Warlordism in Comparative Perspective

Kimberly Marten

Warlordism plagues many weak and failed states, and the parochial and often brutal rule of warlords deprives countries of the chance for lasting security and economic growth. This situation is not new; warlordism has arisen across history in a variety of geographical locations. In some of these cases, societies have managed to eradicate warlordism, paving the way for stable governance structures to emerge. In this article I compare warlordism in medieval Europe and early twentieth-century Republican China to two more recent examples in Somalia and Afghanistan. In so doing, I seek both to develop a rigorous and generalizable definition of "warlordism" and to reveal the factors that lead societies to rise up against warlords.

The four cases examined here demonstrate that warlordism has shared a remarkably similar set of characteristics across time and space. More important, the end of warlordism in both medieval Europe and Republican China was sparked by two crucially similar factors: (1) the emergence of strong, aggrieved economic interest groups that led the charge against the existing system; and (2) the appearance of transformative ideas from outside the existing culture that supported those groups' aims and convinced an increasingly literate population of the desirability of change. If this causal pattern holds, it may offer clues about the possible futures of Somalia and Afghanistan, suggesting that there are limits to what international efforts at state building can accomplish in the absence of revolutionary domestic change. This analysis also suggests, however, that U.S. policies designed to further the stability of Somalia and Afghanistan by giving economic and military support to both countries' warlords have been misguided, because warlords maintain their authority only by preventing the emergence of a functioning state.

In the following sections, I first describe how warlordism threatens both the well-being of populations suffering under its rule and international security

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more broadly. I then develop a rigorous, inductive definition of "warlordism," while critiquing the existing literature's use of the term. This is followed by a description of warlordism in each of the four cases. Next I explain how warlordism was overcome in the two historical cases. I go on to analyze what these causal patterns signify for the likely future trajectories of Somalia and Afghanistan. I conclude with a set of policy implications for the international community today.

Warlordism and Security

Decades of civil strife in Somalia and Afghanistan have made warlords more powerful and authoritative than those countries' putative state leaders. By the mid-2000s both countries had national government institutions, at least on paper, but state leaders failed to create functioning governance systems that could displace warlord rule. Instead, armed men continued their unsanctioned and arbitrary control over small pieces of territory.

WHY STATELIKE STRUCTURES MATTER
Some observers have argued that the absence of functioning states is not problematic for either Somalia or Afghanistan, where the nation-state is essentially an artificial construct. Borders were imposed by colonial rule, and the concept of statehood itself was considered a legacy of European imperialism that lacked inherent legitimacy.[1] Local clans or tribes have traditionally been the important decisionmakers. Furthermore, state authorities in both Somalia and Afghanistan were often brutal toward their own citizens. According to this argument, focusing on state breakdown is a mistake, because societies and economies can function in the absence of states, while state authorities in postcolonial environments are often inhumane and ineffective.[2]

Yet whether or not existing state borders should define the extent of the rule of law, and even if previous state governments have functioned poorly and cruelly, the absence of enforceable and consistent laws in Somalia and Afghanistan—in areas ranging from property rights and tax collection to security and common criminality—has exacted terrible costs on their societies. Gun

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1. Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-states: Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Third World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Jeffrey Herbst, "Responding to State Failure in Africa," *International Security,* Vol. 21, No. 3 (Winter 1996/97), pp. 120–144.
2. Peter D. Little, *Somalia: Economy without State* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); Ken Menkhaus, "Somalia: Political Order in a Stateless Society," *Current History,* May 1998, pp. 220–224; and Ken Menkhaus, "Somalia: State Collapse and the Threat of Terrorism," Ådelphi Paper, No. 364 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2004).

battles, business-related murders, and retribution killings have been everyday occurrences, even if open warfare is mostly absent. Public services such as education and health care are nonexistent in many regions, and spotty at best when present. Electricity is a luxury, because neither Somalia nor Afghanistan has a functioning power grid that can reach the entire country; even in the big cities, electricity provision is intermittent. Private international investment is rare, because of inadequate insurance against the risks involved in doing business. Foreign aid is slow to arrive amid concerns that it will be stolen and that those distributing it will be attacked or kidnapped. Majorities in both countries remain mired in poverty and illiteracy.

In both countries, powerful actors who benefit from warlordism have sought profit in the short term, paying little attention to the long-term development of economic or political institutions. Where life is cheap and the future is unpredictable, incentives to consider either the long term or the public good are sorely lacking.[3] This means that some form of stable governance system to provide security and predictability over large swaths of territory is necessary if even a minimum level of social well-being is to be achieved.

European-style nation-states may not be viable in Somalia or Afghanistan. Neither country has a history of strong statehood. Some observers argue that only the need to repel a rapacious invasion from abroad can create the popular cohesion necessary for strong states to develop.[4] Such an invasion is unlikely to threaten the whole territory of either country today, despite repeated smaller-scale foreign military incursions. Afghanistan in particular is sparsely populated outside a few large cities, with many ethnic divisions straddling an inhospitable geography of mountains and deserts; no state could reasonably hope to exert powerful authority everywhere in the country.[5]

Yet other forms of national-level governance that resemble statehood in important ways may be possible, even if their functions remain limited.[6] The philosopher Max Weber outlined the minimal requirements for governance in his classic 1919 definition of modern statehood,[7] arguing that the legitimacy of the

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3. Mancur Olson, "Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development," *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 87, No. 3 (September 1993), pp. 567–576.

