Mutual Interventions in Africa

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Abstract

Global datasets on interstate armed conflict suggest that African states clash with each other rarely and only for short periods. This research note shows that existing datasets paint a misleading picture. In fact, African states fight each other more often and for longer than is commonly thought, but they do so by mutually intervening in each other's intrastate conflicts. Instead of relying solely on their own armed forces, they support their rival's armed opposition groups. Such mutual interventions—most prevalent in Africa but also evident in other regions—thus span the boundaries of interstate and intrastate conflict. As a result, they have been largely overlooked by conflict scholars. Our note conceptualizes mutual intervention as a distinct form of interstate conflict, comparing and contrasting it with concepts like proxy war, competitive intervention, and international rivalry. The note then presents the first systematic survey of mutual interventions across the African continent. We identify twenty-three cases between 1960 and 2010 and demonstrate that they typically ended independently of their associated intrastate conflicts. We conclude with a research agenda that involves studying the onset, duration, termination, and consequences of mutual interventions, including collecting data on mutual interventions outside Africa to explore cross-regional differences.

Introduction

Mutual interventions involve two states that simultaneously intervene in each other's intrastate conflicts by supporting rebel groups (Cliffe 1999, 90). The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda, Ethiopia and Sudan, and Sudan and Uganda have all repeatedly interfered in each other's conflicts. While the African continent has witnessed the most mutual interventions, they have also occurred in other regions (Tamm 2016, 180). Both during and after the Iran–Iraq War, Iran sponsored Kurdish rebels and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, while Iraq supported the Mujahedin-e-Khalq (Salehyan 2009, 117–19). In the late 1990s, Afghanistan's Taliban regime aided the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, while the Uzbek government backed the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance (Rashid 1999, 29–30). In contrast to competitive interventions in which rival third-party states support opposite sides in the same intrastate conflict (Anderson 2019, 692), mutual interventions have received little *conceptual* attention from International Relations scholars. Africanists, on their part, have tended to limit their *empirical* attention to particular subregions (Abbink 2003; Prunier 2004).

In this research note, we conceptualize mutual interventions (MIs) as a distinct form of interstate conflict that involves transnational cooperation. We then present the first systematic continent-wide overview of their prevalence in independent Africa. Our data collection makes an important contribution to the study of conflict in International Relations by revealing that MIs are far more common and last much longer in Africa than conventional interstate conflicts that directly pit the armed forces of two states against each other. The focus on the latter in quantitative studies has in the past led to "a distorted view of African international relations" as exceptionally peaceful (Lemke 2003, 117). Even using the low threshold of 25 battle-related deaths per year, the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset identifies only 9 direct conflicts between African states from 1960 until 2010, which involved 14 interstate conflict years

(Pettersson et al. 2019). By contrast, we identify 23 MIs involving 117 MI years in the same period.

We do not mean to suggest that existing operationalizations of interstate conflict are wrong. Our data, however, shows that they are incomplete. They omit an (at least partly) indirect form of conflict that is more important than direct conflict in a region that accounts for more than a quarter of the world's sovereign states. This research note thus highlights the continued need to draw on experiences from all regions to better understand interstate relations around the globe.[1] In other words, the note takes on one of the challenges that Acharya (2014, 655) outlines in his call for Global International Relations: "to come up with concepts and insights from one regional context that may also have analytical relevance beyond that region."

Understanding the dynamics of MIs is vital for the study not only of interstate but also of intrastate conflicts. When intrastate conflicts are associated with an MI, they tend to be much more severe: between 1989 and 2010, government–rebel dyads in Africa that were at some point involved in an MI experienced on average nearly six times as many battle-related deaths as dyads never involved in an MI.[2]

In the next section, we distinguish three types of MIs and discuss how they relate to other concepts focused on hostile interactions between states. We then turn our attention specifically to Africa, first providing an overview of our data. We explore the reasons for the onset of MIs and identify five different termination types. Second, we compare the termination of MIs and intrastate conflicts to provide additional evidence that MIs are a distinct phenomenon that requires analysis in its own right. Third, we return to related concepts, such as rivalries, and analyze the extent to which they empirically overlap with MIs in Africa. Fourth, we address the role that third states played in MIs, including how non-African states became less involved

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[1] We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this language.
[2] This figure is based on Table 2 (below) and the UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset, version 18.1 (Pettersson and Eck 2018).

after the Cold War ended. Lastly, our conclusion outlines promising directions for future research.

How Mutual Intervention Differs from Other Concepts

Mutual intervention is a distinct form of interstate conflict insofar as it conceptually *requires* that two states fight each other via or alongside rebel groups from the other state. An MI thus simultaneously involves interstate competition and transnational cooperation. This section further distinguishes between indirect, mixed, and direct MIs and relates them to a host of other concepts, namely proxy war, competitive intervention, international rivalry, militarized interstate dispute, interstate war, and international crisis.

