

# Insurgency in East and Central Africa: Trends and Inter-Connectivity

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**ABSTARCT----** *Plethora of literatures abound on insurgencies that swept away many regimes in East and Central Africa, but not without protracted internecine civil wars, some stretching from 1980s to 2000s. The typologies, propitious triggers, including the economic, social and political paraplegia it inflicted on the States under insurgency attacks have been widely published. The loss in population is equally disheartening. This paper differs from previous works in that it seeks instead, to capture the parallelism through the parallax of interconnectivities cutting across insurgency groups and regimes under insurgency jaws (regardless of type, demand, objective and country).*

*These interconnectivities, albeit multi-faceted and convoluted, when properly grasped, this paper further argues, will advance our existing state of knowledge on the reasons behind the boldness and success of warlords using insurgency route to power. The paper argues that there are labyrinths of interwoven connectedness in the study of insurgency in East and Central Africa. These inter-related dynamics , if adequately understood will be instructive to governments in preventing future rise of insurgency for the much desired peace, necessary for sustenance of development.*

**Keywords---** insurgency ecology; cultural cum territorial homogeneity; external provisioning; net-working and complicity.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rise of insurgency in East and Central Africa, as elsewhere in many parts of Africa led to civil wars fought with the worst primitive style of vandalism, unrestrained senseless killing of human population, rape, torture and maiming of persons (Combatants and non-combatants).

In some extreme cases, it brought about State “collapse”, social and economic disaster and political instability. Under such a climate of banditry and uncontrolled violence, anarchy became institutionalized culture.

The speed at which it spread across many parts of Africa sent nerves of trepidation into the international community on how Africa can cope with such magnitude of self-inflicted ‘holocaust’. More worrisome also is the fact that weak and poor performing governments of Africa lack the prophylaxis to contain insurgency and its socio-economic crisis. What has surprised many scholars is why such a development came immediately after the end of cold war and disintegration of the USSR. It also raises many fundamental questions on regime legitimacy, democratic norms, group inequalities, and the “juridical” and “empirical” domestic state configuration of post- colonial African states.

Other inter-related questions boarder on the underlying precipitants and triggers of insurgency, and why warlords prefer insurgency route to power, instead of democratic means through peaceful election.

The more the questions, the more evasive the answers.

This paper, therefore, seeks to capture the sinews of “warlords” for their courage and effrontery for armed rebellion against the regime they are contesting with for control of government. This can be explained with diverse, but inter-related internal contradictions, fusing with external forces in creating socio-economic and political morass, culminating to the sacking of regime in power. These internal contradictions (largely creations of regimes in power) combining with external forces manifest a trend in inter-connectedness in all insurgents groups and regimes under warlord’s assaults.

## **2. GEO- CULTURAL INTER-CONNECTIVITY**

Remarkably, influenced by awful experience of foreign exploitation and oppression in the hands of the Arabs and Europeans alike, the East and Central Africa developed one of the oldest traditions of insurgency, rebellion, and complex network of guerrilla warfare against foreign domination. For the various peoples inhabiting this region of Africa, raiding, local wars against one another, rebellion and aversion to loss of independence either to other African kingdoms, Arabs or Europeans gained popular acceptance and appeal as institutionalized culture. Without exceptions, all kingdoms and chiefdoms scattered all over the region reflect this fact. If you study one, you have gained insight into all others, as none is distinctively different from the other, in the use of raids and insurgency, in pursuit of lost freedom and independence. These facts have been acknowledged in the works of Hyden (1990), Zolberg (1964), Vansina (1990) Munro (1996), Zartman (1995), Block (1994), Chege (1994), etc. Thus, the explanation to the wild fire of violence, insurgency, and civil wars that engulfed and ravaged many parts of East and Central Africa in the 1950s to the dawn of the present 21st century can be captured in part from this historical background.

