Useful Enemies: When Waging Wars is More Important than Winning Them
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(from the proofs)

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CHAPTER 6: Wars within Wars

While war is generally seen as a contest between two sides, it may sometimes more usefully be seen as an 'enabling environment' for diverse local conflicts. This applies to both civil wars and 'global wars', like the Cold War and the 'war on terror'.

Well before Sierra Leone's civil war, there had been a long-running dispute between ruling families in Kailahun district in the east, a dispute that centred on chieftaincy positions.1 A Methodist minister who was working in Kailahun at the time of the rebel incursion told me that chiefs appointed by the ruling party became a particular target for violence once war broke out, adding:

When the rebels came from Liberia, the main chiefly families in Kailahun were in a position to stand by the soldiers and drive the rebels back. They are known to be good fighters. For the rebels to overtake them tells you a lot. Each [family] saw it as an opportunity to gain ascendancy, so they did not stand as a team to destroy the rebels. They stood by the rebels to destroy the houses of the other factions. The war has been going on long before we realised it, in the sense that people had their differences.

In their own investigation, Philippa Atkinson and her colleagues observed: 'Some people collaborated with the rebels out of desire to wreak revenge in old feuds … Long-lasting family feuds were brought to the surface with the knowledge that pointing a finger could mean death.'2 There are parallels here with the pursuit of personal vendettas under cover of witch-hunts, for example in seventeenth-century Salem, North America.3

Yale scholar Stathis Kalyvas emphasises that civil war has tended to serve as a vehicle for local feuds, but he adds that such wars do not simply represent an accumulation of local feuds. A study by Benjamin Paul and William Demarest of the small town of San Pedro in Guatemala illustrates the point. Here, local cleavages – both political and religious – were actually of long standing, but it took a war to ignite these disputes into outright violence: 'What disrupted the peace in San Pedro was not the presence of differences and divisions, but the army's recruitment of agents and spies that had the effect of exploiting these cleavages.'4

Just as local feuds tend to grow more violent within the context of an 'enabling' civil war, so, too, national disputes tend to become more violent and more destructive within the context of an 'enabling' global war that provides cover and legitimacy for these disputes. Thus, conflicts at various levels tend to overlap dangerously and to interact: there are wars within wars, and systems within systems.

Since at least the Second World War, civil wars have usually been waged within the context of a wider, global war, like the Cold War or the 'war on terror'. In this context, major powers have routinely turned a blind eye to violence by allied

actors (especially allied governments), while civilians have frequently fallen victim to this process. At the national level, civilians may be deemed by their own governments to be illegitimate (and not deserving of rights or protection) because of their (actual or presumed) association with some demonised enemy;5 and where that enemy has also been demonised internationally, the abuse has typically been reinforced.

Whether in the Cold War or after, the standard framework in the West has been to dismiss the grievances of rebel groups (who may

be labelled 'Communist', 'greedy', 'criminal', 'terrorist', 'fanatical', 'genocidal' or some combination of these) and to articulate very publicly the absolute importance of militarily defeating this embodiment of evil.

Unfortunately, this reflex has tended to create a kind of 'open season' for greed and political repression within the machinery of counterinsurgency (which may sometimes extend beyond the state borders to

include neighbouring countries). Meanwhile, any leverage that the West may have in relation to an abusive regime and its international allies has routinely been thrown away amidst a loudly proclaimed project of eliminating a demonised enemy.6 These overlapping war systems are all the more pernicious because the proclaimed intention of eliminating the enemy may often itself be a cover for exploitation and repression, as we have seen. The priorities of pro-Western politicians and their soldiers have rarely centred solely on defeating that enemy, while international actors, too, have typically had goals that complicate – and even impede – the declared goal of 'winning'.

The Cold War meant a 'green light' for government repression in Vietnam, El Salvador, Guatemala, Indonesia, the Philippines and a great many other countries. Often, there was little incentive for repressive governments to reform (for example, implementing land redistribution), since inflows of aid were guaranteed so long as domestic Communists had a presence.7 Some governments were able to play the superpowers off against each other. Meanwhile, there was also Western encouragement for abusive rebel groups in Nicaragua, Angola, Mozambique and elsewhere. Famine, too, found a sinister friend in the Cold War: in Ethiopia, for example, international responses to the 1984–85 famine were impeded by Cold War politics (notably Western fears of driving the regime further into the Soviet camp).8 Meanwhile, the evolving famine in Sudan was deepened when Western governments turned a blind eye to militia raiding – and the blocking of relief – that was sponsored by Khartoum, a Cold War 'ally' that Western governments were reluctant to criticise.9 In effect, the southern Sudanese became 'illegitimate civilians', both nationally and internationally.

Even after the Cold War, the enduring ideological assumption that 'liberalising' governments are good governments has created space for widespread abuses, as we saw in Sierra Leone.

The 'war on terror' has reinvented and reinvigorated many of these damaging dynamics. When George W. Bush famously said that 'either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists', this was usually interpreted (correctly) as a message of intimidation towards those hesitating to sign up to his 'war on terror'. But another problem with this 'pick a side' approach has become increasingly clear: namely, that those who are deemed to be 'with us' have been able to use this status to carve out a great deal of impunity for abuse. In fact, many exploitative

and repressive regimes have managed to secure huge inflows of Western aid – and even lavish praise – while engaging in such abuse.

In Algeria, heightened international fears around 'Islamism' in the 1990s helped fuel regime abuse in a number of ways. Powerful elements of the Algerian military found, in the 1990–98 civil war against 'Islamists', the means of forestalling democratic rule by the Islamists (who were winning the – interrupted – elections in 1992), of attracting foreign aid and loans (to combat the 'Islamists'), of engaging in crime under cover of war (for example, the trade in cars stolen from France), and of positioning themselves within a lucrative privatisation process (notably in relation to the oil and gas industries).10 In his study of the Algerian war, Luis Martinez was led to ask: '... are the Islamist groups and the military not in the process of becoming "complementary enemies" finding in the violence of war the way to achieve their aspirations?'11

Sudan has positioned itself rather ambiguously, but often very cleverly, within emerging post-Cold War global conflicts. After the Cold War had helped to shield the Khartoum government from Western criticism in the 1980s, Sudan's relations with the US soured in the 1990s. This stemmed, in large part, from Khartoum's support for Saddam Hussein's 1990 invasion of Kuwait. Sudan's close ties with the Middle East (including Iran and Iraq)12 and, increasingly, with China and Malaysia, helped to sustain the abusive military government in Khartoum in the 1990s. In effect, Khartoum was able to carve out renewed impunity in the context of, first, the growing tension between the 'Arab world' and the West

(a forerunner of 'the war on terror') and, second, the growing rivalry between China and the West (a mutation of the Cold War).