First, in *indirect* MIs, both states provide rebel groups fighting the other state with support that excludes sending combat troops abroad. The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) refers to this as "secondary non-warring support," which includes "the provision of sanctuary, financial assistance, logistics and military support short of troops" (Croicu et al. 2011, 4).[3] Second, in *mixed* MIs, one state provides support short of troops to rebels while the other state at some point sends troops across its border to fight alongside rebels. The UCDP refers to troop assistance as "secondary warring support" (Croicu et al. 2011, 4). Third, in *direct* MIs, both states at some point send troops across their borders to fight alongside rebels. This occurred during the Iran–Iraq War, with cross-border troop involvement tending to alternate. For example, while both states simultaneously supported rebels, Iran launched an invasion alongside Kurdish peshmerga in 1987, then Iraq attacked Iranian territory alongside the Mujahedin-e-Khalq in 1988 (Razoux 2015, 400, 454).

Whereas indirect MIs can also be conceived of as "reciprocated" or "reciprocal" *proxy wars* (Brewer 2011, 141, 145), the direct troop intervention that partly constitutes mixed and

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[3] San-Akca (2016, 51) offers a slightly different list of types of external state support.

direct MIs does not fit predominant definitions of proxy warfare. Mumford (2013, 15) sees indirect intervention as "the fundamental element of proxy war," and most of the relevant literature shares this understanding (Bar-Siman-Tov 1984, 265; Salehyan 2010, 496; Rauta 2018, 450). Based on this view, indirect MIs are a subset of proxy wars, whereas mixed and direct MIs are not proxy wars in the dyadic sense. Mixed MIs feature one proxy intervention and one nonproxy intervention.

However, not all scholars agree with the narrow definition of proxy warfare as indirect intervention. Hughes (2012, 2) instead defines proxy warfare as the belligerents' use of "third parties as either a supplementary means of waging war or as a substitute for the direct employment of their own armed forces." Based on this alternative conceptualization, which we find less convincing, all three MI types would be considered proxy wars.

The notion of MIs differs from the more common understanding of proxy wars as *competitive interventions* (CIs) in which the government and rebels in the same state receive support from rival external states (Anderson 2019). CIs take place in one intrastate conflict and the interveners are not themselves targets. In the "new Middle Eastern proxy wars" in Syria and Yemen, for example, Iran and Saudi Arabia sponsor opposing sides in wars that take place on foreign soil (Lynch 2016, 9). By contrast, MIs span two intrastate conflicts and the interveners are simultaneously sponsors and targets of rebel groups. Table 1 summarizes the similarities and differences between the MI, CI, and proxy war concepts.

Table 1. Comparison of dyadic concepts of intervention in intrastate conflicts

	Number of conflicts intervened in	Conflict parties receiving support	Troop support possible?
Mutual intervention	Two	Rebels in both conflicts	Yes
Competitive intervention	One	Government and rebels	Yes
Proxy war	One or two	Government and/or rebels	No
Proxy war (Hughes)	One or two	Government and/or rebels	Yes

MIs and CIs sometimes overlap. For instance, the Angolan civil war from 1975 to 1991, which Anderson (2019, 701–04) uses as an example of CIs, also involved an MI. The CIs primarily pitted Cuba and the Soviet Union (which backed the Angolan government) against South Africa and the United States (which supported Angolan rebels). At the same time, Angola was involved in a mixed MI with South Africa: while South Africa sent troops to fight alongside Angolan rebels (Hoekstra 2018), the Angolan government intervened indirectly on behalf of both the African National Congress and the liberation fighters in South African administered Namibia (Lourenço et al. 2014, 833–36; Khadiagala 1994, 98–99).

The most closely related concept to MIs on which systematic data has been collected is the "interventionary" type of *international rivalries* (Thompson and Dreyer 2012, 21), in which "states intrude into the internal affairs of other states as means of reducing external threat or acquiring leverage in the other state's decision making." Thompson and Dreyer's (2012, 21) book, just like our paper, "borrows from Cliffe's discussion of 'mutual intervention' in the Horn of Africa." Their concept, however, is broader than ours, as it includes support to coup plotters within the other state's armed forces and thus does not specifically require support to rebel groups. Moreover, the two authors follow the "more subjective approach" to identifying rivalries, which focuses on "who state decision makers (or their historians) say are or have been their competitive and threatening enemies" (Thompson and Dreyer 2012, 11–12).

The other prominent approach to identifying rivalries is based on action rather than perception. It requires some militarized competition, operationalized as three or more *militarized interstate disputes* (MIDs) occurring within ten to fifteen years (Klein et al. 2006, 337). MIDs themselves also represent a much broader concept than MIs. A MID is "a set of incidents involving the deliberate, overt, government-sanctioned, and government-directed threat, display,

or use of force between two or more states" (Maoz et al. 2019, 812).[4] The highest hostility level

of a MID is a full-scale *interstate war* that results in at least 1,000 battle-related deaths.

Finally, MIs are not the same as *international crises*, which denote increased disruptive

interactions between states that lead to a heightened probability of military hostilities and chal-

lenge the structure of an international system (Brecher and Wilkenfeld 1997, 4–5). In short,

neither rivalries, disputes, nor crises require transnational cooperation with rebel groups, but

they do not exclude it either. Further below, we assess the extent to which they empirically

overlap with MIs in Africa.

