External Forces Can Do

Until around 1990 international military intervention into failing states was just an extension of the Cold War. The Soviet Union armed the government of Angola, via Cuba, and the United States armed the Angolan rebel group UNITA, via South Africa. These interventions certainly did not help Angola. Only after the end of the Cold War did it become possible for military intervention to be motivated by different considerations. The 1990s began well for military intervention—the expulsion of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was a triumph of the new internationalism. Kuwait was a pretty clear-cut case for international intervention: expelling an aggressor. But there are three other important roles for external military intervention: restoration of order, maintaining postconflict peace, and preventing coups.

### *The Restoration of Order*

After Kuwait came another situation that I regard as a clear-cut case for intervention: the restoration of order in a collapsed state. Total collapses are rare, but they happen. In this case it was Somalia. I say the case for this was clear-cut because it is surely irresponsible to leave a huge territory such as Somalia with no government. So did the United States, which sent in its forces under Operation Restore Hope.

Perhaps the U.S. military was overconfident after the huge success in Kuwait, or perhaps it got overruled by the politicians. In any case, the media-intensive military intervention—the invasion of Somalia by U.S. forces was actually delayed by twenty-four hours so that film crews could get ashore in Somalia ahead of the troops—surely invited hubris. Perhaps the scale of intervention was inadequate for the security problems it encountered, but given the media coverage, the eighteen U.S. fatalities that were repeatedly displayed on television doomed the intervention. Don't get me wrong: it is terrible when peacekeeping troops get killed, and it is magnificent of a nation to send its troops into a dangerous situation. But that is what modern armies are for: to supply the global public good of peace in territories that otherwise have the potential for nightmare. Sometimes soldiers will die in the line of duty, and those who do are heroes to be honored, but armies cannot function productively at zero risk. Anyway, what had perhaps been planned as a great media coup for the U.S. presidency had by October 1993 become a media nightmare, and U.S. forces were promptly pulled out. Of course, post-Iraq, the fact that the United States pulled out of Somalia as a result of a mere eighteen deaths looks even more bizarre, but that is what happened.

The consequences for Somalia were miserable: more than twelve years later it still has no functioning national government. By 1995 around 300,000 people had died, and beyond that there are no estimates of the deaths from continuing conflict and the failure of health systems. But the biggest killer consequent upon the withdrawal was not what happened in Somalia but the lesson that was learned: never intervene.

It took only months to prove how disastrously wrong this lesson was. Remember that 1994 was the year of Rwanda. We didn't want a second

Somalia, with another eighteen American soldiers killed, so we got Rwanda, in which half a million people were butchered, entirely avoidably, because international intervention was inadequate. This chapter is written for people who cannot imagine that it is better for half a million Rwandans to have died than for eighteen Americans to be sacrificed. But there is another factor to consider, too: the consequences of civil war spill over to the rich world in the form of epidemics, terrorism, and drugs. Some citizens of the rich world are going to die as a result of chaos in the bottom billion. The choice is whether these deaths will be among civilians as victims of the spillovers or among soldiers who have volunteered to put things right. And there have been spillovers from Somalia. As a result of the continuing chaos, there has been an exodus of young Somali men to developed countries. In July 2005 one of them, an asylum seeker in Britain, filled his rucksack with explosives and tried to blow up commuters on the London Underground. In November 2005 a Somali gang murdered a policewoman in a bank robbery in Bradford, United Kingdom. I have a young son, and when he is older I don't want him to be exposed to the risks of being a peacekeeping soldier. But I don't want him exposed to the risk of being blown apart in London or shot in Bradford by some exile from a failing state, either. Nor do I want him exposed to the risk of disease. Somalia was the last place on earth to be home to smallpox. It was eliminated there by international health interventions a few years before the Somali state collapsed. Now such elimination would not be possible. Had the Somali state not lasted as long as it did, we would still have smallpox. On balance, I think that my child, and everyone else's, will be safer if we respond to the problem of failing states by restoring order, rather than by relying only on the myriad of defensive measures that we need if we don't.