The US, however, had not given up on restoring its influence in Khartoum, and in the aftermath of 9/11 Washington and Khartoum enjoyed something of a 'rapprochement'. Significantly, Khartoum gave the US government access to banking details on Osama bin Laden (who had lived in Sudan from 1991 to 1996), as well as information on other al Qaeda operatives. Khartoum also courted favour with Washington by, first, detaining Islamist militants on their way to join insurgents resisting the US-led occupation of Iraq from 2003, and, second, by supplying information on Islamist groups in Somalia. Disturbingly, Sudan's intelligence chief, Major-General Salah Gosh, was even flown by executive jet in April 2005 to meet CIA officials in Virginia.13 Yet this was the same Salah Gosh who had been accused by US Congress members of directing attacks on civilians in Darfur. John Prendergast and Colin Thomas-Jensen commented:

Cooperation accelerated after the 9/11 attacks on the United States, and Sudanese intelligence officials deftly exploited this relationship to deflect US pressure on other fronts. When President Bush asked his cabinet for robust options to sanction the Sudanese government because of Darfur, the US intelligence community squashed any actions that might upset the US-Sudanese relationship.14

Too much international protest over Darfur was also seen as jeopardising the north–south peace agreement that the US government had done so much to nurture. In these circumstances, particularly during the intense government-sponsored violence in 2003, many victims of violence in Darfur became, to a significant extent, 'illegitimate civilians', whether in the eyes of Khartoum or Washington. Washington's view began to change as the campaign in the US to highlight genocide in Darfur gathered steam in 2004, but much of Darfur was already in ruins by that time, and even the US declaration of 'genocide' did not translate into very substantial sanctions or protection on the ground.15 Meanwhile, the Arab victims of Arab pastoralists' violence tended to remain unremarked and unassisted, and the continuing grievances of some of the attackers were largely neglected.16

The case of Libya also shows how systems of violence can overlap and interact. Muammar Gaddafi, Libya's 'brother leader', had long been seeking to clamp down on domestic Islamists, even claiming that they were supported by 'Zionists' and 'US imperialists'. After the 1988 Lockerbie plane bombing, Gaddafi also faced UN sanctions, which threatened to ignite Islamist opposition. The events of 9/11 gave him a new opportunity, and Gaddafi was able to secure something of a green light for his habitual internal repression by positioning himself as an unlikely ally in the 'war on terror'. In George W. Bush's brave new world, where you were 'either with us or with the terrorists', Gaddafi was 'with us'. After 9/11 (and facing the threat of an Iraq-style attack by the Bush regime), Gaddafi announced the end of his programme for weapons of mass destruction and allowed international access to the relevant sites. The Bush administration had hoped that attacking Iraq would send a message to any state with plans for weapons of mass destruction, and in the case of Libya at least the tactic may actually have worked. Gaddafi stated explicitly that, with George Bush in charge, no one could know whether they would be a target or not17 (a point that seems to have applied equally to Vice President Dick Cheney, who famously missed the quail during a 2006 hunting trip and shot a fellow hunter). Gaddafi was also courted as a source of oil, a customer for Western arms, and an unlikely advocate of Tony Blair's 'Third Way' between capitalism and socialism.

In December 2003, the UN Security Council lifted sanctions on Libya, and less than a year later the European Union ended its embargo on weapons sales to Tripoli. All this opened up major opportunities, in particular for arms companies and US oil companies.18 The EU granted export licences for more than 800 million euros' worth of arms exports to Libya.19 Britain was even happy to export 'toxic chemical precursors' (which can be used to make chemical weapons) to the country (a courtesy also extended to Sudan, where in 1998 the US had bombed a Khartoum factory that was suspected of producing chemical weapons).20 Political scientist Luis Martinez commented: 'for the oil companies and the weapons industry, the Libya of Colonel Qadhafi turned from a "pariah state" into a Mediterranean "eldorado".'21

One of Gaddafi's assets in this remarkable turnaround was his knowledge of the Islamist groups that he had been attempting to suppress within Libya for many years.22 A wave of Islamist violence had threatened the regime in the late 1990s. When Gaddafi had blamed this on 'imperialist' and 'Zionist' powers, he was trying to build an international support base in the Arab world. But he was generally unsuccessful in this endeavour.23 Gaddafi cleverly adapted to the new

international climate, and after 9/11 the Islamist opposition within Libya was deftly rebranded as the work of al Qaeda.

Another of Gaddafi's assets in his rapprochement with the West, strangely, was precisely his experience and expertise in sponsoring international terrorism. Over the years, Gaddafi had not only supported the 1988 Lockerbie passenger-plane bombing, but had also lent his support to a wide range of terrorist groups around the world, including the Irish Republican Army (IRA), Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines, and even the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone. After 9/11, Gaddafi proved his newfound 'usefulness' by helping to secure the release of hostages held by Islamist groups in Algeria and the Philippines, for example.24 Like President Bashir in Sudan, Gaddafi benefited from supplying the West with information on his erstwhile friends. At my university, an expert in information technology once told me that the most lucrative corporate jobs combating viruses sometimes go to those who have created viruses themselves; Gaddafi seems to have been exploiting a similar logic.