Mutual Interventions in Independent Africa: A Systematic Overview

This section provides a survey of MIs in Africa between 1960 and 2010. First, we discuss the

rules we used to code MIs, including their start and end dates. Second, we analyze geographic

patterns and temporal trends, highlighting four regional clusters and two historical waves of

MIs. Third, we briefly explore the causes of MIs. Fourth, we identify five termination types.

Coding Rules

Rival African states often entertain some sort of relations with each other's dissidents, but not

all of these relations qualify as MIs. We apply restrictions concerning both the nature of the

dissidents and the nature of their relations with foreign states. First, we consider only armed

opposition (i.e., rebel) groups listed at least once in the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset

(ACD) as being involved in an armed conflict with the government that results in at least 25

battle-related deaths in a calendar year. There are several potential cases in which states are

reported to have sponsored rebel groups that do not appear in the ACD.[5] We exclude such cases

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[4] In their analysis of the causal links between intrastate conflicts and MIDs, Gleditsch et al. (2008, 485) briefly
touch on MIs, calling them "tit-for-tat" interventions.

[5] See the online appendix.

because these groups tend to be very small and because reliable data on them—and on when state sponsorship began and ended—tends to be hard to find. We thus likely undercount the extent of the MI phenomenon.

Second, we consider only relationships in which both states simultaneously—in the same months—provide rebel groups with the types of support listed in the UCDP External Support Dataset (ESD): troops as secondary warring party; access to military or intelligence infrastructure; access to territory; weapons; materiel/logistics support; training/expertise; funding/economic support; and intelligence material (Croicu et al. 2011, 7; Högbladh et al. 2011).

Although we build on the ACD's list of rebel groups and the ESD's types of support, our MI data differs in important respects from the ESD. First, we cover a longer time period by starting in 1960 rather than 1975 and by including the year 2010. Second, whereas the ESD records state support only for years in which a rebel group is active in the ACD (i.e., involved in a conflict with at least 25 deaths that year), we also record state support in other years. Our criterion for an MI concerning conflict activity is merely that at least one of State A's rebel clients and at least one of State B's rebel clients were active in the ACD in the same year at least once while simultaneously receiving support. As we discuss in the online appendix, this criterion results in start and end dates that capture the MI phenomenon far more accurately than if we considered only the ACD's active conflict years. The online appendix also includes a table that lists, for every MI, both the sources we used for coding start and end dates and the differences between our data and the ESD.

Table 2 summarizes our data on MIs in Africa between independence and 2010, which comprises 23 cases and 15 distinct state dyads. In line with the above criteria, the start date refers to the first year in which both states simultaneously supported rebel groups in each other's countries. The end date refers to the first year after the start date in which at least one

of the two states stopped supporting rebel groups in the other state. Before discussing why MIs

started and how exactly they ended, we explore their occurrence across space and time.
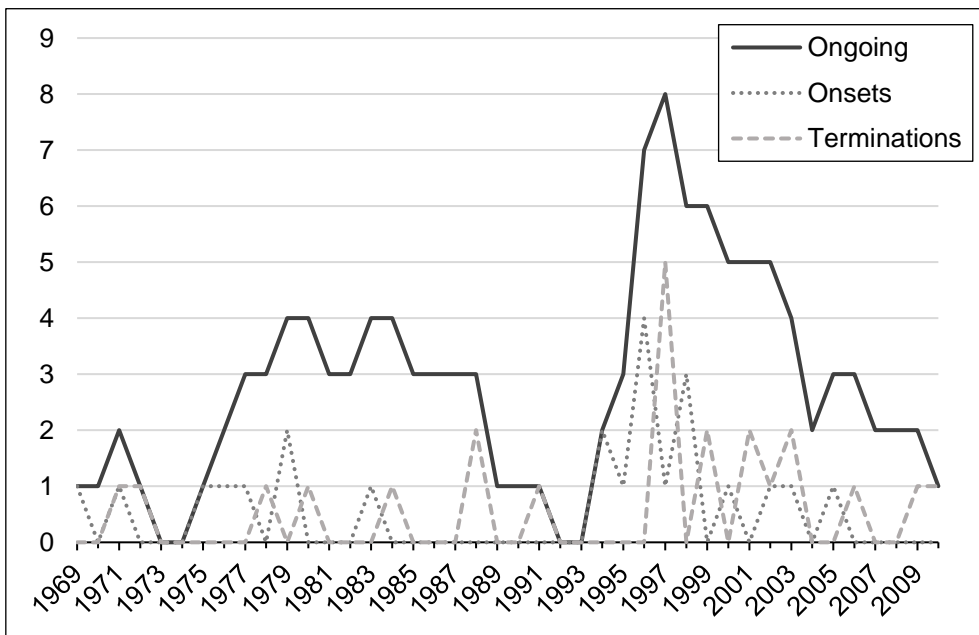
Table 2. Mutual interventions in Africa, independence to 2010

