REFUGEES AND THE SPREAD OF CONFLICT: CONTRASTING CASES IN CENTRAL AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Do refugee movements cause the spread of conflict from one country to another and if so, under what conditions? This artice explores these questions by examining the contrasting cases of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania. The 1994 influx of Rwandan refugees into eastern Congo was a contributing factor in the outbreak of war there in 1996 and again in 1998. The 1994 refugee migration into western Tanzania, however, was relatively peaceful and did not generate further conflict. By exploring similarities and differences between the two cases, this artice develops several hypotheses about the conditions under which a massive refugee influx may result in the spread of conflict. In the end, the paper argues that refugees enter into an existing political context, creating new alignments and transforming old ones. In some cases, conflicts may result, each with its own dynamics, but in others they do not.

Introduction

There is a common concern in international politics that instability in one country will spill over into neighboring countries, affecting ever-growing numbers of people and becoming increasingly complex to resolve. Even now, as instability continues within Iraq, officials in Turkey and Iran are critical of the inability of the American-led coalition there to restore law and order (Mulholland 2003). Given the religious and ethnic ties among the countries, it is not surprising that these neighbors would worry about spillover effects. Several years ago, in seeking to justify the United States' involvement in Bosnia, then President Bill Clinton argued that without such intervention, "the conflict that already has claimed so many people could spread like poison throughout the entire region" (U.S. Department of State 1995). Similarly, United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan has warned, "no war leaves the neighboring countries untouched…What often begins as an internal dispute over power and resources can quickly engulf an entire region" (Annan 2001). In the post-Cold War world, many analysts worry that conflicts are contagious and outbreaks of violence in one place will lead to broader crises of "catastrophic proportions" (Lake and Rothchild 1998).

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Often, refugee movements are assumed to contribute to—and even cause—this cross-border spread of violence. As Arthur Helton notes, "the UN Security Council has now found the prospect or fact of population displacements to pose threats to international peace and security on several occasions" (Helton 2002:120). Indeed, in recent years, such concerns have led to various efforts to contain refugee flows in order to prevent conflict spillover. In 1991, faced with the imminent influx of 350,000 Kurdish refugees from Iraq, Turkey and its NATO allies pushed through a UN Security Council resolution that led to the creation of a safe zone in northern Iraq (International Institute for Strategic Studies 2002). The refugees received international protection at home, and Turkey avoided a potentially volatile situation with its own Kurdish population. In early 2003, during the build-up to the U.S.-led war against Iraq, Turkey again worried about a possible influx of Kurdish refugees. It amassed troops along the border and prepared to invade Iraq. In the end, though, a mass exodus of refugees from Iraq was avoided.

In early 1999, Macedonian officials briefly closed the border with Kosovo. In a country whose population is two-thirds Macedonian and one-fourth Albanian, the sudden presence of more than 200,000 ethnic Albanian refugees threatened the government's fragile coalition. In an apt analogy to the domino theory of the 1950s, now focused on the spread of conflict rather than communism, one report quipped, "the domino is wobbling" (Alter and Power 1999:39). The common theme underlying all of these cases was the notion that refugee movements spread conflict from country to country, potentially engulfing an entire region and threatening international peace.

Rather than being a foreign policy assumption, I argue that the relationship between refugee flows and instability should be a research question: Do refugee movements cause the spread of conflict from one country to another and if so, under what conditions? This article responds to these questions by examining the contrasting cases of the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) and Tanzania. The 1994 influx of Rwandan refugees into eastern Congo was a contributing factor in the outbreak of war there in 1996 and again in 1998. The 1994 refugee migration into western Tanzania, however, was relatively peaceful and did not generate further conflict. By exploring similarities and differences between the two cases, I develop several hypotheses about the conditions under which a massive refugee influx may result in the spread of conflict. In doing so, I suggest that existing analyses of this issue have not given sufficient attention to the domestic political context into which refugees enter.

The article is based on a range of sources, including data gathered through two years of field research from 1996 to 1998. The following section provides an overview of the literature on refugees and the spread of conflict and identifies apparent gaps. The subsequent sections present basic timelines of the Rwandan refugee situation in Congo and Tanzania. The article then systematically compares the two situations, focusing particularly on differences between the domestic political contexts. The hypotheses drawn from this analysis are subse-

quently examined with respect to refugee situations elsewhere in Africa. In the end, I argue that unique dynamics within host countries determine whether they will experience conflict as the result of a refugee influx. Such influxes *can* exacerbate existing tensions in a way that contributes to conflict, but they can also transform local dynamics without generating a violent outcome.

Research on Refugees and the Spread of Conflict

Although there is relatively little academic literature specifically on refugees and the spread of conflict, there is a growing body of work about the internationalization of conflict more broadly (de Silva and May 1991; Midlarsky 1992; Brown 1996; Carment and James 1997; Lake and Rothchild 1998). Research in this field has focused on identifying factors that contribute to the cross-border spread of violence, and refugee movements are often included on the list. But most analyses fall short of fully articulating the mechanisms through which each contributing factor leads to the spread of conflict, portraying the process instead as a "messy, haphazard and highly dangerous phenomenon" (Lischer 2002:16).