In addition to Sudan and Libya, a number of other abusive regimes in Africa have been able to carve out a degree of impunity from the 'war on terror'. A particularly disturbing case is Somalia, which hit the headlines when famine spilled over from southern Somalia into Kenya and Ethiopia in 2011. For many months, this catastrophe was presented within a depoliticised framework that highlighted 'drought'. In fact, as Somali scholar Abdi Ismail Samatar has pointed out: 'The African Union, the UN, the EU and the US continued to describe the famine as a drought until July 18 [2011].'25 While drought was certainly a factor, the role of conflict went damagingly unremarked. And when it was belatedly acknowledged, this was usually through a vague reference to 'civil war' or to the abuses of the Islamist rebels in Somalia. An October 2011 report by Matt Bryden for the prominent US pressure group Enough stated: 'it is ultimately al-Shabaab's [the Islamist rebels'] twisted ideology, repressive methods, and indifference to the suffering of its own people that lies behind this catastrophe.'26 While the rebels played a major part, this famine also owes a great deal to the US-led 'war on terror' and to various forms of violence that have been deemed acceptable – even desirable – within a 'war on terror' framework.

In 2006, a coalition of local Sharia courts ended the fifteen-year domination of Mogadishu by Somali warlords. The resistance of many militias crumbled as the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) gained ascendancy in much of the country and restored a significant degree of order. Most Somalis seem to have welcomed the UIC as blessed relief from the warlords, and Samatar observed that 'the vast majority of Somalis supported the UIC and pleaded with the international community to engage them peacefully'.27 But the US government, which had been cooperating with several of the incumbent warlords in apprehending suspected terrorists,28 suspected that the UIC was itself harbouring East African terrorists. In fact, there were growing fears that Somalia was becoming a haven for al Qaeda.

These fears were rather exaggerated: most Somali experts estimated that there were no more than half a dozen terror suspects on Somali territory. But the damage done by this atmosphere of suspicion and paranoia was real enough. For one thing, US statements against – and lack of support for – the UIC government meant that some of the less radical Islamists lost influence to the radicals.29 In these circumstances, Ethiopia was able to play cleverly on US fears of a 'new

Taliban', and in December 2006 – with Washington's explicit approval – Ethiopian forces invaded Somalia, defeated the Islamist UIC government, and installed a new regime in Mogadishu (known as the Transitional Federal Government, or TFG).30 At this time, Ethiopian forces shelled heavily populated neighbourhoods in Mogadishu, while TFG militias terrorised the population of the capital.31 More than a million people were displaced, and many were propelled along a path that was to culminate in outright famine in 2011.32 Meanwhile, the newly installed TFG regime proved deeply abusive and corrupt. According to a detailed report by the International Crisis Group in February 2011:

A cabal within the [TFG] regime presides over a corruption syndicate that is massive, sophisticated and extends well beyond Somalia's borders. The impunity with which its members operate and manipulate the system to serve their greed is remarkable. They are not fit to hold public office and should be forced to resign, isolated and sanctioned.33

Such concerted pressure was never brought to bear, however. Instead, the TFG was shored up by international support in the context of a much-highlighted 'al Qaeda threat'. As Mark Bradbury noted in an authoritative report:

... the Ethiopian invasion (unsanctioned by the UN), US airstrikes, the rendition of suspected Islamic militants, the closure of the

Kenyan border to Somali refugees, the indiscriminate shelling of civilian neighbourhoods in Mogadishu by Ethiopian forces, the mass displacement of civilians from Mogadishu, assassinations, and arbitrary detentions all elicited very little reaction or condemnation from foreign governments and multi-lateral agencies ... The international backing for the TFG and muted international response to abuses by it, illustrated the extent to which the 'global war on terror' had taken priority over human rights, humanitarian principles, and international law.34

In these circumstances, unsurprisingly, the TFG showed little genuine interest in power-sharing. The former 'Islamist government', now recast as 'Islamist insurgents', was subjected to a series of American missile strikes against 'high value terrorist targets'.35 As so often in the past, however, this kind of aggressive approach proved profoundly counterproductive. In a cogent analysis, Harry Verhoeven observed: 'the decision by the White House to place Al-Shabaab [the Islamist rebels] on the list of terrorist organisations [in March 2008] has further radicalised Somalia's Islamist youth'.36 Particularly destabilising was a May 2008 US Tomahawk missile strike that killed the leader of al-Shabaab, Aden Hashi Ayro. Al-Shabaab responded by declaring that all American, Western and UN officials and organisations were now on its expanded list of targets, something that placed aid agencies in much greater danger.37 The assassination also encouraged a fragmentation of the Islamists, which further reduced the security of humanitarian agencies.38

In 2008 retired Colonel Thomas Dempsey, former director of African Studies at the US Army War College, told a US Senate hearing on the Horn of Africa that military strikes in Somalia had created widespread mistrust of the US in Africa, adding:

The collateral damage, including loss of innocent civilian lives, which is an unavoidable consequence of military strikes, no matter how carefully targeted or surgically delivered, threatens to undermine the moral authority of our

counterterrorism efforts and arguably contributes to the ongoing recruitment efforts of the terrorist groups themselves.39

Meanwhile, TFG leaders and security forces (which were being supported by the 'international community') were themselves blocking and looting relief, arguing that this relief was helping 'the terrorists'.40 Some government supporters were also attacking aid workers.41 These abuses from both sides helped to starve the population of Mogadishu, as well as people displaced from the capital.42 At the same time, some UN and donor-state diplomats were downplaying the crisis, lest it embarrass an internationally favoured TFG government that was said, rather optimistically, to be engaging in 'state-building'.43

It is true that al-Shabaab has banned most agencies from working in the zones it controls and has carried out attacks on humanitarian workers. It has also confiscated food and other goods and restricted people's freedom of movement. All these actions have contributed significantly to famine, and there is an urgent need for governments in the Middle East, in particular, to exert whatever leverage they can on the rebels.44 That said, there is something a bit too easy about blaming – once again – the 'fanatical rebels' (in this case, 'Islamic extremists'). Al-Shabaab's antipathy towards Western-led interventions (including Western-led relief operations) has not arisen out of nothing, but rather reflects, in large part, a backlash against the US/Ethiopian interference in Somalia and the ousting of a government that was, in many ways, both popular and successful. It would seem to be a case of Hannah Arendt's concept of 'action as propaganda' – essentially the use of violence, usually by totalitarian regimes, to shape the world in a way that makes propaganda look more plausible.45 In this case, the military intervention by US-backed Ethiopian forces helped to create a radicalised and anti-humanitarian al-Shabaab. As the stereotype of the 'fanatical Islamist rebel' became more and more plausible, this seems progressively to have edged out any lingering international recollections of the relative peace that the UIC had brought to Somalia before the Ethiopian intervention.