#### *Maintaining Postconflict Peace*

After Rwanda, military intervention was back in business, and the new role was the maintenance of peace after conflict ended. It was pretty hit-and-miss: some places got lots of troops, others not many. About the highest ratio in the world of foreign peacekeepers to population was in East Timor. One peacekeeper I met there was from Gambia, one of the smallest

and poorest countries in Africa. When I asked him about the situation in East Timor, he told me that it was terrible. "These people are *really* poor," he said. If he thought so, they were. Later, when I met up with the diplomatic set, I asked why there were so many peacekeepers in that country. The answer I got about summed up the problems of foreign military intervention: because it was safe there. Governments that send soldiers to serve as UN peacekeepers are paid \$1,000 per individual per month. For some countries this is not a bad way of getting some income from their armies. The imperative is then that soldiers should not get themselves killed, so safe environments such as East Timor are ideal, and risky environments such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo are unattractive. Even if troops are sent to dangerous places, they often play it safe. The best-known example occurred near Srebrenica in Bosnia in 1995, where Dutch troops were supposed to be providing a safe haven but failed to protect the scared refugees, who were massacred. The Dutch seem not to have learned a lesson from this—when Liberia looked worrying in 2004, as it has periodically in recent years, the Dutch sent a naval vessel, but their instructions were, broadly, to sail away if trouble developed. Another revealing case is the ragtag United Nations force in Sierra Leone. In 2000 the RUF rebel movement took five hundred of these soldiers hostage and stripped them of their military equipment. Was the RUF such a formidable fighting force? Hardly—once a few hundred British troops arrived a few months later, willing to take casualties, the whole rebel army rapidly collapsed. The UN troops were an easy target because the RUF understood that they would not resist. They were carrying their guns like tourists flaunting their jewelry.

So much for how not to provide international military intervention. By contrast, the British intervention in Sierra Leone just mentioned, Operation Palliser, has been a huge success. It has imposed security and maintained it once the RUF was disposed of. The whole operation has been amazingly cheap. I can think of no other way in which peace could have been restored and maintained in Sierra Leone. Anke Hoeffler and I even tried to do a cost-benefit analysis of the operation. Finding out about the costs was surprisingly easy—I simply phoned the Foreign Office, and not only did they more or less know, they more or less told me. The harder part was to estimate the benefits. After all, nothing much had happened in

Sierra Leone since the British troops established peace. This, of course, was the point. Without them there would have been some probability that plenty of very bad things would have happened. That avoided probability is the key to the payoff to British troops. We used our model of conflict to estimate the likely risk of reversion to conflict in Sierra Leone—admittedly a pretty crude approximation because we used the model of a typical postconflict country, which ignores the particularities of Sierra Leone. But as a way of estimating a representative payoff to postconflict interventions, sidestepping the particularities is not such a bad thing. We then took this avoided probability of conflict and multiplied it by the typical cost of a civil war, already estimated at around \$64 billion. I have to say that I do not like making calculations such as this; our model is better used to establish which policy interventions might typically work than to estimate risks in any particular case, because there is so much important information about each situation that a model must omit. But for what it's worth, we estimated that the benefits of intervention were around thirty times its cost. With a cost-benefit ratio like that, there is quite a bit of room for error in the calculations before they become misleading.

Operation Palliser was brilliant, and the British army can be proud of its contribution to the development of Sierra Leone. It also serves as a model for military intervention in the bottom billion: cheap, confident, and sustained. It was welcome, too—the people of the country were truly thankful. Yet it is completely uncelebrated. Instead, reverberating in the newspaper headlines each day is Iraq. As with Somalia, the apparent lesson from Iraq is to never intervene. That is not just the popular reaction but also the reaction of the insiders. In November 2005 I was invited to Brussels to address a bunch of specialists, and the room was awash with military braid. When I made my pitch on Sierra Leone, the first response was, "But surely that's been blown out of the water by Iraq." The important thing to remember, though, is that we've already discovered what happens when we stick our heads as deep in the sand as they will go: we get Rwanda.

So we should intervene, but not necessarily everywhere. Sierra Leone rather than Iraq is the likely future of intervention opportunities in the bottom-billion countries. Look at the contrasts between the two situations. In Sierra Leone our forces were invited in by the government and

hugely welcomed by the local population. In Sierra Leone we could not be accused of going in for the oil, as there wasn't any. In Sierra Leone we did not have to worry about "fixing what we broke," for there was not much to break, and we ousted the RUF with minimal damage. In Sierra Leone we needed less than a thousand proper soldiers to achieve decisive military change. The differences seem obvious.