A reading of the literature suggests that refugee flows can contribute to the spread of conflict in two main ways. The first is when a refugee influx alters the balance of power in the host state, by changing the country's ethnic composition, for example, or affecting access to resources. This process of *diffusion*, as termed by Lake and Rothchild (1998), can generate violence in the host country. If the process is left unchecked, according to some analysts, the conflict can eventually engulf an entire region. Fearon (1998) envisions a possible "chain reaction in which ethnic war causes refugees, who de-stabilize a new place, causing more war, causing more refugees, and so on" (p.112). Even more dramatically, Premdas (1991) argues that migration spreads ethnic conflict across borders, creating "an uncontrollable chain of ever-widening involvement of host communities" (p.16) and "embroiling and accumulating antagonists and strange bedfellows, thereby growing larger and more irrationally out of control" (p.10).

The second way the literature suggests that refugee flows can contribute to the spread of violence is through a process of *escalation* that brings new belligerents into the conflict. This could include intervention by the host government in the conflict or the use of its territory by combatants for mobilization and attacks back into their home country. As Lake and Rothchild (1998) explain, "this spillover can lead to recriminations between the two affected states and, in cases of 'hot pursuit,' direct border clashes that may spiral out of control" (p.30). The presence of "refugee warriors" is not new (Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo 1989); for years, refugees have conducted military training and launched incursions across the border from bases in host countries. With the end of the Cold War and the decline of external support, though, these groups have increasingly integrated themselves among civilian refugees and exploited humanitarian aid to further their military causes. This situation sours relations with the host government, as

well as international aid agencies, and heightens security concerns along the border.

The literature on the international spread of conflict thus provides some useful insights about the contributing role of refugee movements, among many other factors. Beyond these initial observations, however, existing scholarship does not fully articulate the exact process through which refugee flows and other such variables generate violence in neighboring countries. Perhaps more importantly, most analyses focus on cases in which conflict was seen as having spilled over from one country into another (violent outcomes) and do not consider cases in which similar factors may have been present but did not result in the spread of conflict (non-violent outcomes). It is therefore necessary to build on this literature and examine in greater detail the specific conditions under which refugee movements can contribute to the spread of conflict.

In a recent effort to examine more systematically the relationship between refugees and conflict, Sarah Lischer (2002) compares violent and non-violent refugee situations in equal numbers. Her case studies include Rwandan refugees in Zaire and Tanzania, Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran, and Bosnian refugees in Croatia. Through this analysis, Lischer identifies three factors that determine the likelihood of war spreading across borders: the level of political cohesion and militancy among the refugees; the capacity and will of the host country government to demilitarize camps; and the extent to which third parties provide resources to militant refugee groups. This political approach helps predict the circumstances under which refugee flows may spread conflict, but it also elicits further questions. Of particular relevance to the current analysis is the question of why certain host governments are more willing and able than others to demilitarize refugee camps. Clearly, further explanation is needed.

This article seeks to contribute to the emerging literature on refugees and the spread of conflict by focusing on the domestic political context in the host country. Political factors often determine the policies that a government takes toward refugees, and thus the extent to which it is prepared to prevent the spread of violence. In addition, domestic political dynamics influence the way in which refugees are received by hosts and shape subsequent interactions between the two groups. Finally, the balance of power within a country has important implications for the outcome of a massive refugee influx; a country with a secure and stable government is likely to experience different results than one whose hold on power is tenuous. By further exploring political dynamics in the countries into which refugees flee, we can better understand the possible outcome of the influx and the potential for the spread of violence.

Rwandan Refugees in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Between July and September 1994, more than one million Rwandans crossed the border into Congo (then Zaire). Accompanied by some who were implicated in the Rwandan genocide, the predominantly Hutu refugees were fleeing the advancing

Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), which took power in Kigali on July 19, 1994. The massive refugee influx led to a humanitarian crisis, with outbreaks of cholera and dysentery that temporarily became the focus of international attention. Officials of the former Rwandan government dominated the camps and sought to control the distribution of resources by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and aid agencies. Heavily-armed former *Forces Armées Rwandaise* (ex-FAR) soldiers and *interahamwe* militia mobilized and trained near the camps, preparing for an attack back into Rwanda.

Throughout 1995, international negotiations emphasized immediate repatriation as the only solution to the refugee situation. Despite hopes that refugees who had not committed crimes in Rwanda would filter back home, hard-liners in the camps intimidated their neighbors and prevented them from repatriating. In light of this challenge, regional states accepted the principle advocated by the RPF government that suspected perpetrators of genocide (*génocidaires*) and intimidators in the camps should be separated from "innocent refugees."[1] International support to facilitate that process was not forthcoming, however, and there was little progress toward repatriation. As the situation dragged on, Rwanda warned that it would take action to eliminate the threat along its borders if the international community was unable to do so (McNulty 1999).

In October 1996, violence broke out in eastern Congo. With support from Rwanda and Uganda, Congolese rebels launched a series of attacks on refugee camps and local villages. Hundreds of thousands of refugees were forced from their camps, and aid agencies left the area. Within weeks, roughly 600,000 refugees fled back into Rwanda and another 300,000 headed west into the dense forests of central Congo. The RPF strategy was to create a buffer zone along Rwanda's borders from which it would be safe from attack. Along with the Congolese rebels, therefore, Rwandan troops moved westward, chasing suspected *interahamwe* and *génocidaires* into the forest, where they carried out their own massacre (Human Rights Watch 1997; Lemarchand 1998).