International aid also seems to have been compromised by the 'war on terror'. At the beginning of 2010, the World Food Programme (WFP) suspended aid to south-central Somalia, citing insecurity. But the UN agency had also been under strong pressure from the US government, a major donor, not to provide relief that could find its way into the hands of 'terrorists'.46 US food aid to Somalia fell foul of US anti-terrorist legislation in 2009,47 and Somalia expert Ken Menkhaus notes that relief to areas of rebel strength was effectively criminalised, as the US government sought to ensure that no relief would reach terrorist groups.48

Unfortunately, impunity linked to the 'war on terror' has radiated outwards from Somalia to affect neighbouring Ethiopia as well. Ethiopia is a key US ally in Africa, particularly given its role in confronting 'Islamists' in Somalia. Ethiopia has attracted huge aid resources from the West, and this assistance (and related international approval) has given Addis Ababa a great deal of political space in which to deepen the repression of its own people.49

In the Ogaden region, the Ethiopian government has confined aid agencies to the edge of the war it has been waging since 1994 against the Ogaden National Liberation Front, allowing the government to conduct reprisals 'behind closed doors'. These reprisals, intensifying since 2007, have included forced displacement and a commercial blockade against the Ogadeni population, which

is mostly Muslim and ethnic Somali.50 Aid agencies were accused of supporting the rebels, while the aid agency Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has been particularly critical of what it sees as a weak response within the UN system.51 The Ugandan government, too, has derived damaging impunity from the 'war on terror' – not least because of its involvement in Somalia. Uganda has provided 'peacekeepers' to support the US-backed Transitional Federal Government in Somalia, and has also hosted European Union training of TFG soldiers.52 As so often, these mechanisms are variations on a well-worn theme: it may be recalled that repressive governments in the Philippines and South Korea, for example, gained important US support from supplying troops for the war in Vietnam.53 The provision of 'peacekeepers' for Somalia was only the latest in a series of efforts by the Ugandan government to curry favour with the US as an ally against 'terror'. In the 1990s (and before 9/11), the US was already turning its attention to 'Islamic extremism' as part of the new, post-Cold War definition of the enemy. Sudan's government was seen as part of this emerging threat, and in these circumstances – as Andrew Mwenda shows – Washington increased its support to the rebel SPLA in southern Sudan, using Uganda as a channel for this assistance.

The Sudanese government retaliated by supporting the Ugandan rebel LRA. While Khartoum's abuses against southern Sudanese people
were all too real (as we have seen), Uganda's role in the US anti-terror drive itself proved to be an opportunity for manipulation and abuse. Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni was able to present himself
as confronting Sudanese government 'terror', as well as LRA rebel
'terror' in Uganda and Sudan, and in these circumstances he was able
to secure very substantial economic and diplomatic support from the US. The US government also stepped up its logistical and intelligence support for the Ugandan army, and encouraged Ugandan forces to pursue the LRA inside Sudan. Yet this flew in the face of existing evidence on just how ineffective and acquisitive the Ugandan army
was proving to be when confronting named enemies in the DRC and in northern Uganda.54

The Khartoum government, anxious to be seen as 'anti-terrorist'
in the wake of 9/11, gave explicit permission for Uganda's 'anti-LRA' operations in 2002, operations that had been going on unofficially for many years prior to that and that offered a continuing opportunity
for economic predation.55

In fact, Museveni was able to obtain a free hand for a wide variety of dangerous 'security' projects – not only the invasions of Sudan from 1997, but also the mass displacements and expropriations in northern Uganda, the Ugandan-backed incursion of Tutsi RPF rebels into Rwanda in 1990–93 (which helped to precipitate genocide in 1994), and the Ugandan invasion of the DRC in 1998.56 For a country with a reputation in the West for 'good government', this represents a formidable record. Uganda's strategic alliance with the West was underlined when Uganda (like Rwanda) signed up to the so-called 'coalition of the willing' that supported the US-led invasion of Iraq.57

Within Latin America, the 'global drive against 'terror' has probably proved most damaging in Colombia. Combining perniciously with the 'war on drugs', a pre- and post- 9/11 'war on terror' has propped up abuses by counterinsurgency

actors, while at the same time minimising the attention paid to grievances that have helped to inform rebellion. Most of the spending under the US-backed Plan Colombia (announced in 1999) has been military spending, in contrast to the US's Alliance for Progress scheme in the 1960s, when the proportion was only around 10 per cent. The radical land and tax reforms envisaged in the 1960s were also dropped amidst a fashionable emphasis on the need for a military solution to the problems of drugs and 'terrorism'.58

In the Middle East, Israel has been able to exploit the 'war on terror' to underscore its longstanding impunity in the face of its abuse of Palestinian civilians and its periodic aggression in Lebanon. While the economic context for Israel's abuses is rarely discussed, it is significant that the country has pioneered 'home security' industries, and that its economy – increasingly geared towards counterterrorism industries – has flourished amidst widespread violence in the region. In 2006, Israel was the fourth-largest arms dealer in the world – larger than the UK – and the country's large imports of US weaponry have encouraged Israel's own arms industry to look for markets abroad.59 Israel has also been extremely active in exporting counterinsurgency advice and technology (including to dictatorships, as well as abusive counterinsurgencies like those in Guatemala, Turkey and Sri Lanka).60 Klein notes that while wars around the world have often sent shocks through financial markets, the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange actually rose in August 2006, despite a devastating war with Lebanon. This is not quite the whole story, as the markets did fall in the summer of 2006 when the war was starting, but the general point still holds. As an enthusiastic report from Wyatt Investment Research points out: 'Less than three months after the war, the Tel Aviv stock market hit all time highs. The war put only a slight damper on growth, and after it ended, almost every sector of the economy came out stronger than before … Israel truly is a success story.'

