

Boundaries and War in Africa in 1995

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Just like smoke indicates fire, boundaries indicate power. Boundaries could be defined as the very shape of power. This relationship holds at every scale from parental control over access to the master bedroom to boundaries that separate states. Boundaries also attend to war: the organised and strategic use of armed forces over time to alter the boundaries of power. Such boundaries may be administrative (political), economic, cultural, or strategic (e.g. controlling sea lanes) but power always includes some spatial extent. The purpose and usually the outcome of war is a new distribution of power. Anyone who regularly uses historical atlases may have noted that boundary changes are typically referenced to periods before and after wars (the monumental boundary changes after the Cold War being no exception).

Observing this relationship between boundaries and war and given the extent of the academic literature on classifying war, it is quite remarkable how few scholars choose to classify war in terms of bounded spaces. The level of violence, the ethnicity, race, class, or religion of the contenders, geographic scale, and abstract notions such as 'endemic' and 'non-endemic' have all been used to classify conflict.¹ These other means of classification are by no means obviated by describing war in terms of the struggle over bounding space.

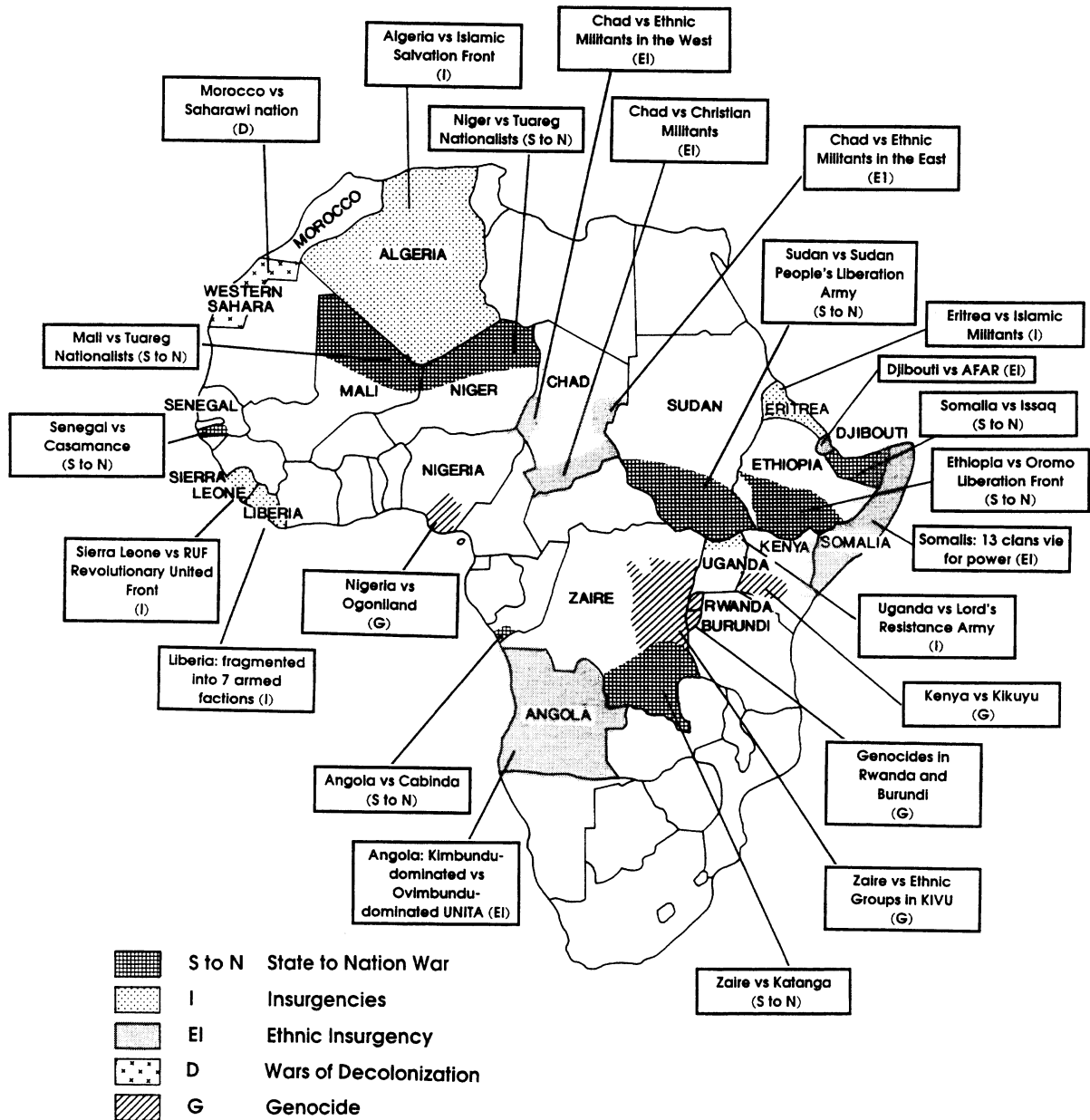
However, to neglect the relationship between boundaries and war can lead to fallacies in counting the actual number of wars. Sometimes wars do not meet some arbitrary intensity rating like 1,000 dead per year. Sometimes the scale of observation (usually the state) leads a scholar to identify only one war when a single state may experience several different wars of differing types on different fronts all within its boundaries (e.g., India, Burma/Myanmar, Chad). The most typical error in categorisation conflates secessionist struggles and insurgencies as 'civil war'. Each has a different historical origin, a different territorial objective, and both can occur at the same time in the same state (e.g., Angola).