With continued support from foreign allies, the rebels encountered little resistance from unpaid and ill-disciplined government troops as they marched toward the capital. In May 1997, just one day after long-time dictator Mobutu Sese Seko fled, the rebels took Kinshasa and installed Laurent Kabila as president. Although welcomed at first as a liberator, Kabila soon faced pressure from all sides. In domestic circles, people resented the presence of foreign troops and the appointment to senior positions of many *Banyamulenge.*[2] They also were concerned about the exclusion of established parties and civil society groups from the political process. Kabila faced international criticism for stalling UN investigations into the massacres of Rwandan refugees. The most significant pressure, however, came from Kabila's erstwhile allies—Rwanda and Uganda—who were dissatisfied with his efforts to eliminate security problems along their borders.

In August 1998, another rebellion broke out in eastern Congo, again aided by Rwanda and Uganda. The *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Democratie*

(RCD) was initially led by Wamba dia Wamba, but soon splintered into several groups. In response to foreign involvement in his country, Kabila sought assistance from the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Several countries sent troops to defend his government, including Namibia, Angola, and Zimbabwe. By September 1998, as many as seventeen countries were involved in the conflict—some with military support, others through their allegiance to one side, and a few in attempts to mediate. It was, as the United States' Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said, Africa's first world war.

As the violence between pro-government forces and pro-rebel forces continued, the situation was complicated further by divisions among the rebels and their foreign backers. In May 1999, the RCD split into two factions—one supported by Rwanda and the other by Uganda. Another rebel group known as the *Mouvement pour la Libération du Congo* (MLC) was also supported by Uganda. Then, in August 1999, tensions reached a peak when Rwandan and Ugandan troops fought for four days over control of the Congolese city of Kisangani. The battle represented "a deadly competition between rebel factions and their foreign allies over access to the Congo's mineral wealth" (Lemarchand 2000:342).

In July 1999, the warring parties signed a deal. Despite general agreement that the Lusaka Accords were the best possible blueprint for peace, implementation was stalled by a number of factors, including continued squabbling among the rebels, limited international commitment, and lingering mistrust. One of the most significant obstacles to implementing the agreement, though, may have been the richness of the Congo itself. Many foreign armies benefited significantly from the country's vast mineral resources and had little incentive to withdraw their troops.[3] As with any war, the real losers were the people. According to the International Rescue Committee (2003), roughly 3.3 million Congolese people have died since August 1998 as a result of the conflict.[4]

Recently, there has been renewed hope for an end to the violence in Congo. Having taken office after his father's assassination in January 2001, Joseph Kabila has demonstrated greater commitment to the peace process. In mid-2002, with South African encouragement, his government reached agreements with Rwanda and Uganda, which have since withdrawn most of their troops. A peace deal with the main rebel groups in December 2002 called for the formation of an interim power-sharing government and elections within two years. Although the agreement signaled an end to the four-year war, infighting among the rebel groups continues to threaten the country's stability.

Many observers trace the roots of this recent history of Congo to the Rwandan genocide and the resulting refugee crisis. Indeed, security concerns associated with the refugee presence are key to understanding the level of foreign involvement in the conflict. However, the violence in Rwanda did not simply spill over into Congo. Rather, as David Newbury argues, each conflict had its own causes rooted in the local political context:

> It is tempting to see this recent history simply as ongoing regional turmoil, with tragedy spilling from one country to another. However, though mutually reinforcing, these conflicts were not simply the extension one of the other. Instead, each had its own history. Despite the fact that political tension and violence in each country clearly exacerbated violence in the others, each one also had deep local roots; they were 'convergent catastrophes,' independent in origin, even as they were interdependent in their evolution. (Newbury 1998:75)

As will be discussed further below, the refugee situation certainly factored into local political dynamics, but it was not the cause of the violence. Before turning more fully to these arguments, though, it is first necessary to examine the very different outcome of the Rwandan refugee presence in western Tanzania.

Rwandan Refugees in Tanzania

The influx of Rwandan refugees into Tanzania began in mid-April 1994, peaked later that month, and continued at a slower rate through the end of the year. By early 1995, there were nearly 600,000 Rwandan refugees living in western Tanzania. They were settled in a dozen camps along the border. Suddenly, rural hinterlands were transformed into sprawling cities and sleepy towns became headquarters for hi-tech aid operations. Business and trade flourished, as agricultural production, employment, and capital flows all increased. At the same time, crime, environmental degradation, and inflation caused resentment among Tanzanian hosts.

As international efforts to address the refugee situation failed, Tanzanian policy makers became particularly concerned about regional security. The refugee camps in Tanzania continued to pose a threat to the new regime in Rwanda, and thus to affect relations between the two countries. In March 1995, as thousands of Rwandan refugees were approaching Tanzania from camps in Burundi, the Tanzanian government closed its western border. Tanzania was already hosting nearly one million refugees from various countries, and officials were frustrated by the lack of progress toward repatriation. The border remained closed until January 1996, when it was officially re-opened in response to domestic and international pressure and an escalation of violence in Burundi.