The report went on: '… violence has done very little to derail the tech sector's growth … On November 4 2008, the Israeli Defense Force made their first major incursion into Gaza … Despite this surge in violence, the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange traded more on news of Lehman Brothers' collapse than battles next door.'61 In fact, the Tel Aviv stock market rose strongly after the renewal of the Gaza conflict.62

Many of Israel's 'home security' and 'defence' products can truthfully be proclaimed to be 'tried and tested' locally, and each new war brings a chance to advertise high-tech killing products.63 Israel's changing economy has also subtly – but substantially – affected its attitudes to peace. In the early 1990s, the damage inflicted when Arab countries boycotted Israel provided a significant incentive for peace accords in the form of the 1993 Oslo agreement.64 But Israel's growing reliance on high-tech exports – including its defence-related exports – has seen a growing focus on Western markets rather than Arab markets; and these exports generally do not require Arab labour either. This seems to have created a greater indifference to Arab opinion (and sanctions), while also incentivising border 'closures' (which limit the 'flow' of Palestinian labour into Israel and simultaneously create great suffering).65 Meanwhile, hardship arising from the opening up of the Israeli economy and the loss of many traditional manufacturing jobs tended to strengthen Israeli nationalist parties while also angering the Arab minority within Israel.66

Yemen provides another illustration of the way in which impunity for local abuses can flourish in the context of a 'war on terror'. It also illustrates how the expressed desire to eradicate the enemy may conceal a degree of mutual interest. Yemen's tribal periphery has become a refuge for several leaders of a shadowy group known as Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).67 While Yemen was already seen as an ally in the 'war on terror', the country's own terrorist problem came under much greater international scrutiny when the attempted bombing of a US passenger jet on Christmas Day 2009 was linked to AQAP. International concerns about Yemen deepened in October 2010, when explosives were found in the toner cartridges of two printers on board cargo planes whose flights originated in Yemen. The separate packages were discovered in the UK and Dubai just hours before they were set to detonate.68 In this climate of heightened fear, Yemen's long-time president, Ali Saleh, seems to have realised that AQAP represented in many ways a rather useful enemy. Saleh was able to appeal to the West for massive economic assistance to ward off the threat of AQAP.69 Meanwhile, AQAP also offered a pretext for internal repression, including intimidation of the media. All this helped Saleh to prop up an extremely corrupt political system.70

In these circumstances, the Yemeni government's desire to eliminate AQAP – and other 'enemies' – has been very much open to doubt. After the Yemeni government announced the killing of Abdullah al-Mehdar, he was officially described as one of the country's most wanted militants and the suspected leader of an al Qaeda cell. But Guardian journalist Brian Whitaker noted pithily: 'The word in Yemen is that Mehdar was just a troublesome tribal figure who didn't join al-Qaida until he was dead.'71

Whitaker added in January 2010 that in the 'Houthi war' (a rebellion in northern Yemen led by former member of parliament Hussein al-Houthi), 'the army has supposedly been just days from victory ever since September [2009]'.72 That war in the north has seen government abuses that have themselves been encouraged by the 'war on terror'. Michel-Olivier Lacharité, with the aid agency MSF, notes:

There was very little media coverage of the Yemen conflict between 2004 and 2007. The lack of war images and reports was due to the Yemeni government's extremely tight control over information exercised through physical persecution of journalists and legal prosecution of the regime's opponents. These prosecutions stepped up in 2001, helped by Yemen joining the 'Global War on Terror', which signified its alignment with the United States.73

In late 2009, MSF did draw attention to government air strikes and poor health service provision (and also put Yemen on its list of 'top ten humanitarian crises'), but the government immediately suspended permission for all MSF activities, and the aid agency quickly issued an apology.74

In a pattern familiar from Vietnam, Afghanistan, Somalia and elsewhere, Western intervention in Yemen seems to have ignored (and worsened) corruption within the government and the counterinsurgency, while also ignoring (and worsening) grievances among the rebels. The two problems are linked, since – again mirroring Vietnam, Afghanistan and Somalia – government corruption has fed strongly into rebel grievances.

As so often, large-scale international aid has created 'perverse incentives' for the local elite, reducing the need for it to be responsive to its own constituents.75 As

Phillips puts it, 'By seeking to strengthen the existing power hierarchies, donors may unwittingly reduce the incentives for the Yemeni elite to become more responsive to the deep socio-political ruptures it is perpetuating.'76 Among the most profitable activities for government actors have been large-scale diesel smuggling and the shadowy operations of the Yemen Economic Corporation, which was originally funded by soldiers' contributions and which proved to be the main beneficiary of a privatisation drive at the end of Yemen's 1994 civil war. Like the Viet Cong, the Taliban and al-Shabaab, AQAP has made good use of bad governance. Phillips comments drily: 'Much of AQAP's potency rests on its ability to offer – or be perceived to offer – more to the tribes than what the government is offering. Given the current turbulence of Yemen's domestic politics, this is not an overwhelming task.'77 Among the grievances that AQAP has exploited has been the draining of oil revenues from poor regions of the country.78 A related grievance has been the use of oil money, from the late 1980s, to undermine the willingness of tribal leaders to advocate on behalf of their constituents; many of these leaders moved to the cities, where they could strengthen their ties with the central government, often neglecting their own people.79 Falling oil revenues have themselves put a major strain on this system.