ID	Start	End	State A	State A's client(s)	State B	State B's client(s)	Termination type
1	1969	1971	Ethiopia	SSLM	Sudan	ELF	Negotiated settlement
2	1971	1972	Sudan	Kikosi Maalum	Uganda	SSLM	Negotiated settlement
3	1975	1978	Angola	FLNC	Zaire (DR Congo)*	FNLA, UNITA	Negotiated settlement
4	1976	1988	Angola	ANC, SWAPO	South Africa*	UNITA	Negotiated settlement honored only by one state (Angola)
5	1977	1980	Mozambique	PF	Rhodesia	Renamo	Indirect negotiated settlement
6	1979	1984	Mozambique	ANC	South Africa	Renamo	Negotiated settlement honored only by one state (Mozambique)
7	1979	1988	Ethiopia	SSDF, SNM†	Somalia	WSLF	Negotiated settlement honored only by one state (Somalia)
8	1983	1991	Ethiopia	SPLM/A	Sudan	EPLF, OLF, TPLF, EPRDF†	Client victory (EPLF, EPRDF)
9	1994	2002	Sudan	LRA, WNBF, ADF†, UNRF II†	Uganda*	SPLM/A, NDA†	Negotiated settlement
10	1994	1999	Eritrea*	NDA, SPLM/A	Sudan	EIJM – AS	Negotiated settlement
11	1995	1999	Ethiopia*	SPLM/A, NDA†	Sudan	Al-Itahad al-Islami, OLF, ONLF	Negotiated settlement
12	1996	1997	Rwanda*	AFDL	Zaire (DR Congo)	ALiR	Client victory (AFDL)
13	1996	1997	Uganda*	AFDL	Zaire (DR Congo)	ADF, WNBF	Client victory (AFDL)
14	1996	1997	Burundi*	AFDL	Zaire (DR Congo)	CNDD	Client victory (AFDL)
15	1996	1997	Angola*	AFDL	Zaire (DR Congo)	FLEC-FAC, UNITA	Client victory (AFDL)
16	1997	1997	Angola*	Cobras	Congo-Brazzaville	FLEC-FAC, UNITA	Client victory (Cobras)
17	1998	2009	DR Congo	ALiR, FDLR†	Rwanda*	RCD, CNDP†	Negotiated settlement
18	1998	2002	DR Congo	ADF	Uganda*	MLC, RCD, RCD-ML†	Negotiated settlement
19	1998	2003	Burundi*	RCD	DR Congo	CNDD-FDD, Palipehutu-FNL†	Indirect negotiated settlement
20	2000	2001	Guinea	LURD	Liberia*	RFDG	Client defeat (RFDG)
21	2002	2003	Côte d'Ivoire	MODEL	Liberia	MJP, MPIGO	Indirect negotiated settlement
22	2003	2006	Eritrea	JEM, SLM/A	Sudan	EIJM – AS	Negotiated settlement
23	2005	2010	Chad	JEM, SLM/A, NRF†, SLM/A (MM)†, SLM/A-Unity†	Sudan	FUCD, RAFD†, UFDD†, AN†, UFR†	Negotiated settlement

(Note: An asterisk indicates that the state provided troop support for at least part of the mutual intervention; a dagger indicates that the rebel group received support over the course of the mutual intervention but not in its first calendar year.)

Map 1. Geographic overview of mutual interventions in Africa

Figure 1. Trends in the prevalence of mutual interventions in Africa, 1969–2010

Geographic Patterns and Temporal Trends

Map 1 shows that there were four geographic clusters of MIs, three of which overlapped.[6] Central Africa and the Greater Horn each saw nine MIs, with the DRC (formerly Zaire) and Sudan at their centers. The only Central African MI that did not involve the DRC pitted Angola against Congo-Brazzaville. The only MI in the Greater Horn that did not feature Sudan occurred between Ethiopia and Somalia. The two clusters were connected by Uganda. Southern Africa, the third cluster, experienced three MIs, pitting states ruled by white minorities (South Africa and Rhodesia) against so-called frontline states (Angola and Mozambique) in the 1970s and 1980s (Khadiagala 1994). The Southern African and Central African clusters were linked via Angola. Finally, the small and isolated West African cluster witnessed two MIs, both involving Liberia in the early 2000s (Adebajo and Rashid 2004). If one considers Namibia as (*de facto*) South African territory until its independence in 1990, then all 23 MIs featured pairs of contiguous states.

Figure 1 shows the prevalence of MIs over time. Between 1969 and 2010, there were only two short periods in which no MI was ongoing: 1973–74 and 1992–93. During the Cold War, the prevalence of MIs peaked at four in 1979–80 and 1983–84; after the Cold War, it peaked at eight in 1997. The start of the first wave of MIs in the 1975–77 period was connected to the independence of Angola and Mozambique. The beginning and peak of the second wave in the 1994–97 period were linked exclusively to "regional conflict complexes" in Central Africa and the Greater Horn (Wallensteen and Sollenberg 1998).