#### *Protection Against Coups*

It is politically correct to argue that the military forces of the rich countries no longer have a role in the bottom-billion countries. Indeed, for fear of arousing anticolonialist sentiments the French have got themselves into the odd position of maintaining large military forces in Africa that they dare not use. For example, in 1999 they let the head of the tiny army in Côte d'Ivoire, Robert Gueï, mount a successful coup against the legitimate government despite having two thousand troops stationed in the country. To keep the French forces in their barracks, the coup leader promised to hold an election within six months. And so the French decided to let the coup succeed—after all, it was only for a little while. Evidently, the French government was not aware of the problem of time inconsistency: that sometimes the incentive to break a promise is overwhelming. To be fair, the coup leader did stick to the letter of his promise and held an election. But he put himself forward as a candidate and banned both of the country's most prominent political leaders from running. As you might imagine, this did not produce a happy outcome, and so the French army did eventually have to intervene to prevent a rebel group from seizing the capital. But instead of either putting down the rebellion or forcing a compromise settlement, the French simply held a line separating the government and rebel forces, yielding a *de facto* partition of the country that has now persisted for several years. Each side has used the respite to rearm; after doing so, the government attacked the French forces, since they saw them as protecting the rebels.

The French hesitation to intervene is mirrored in the deployment of the European Union's new rapid reaction force. Ostensibly this force is for deployment in African emergencies. I suspect that it will never be deployed. For example, it has not been used in Darfur, Sudan, where

government-backed militias are currently slaughtering and terrorizing the region's people, nor to put down the August 2005 coup in Mauritania. Its creation allows Europe to present the impression that it is doing something, just as the continuing French military presence in Africa creates the illusion of French power. But in reality these forces are impotent because Europe does not have an authorizing environment for their use. The United Nations does, but actually for many bottom-billion environments we can do better: we could turn to the regional political groupings. Most of the costs of state failure accrue to neighbors—that is, state failure is a regional public bad. So it is the region that has the strongest interest to do something about it. But in Africa no country really has the resources or the political ascendancy to impose order on failing neighbors. So the European Union has the forces and the aspirations, and the affected regions have the interests and can confer legitimacy. This situation has the potential for a marriage: the African Union could provide the political authority for military intervention, and the European rapid reaction force could be the backbone of whatever force was used to intervene. I will give an example of what I have in mind, something that almost worked out well, but didn't: Togo.

Togo was ruled as the personal fiefdom of a dictator, Gnassingbé Eyadéma, for thirty-eight years, a longer continuous period of rule than anywhere else other than Cuba. His rule was economically ruinous as well as politically stifling. He died in February 2005, and his son, Faure Gnassingbé, declared himself president. At this point the African Union, to its considerable credit, classified the event as a coup and insisted on a constitutional process. The African Union had sufficient power relative to Togo that Gnassingbé agreed to elections. Triumph? Nearly. Gnassingbé decided not only that he would be a candidate in the elections but that he would run them. To nobody's great surprise he announced himself the winner, though had he actually taken the trouble to count the votes he would have discovered that he had lost. So what should have happened? Well, surely what should have happened is that once the African Union had declared the coup unconstitutional, an international military force should have arrived promptly in the country to take temporary power. It really would not have needed to be a very big force. Speed would have been more important than size. In fact, what was needed was a rapid reaction force, which the European Union already had. A temporary military intervention would

have supervised free and fair elections. Nobody could have accused such an intervention of being neocolonialist, as the international force would not have been trying to colonize Togo. It would have sat there for perhaps four months. As it is, the world may have to wait a good long time until Gnassingbé makes his own decisive contribution to its development by dying, for he was thirty-eight when he became president.

Coups such as the one that destabilized Côte d'Ivoire are still a problem for the bottom billion. Remember, they are driven by much the same factors as rebellions are: poverty and stagnation. And yet it would be relatively easy to make coups history. We just need a credible military guarantee of external intervention. Obviously the European Union is not going to offer a blank check to every regime in the bottom billion. But we could offer a guarantee to democratic governments conditional upon internationally certified free and fair elections. I will spell out the conditions we might specify in Chapter 10, on international norms.

### **Are Domestic Militaries a Substitute?**

You might well be prepared to accept that in extreme situations such as Somalia, where there is a total breakdown of authority, there is a need for external intervention. But as for postconflict situations and the risk of coups, why don't the governments of the bottom billion rely upon their own security forces? Well, because in precisely the situations where governments face the greatest risks their own military establishments are not the solution but rather part of the problem.