In another echo from other wars, the legitimacy of the Yemeni government has been further undermined by US air attacks. As Phillips observes, 'AQAP's political appeal is … heightened by the US air-strikes that help the group to paint the Yemeni regime as an American puppet.'80

Also moving towards 'centre stage' in the 'war on terror' has been Pakistan. Here, a series of governments have been able to secure massive resources – and a high degree of impunity for internal repression – by positioning themselves cleverly in relation to wider, 'global' wars. After India and Pakistan became independent at the end of the Second World War, it was Pakistan that was chosen as America's 'anti-Communist' ally. Pakistan fell from grace with the 1965 India–Pakistan war, but large-scale US aid was revived by Pakistan's role in the anti-Soviet struggle in Afghanistan in the 1980s, and then again (after a lull in the 1990s) by 9/11 and the renewed need for help with war in Afghanistan.81 Between 2002 and 2006, the US supplied Pakistan with over a billion dollars a year in military aid, and Pakistan has also benefited from the rescheduling of its huge debt.82 Total US aid topped $4.5 billion in 2010, a huge sum in a country (population 180 million) where less than 2 million people pay taxes.83 It has been a cosy arrangement for Pakistan's top brass, as well as for US military industries that supply the military exports. Since the birth of Pakistan, Western assistance has helped to stave off political reform. As one analyst put it:

The army dealt with the Americans without reference to other Pakistani institutions … Grave matters of state security were taken out of the hands of the always untrustworthy political class … This phenomenon also contributed to the myth that the army was Pakistan's most competent institution – a myth because civilian institutions never had a chance to grow, nor were they encouraged by outsiders who lavished funds on the military.84

Playing on Western fears of a 'Talibanised' Pakistan run by 'atomic mullahs', Pakistan repeatedly promised to take on the Taliban.85 But those 'confronting' the Taliban in Pakistan's border region have generally been poorly trained and woefully equipped for the task.86 Meanwhile, most of the military aid has been spent on defence relevant for deterring India – for example, fighter jets, anti-ship

missiles and air defence radar – rather than on 'counterterror' operations.87 In fact, as Lawrence Wright notes in The New Yorker,

As much as half of the money the U.S. gave to the I.S.I. [Inter-Services Intelligence] to fight the Soviets was diverted to build nuclear weapons. The father of Pakistan's bomb, A.Q. Kahn, later sold plans and nuclear equipment to Libya, North Korea and Iran. A month before 9/11, Pakistani nuclear scientists even opened a secret dialogue with Al Qaeda.88

Pakistan's military benefited hugely from US aid during the Cold War – most notably in the 1980s, when funds were directed through the military's shadowy Inter-Services Intelligence directorate to help the Afghan mujahadeen wage war on the Soviet-installed government in Kabul. Today, the military's willingness to eradicate a Taliban or al Qaeda enemy is still very much open to doubt. The well-known Pakistani writer Ahmed Rashid commented in 2007: '... the Pakistani military, arguing that only it can combat Islamic fundamentalism, believes that the threats posed by Al Qaeda and the Taliban encourage continued international support for General Pervez Musharraf's regime and for military rule.'89 Notoriously, Osama bin Laden was able to live in considerable comfort less than a mile from the military academy in the Pakistani city of Abbottabad, a city where the Intelligence Bureau, Military Intelligence and the ISI, as well as local police, had a presence. Significantly, the US government declined to inform the Pakistan government about the planned raid on bin Laden's residence, apparently fearing that the operation might be jeopardised. Lawrence Wright commented in The New Yorker in May 2011:

What would happen if the Pakistani military actually captured or killed Al Qaida's top leaders? The great flow of dollars would stop, just as it had in Afghanistan after the Soviets limped away ... The Pakistani army and the I.S.I. were in the looking-for-bin-Laden business, and if they found him they'd be out of business.90

Washington has clung to the hope that the defence bonanza it is providing will somehow encourage Pakistan – and particularly its military and
its intelligence agencies – to cooperate in the struggle against not just the Pakistan Taliban, but also the Afghan Taliban. But quite apart from the perverse incentives around capturing bin Laden, there is another fundamental problem here. Pakistan sees its long-term interests in Afghanistan as demanding a strong Pashtun/Taliban group in Afghanistan – principally as a way of countering India's influence in Afghanistan. The problem goes beyond non-cooperation by Pakistan: many credible Western analysts believe the Pakistani military and its intelligence agencies are actually the main forces behind the Afghan Taliban (as well as Lashkar-e-Taiba – LeT – militants in Kashmir).91 A degree of antipathy to the US within the Pakistani military has also been encouraged by the 'stop–go' nature of US assistance over the years – not least a sense of being used for war in Afghanistan in the 1980s and then discarded.92

Significantly, while the Pakistani military has targeted members of the Pakistani Taliban in South Waziristan and elsewhere in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), the military has refused to take action in North Waziristan, headquarters of the Haqqani network that has been involved – as part of a broad Taliban coalition – in the cross-border insurgency in eastern Afghanistan. This inaction, in turn, has been used as an argument for more hardware: the Pakistani

military claims it is stretched thin by existing deployments, and that it needs more equipment like helicopters.93

Even when it comes to the military campaigns that have been waged within Pakistan, there is a suspicion that war itself may be more interesting than winning: the Pakistani military displaced some 600,000 of its own citizens in 2009 offensives in the Swat Valley and South Waziristan without capturing or killing any significant number of senior Taliban leaders.94 There is also reason to believe that the tactics adopted, having created such suffering, will not be successful in reducing the strength of extreme Islamist groups.95 Apart from the mass displacement, attacks by unmanned drones in Pakistan have produced a lot of civilian casualties.96 Many of the displaced have not even been registered for assistance because they do not come from areas recognised by the government as the location of counterinsurgency operations.97

Even when attempts have been made to bring Pakistan 'into line' on Afghanistan, they have ended up underlining the ability of local actors to subvert the global 'war on terror'. The most notable initiative was the US's 2009 Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act, which made continued military assistance conditional on Pakistan ceasing support for militant groups outside the country (including Afghanistan) and on effective civilian oversight of military budgets, strategy and promotions.98 This move prompted a major backlash by the Pakistani military, which was then appeased by having the conditions watered down and by being offered an additional $2 billion in military aid.99 The Pakistani tail seems to be wagging the American dog, but the military-industrial complexes of both countries benefit in any case.