Africa's ongoing wars as of April 1995 are employed here as an illustration that war, categorised by the territorial distribution of power being sought, can furnish a relatively accurate count. To achieve this the following definitions, enumeration of wars by region, a summary, and an illustrative map are provided. In preface, please note the following:

- By the definition of war outlined above sporadic feuding between various groups (political parties, religious groups, ethnic groups) are not included.
- Coups do not qualify as an 'ongoing war' since the key element is the timing of the overthrow.² Counting coups require historical summation.
- While there appear to be no state-to-state wars at this writing, this category remains for comparative purposes.
- The term nation is a term of self-identification and therefore any group making this claim is for our purposes so defined. On the other-hand a state is defined by boundaries established by international law.
- Nation claims to territories of recognised states exceeds the number of wars of secession. Some of these have the potential to erupt into war and will be footnoted but not calculated as state-to-nation war.

Insurgencies and Ethnic Insurgencies could be collapsed into a single category and the reader is welcome to do this in analysing the data. The categories are distinguished because of the distribution of power being sought. In one case statewide conversion to an ideology or religion is being sought (e.g. Islam in Algeria) and in the other case a specific group of people with common historic and cultural ties are seeking to dominate but not necessarily to alter the ethnic composition of the state.

WARS IN AFRICA 1995



Wars by Region

I. North Africa

1. Morocco vs Western Sahara or 'Saharawi Nation' (D).³
2. Algeria vs Islamic Salvation Front (I).⁴
3. Chad vs Ethnic Militants in the West (EI).
4. Chad vs Ethnic Militants in the East (EI).
5. Chad vs Christian Militants in the South (EI).⁵
6. Mali vs Various Armed Forces of Tuareg Nationalists (S to N).
7. Niger vs Various Armed Forces of Tuareg Nationalists (S to N).

II. Horn of Africa

8. Eritrea vs Islamic Militants (I).
9. Ethiopia vs Oromo Nation (S to N).⁶
10. Djibouti (Issa Dominated) vs Afars (EI).⁷
11. Somalia vs Issaq as 'Republic of Somaliland' (S vs N).
12. Somalia: Thirteen Armed Clans Vie for Power (EI).
13. Sudan vs Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (S to N).⁸

III. East Africa⁹

14. Kenya (Kalenjin dominated) vs Kikuyu and other ethnic groups (G).¹⁰

IV. West Africa.

15. Senegal vs Casamance (S vs N).¹¹
16. Sierra Leone vs Revolutionary United Front (I).
17. Nigeria vs Ogoniland (G).
18. Liberia: Seven Armed Factions (I).

V. Central Africa

19. Zaire vs Shaba as 'Katanga' (S vs N).
20. Zaire vs Ethnic Groups in Kivu (G).
21. Burundi: Tutsi vs Hutu (G).
22. Rwanda: Tutsi vs Hutu (G).
23. Uganda vs Lord's Resistance Army (I).