The contagious terrain in the territories of East and Central Africa made for uninterrupted movements of peoples across boarder divide. Colonial partition also contributed in splitting ethnic groups into different colonial states, as in the former kingdom of Rwanda partitioned into Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda, each with Tutsi and Hutu population. The same is true of Kingdom of Burundi comprising Tutsi minority and Hutu majority population. Territorial continuity of East and Central Africa facilitated migration of peoples and groups outside their autochthones combined with arbitrary European partition of the region as elsewhere in Africa, into different colonial states, later became a source of conflict between the autochthones and groups classified as citizens. A good example is in Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC and Cote d' Ivoire. In the former, the citizen law of 1981 robbed the Hutu and Tutsi right of citizenship, while in the latter, Laurent Gbagbo disfranchised his arch political rival, Alassane Quattara on the ground that the latter was an alien. Even, Yoweri Museveni, the Ugandan insurgent leader, was discredited by the then Obote led Ugandan government of being a Rwandan, "and hence a foreigner meddling in Ugandan internal affairs from Tanzania" Ngoga: 1988 p98.

## **3. ETHNIC HOMOGENEITY INTER – CONNECTIVITY**

The cutting across of many ethnic groups into different post-colonial states in East and Central Africa, their long tradition of warfare, resistance to foreign exploitation, as well as commonly shared values, culture and centuries of unrestricted social and economic interactions created a web of inter – connectivity of a sort among the peoples of the region. The effect is that events in one country spontaneously impact on the other countries, albeit varying in intensity and context. It is not, therefore, surprising that greater part of the region if not entirely, in a swoop, become trapped in armed insurgency, either from odd grouping of nationalities, alien to one another into one state, as in the incorporation of South Sudan into North Sudan, Eritrea into Ethiopia, Western Sahara into Morocco, or feeling of alienation, desperation and post- independence disillusionment as in DRC, Chad, Uganda, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, Sudan, Kenya, etc.

These insurgencies as characteristics of many states in East and Central Africa call for five inter- related questions;

- i. Regardless of the weakness of any government, can an insurgent group attack a ruling government (no matter the process through which it came to power) without external support and resource base?
- ii. Was it a spill- over from one country to another, arising from shared revolutionary ideology, coordination, or a product of support for insurgent groups by governments outside the borders of states under insurgency attack?
- iii. If neighborhood states were their collaborators, what reasons were responsible for such collaborations?
- iv. Are the triggers from internal contradictions?
- v. Can the reasons for the success of the insurgencies in-part, if not entirely, be located in ethnic fraternity among the varying ethnic groups divided across different countries in the East and Central Africa?

One shared characteristics among the contested states; Ethiopia, Chad, Sudan, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, DRC is state decay, arising from misrule and corruption by successive regimes. Others are internal contradictions of political exclusion, alienation and marginalization and pauperized citizenries. Admittedly, granted that insurgency thrives in weak states, such weakness is very unlikely to reduce the states to a level too weak for containment of insurgent onslaughts. The reason, therefore, has to be sought in external support and resource provisioning from other countries in the regions. However, this does not dismiss the centrality of failed state as a plus mark to regime challengers and the numerous advantages it presents to insurgency groups in attracting internal support from the peasantry and the unemployed youth. It is within the realm of this external support and backing of insurgency groups from some governments in the region that I shall locate the success question on insurgency.

Before looking at external support for insurgency, it is pertinent here to make the following clarification on insurgency.

Insurgency is contest over the control of government of a state by use of violence. The contest is between the leadership of the state and its regime challengers (known as insurgents) involving the military of the state and forces of the insurgent group(s), resulting to civil war, the collapse of the central government, the capture of the capital, and total sack of the regime in power. To accomplish this onerous task demands for super courage, dissipation of energy that requires constant re-energisation, protracted civil wars, assured sources of recruitment of persons to do the fighting, secured bases for training, resources to prosecute the wars, and daring spirit to take risks. Insurgent groups rationalize the justification for such a risky ambition with social and economic upheavals precipitating their armed struggle with the regime in power and its armed forces. Their argument on inequality, systematic discrimination and state decay as reasons for armed contest with the regime in power in my opinion is more of excuses than reasons, because after their overthrow of the supposedly bad regime and ascendancy to power, they too have also failed in providing a better alternative government than the one they replaced. Their “revolution” presumably meant to liberate the people from inequalities, end up putting the same masses into similar or worse forms of discrimination and marginalization. This observation agrees with Brass (1991) contention that mere existence of inequality is not always a catalyst for anti-state movement, because dominate groups, not disadvantaged by the regime believed to be anti- people oriented, sometimes even initiate insurgency.