Throughout this period, Tanzanian officials continued to advocate repatriation and seek international assistance to separate intimidators and *génocidaires* from legitimate refugees. These discussions were overtaken by events in eastern Congo in late 1996, however, when rebels and Rwandan troops attacked the camps there. In late November of that year, a Rwandan envoy met with senior officials in Dar es Salaam. Though details of the meeting were not released, the envoy reportedly made it clear that his government was prepared to take similar action to clear out the refugee camps in western Tanzania. Rather than risking a military attack, the Tanzanian government announced that all Rwandan refugees

were required to leave the country by the end of December 1996.[5]

Within days of the announcement, refugees started fleeing eastwards, away from Rwanda. Some reached the Ugandan border, where they were turned away, and a few made it to Kenya. In response, the Tanzanian military moved into the region and pushed half a million refugees along the road for anywhere from 20 to 220 kilometers until they crossed the border into Rwanda. UNHCR provided trucks to transport vulnerable refugees and set up "way stations" along the road to distribute high-energy biscuits and water. By December 28, 1996, the repatriation operation was officially finished and nearly all of the Rwandan refugees in Tanzania had returned home.[6]

In the months that followed, the Tanzanian army conducted frequent operations in local villages to round up and deport Rwandan refugees, many of whom had been living there for years.[7] It was not until early 1998 that Tanzania again started admitting asylum seekers from Rwanda. In 2000 and 2001, refugee flows increased; by early 2002, there were about 25,000 Rwandan refugees in Tanzania. In October 2002, the Tanzania government once again announced that all Rwandans should repatriate by the end of December. UNHCR provided assistance for the operation, which concluded ahead of schedule. As they had in 1996, refugee rights groups expressed concern about the repatriation, though observers commented that it appeared more voluntary this time around (Integrated Regional Information Network 2003).

In contrast to eastern Congo, therefore, the Rwandan refugee presence in western Tanzania did not result in violence, ethnic hostility, or widespread insecurity. Instead, Tanzania remained relatively peaceful throughout the time the Rwandans were there. There was an increase in crime and banditry in refugee-hosting areas, but it did not threaten the overall stability of the country. Of course, the refugee presence did affect Tanzanian politics in more subtle ways. Politicians used the issue strategically in political debates.[8] The situation highlighted elite dominance of the policymaking process, and shifted leaders' attention from domestic issues to regional security concerns. But clearly, the Rwandan presence in Tanzania did not have as dramatic an outcome as it did in eastern Congo. To a large extent, as the next section explains, this contrast reflected the radically different political contexts into which the refugees first entered.

Explaining the Contrast between Congo and Tanzania

While the refugee crisis in eastern Congo exacerbated tensions and generated further conflict, the situation in western Tanzania posed little threat to the long-standing stability of that country. Why did the influx of Rwandan refugees have such divergent outcomes? What differences between the two countries contributed to the spread of conflict in one and not in the other? The following sections compare Congo and Tanzania in terms of the legitimacy of the existing regime, the level of politicization of ethnic identities, and the domestic political calculus of the leader.

While these factors may not be entirely sufficient to explain the differing outcomes in the two countries, they are a necessary part of that effort.

Legitimacy of the Existing Regime

In order to understand the dynamics of the refugee situation in eastern Congo and western Tanzania, it is necessary to examine the political contexts into which the Rwandans entered. Throughout the Cold War, the Mobutu regime in Congo (then Zaire) had been propped up by Western donors who saw him as a bulwark against communism in the region. While Mobutu himself amassed a personal fortune from foreign aid and the exploitation of the country's natural resources, the state extracted wealth from its people and hindered development. Insecurity and scarcity contributed to a "dialectic of oppression" in which state elites sought to accumulate resources as quickly as possible before falling from their positions (Schatzberg 1988). Increasingly, people avoided the reaches of the state and participated in a flourishing second economy (MacGaffey 1991).

In the 1980s, as the extractive state continued to erode the economy, churches and civil society groups increased their pressure for political reform. When the Cold War ended, the West no longer needed Mobutu's allegiance and cut off foreign assistance. Mobutu was "harassed for human rights violations, denounced by the media for his corruption, marginalized by the IMF for nonrepayment of loans and even at one point banned from Europe when his old ally France refused him an entry visa" (Prunier 1997:376). An unpopular dictator at home for many years, Mobutu was also becoming a pariah in the international community.

In the early 1990s, confronted with increasing domestic and international pressure and rapid economic decline, Mobutu adopted the rhetoric of political liberalization. He declared an end to the one-party state and, after postponing it five times, convened a National Conference in August 1991. The conference dragged on for 18 months, due to a combination of repressive measures and calculated evasions that made it clear that Mobutu had no intention of surrendering power (Bratton and van de Walle 1997). Mobutu sought to co-opt some opposition leaders and threatened others. He manipulated and provoked ethnic violence in order to create a sense of instability and stall the reform process. In early 1993, Mobutu refused to recognize the new transitional assembly, put in place by the National Conference, and its elected leader Etienne Tshisekedi. Instead, he appointed his own prime minister, and for more than a year the country had two governments.