As the asterisks in Table 2 indicate, troop support to rebels also followed a clear temporal trend. Six of the eight MIs (75%) that began during the Cold War were indirect. By contrast,

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[6] For related but broader discussions of regional security dynamics and regionalized conflicts in Africa, see Buzan and Wæver (2003, 229–48); Schmidt (2013; 2018); Whitaker and Clark (2018, 169–96).

only three of the 15 MIs (20%) that started in the post–Cold War period were indirect. The other twelve cases (80%) were mixed MIs. We did not identify any direct MIs.

Causes

While we leave a detailed analysis of the causes of MIs for future research, two factors deserve brief discussion: revolutionary regimes and transborder ethnic kin.

First, all but one of the twenty-three MI onsets featured at least one government identified as a (neo-)liberation and/or revolutionary regime (Roessler and Verhoeven 2016, 39–44; Colgan 2012).[7] Of the fifteen MIs that involved (neo-)liberation regimes, the three Southern African cases most clearly fit Roessler and Verhoeven's argument that "the liberation project and its counter-revolutionary backlash have been key drivers of transnational conflict in Africa" (2016, 45). Other scholars question the extent to which this ideological dynamic determined the threat perceptions that drove the four MIs resulting in the overthrow of Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire (Carayannis 2018, 213–14; Fisher 2020, 150). Moreover, the involvement of Sudan's Islamist regime in five MIs starting in the 1990s and 2000s highlights the benefit of widening the lens from (neo-)liberation to other revolutionary ideologies. By supporting Islamist rebel groups, Sudan antagonized many of its neighbors, including Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Uganda (Lesch 2008, 414).

The broader pattern which emerges is that "revolutions intensify security competition between states and increase the probability [not] of war" but of mutual intervention (Walt 1996, 45). Even though interstate conflicts in Africa typically take a distinct form—involving indirect intervention by at least one state—their causes thus bear some resemblance to the causes of direct interstate conflicts identified in other regions.

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[7] The exception is the case involving Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia.

Second, transborder ethnic ties played a role in the onset of several MIs, but we believe

that they were the single most important factor in only two cases. Both Somalia's support for

Somali rebels in Ethiopia's Ogaden region and Chad's support for Zaghawa rebels in Sudan's

Darfur region were caused by the armed forces' pressure on their presidents to support trans-

border coethnics (Saideman 1998, 75–76; Prunier 2008, 115). In other cases, such as Rwanda's

support for rebel groups in which Zairian/Congolese Tutsi were overrepresented, ethnic soli-

darity appears to have been of secondary importance. Congolese Tutsi were internally divided

over Rwanda's support due to a widespread "feeling of being used," which resulted in clashes

between some of them and the Tutsi-led Rwandan army (Reyntjens 2009, 204–05). Similar to

this preliminary analysis, the wider literature on transborder ethnic kin and third-party inter-

vention reveals a complex mix of findings (Koga 2011; Cederman et al. 2013; Nome 2013).

Further research—encompassing noninterventions, one-sided interventions, and mutual inter-

ventions—is needed.

Termination Types

MIs ended in five different ways, as shown in Table 2. The most common termination type was

a direct *negotiated settlement* honored by both states (10 cases, 44%).[8] The second most com-

mon type was a *client victory* in which rebel groups overthrew one side's government (6 cases,

26%). Four of these six cases relate to the same rebel victory—the triumph of the Alliance of

Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL) over Mobutu. The third and

fourth most common outcomes were a *negotiated settlement honored only by one state* and an

indirect negotiated settlement (with 3 cases, or 13%, each). Not honoring a settlement refers to

continued support for rebels in the subsequent calendar year.[9] An indirect settlement refers to

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[8] Given the frequently covert nature of external support for rebels, it was sometimes challenging to confirm beyond reasonable doubt that both states honored the agreement.

[9] The Ethiopia–Somalia case is not clear-cut. Most older sources suggest Ethiopia stopped supporting the SNM in 1988, but we follow more recent sources that, drawing on the Ethiopian Foreign Ministry's archives (Yihun

the termination of an MI as a result of a negotiated settlement intended to resolve one of the two intrastate conflicts. The online appendix includes information on all direct (interstate) and indirect (intrastate) negotiated settlements. The fifth type, *client defeat*, occurred only once (4%). It refers to one side's clients being effectively eliminated. The poor showing of the Rally of Democratic Forces of Guinea (RFDG) meant that the MI between Guinea and Liberia ended quickly, turning into a one-sided intervention in which only Guinea sponsored a significant group (Milner 2005, 169).