#### **4. ETHNICITY, POLITICS OF EXCLUSION, INTRIGUES, VIOLENCE AND WEAK INSTITUTIONS CONNECTIVITY**

From the 1960s until recent times, coups and insurgencies are common forms of political transition, particularly in Africa. No matter the excuses, they do not fit into any known form of revolution, but should be seen as product of low political culture, power hunger, mass ignorance on democratic principles, absence of national consciousness and integration, unlike in Asia and South America where they are revolutionary. The spat of insurgencies that cross crissped and disquieted many countries of East and Central Africa are not response to diffusion of revolutionary spirit or ideology. The explanation can be located on the regions’ similarities and interconnectedness in politics of violence and exclusion, yielding to the urge to use violence as others elsewhere to ascend to power, which they cannot realize through peaceful means. Their connectivity as political warriors, irrespective of country they are fighting to possess, naturally created a network of fraternity amongst them through alliances and co-operations.

Paradoxically, on the contrary, government either under insurgency attacks or apparently without threats of insurgency, instead of uniting against a common foe and threat to the region, saw it as an opportunity to destabilize governments perceived as unfriendly, only to end up becoming victims as well. Some actually assisted insurgents in neighborhood countries as means of settling political scores and for weakening of regimes they see as threats (real or unfounded). This poor diplomatic calculation represents another aspect of interconnectivity in the reaction of East and Central African governments towards insurgency. Kenya stands out perhaps as the only exception that saw the hand writing clearly on the wall as demonstrated by Arap Moi’s loud cry of fear and accusation that “Uganda was harboring and training insurgents to overthrow his regime” Ngoga (1998 p.106). By the 1980s and well into the 1990s, a greater part of East and Central Africa has come under the niche of insurgency.

The history of insurgency in East and Central Africa shows interconnectedness in interests and alliances between the insurgent groups in the various countries where the central governments are under insurgency attack on one hand, and co-operations with regime challengers referred sometimes as warlords and/ or guerrillas with some governments in the two sub-regions. Other related interconnectedness shared commonly by these states under contest are weak institutions, state decay, weak central authority, loss of control over some territories to the warlords, parallel economy (a development that places the resources of lands under insurgents’ occupation to be harnessed by the warlords), paving way to dilapidation of national economy. Another artery of connectivity is the role of homogeneous ethnic groups and their distribution, as I earlier said, across different countries.

Wide inequalities in the distribution of national wealth, choiced jobs and political alienation targeted at some ethnic group(s) combined with socio-economic marginalization of the disadvantaged group(s) at periphery to provide triggers for insurgency. If insurgent groups succseed(s) in taking over the rein of government in contested state(s), sometimes after protracted civil war(s), members of their ethnic kind(s) in other countries in East and Central Africa tend to give them solidarity, and often re-create similar rebellion in their own regions. Networking of support among the

various insurgent group(s) with either common origin, but divided across different countries, or shared experience of marginalization created a connectivity of a sort among the insurgents, in their perception of their government as an enemy to be conquered. Many of the insurgencies and separatist movements reflect this trend. The works of Asiwaju (1995), Horowitz (1985), Kaplan (1994), Crawford (1976), Zartman (1995), Anaele (2012), bear eloquent proofs on the convergence and interconnectivity of various dynamics that fused into complex whole in aggravating insurgencies and separatist movements that resulted to the ‘collapse’ of many states in Africa from 1980s to the dawn of the 21st century.

The emphasis here is not that ethnicity itself causes insurgency and secessionism, but it does, as in Africa, where it combines with economic inequalities, injustices, as the dominant consideration for who gets what from government. Unlike in Western and other advanced democracies, Africa still displays wide group inequalities, ethnic divide in power and social relations, and silencing of sound reasoning from opposition with brutal force. This reality has pushed the oppressed group(s) to resort to the use of force against government, when they fail in their bid to change the structure by peaceful and constitutional means. Evidently, there is a correlation between African governments’ insensitivity to group(s) cravings and insurgencies that plagued and have continued to afflict several African countries till the present. This internal colonization of one group(s) by another must continue to catalyze social unrest, so long as it persists, as a political culture. The reasons for the huge successes recorded by insurgent group(s) in over-powering regimes in the contest over control of government have remained a topical debate. Some scholars allude it to state decay, weak institutions and unyielding of regimes to the cores of democracy. Those who share this view are Adekanye (2007), Nnoli (1989), Ihonvbere (1994), Egwu (2006), and several other scholars of like-mind. Sound and correct, the above view appears, this paper argues that state decay, weak institutions and undemocratic structures cannot alone reduce a state to a shameful level of easy pounding by insurgent group(s), knocked in power struggle with the state(s). The position of this paper is that what accounts for this success is when state decay and weak institutions combine with support to the insurgents from regimes within the East and Central Africa and collaboration with insurgents in other states. I shall in the subsequent and concluding sub-heading attempt polemics on the connectivity between state actors within the East and Central Africa and the hordes of insurgent group that wrestled power from several regimes in the two sub-regions.