By July 1994, when the Rwandan refugees arrived, the disintegrating and discredited state failed to provide even the most basic government services and had gradually lost control over the eastern part of the country (McNulty 1999). At first, Mobutu sought to use "the Rwandese refugees as blackmail to get his reintegration ticket into the international community" (Prunier 1997:376). Foreign

assistance once again flowed into the country as donors and international organizations assisted the refugees. By late 1995, though, international sentiment turned decidedly against the Hutu refugees, and "Mobutu had milked the maximum political capital out of [them]" (Lischer 2002:117). Mobutu's hold on power continued to erode, and his health also declined. By early 1997, with Kabila marching toward Kinshasa, "the collapse of Mobutu's extractive state was nearly complete" (Clark 1998:124).

Although Tanzania also was undergoing significant changes at the time of the influx of Rwandan refugees, the political climate was very different from that of Congo. After nearly thirty years of one-party state socialism, the government was moving hesitantly along a path of liberalization that included a shift toward capitalism and the adoption of a multiparty system. Tanzania began the process of structural adjustment in the mid-1980s, when the economy was in a state of severe crisis. This situation was brought about by a range of external and internal factors, including the oil shocks of the 1970s, a drop in world coffee prices, and inefficient state-centered economic policies. Under pressure from donors and technocrats in his own government, President Julius Nyerere paved the way for reform in 1985 by voluntarily stepping down in favor of Ali Hassan Mwinyi, who won election under the single party system that same year.

Within one year, the government launched a series of economic reforms and negotiated an agreement with the International Monetary Fund. Interestingly, the liberalization policies did not generate widespread opposition among the social groups they affected most (Tripp 1997). As the state gradually extricated itself from the economy, price incentives shifted in favor of agriculture and rural production increased. Consumer goods, which had been rationed during the worst years of the crisis, became available throughout the country. Per capita income began to increase, and there was growing optimism about the economy. Still, structural adjustment carried inevitable difficulties, including a decline in government investment in social services, economic growth that favored some more than others, and increasing dependence on assistance from foreign donors (Barkan 1994).

Once the ruling party moved away from its ideological emphasis on socialism, its attachment to the idea of a one-party state weakened. Sensing the winds of change, Nyerere questioned the supremacy of the one-party state he had designed. In 1990, the father of the nation declared, "It is now possible to have alternative parties, if only to overcome problems related to complacency in a single-party system" (Dowden 1990:13). This statement opened the possibility for what had previously been unimaginable, and Mwinyi was forced to initiate political reforms. Opposition parties were legalized in 1992, and multiparty national elections were held in 1995. The ruling party maintained its control of the State House under President Benjamin Mkapa, but the parliament gained 55 members (20 percent of its 275-seat total) from newly formed opposition parties (Mmuya 1995). At the time the refugees arrived, therefore, the joint processes of econom-

ic and political liberalization were generating both excitement and uncertainty throughout the country.

The political climates of Congo and Tanzania were thus very different in the mid-1990s. In Congo, people were frustrated with Mobutu's efforts to thwart the process of political reform and increasingly pessimistic about the possibility of a peaceful transition. This created a climate in which opposition groups and rebel movements could easily recruit followers and convince unemployed youth to join the struggle against an ailing dictator. In Tanzania, on the other hand, economic reforms were starting to produce positive results and the political system was becoming more democratic. People were generally optimistic about the future of the country, and the government enjoyed widespread legitimacy. The situation was simply more stable in Tanzania, whereas the seeds of conflict had already been planted in Congo even before the refugees arrived.

Politicization of Ethnic Identities

A second reason for the divergent outcomes of the refugee influx was the differing levels of politicization of ethnic identities in Congo and Tanzania. As mentioned above, Mobutu tried to use the refugees as an ethnic card in the already complicated politics of the Kivu province, although his plan ultimately backfired (Prunier 1997). There were many groups of people of Rwandan culture living in eastern Congo, having migrated into the area over the past several centuries. In 1981, a new citizenship law required people to prove that their ancestors had been living on Congolese soil at the time of the 1885 colonial division of Africa.[9] Although many ancestors of the Rwandan peoples had migrated prior to that date, intermarriage and lack of documentation made it difficult to provide proof. The law was not enforced for several years after its passage.

In the early 1990s, however, as Mobutu sought to stir up tensions and thwart the process of political reform, the law was put into effect. At first, it had the desired result. In early 1993, periodic fighting broke out in North Kivu between *autochtones*[10] and peoples of Rwandan culture who had been living there for years. As the civil war continued in neighboring Rwanda, divisions emerged between Hutu and Tutsi in Congo and the conflict became triangular. In 1994, the influx of one million refugees allowed for the further manipulation and politicization of ethnic identities. The predominantly-Hutu refugees joined in the struggle against local Tutsi, though the conflict was largely contained in North Kivu.