Elsewhere in Asia, the 'war on terror' has been helping a range of other abusive regimes. Indonesia billed its military campaign in Aceh from 2003 as a signal that Jakarta was 'serious about terrorism',100 and the campaign also involved the use of 'embedded journalists', mimicking the US-led invasion of Iraq.101 In the Philippines, as Eva-Lotta Hedman observes:

… the events of 11 September 2001 and the onset of the so-called Global War on Terror encouraged an intensification of Manila's 'forward movement' in the southern Philippines, with the new president, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, keen to demonstrate her loyalty and usefulness to the Bush administration in Washington. With US military assistance and active involvement, the AFP [Philippines armed forces] extended their counterinsurgency and counterterrorism campaigns in Muslim areas of Mindanao and parts of the Sulu Archipelago.102

This represented more of Hannah Arendt's 'action as propaganda', since it helped to reinforce the problem to which it claimed to be responding. Hedman notes: 'The response of the armed groups mobilized in parts of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago – most notably the onset of a terrorist bombing campaign in cities across the country – was deemed an ample post-facto justification for the prosecution of the Global War on Terror in the southern Philippines.'103

Among the most disturbing cases of a 'war within a war' has been Sri Lanka. From the 1950s, the US directed significant aid at Sri Lanka – in part because of Cold War rivalries. After the Tamil Tigers were formed in 1976, rebels were sometimes labelled 'Communist terrorists'. While the easing of superpower tensions meant that it was no longer useful or plausible to dub the Tigers 'Communists', the 'war on terror' did sustain the profound utility of the 'terrorist'

label. Moreover, this new international context helped to maintain the status of the Tamils as, in effect, 'illegitimate civilians': the Tamil population as a whole has been exposed to renewed and large-scale state violence that has received significant

international support.

Both the US and the European Commission declared the LTTE a terrorist group,104 and US law prohibits contact with a listed terrorist group, even for the purpose of distributing food, and individual aid

officials can be prosecuted if food falls into the hands of 'terrorists'.105

During Colombo's military onslaught on the east and north, US government intelligence proved important in putting a military squeeze on the Tamil Tigers. In a detailed report for the New Yorker, John Lee Anderson noted: 'Sri Lankan diplomats and military officers acknowledged to me privately that U.S. satellite intelligence had been crucial when, in 2008, Sri Lanka's Navy sank seven Tiger ships loaded with military cargo.'106 The Tigers lost tens of millions of dollars' worth of materiél – a major blow. At the time, the ships were cruising in international waters up to a thousand miles from Sri Lanka. In August 2010, at a self-congratulatory naval conference in Galle, south of Colombo, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, defence minister and the president's brother (and a man who keeps four sharks in a large aquarium at the bottom of his garden), thanked the US for helping to locate the Tigers' ships.107

Alongside the targeting of the Tigers themselves, there was a significant degree of international toleration of abuses against civilians. For one thing, the 'war on terror' seems to have created an ambivalence within the US government in relation to the abuses of the paramilitaries – often Tamil – enlisted by the Sri Lankan government against the LTTE rebels. A secret 18 May 2007 cable from the US embassy in Colombo, while noting that addressing paramilitaries' human rights abuses was a top priority for the embassy, observed that 'it is perhaps understandable that the GSL [Government of Sri Lanka] wants to use every possible means in its war against LTTE terror …'108 When Karuna's paramilitary faction (having broken away from the Tigers in 2004) joined the counterinsurgency in the east from 2006, international protests were muted.

In general, the framework of a 'war on terror' encouraged repeated concessions (in upholding international law and humanitarian principles) to the Sri Lankan government. This was most glaringly in evidence at the point, in September 2008, when Colombo effectively kicked aid agencies out of the north. Asked if there were protests from influential international governments at the expulsion, one experienced UN staff member who was working in Sri Lanka told me:

No, they [the government] have the support of the Americans, the Pakistanis and the Indians for their strategy. The Americans wanted to avoid civilian casualties – they pushed to allow the humanitarian corridors to go in, but only to the extent that it did not conflict with war objectives.

In the shadow of Guantanamo Bay, it was also difficult for US leaders to criticise the Sri Lankan government's policy of indefinitely detaining Tamil civilians in camps. While the British government did exert strong pressure in 2009 for disbanding these internment camps, the positioning of the war within an 'anti-terrorist' framework always implied the need to strike a 'balance' between liberty and security (with Tamil civilians as the likely victims of such a compromise).

The Sri Lankan case is a particularly complex one, and the Colombo government has been especially shrewd in playing to several audiences simultaneously. While the 'war on terror' framework plays well with many Western governments, at the same time the Sri Lankan government has explicitly aligned itself, so to speak, with the Non-Aligned Movement (and Russia and China), and has portrayed itself as defending national sovereignty and as standing up to the West and the declining colonial countries of Europe. An NGO worker commented: 'The government has played as much as it can on the global war on terror, but also at the same time they use the defence that this is a purely national problem, not an issue that has international implications.' In the war's final year, with the US and UK governments belatedly stepping up their public pressure for international humanitarian law to be observed, China supplied a billion dollars' worth of military aid, including fighter jets. Russia and Pakistan provided artillery shells and small arms, and Iran supplied fuel.109 Colombo also had a fleet of Israeli Kfir combat aircraft.110 A variety of soft loans, including from the IMF, also reduced the potential for individual Western governments to exert leverage – a potential that had already been eroded by their 'anti-terrorist' agenda. Meanwhile, major aid donors – as in Afghanistan – were anxious to spend their aid budgets if at all possible. Jonathan Goodhand, a Sri Lanka specialist and an academic at London's School of Oriental and African Studies, succinctly summed up the complex circumstances contributing to impunity in Sri Lanka:

There is a realisation among Sri Lankan elites that international concerns about terrorism, the state-centric bias of larger donors, disbursement pressures [donors' desire to spend their aid budgets], vested institutional interests and the growing importance of non-traditional donors in many ways load the dice in their favour, enabling them to create policy space for themselves.111

The weak (or non-existent) criticism by aid agencies of human rights abuses in Afghanistan and Iraq in the context of a 'war on terror' – for example, the massacres of prisoners of war in Afghanistan in November 2001 and the torture at Abu Ghraib – was used by the government in Sri Lanka (as well as by governments in Russia, Colombia, Algeria and Pakistan) as evidence of 'double standards' on the part of aid agencies that tried to criticise them.112