## **5. STATE ACTORS, INSURGENCY AND INTER-CONNECTIVITY**

For many governments in the East and Central Africa, the wave of insurgency in several countries lying within the two sub-regions presented opportunities for state actors to settle scores with unfriendly governments. Though, there is no evidence of official alliances or vocal support for dissidents in principles, in practice, several insurgent groups actually leaned on the support of neighborhood governments. There was a network of co-operation among some of the warlords with those of their kind(s) fighting for control of state power in other countries. For instance, it was combined attack on Ethiopia from Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front, EPRDF, and Eritrean People’s Liberation Front, EPLF, that led to the capture of Addis Ababa and defeat of Mengistu in May, 1991 and subsequent defeat of Mengistu’s soldiers in Asmara May 24, 1991 by EPLF. The result of this was total independence of Eritrea from Ethiopia. Another related example was the capture of Zairian Capital, Kinshasa, by the forces of Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo/Zaire, ADLF, and the Rwandan Patriotic Front, RPF, in May, 1997 that sacked the government of Mobutu. East and Central Africa are volatile regions characterized by inter-state mischief, distrust and competition for monopoly of supremacy. It is not surprising, therefore, that the wave of unbroken insurgencies in the region created opportunities for paying back for old wounds and wrongs.

In the Sudan, the Sudan People’s Liberation Army, SPLA, had backings from the governments of Uganda, Ethiopia and Eritrea in retaliation of Sudanese government assistance to dissident groups in those countries.

The National Resistance Army, NRA,,an insurgent group in Uganda, ousted the military regime of Tito Okello following her capture of Kampala on January 26, 1986. The leader, and incumbent president of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni, received moral and logistic support from Tanzania. Majority of NRA militia were Rwandans. Earlier insurgent group in Uganda, Front for National Salvation, Fronasa, formed during Idi Amin’s regime for the purpose of ousting Amin trained their first crop of militia in Mozambique, and in 1971, 1972 attempted attack on Uganda from their base in Tanzania. It was in the bid to end Fronasa threat that influenced Amin’s declaration of total war with Tanzania in 1978-79, ending with his fall and exile. In the war, Franasa joined forces with Armed Forces of Tanzania.

Rwanda Patriotic Front, RPF, an insurgent group that took over power in Rwanda was a mixture of Tutsi militia and foreigners from Burundi, Uganda, Zaire, and Tanzania. Initially, Burundi was the first base of Inyenzi (the cockroach) onslaught on Rwanda. The RPF was formed in Uganda on December, 1987. In October,1990, the RPF attacked Rwanda from Uganda. By this attack, it set the stage for its war with Rwandan government of Habyarimana. Following the death of Habyarimana in a plane crash 1994, the Hutu with exciting proficiency and primitive warfare organised a greusome genocide against the Tutsi, killing within eight weeks nearly one million Tutsi population. By this act of pogrom, the RPF, saw the genoside as outright violation of its truce and power sharing with Hutu dominated



government of Rwanda. RPF took to arms again, captured Rwandan capital, Kigali, same 1994. Its leader, Paul Kagame, became the president of Rwanda.

As government forces came under the assault of RPF, the Rwandan government fled to eastern Zaire (sharing borders with Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda). In Zaire, it soon consolidated its powers, set up a shadow government and steadily built up an armed wing, a development that had obvious implications.

(i) It extended its spread into many parts of eastern Zaire for the settlement of its numerous population of refugees, (ii) its militia provided enlarged strength for Mobutu in silencing armed opposition against his regime, (iii) the co-operation it received from Mobutu government emboldened it to execute organised infiltration into Rwanda through Zaire's borders with Burundi and Uganda for raids inside Rwanda.