Then, in 1996, the government increased its pressure on a group of people of Rwandan culture in South Kivu known by then as the *Banyamulenge*. These people, who were primarily Tutsi, had migrated to the area in the mid-nineteenth century, fleeing the state-building process of Mwami Rwabugiri; they were never fully integrated into the Rwandan state, and were actually refugees from it (Newbury 1997). Even so, Mobutu claimed they were part of a greater Tutsi diaspora and were foreigners on Zairian soil. In September 1996, the government

announced a plan to expel all *Banyamulenge* from the country. But Mobutu had finally played the ethnic card one too many times. The announcement provided useful justification for the alliance between *Banyamulenge* resistance groups and the Rwandan government, which attacked the refugee camps and ultimately overthrew Mobutu. The conflict, rooted in Mobutu's own efforts to politicize ethnic identities, was eventually co-opted by forces beyond his control.

In contrast, the influx of half a million Hutu refugees into Tanzania did not lead to a politicization of ethnic identities, largely because those identities had little salience in the Tanzanian political context. This was due in part to the efforts of former President Nyerere to foster a broad Tanzanian identity (by adopting Swahili as the national language, for example) and to prevent politics from being conducted along ethnic lines. Although recent economic policy changes have caused cracks to emerge in this structure of national unity (Kaiser 1996), Tanzania continues to enjoy greater social cohesion than its refugee-producing neighbors. Rather than politicizing ethnic identities, the refugee situation actually seemed to strengthen the hosts' identification as Tanzanians. In interviews, many sought to distinguish themselves explicitly from *Banyarwanda*, *Barundi*, and *Zairois* when discussing politics in the region, and expressed a sense of solidarity with their compatriots elsewhere. This finding is confirmed by Landau (2003), who discovered that Tanzanians in refugee-hosting areas articulated stronger nationalist sentiments than their compatriots elsewhere; their use of Swahili constituted somewhat of a "restricted code" that separated them from the refugees. The influx of Rwandan refugees into western Tanzania did not exacerbate existing tensions and fuel ethnic conflict as it did in eastern Congo.

The Political Calculus of Maintaining Power

Finally, the respective leaders of Congo (then Zaire) and Tanzania each faced a very different political calculus in the effort to maintain power and thus developed different approaches toward the refugee situation. As we have seen, Mobutu was struggling desperately to block the process of political reform and maintain his grasp on power. His approach was to manipulate existing divisions—and foment new animosities—to benefit his allies and harm his enemies. The aforementioned effort to stir up violence against the *Banyamulenge* was an example of this strategy.

The same political calculus extended to Mobutu's perception of security within the region. As a close ally of former Rwandan president Juvenal Habyarimana, Mobutu used the refugees as a tool against the new RPF regime in Kigali. He offered shelter and protection to officials of the former Rwandan government, and gave suspected *génocidaires* freedom of movement rather than arresting them. His government allowed former Rwandan troops to train near the refugee camps for an eventual return by force to their home country. Mobutu's officials permitted, and even facilitated, the procurement of weapons for the ex-

FAR, despite an international arms embargo on Rwanda.

Mobutu thus played a crucial role in facilitating the establishment of a Rwandan government-in-exile on Zairian territory (Human Rights Watch 1995). The threat posed by this situation to Rwanda and the proliferation of arms in the area led to heightened insecurity in the region, which required increased attention from top officials. Due to the cross-border alliances and linkages between actors, regional security concerns and domestic political interests essentially became one and the same. In Zaire, therefore, the Rwandan refugees became a political resource that was manipulated by many sides in the violent struggle for power. Of course, in this instance, Mobutu's calculations were drastically wrong and resulted in his removal from power by a rebel alliance backed by a new government in Rwanda that was concerned about its own security.

This situation contrasted sharply with Tanzania, where the government "never tried to play any sort of political games with the Rwandese refugees on [its] territory" (Prunier 1997:378). In fact, the political calculus of President Benjamin Mkapa required that he do everything possible to prevent a violent outcome in Tanzania. Generally speaking, Tanzanians view peace and security as matters of special political salience. In the middle of 1995, a poll of political attitudes in nine rural regions asked people to identify the single most important role of government. The most common answer, offered by 27 percent of the 761 respondents, was "insure personal security and justice." Other government functions such as education, health care, and economic planning were each mentioned by no more than 13 percent of those polled (Sivalon 1995).

Tanzanians clearly view security as a primary responsibility of government, and thus as an important political issue. In the context of renewed competition with opposition parties, the ruling party highlighted as one of its major achievements the country's long record of peace and stability. Mkapa and his colleagues thus found it necessary to protect this legacy by taking measures to prevent the spread of conflict in western Tanzania. They made efforts to remove weapons from the refugee camps and increase security forces in surrounding areas. They even went to the extent of forcibly repatriating the Rwandan refugees when faced with the possibility of a military attack. Whereas Mobutu's strategy was to manipulate the refugee situation and stir up further conflict, Tanzanian leaders knew they had to protect the country's peace and security to maintain their popularity at the polls.