Comparing the Termination of Mutual Interventions and Intrastate Conflicts in Africa

The fact that 13 (81%) out of 16 negotiated settlements resulted from direct *interstate* agreements already suggests that the termination of MIs is often distinct from the termination of the *intrastate* armed conflicts associated with MIs. Indeed, in 19 (83%) out of 23 MIs, at least one of the intrastate conflicts continued after the MI itself ended.[10] In this section, we take a closer look at the relationship between the two phenomena. Our purpose here is simply to show that there is typically no *constitutive* relationship between MI termination and intrastate conflict termination: reciprocal support to rebel groups often ends even though groups continue their rebellions. We leave the issue of *causal* relationships—e.g., whether MI termination increases the medium-term likelihood of conflict termination—for future research. The main takeaway is that more than half of the intrastate conflicts ended at least a year after the MI ended, providing evidence that MI termination is a phenomenon that deserves to be studied in its own right.

In Table 3, we aggregate information from the dyad-level UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset (Kreutz 2010) on each of the 46 sets of rebel clients listed above in Table 2. For the 20 sets that include more than one rebel group, we focus on the government–rebel dyad that

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2014, 685) and interviews with former Somali officials (Ingiriis 2016, 201), report continued Ethiopian support in 1989.

[10] This statistic is based on the rebel groups listed in Table 2 and on the dyadic UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset, version 2-2015 (Kreutz 2010).

terminated last. For example, in the Ethiopia–Sudan (1983–91) MI, Sudan's clients included the EPLF, OLF, TPLF, and EPRDF. According to Kreutz (2010), the TPLF ceased to exist in 1988, when it merged into the EPRDF; the EPLF and EPRDF won in 1991, which is why we code the MI as a client victory; the OLF, however, quickly fell out with the EPRDF (Markakis 2011, 282–83) and continued its anti-government struggle until mid-1992, when the dyad temporarily terminated due to low activity. We thus focus on the OLF and count this set of rebel clients under "Continued." This explains why Table 3 lists only six conflicts that ended the same year as MIs that ended in victory or defeat, even though there are seven such MIs in Table 2.

Table 3. The relationship between mutual intervention and intrastate conflict terminations

Type of mutual intervention termination	Timing of intrastate conflict termination		
	Ended first	Ended the same year	Continued
Victory or defeat	0	6	8
Negotiated settlement	7	9	16
Total in percent	15%	33%	52%

It is also important to note that intrastate conflicts are counted multiple times in Table 3 if they appear in multiple MIs in Table 2. For instance, the conflict between Zaire and the AFDL, which the rebels won in 1997, is counted four times because it is associated with four MIs— those that pitted Zaire against Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, and Angola in 1996–97.

While it almost follows by definition that one of the two intrastate conflicts linked to an MI that ended in client victory or defeat should end the same year as the MI (with the OLF as an outlier), the next number in the "Victory or defeat" row—eight—is far more striking. It implies that every single state whose rebel clients won against the rival state nonetheless

continued to face an intrastate conflict in the following year. In other words, winning an MI is not a silver bullet; victory abroad does not guarantee immediate success at home.

Turning to intrastate conflicts linked to negotiated settlements, the first column is a reminder that we sometimes code rebel clients as active even though the UCDP datasets code the conflicts in which these rebels are involved as terminated. Out of the seven intrastate conflicts that ended first (i.e., before the MI ended), three ended due to low activity, two ended due to a ceasefire, and one each terminated due to a peace agreement or a government victory.[11]

In terms of substance (rather than coding technicalities), the second and third columns in the negotiated settlement row are more interesting. Only nine intrastate conflicts (28% of the 32 conflicts) ended in the same year in which settlements occurred. These conflicts are linked to seven MIs, so there were only two MIs in which both conflicts terminated the same year. Notably, conflicts continued the next year almost twice as often as they ended the same year: 16 conflicts (50% of the 32) continued after MIs were settled. These conflicts are linked to 12 MIs; there are four MIs in which both conflicts continued. In short, the annual-level overlap of negotiated settlements of MIs and conflict termination is rather limited.

Finally, the row containing totals highlights this section's main point: 24 out of 46 (52%) intrastate conflicts continued after MIs ended, whereas only 15 (33%) ended in the same year as MIs.

**Comparing Mutual Interventions, Wars, Crises, Disputes, and Rivalries in Africa**

Having explained the conceptual relationships between MIs, interstate wars, militarized interstate disputes (MIDs), international crises, and rivalries in the second section, we now investigate their empirical overlap in Africa. To do so, we break down the cases listed in Table 2 by

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[11] We report the *Outcome_early* variable here, which is coded "solely on the basis of events during the final year of activity" (Kreutz 2010) and thus aligns with the last year in which a rebel group appears in the ACD before dropping out for at least one year.

MI year. The first MI, for example, results in three observations: Ethiopia–Sudan in 1969, 1970, and 1971. Overall, there were 117 MI years.