These developments were perceived as regional destabilization by neighbouring governments, especially Uganda and Burundi, both of which feared the consequences it would have if Rwandan insurgents in Zaire hook up with the insurgents and internal oppositions against their governments. Similarly, violence supported by Zaire in northern Uganda dotted with insurgency against Museveni assumed a new twist. At the same time, the Hutu insurgents in Zaire conspired by the Rwandan government in exile, perpetrated series of raids in Rwanda, forcing Rwandan government to declare war against them and their host country, Zaire, in 1996, when its activities became increasingly a threat to Rwanda and the entire Sub-region. The former Rwandan government in exile, through its alliances with authorities in eastern Zaire unrepentantly participated in genocide in which the Tuti population were by no means the only victims, in collaboration with Zairean Armed Forces, FAZ. The hostilities of the Rwandan Hutu insurgents and the FAZ on eastern Zaire combined with the Mobutu misrule and appropriation of the state to prepare the stage for the rise of an insurgency group, the Alliance of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire, ADLF, under the leadership of Kabila, an irreconcilable opposer to Mobutu's regime since 1963.

After transforming himself into a warlord, Kabila bided for the support of the masses who overwhelmingly allied with his 'movement'. Forces of former Rwandan government in Zaire retreated as he steadily gained ground into their areas of occupation, until he finally got rid of them, and Rwandan refugees in Zaire soil. Pounded from all sides by ADLF, Uganda and RPF, Mobutu to his disbelief lost grip on Zaire, as he watched his military, irredeemably evaporating from the heat of the RPF and ADLF assault. Weakened by poor morale and war fatigue, FAZ was reduced to a paper tiger and proved conspicuously unable to halt the advancement of ADLF and RPF into Kinshasa. This was achieved with fierce battle. By this sudden victory over Mobutu, though anxiously long expected, Kabila declared himself Zaire president.

Interestingly, Kabila's insurgency demonstrates another confirmation of my earlier position on insurgency and inter-state(s) interconnectivity. This can be summarised under the following characteristics: (1) Mobutu was unfriendly to Museveni government, if not in official policy but by action. (2) insurgent groups in northern Uganda are believed to enjoy the good-will of Sudan and Zaire. Zaire has been suspected as a launch pad between Uganda and the nests of the insurgents in Sudan. (3) during Mobutu's regime, Zaire Armed Forces, FAZ were known for allying with Ugandan dissidents. (4) Ugandan forces were part of the triumvirate (Uganda, RPF and ADLF) that fought the war against Zaire. (5) Angola, Zambia allowed ADLF to attack Zaire from their borders with Zaire. (6) ADLF received quantum patronage from Zimbabwe in arms and political good-will. (7) Mobutu solicited for mercenaries from Angola and South Africa.

## **6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

This study shows that insurgency does not just happen, as in the case of East and Central Africa, neither does it exist in a vacuum, nor is it fortuitous. It is a product of accumulated grievances, group inequalities and dependencies arising from privatization of the state by one person, his ethnic group and political entrepreneurs.

From this, we are placed in a better position to capture the various webs of interconnectivity that run across all the regimes under insurgency attack on one hand, and the warlords that use the insurgency route to power on the other hand. This paper argues that interconnectivities manifest in insurgency movements that led to the sacking of many regimes after horrific civil wars are products of internal contradictions and external forces. Several among these are geo-cultural propinquity, ethnic homogeneity across borders, ethnic paranoid, group inequalities in wealth and access to resource control and juicy jobs. Others are restrictions in the opening of political space, and politics of retaliation of many regimes in East and Central Africa in providing support and political good-will to insurgent group(s) in regimes they perceive as unfriendly. A study of insurgency ecology of East and Central Africa reflects connectivity between these internal dynamics and contradictions and external complicity of some regimes in the two sub-regions in the civil wars. These are what this paper has attempted to factorise, because they are largely accountable for the rise and success of insurgency.

These go to show that insurgency and the attendant civil wars are politically driven, though subtly expressed using ethnicity and economic marginalisation to sustain the momentum. Therefore, the only prophylactic is political solution through internalisation of full democratic norms, strong institutions, and unreserved compliance to due process, respect for human rights, just laws, opening of political space and respect to the franchise will of the people through free and fair elections.

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