Overall, then, the Rwandan refugees fled to two very different countries. Those who went to Zaire encountered a government on the verge of collapse, heightened tensions among politicized ethnic groups, and a dictator prepared to exploit any situation in his effort to maintain power. The refugees who went to Tanzania, on the other hand, found a country undergoing a process of liberalization along non-ethnic lines with a government that had political incentives to promote peace. It is also worth noting that the refugee populations themselves were quite different. As a result of the timeline and geography of the war in Rwanda,

more former government officials and *interahamwe* were pushed out of the country to Congo, while the camps in Tanzania harbored mainly "small fish." While this is an important distinction, it does not take away from the clear differences between the domestic contexts into which the refugees fled. With all of this as background, it is perhaps not surprising that the Rwandan refugee influx had radically divergent outcomes in these two neighboring countries.

Refugees and Conflict in Comparative Context

The comparative analysis above suggests several conditions under which refugee flows may be more likely to generate conflict. First, a country whose political climate is characterized by a collapsed or deteriorating state that lacks popular legitimacy may be more vulnerable to conflict in the event of a refugee influx. Second, in situations where the refugee-generating conflict has ethnic dimensions, a high level of politicization of ethnic identities in the host country may contribute to violence and instability. Third, the likelihood of conflict may also increase when the host country leader finds it advantageous to use the refugees as pawns in the effort to maintain power. Of course, the combination of these factors can have particularly disastrous consequences.

A brief examination of other refugee contexts in Africa provides some support for these hypotheses. In Southern Africa, refugee flows generally have not been associated with the spread of conflict. Host countries such as Zambia and Malawi have remained relatively stable despite long-term civil wars in neighboring countries. For decades, Zambia has hosted thousands of Angolan refugees, with the numbers fluctuating depending upon the level of violence. In recent years, the country has also welcomed more than 50,000 refugees from Congo. Although the government in Lusaka has not always been popular, particularly during the economic crisis of the 1980s, its legitimacy and capacity to control the country have not been threatened. Ethnic identities have been a factor at times in Zambian politics, but have never been so highly politicized as to generate conflict. Respective governments have found little reason to exploit the refugee situation for political gain, other than to appeal for increased international assistance.[11]

Like Zambia, Malawi remained relatively peaceful during the decade that it hosted refugees from Mozambique. They started arriving in the 1980s and numbered more than one million by 1992. As it had for years, the government of president-for-life Hastings Banda maintained its tight hold over the country, and even sought to extend its control to the relief operation. By essentially housing that operation within its existing structures, the government prevented the proliferation of international aid agencies and ensured that host communities would benefit (Zetter 1995). In the early 1990s, under mounting external and internal pressure for democratization, Banda seized upon the increasing refugee influx to solicit renewed aid from Western donors (Callamard 1994). To some extent, therefore, the refugees were pawns in Banda's ultimately unsuccessful effort to hold

onto power, though hardly to the extent that they were in Mobutu's Zaire.

The record on refugees and conflict in the Greater Horn of Africa has been more mixed. Over the years, Kenya has been an island of relative peace in an unstable region. As such, it has hosted thousands of refugees, primarily from Somalia and Sudan. The Somali influx came at a time in the early 1990s when Daniel arap Moi's government faced widespread criticism for its failure to embrace democratic reforms. Even so, opposition groups and pro-democracy activists continued to press for change through legal and constitutional means. In this sense, the legitimacy of the government was not in question. Although ethnic identities became increasingly politicized throughout the 1990s, resulting in localized violence during elections in 1992 and 1997, the situation was unrelated to the refugee populations. Kenya has also sought increased international assistance to support the refugees, but has not exploited them in a local power game. Following the recent elections in Kenya, the new government appears to enjoy a level of popular legitimacy that would make instability and conflict even less likely.

In contrast, the refugee presence in Uganda has been a contributing factor to ongoing violence in the northern part of that country. The government under Yoweri Museveni does not exercise complete control over the area, though it does have some capacity. Thousands of Sudanese refugees have been caught up in the conflict, which for the most part pits the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) against the Ugandan government. The situation is complicated by Sudan's support for the LRA and, reciprocally, Uganda's support for the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement, which has been fighting for years for greater autonomy for southern Sudan. Despite repeated diplomatic agreements to stop aiding rebel movements in each other's country, violence continues on both sides of the border. The resolution of the conflict in either country is likely to require some sort of solution to the refugee situation.

In West Africa, refugees have been most frequently associated with the spread of conflict. It is often argued that the civil war in Liberia in the early 1990s spilled over into Sierra Leone and, more recently, Guinea, primarily through the movement of refugees. While the circulation of refugees in the region is clearly an important factor behind the ongoing violence, it is but one piece of a larger puzzle. A more significant part of that puzzle may actually be former Liberian President Charles Taylor and his aggressive stance toward his neighbors. Liberian refugees first entered Sierra Leone at a time when the government under Major-General Joseph Momoh was orchestrating an uncertain transition to a multiparty system. When then rebel leader Taylor's supporters invaded, frustration with Momoh's response prompted a military coup. As government legitimacy declined and its control over the country weakened, violence spread and the country was ultimately engulfed in a full-scale civil war.

Since the early 1990s, Guinea has hosted hundreds of thousands of refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone. After avoiding conflict itself for most of that time, violence broke out in late 2000 due to both external and internal factors.