The middle bars in Figure 2 indicate how often other types of conflict occurred in the 117 MI years. In order to get a sense of whether MIs were frequently preceded or succeeded by these other types, we also show how often they occurred up to five years before or after an MI, with 2010 as cutoff. Since some MIs recurred within less than five years or ended after 2006, and since some countries became independent within less than five years before their first involvement in an MI, the number of pre- and post-MI years is smaller than that of MI years. Figure 2 thus uses percentages to ensure comparability.
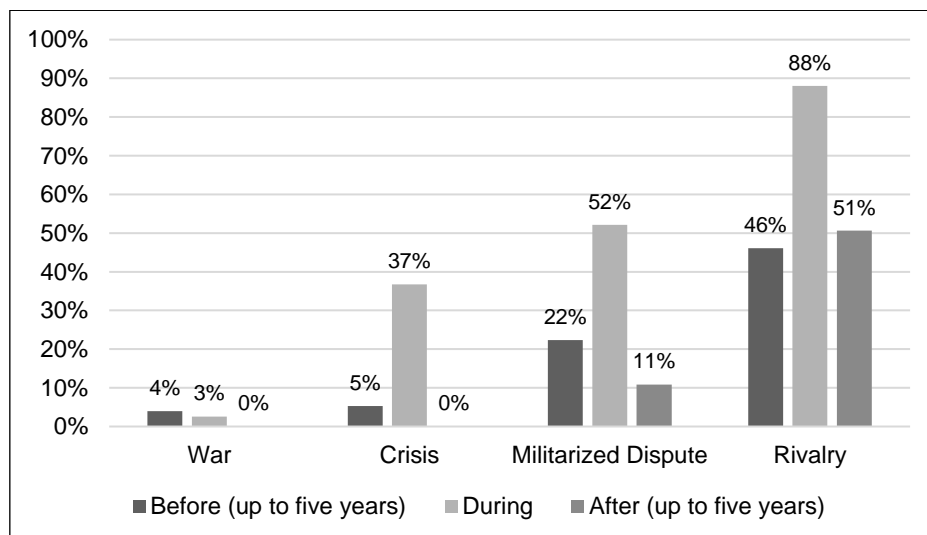
Figure 2. How war, crisis, dispute, and rivalry years relate to mutual intervention years

By far the smallest overlap is with full-scale interstate wars, as defined by the Correlates of War (COW) project (Sarkees and Wayman 2010). Only three MI and war years overlap: in 1975 and 1976, Angola and Zaire were involved in what the COW project calls the War over

Angola, which also involved South Africa in 1976.[12] War occurred at a similar rate before an MI started. The War over Angola already featured South Africa in 1975, a year before Angola began supporting South African rebels. Ethiopia and Somalia fought each other in the Second Ogaden War in 1977 and 1978, a year before their MI started (Tareke 2000).

The overlap with international crises is far greater, with crises occurring in 43 (37%) out of the 117 MI years. The crisis concept relies heavily on "perceptions held by the highest level decision makers" (Brecher and Wilkenfeld 1997, 3). Such perceptions are difficult to ascertain—especially for Africa's interstate relations, which are generally less well researched than those of other regions—and it is therefore likely that the crisis data undercounts African crises. In any case, it is notable that no crisis outlasted an MI, as indicated by the missing third bar.

Roughly every other MI year (52%) involves a MID. Since MIDs are conceptually less restrictive than crises, the relatively bigger overlap is unsurprising. The overlap is much lower for the years before or after MIs occurred. The fact that an MI year is nearly as often *not* coded as a MID year as it is coded as one highlights that scholars should not use MIDs as proxies for reciprocal support for rebel groups, which Henderson (2015, 176–77) does in his otherwise astute analysis of neopatrimonial balancing.

Finally, by far the biggest overlap of MI years is with international rivalry years: 103 out of 117 (88%). There are five MIs that are not coded as rivalries in any of their years, but four of them lasted only either one year or two years. It is noteworthy that rivalries are coded as active in nearly half of pre-MI years and in more than half of post-MI years. The existing literature on rivalry onset and termination (e.g., Rasler et al. 2013) thus has only a limited bearing on explaining the onset and termination of MIs. In short, this brief survey of empirical

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[12] We present COW data on interstate wars rather than the UCDP/PRIO data on interstate conflicts mentioned in the introduction because the overlap with the latter is even smaller (despite the lower death threshold): the only MI year that is also a UCDP/PRIO interstate conflict year involves Ethiopia and Somalia in 1980.

overlaps between MIs and other types of conflict reaffirms our argument that MIs need to be studied in their own right.

The Role of Third States

MIs occur between two states, but these states do not act in isolation. Third states often play important roles by supporting one of the two rival states or some of their rebel clients. In this section we distinguish *intracontinental* (African) from *extracontinental* (non-African) third states and pay special attention to how the role of the latter changed when the Cold War ended.

The most obvious form of involvement by third states from the African continent relates to the "interconnectedness" between two or more MIs (Forsberg 2016, 83), as noted above with regard to Mobutu's Zaire and Islamist Sudan. Several MIs were thus not only dyadic but also multilateral (or *k*-adic) phenomena (Poast 2016). More generally, in all but two of the 23 MIs (namely, the West African cases), at least one African third state provided support to at least one of the rebel clients. For example, in the first two years of the MI between Ethiopia and Sudan beginning in 1983, Libya provided weapons to the SPLM/A (Manoeli 2019, 153). Exploring in greater depth how exactly other African states affect the onset, dynamics, and termination of MIs would be a worthwhile endeavor, but it is beyond the scope of this research note.