### *Peace Through Strength?*

Back in Chapter 2 I discussed the risk that postconflict situations might revert to conflict. It's a substantial risk, and postconflict governments know it. Typically what they do is to keep their military spending high—almost as high as during the war itself. They forgo the chance of a peace dividend, thinking it too risky. This is a natural reaction, and you can see it on the ground—high levels of domestic military spending are typical in postconflict situations. But this could just be inertia. I wondered whether it would be possible to test whether governments set their levels of military spending

specifically in response to the risk of civil war. Anke and I were already working in the specialized world of military spending in order to determine whether it was financed by aid, as I discussed in Chapter 7. And we had already modeled the risk of civil war, as you saw in Chapter 2. We now brought the two together. Sure enough, the level of military spending that a government chose reflected the risk of civil war that it faced. Postconflict governments were spending more on the military largely because they faced abnormally high risks. Then we decided to confront the issue of whether this high level of postconflict military spending was effective in deterring conflict. This was not an easy question to answer because obviously the governments that spend the most are likely to be those that face the biggest risks. As a result, unless military spending is totally effective, high spending will be correlated with reversion to conflict. In other words, because causality runs from risk to spending, it is hard to distinguish any causality from spending to risk. We think we managed to overcome this problem, and our published results indicate that high military spending in postconflict situations is part of the problem, not part of the solution. It makes further conflict substantially more likely. It is natural for a postconflict government to try to defend itself, but it doesn't work. We have an idea of what goes wrong, and it involves time inconsistency. In postconflict situations neither side trusts the other. The rebels face the greater problem because governments can maintain their armies during peace much more easily than can the rebels. So although the government has an incentive to promise an inclusive peace deal, as time goes on it has less and less of an incentive to keep its word. As a result, there are sure to be factions among the rebel forces wanting to go back to war preemptively, while the option is still open. High military spending by the government may inadvertently signal to the rebel forces that the government is indeed going to renege on any deal and rule by repression.

I was once brought in to talk to a depressingly large group of finance ministers from postconflict countries, and I put to them this argument that high military spending is likely to be dysfunctional. Despite the fact that military spending is often a taboo subject, there was an enthusiastic chorus of approval led by the finance minister of Mozambique, Luisa Diogo. Now prime minister, Diogo gave us the example of her own country. Completely bucking the usual trend, her government had radically cut

military spending to virtually nothing, and the peace had endured. It turned out that, far from favoring big military budgets, finance ministers wanted evidence to defend their spending priorities against the demands of the powerful military lobby.

The key implication is that in postconflict situations risks are high. Governments recognize these risks. Eventually, if they run the economy well, this will bring the risk down, but it is going to take around a decade. There is no magic political fix, and so there has to be some military force to keep the peace during this dangerous period. But if the force is domestic, it exacerbates the problem. In the typical postconflict situation external military force is needed for a long time.

#### *Grand Extortion*

One obvious feature of coups is that they are perpetrated by the military. Our work on coups and on military spending shows pretty straightforwardly that after a successful coup the new leaders slam up military spending. But Anke and I wondered whether in response to a high risk of a coup governments tried to buy the military off. If this was the case, the military would, in effect, be running a protection racket on a grand scale. We termed this grand extortion. So we had a clear question: did a high risk of a coup drive up military budgets? Again, it was not an easy question to answer. Our research (which is still new and as yet unpublished) revealed that behavior was distinctive in the governments of the bottom billion. In countries that are richer than the bottom billion the risk of a coup is small, and if it increases a little, the military budget is not increased—indeed, if anything the military gets cut if it starts to be a nuisance. By contrast, in the countries of the bottom billion coup risk is generally much higher. The threat from the military is indeed probably the biggest risk of losing power that most of these governments face. And they pay up: more risk induces more money for the military.

If, however, we are right, then governments in the bottom billion are in a bind. They are genuinely threatened by their own armies, and so, threatened by grand extortion, they pay up. I say “they” pay up, but remember from Chapter 7 than in many of the bottom-billion countries around 40 percent of military spending is inadvertently financed by aid. So actually,

we in the West pay up. The militaries of the bottom billion are running an extortion racket and our aid programs are the victim. Coups are usually a dysfunctional way of changing government, and that is the core reason why we need to provide external military guarantees against them. But we might also bear in mind that if we provided military guarantees, the protection rackets would collapse. Governments could spend our aid on development instead of extortion.