In the wake of the 2009 Sri Lankan emergency, patterns of judicial accountability also seem to owe something to Western strategic priorities. Amnesty International's Steve Crawshaw commented:

Quite recently the Security Council unanimously voted for the case of Libya to be referred to the International Criminal Court in the Hague. The contrast between that and the complete and utter silence and inaction on scores of thousands dead in Sri Lanka is absolutely striking. I think it is inexplicable and morally quite indefensible.113

We can see, then, that civil wars and wider 'global wars' have intersected in a number of important ways, and that this has routinely created significant windows of impunity for abusive actors who are able to manipulate these overlapping war systems. More specifically, high-profile global conflicts like the Cold War and the 'war on terror' have created a large degree of impunity for allies who are deemed useful in these wider wars. This has helped those allies to abuse and exploit their own populations, while international criticism or sanction remains damagingly limited. Worse, such regimes have frequently

received encouragement and tangible assistance. It is 'illegitimate civilians' who have paid the price.

Chapter 6: Wars Within Wars

1. Bradbury (1995: 26).
2. Atkinson et al. (1991: 12).
3. These are well dramatised in Miller (1996); see also Nordstrom (2004).
4. Quoted in Kalyvas (2003: 485). Paul and Demarest (1992: 154) go on to note: 'San Pedro has been moving in the direction of greater democracy, while the Guatemalan government has been moving in the opposite direction. Increasing divergence between the two tendencies, the local and the national, can be seen as a source of the affliction that befell San Pedro.' See also Kabera and Muyanja (1994: 98); Kriger (1992).
5. Weissman (2004); see also Stockton (1998).
6. See, in particular, Byman (2006).
7. See, for example, Barakat, Deely and Zyck (2010).
8. Vaux (2001); Keen (2008).
9. Keen (2008).
10. Martinez (1998).
11. ibid.: 168.
12. See, for example, de Waal (2007).
13. Silverstein (2005). See also Prunier (2005: 138–9).
14. Prendergast and Thomas-Jensen (2009: 213); see also Keen (2008).
15. See, for example, Prunier (2005).
16. For an enlightening analysis, see Flint (2010).
17. Martinez (2006).
18. ibid.
19. Guardian (2011).
20. Mackay (2002).
21. Martinez (2006: 153).
22. On this struggle, see Ronin (2002).
23. Adebajo (2011).
24. Martinez (2006).
25. Samatar (2011).
26. Bryden (2011–1).
27. Samatar (2011).

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28. ibid.; see also Menkhaus (2010); Leduc and Neuman (2011).
29. Verhoeven (2009).
30. ibid.
31. Menkhaus (2010).
32. Samatar (2011).
33. International Crisis Group (2011d: 2).
34. Bradbury (2010: 6).
35. Verhoeven (2009).
36. ibid.: 417; see also Bradbury (2010).
37. Menkhaus (2010).

38. Leduc and Neuman (2011).
39. Dempsey (2008: 2); see also International Crisis Group (2008a).
40. Menkahus (2010; 2011).
41. Leduc and Neuman (2011).
42. Menkhaus (2010).
43. ibid.
44. ibid; Leduc and Neuman (2011).
45. Arendt (1979).
46. Menkhaus (2010); Bradbury (2010: 1–24).
47. Bradbury (2010: 12–13).
48. Menkhaus (2010).
49. See, for example, Human Rights Watch (2010b).
50. Allie (2011: 12); Binet (2011).
51. Binet (2011).
52. Bradbury (2010).
53. See discussion in Mirsky (2000).
54. Schomerus (forthcoming).
55. ibid.
56. Mwenda (2010).
57. Rampton and Stauber (2003: 117).
58. Fajardo (2003).
59. See, for example, Sadeh (2001).
60. See, notably, Pieterse (1985).
61. Wyatt (2010).
62. ibid.
63. Baudrillard (1995).
64. Bouillon (2004).
65. Klein (2007).
66. Bouillon (2004).
67. Phillips (2011).
68. ibid.
69. For example, Whitaker (2010).
70. ibid.
71. ibid.
72. ibid.
73. Lacharité (2011: 46–7).
74. ibid. A diplomatic intervention by Qatar in 2007 – and stories appearing on the Qatar-based Al Jazeera television station – helped bring increased attention to the Houthi conflict in Yemen.
75. cf. Bauer (1971); de Waal (1997).
76. Phillips (2011: 99–100).
77. ibid.: 107.
78. ibid.

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79. ibid.
80. ibid.: 107.
81. Cohen (2010).

82. Bird and Marshall (2011).
83. Wright (2011).
84. Cohen (2010: 141).
85. Shah (2003).
86. Bird and Marshall (2011); Schmidt (2009).
87. Bird and Marshall (2011); Schmidt (2009).
88. Wright (2011).
89. Rashid (2007: 18).
90. Wright (2011).
91. Fair (2011); Shah (2003); see also Woodward (2010: 3–4).
92. Cohen (2010).
93. Shah (2011).
94. ibid.
95. See, for example, Bird and Marshall (2011).
96. ibid.
97. Oxfam (2011).
98. Fair (2011).
99. Schmitt and Sanger (2010); Fair (2011).
100. Hedman (2009a).
101. ibid.
102. Hedman (2009b: 4).
103. ibid. It has plausibly been argued, for example, that US provision of military assistance to the Philippines and Indonesia to counter 'terrorism' without tying this to security sector reform makes it harder for reformist voices to be heard within South East Asian governments (Beeson et al., 2006).
104. This was in 1996 (European Commission) and 1997 (US).
105. Bradbury (2010: 12–13).
106. Anderson (2011).
107. ibid. This is reported by Anderson, but interestingly it is not in the printed version of the defence minister's speech.
108. Wikileaks (2007).
109. Anderson (2011); see also Goodhand (2010).
110. Channel 4, Sri Lanka's Killing Fields (14 June 2011).
111. Goodhand (2010: S359).
112. Weissman (2011b).
113. Channel 4, Sri Lanka's Killing Fields (14 June 2011).