Turning to the involvement of non-African states, there are stark differences between the eight MIs that began before 1991 and the 15 MIs that started after 1990.[13] During the Cold War, 12 (75%) out of 16 states and 12 (55%) out of 22 rebel clients involved in MIs received extracontinental state support. After the Cold War, only 9 (30%) out of 30 states and 3 (5%) out of 56 rebel clients involved in MIs obtained such support. Focusing on MIs rather than MI participants as units of analysis, all 8 MIs (100%) during the Cold War featured *some*

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[13] The remainder of this section relies on data on non-African state supporters originally collected by Högbladh et al. (2011) and complemented by Twagiramungu et al. (2019). Our use of 1991 as the first post–Cold War year follows Kalyvas and Balcells (2010).

extracontinental state support (for either states or rebel clients), whereas only 9 (60%) out of 15 MIs after the Cold War featured such support.

All but one of the eight Cold War MIs involved some support from either the Soviet Union or the United States. Only half of the eight MIs, however, involved both superpowers, with the Soviets supporting Angola (twice), Ethiopia (twice), and South African rebels (alongside Angola), while the United States backed Angolan rebels (alongside South Africa and Zaire), Somalia, Sudan, and Zaire (Ottaway 1982; Westad 2005, 228–87; Mitchell 2016). Given the key role of revolutionary regimes in the onset of Africa's MIs, the ideological inspiration that the Soviet Union provided is as noteworthy as its material support (Drew 2014).

The one state that was involved in even more MIs than the Soviet Union was Cuba, itself driven by "revolutionary zeal" (Gleijeses 2013, 526). Another prominent smaller state was Israel, which backed Sudan's enemies in five separate MIs, including one in the post–Cold War era, while Sudan received support from several Arab states (Aalen 2014, 628).

Conclusion

Solely looking at armed conflicts in which states directly fight each other seriously underestimates the level of interstate conflict in Africa. This research note shows that African states typically fight each other via or alongside rebel groups—a form of interstate conflict that has received too little attention. The concept of mutual intervention captures this phenomenon. Whereas direct interstate conflicts have been rare and short-lived on the African continent, MIs have been relatively common and sometimes long-lasting. They have occurred in four regional clusters, three of which have been linked. They have frequently been ended by a negotiated settlement even as their associated intrastate conflicts continued.

Before outlining a research agenda specifically on MIs, it is worth revisiting the broader issue that our findings raise: existing operationalizations of interstate conflict and war, which

exclusively address the direct use of armed force between states, need to be complemented so as also to address (partly) indirect forms of warfare.[14] Concerns about concepts that are "considered to be universal" even though they "do not fit" at least parts of what many scholars used to call the Third World are not new (Neuman 1998, 2). However, recent calls for Global International Relations have given these concerns a new lease of life (Bischoff et al. 2016).

The evidence on MIs provided in this research note is primarily descriptive. It paves the way for several primarily causal questions to be addressed in future research, but it also raises another descriptive question: How many MIs exactly have occurred outside of Africa? Given that MIs appear to have been most prevalent in Africa and given the time it takes to confirm both the onset and termination of simultaneous two-sided support for rebels, we limited our systematic data collection to Africa. While the UCDP External Support Dataset points only to the two non-African cases mentioned in the introduction, San-Akca's (2016) more recent dataset on state support for rebel groups identifies several other potential MIs, involving dyads such as Afghanistan and Tajikistan, China and India, India and Pakistan, and Iraq and Syria. Further research is required to confirm whether they meet the criteria we use.

Turning to primarily causal questions, why have there likely been many more MIs in Africa than in other regions? One-sided support for rebels ("nonmutual" intervention) is very common elsewhere (San-Akca 2016, 58), so why do non-African states retaliate less often via rebels? More generally, what determines the onset, duration, and termination of MIs? Regarding onset, we note above the key role of revolutionary regimes and the less frequently important role of transborder ethnic ties. Both call for further study.

Our research note also raises causal questions specifically concerning Africa. Why do some MIs end in negotiated settlements whereas others do not? Does the involvement of third

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[14] We deliberately use the term "operationalizations" rather than "concepts" because conflict and war are sometimes conceptualized less narrowly than they are operationalized (e.g., Levy and Thompson 2010, 5–11).

parties increase the likelihood of settlements? What makes negotiated settlements aimed at ending MIs successful? Schultz (2010) shows that negotiated settlements that stipulate a monitoring mechanism make the termination of interstate conflict over rebel support more likely, but does this finding also hold for the termination of rebel support itself? Does MI termination in turn increase the likelihood of intrastate conflict termination, perhaps depending on termination type? The termination of the MIs between Sudan and its neighbors removed a major obstacle to peace between the Sudanese government and the SPLM/A (Brosché and Duursma 2018), which suggests that at least in some instances peace can trickle down from the international to the national level. In short, we hope this note is merely a first step in developing what promises to be an exciting research program on mutual interventions in Africa and beyond.

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