For years, based on his view of regional security, President Lansana Conte provided support to Liberian refugees and allowed them to organize and recruit to fight against Taylor's forces. In September 2000, Conte blamed Taylor for a series of incursions from Liberia and Sierra Leone. The attacks turned local Guineans against refugees living in their midst, thus intensifying the violence. Meanwhile, a group of Guinean rebels emerged to challenge the Conte government, whose legitimacy has declined in recent years. The refugee situation thus combined with growing domestic discontent to generate the recent violence.

Côte d'Ivoire may provide the strongest support for the hypotheses proposed above. The country has long hosted refugees from Liberia and elsewhere, but until recently was a model of stability within the region. All of that changed in September 2002, when rebels in the north demanded President Laurent Gbagbo's resignation and new elections. The Ivorian government has accused neighboring countries of supporting the rebels, and launched a campaign against foreigners in the country, including refugees.

But the factors that have changed in Côte d'Ivoire have little to do with refugees and much to do with domestic politics. Starting in the mid-1990s, respective leaders sought to generate support by championing the concept of *Ivoirité*, thus politicizing identities in a country with a large number of immigrants. The major opposition figure, Alassane Ouattara, was repeatedly ruled ineligible from participating in elections on the controversial claim that he was from Burkina Faso. Most recently, Ouattara was barred from running in the 2000 elections that brought Gbagbo to power, thus leading many supporters to question the legitimacy of the current government. That refugees are now being used as pawns in the situation is thus a by-product of a domestic power struggle. Rather than being the agents through which conflict has spread, therefore, the refugees are suffering through conflict a second time around.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion highlights an important point: conflicts do not simply spill over from one country to another through the movement of refugees. Instead, refugees enter into an existing political context, creating new alignments and tensions and transforming old ones. In some cases, conflicts may result, each with its own dynamics, but in others they do not. The outcome depends largely on the conditions that exist in the host country even before the refugees arrive. This supports a conclusion of Lake and Rothchild about the spread of conflict more broadly: "conflict does diffuse abroad," they argue, "but largely to states that already contain the seeds of discord" (Lake and Rothchild 1998:342).

The contrasting cases of Congo and Tanzania demonstrate this point. In each country, the massive influx of Rwandan refugees had significant political consequences, although they were quite different from one to the other. In Tanzania, the refugees encountered, and were received by, a relatively popular

government undergoing a process of liberalization that opened it to opposition pressure. Although there were instances of crime and insecurity, dynamics were such that the refugee situation generated relatively few conflicts. In contrast, the refugee influx into eastern Congo exacerbated existing tensions dominated by the attempts of an unpopular dictator to thwart the liberalization process. As identities were further politicized and incoming resources were exploited, the refugee situation was one of a series of factors that ultimately led to two violent wars.

In each host country, therefore, a refugee situation is likely to have different consequences based on existing political dynamics. In some cases, the seeds of conflict have already been planted—through the deterioration of the state and its legitimacy, the politicization of ethnic identities, or the willingness of desperate leaders to stir up conflict in order to maintain power. In such contexts, a sudden influx of refugees can exacerbate an already unstable situation and generate violence. In other places, however, few if any of these conditions are present. Thus, rather than simply assuming that refugees will spread conflict from country to country, potentially engulfing an entire region, it is important to analyze political dynamics to predict if and when a refugee influx may result in a violent outcome. While officials in Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Guinea, Zambia, and many other countries have legitimate concerns about possible refugee influxes, they should take a closer look at their own domestic political environments to assess the potential for violence. In some cases, their worries may be exaggerated. In situations where violence can be expected, however, the host government and the international community should focus on both protecting incoming refugees and addressing the underlying seeds of conflict.

NOTES

1 See, for example, Republic of Kenya (1995).

2 Although they had lived in the country for many decades, these Congolese of Rwandan descent were still perceived as foreigners by many. This issue is discussed more fully later in the article.

3 For more information on the exploitation of the Congo's resources by foreign armies, see United Nations (2001).

4 While a small portion of the deaths have been attributable directly to the violence, most have been due to malnutrition and disease.

5 This decision was based largely on regional security considerations, although the decline in international funding for the relief operation was also significant (Whitaker 1999).

6 Rwandans could seek permission to stay in Tanzania if they had a legitimate fear of persecution upon returning home. In effect, this meant that individuals who had participated in the 1994 genocide were not forcibly repatriated. Instead, they were sent to a prison camp at Mwisa. More than 50 Rwandans took advantage of this offer. For more on this skewed logic of refugee protection, see Whitaker (2003).

7 Tanzania's long history of hosting refugees from Rwanda and Burundi influenced public attitudes and government policy during the most recent influxes. These issues are discussed more fully elsewhere (Whitaker 1999), but are beyond the scope of the current analysis.

8 During the 1995 election campaign, for example, ruling party candidates sought to raise concerns about the stability of the country in the multiparty era by suggesting that refugee-generating conflicts in Rwanda and Burundi were the result of multiparty politics.

9 This replaced a 1972 law that had granted citizenship to all Kinyarwanda-speaking peoples who were resident in the country before 1950.

10 This was the name they gave to themselves to stress their rights to citizenship (Prunier 1997).

11 The government recently launched the Zambia Initiative, which seeks funding from international donors to integrate long-term Angolan refugees into local communities. The underlying idea is to use refugee-related resources to benefit both refugee and host populations.

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