VI. Southern Africa¹²

24. Angola: Kimbundu-dominated MPLA vs Ovimbundu-dominated UNITA (EI).
25. Angola vs Cabinda (S to N).¹³

TOTALS

S to S	S to N	I	EI	D	G
0	8	5	6	1	5
0%	32%	20%	24%	4%	20%

The Categories

State-to-State Wars (S to S): One state seeks to militarily expand beyond its territorial boundaries at the expense of another state. State-to-Nation War¹⁴ (S to N): A self-identifying nation with self-defined territorial boundaries uses armed force to wrest a separate self-governing status from one or more state claimants.

Insurgencies (I): One or more armed factions representing an ideology or religion distinct from that of the state is using armed forces to bring the entire bounded area of the state under its control.

Ethnic Insurgency (EI): Two or more competing ethnic groups, clans, or tribes use armed forces to bring the entire bounded area of the state under exclusive control.

Wars of Decolonisation (D): An occupied state or nation employs armed forces to remove an occupying power from its territory.

Genocide (G): A government or another powerful organisation within the state uses armed force to kill off or otherwise effect the mass removal of a nation, a people, or an ethnic group from the state's claimed territories.¹⁵

Conclusion

As of March 1995 there were twenty-five different wars in Africa involving twenty different states. Chad, Angola, Somalia, and Zaire face wars on more than one front. At least eighty percent of Africa's wars are tied to the issue of ethnicity and identity in some manner (a legacy of colonial boundaries¹⁶). All the wars are related to some form of territorial claim but there are no wars between states over boundaries (ironically many people think of war as state-to-state combat). There is only one war of decolonisation: the Western Sahara has faced twenty years of occupation and colonisation by neighboring Morocco.

The largest single category of war may be state to nation conflict (one-third). However, if we collapse the distinction between insurgencies for ideological and religious reasons and those based on ethnicity, a greater number of wars (forty-four percent) are insurgents battling for state control. Genocide accounts for a significant number of one-sided wars in which the victims are relatively defenseless. If we excluded this category, one could argue that there are twenty ongoing wars,

but this would leave out one-fifth of the violent conflict and most likely the largest contributor to deaths by war in light of recent events (e.g., one million dead in Rwanda in the latest round).

Notes

- ¹ For example see Osaghae, (1994) 'The Persistence of Conflict in Africa: Management Failure or Endemic Catastrophe'; *The South African Journal of International Affairs*, 2, 1: 85-103, Summer; Gurr, R. T. (1994) 'Peoples Against States: Ethnopolitical Conflict and the Changing World System', *International Studies Quarterly*, 38: 347-377.
- ² However, the *coup d'état* may be defined in terms of bounded space: a particular group within the existing government structure that takes command of the entire bounded space of the state.
- ³ Probably Africa's last colony. Morocco stepped in 1975 just after the Spanish pulled out.
- ⁴ Islamic militants are also a threat to the original Berber inhabitants of Algeria. who have formed the Berber Cultural Movement and villagers with some government support are in military training to protect their villages.
- ⁵ Most of the armed forces are of one predominant ethnic group or another although other issues are involved including religion.
- ⁶ Oromo Liberation Front.
- ⁷ The armed faction of the Afars is known as the Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy.
- ⁸ The predominant two groups in the South are the Dinka and Nuer but as many as 100 different ethnic groups and nationalities are involved in the war.
- ⁹ The secessionist bid by Zanzibar (Tanzania) is tense and has the potential of erupting into a state to nation war.
- ¹⁰ The ruling party, the Kenya African National Union, is dominated by the tribe of President Daniel Arap Moi. Extrajudicial executions instigated by the government have been ongoing since 1991 (see Amnesty reports).
- ¹¹ Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance.
- ¹² Note also that there are calls for secession in the Western Province of Zambia based on the identity of the Lozi Nation ('Barosteland') and previous legal arrangements. There are also concerns that the Zulus may attempt to secede from South Africa but this is not likely as the official policy of the Inkatha Freedom Party is autonomy within the state (federalism).
- ¹³ The Front for the Liberation of the Cabinda Enclave wants to secede from Angola. Since its offshore oil wells produce about two-thirds of Angola's total production state resistance is strong.
- ¹⁴ This is typically called secession but that term is state-centric since the nation often preceded the state in historic terms. Furthermore, from the nation standpoint, one does not 'secede' from a union that was not voluntary but continues or resumes a long-standing struggle for liberation.
- ¹⁵ The popular term today is "ethnic cleansing."
- ¹⁶ See Griggs, R. (1995) 'The Boundaries of a New Africa,' *Boundary and Security Bulletin*, 2, 4: 30-32, January.

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