4. Michael C. Desch argues that the presence of an external threat is necessary for strong state cohesion and predicts that the absence of war may lead to state decline. Desch, "War and Strong States, Peace and Weak States?" *International Organization*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (Spring 1996), pp. 237–268.

5. For a striking first-person anthropological perspective on this, see Rory Stewart, *The Places in Between* (New York: Harcourt, 2004).

6. This is suggested by Herbst, "Responding to State Failure in Africa."

7. Max Weber defines "modern statehood" as "that community which (successfully) lays claim to the *monopoly of legitimate physical violence* within a certain territory," and adds that rule in the modern state is legitimated "by virtue of belief in the validity of legal *statute* and the appropriate . . . ju-

modern state is based on two key requirements: to maintain a monopoly over the legitimate use of violence across an extensive piece of territory, and to enforce consistent laws that are perceived to be rational and that endure beyond the short-term reign of individual leaders. As the seventeenth-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes famously argued, the purpose of states is to keep anarchy at bay, so that people can go about their everyday business and invest in the future without fear.[8] In other words, even if the current borders of the sovereign states of Somalia and Afghanistan prove untenable, and national government roles remain to be negotiated, something that looks very much like a state must emerge if these countries are to escape from the violence and uncertainty that now plague them.

WARLORDS AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

The absence of functioning states in Somalia and Afghanistan has made the rest of the world insecure as well. Their international borders have been poorly controlled and remain porous; illegal trade and weapons smuggling have been rife. Moreover, Afghanistan has become the primary source for heroin sold in Europe. Although some Afghani regions have long grown opium poppies, their cultivation expanded across the entire country after the ouster of the Taliban in 2002, and heroin-processing laboratories appeared inside the country for the first time. Income from the poppy industry skyrocketed as a result, and new links to international organized crime networks were established.[9] Both warlords opposed to state control and Taliban fighters linked to al-Qaida are profiting immensely from this international drug trade.

International security is also threatened by an unintended consequence of warlordism: popular disgust with warlord brutality enhances the attractiveness of radical alternatives. Both Afghanistan and Somalia have at various times served as transit points and training grounds for al-Qaida, and they may do so again. By mid-2005 the methods and means of the Iraqi insurgency had begun to replicate themselves in Afghanistan, in a resurgence of Taliban activity that state security forces were unable to control without the help of U.S. and NATO troops. This Taliban resurgence, like all antistate insurgencies, was made possible only through the support of significant elements of the local

ridical 'competence' founded on rationally devised rules." Weber, "The Profession and Vocation of Politics," in Peter Lassman and Ronald Speirs, eds., *Weber: Political Writings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 310–312 (emphasis in original).

8. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), C.B. MacPherson, ed. (New York: Penguin, 1980), pp. 185–186.

9. Barnett R. Rubin, *Road to Ruin: Afghanistan's Booming Opium Industry* (New York: Center on International Cooperation, New York University, 2004).

population, who were willing to hide and feed its fighters because they lacked faith in the new government. The border straddling Afghanistan and Pakistan is once again a hospitable place for al-Qaida training activities. By mid-2006 an Islamic clerical militia, the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), had gained control over most of southern Somalia, including the capital of Mogadishu, by fighting against the warlord-dominated transitional government. Radically conservative, anti-Western elements appeared to be emerging as the UIC's key leaders, even though religion has traditionally played far less of a role in the country than clan identification. Once again, popular disgust at the warlord-dominated transitional government increased the UIC's popularity. This, too, had immediate international security implications, as the country's intermittent armed conflict with Ethiopia resumed when pro-Ethiopian warlord factions turned to their neighbor for military assistance.

In both countries, warlords have been funded and otherwise supported by neighboring states (Ethiopia in Somalia, and Pakistan and Iran in Afghanistan) that seek to gain influence. In addition, the United States has repeatedly given military support and economic assistance to warlord factions in both countries in an effort to form alliances designed to thwart anti-Western Islamist radicals and bring stability. U.S. actions have been criticized by human rights activists, who point out that many of the warlords have themselves committed war crimes and other atrocities, but U.S. policymakers saw few alternatives; no potential partners in these countries had both military skills and liberal ideals of governance. The United States began supporting Afghan warlords during Afghanistan's long civil war against Soviet intervention in the 1980s, and warlords were a fundamental part of the U.S.-led 2001–02 coalition war against the Taliban and al-Qaida.[10] Warlord support remains a key tactic of U.S. state-building and counterinsurgency operations in the country.[11] In Somalia the

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10. For a description of U.S. policy before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, see Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin, 2004). For a description and debate about the utility of U.S. tactics during the 2001–02 war, see Michael E. O'Hanlon, "A Flawed Masterpiece," *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 81, No. 3 (May/June 2002), pp. 47–63; Stephen Biddle, "Afghanistan and the Future of Warfare," *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 82, No. 2 (March/April 2003), pp. 31–46; Richard B. Andres, Craig Wills, and Thomas Griffith Jr., "Winning with Allies: The Strategic Value of the Afghan Model," *International Security,* Vol. 30, No. 3 (Winter 2005/06), pp. 124–160; and Stephen D. Biddle, "Allies, Airpower, and Modern Warfare: The Afghan Model in Afghanistan and Iraq," *International Security,* Vol. 30, No. 3 (Winter 2005/06), pp. 161–176.
11. Astri Suhrke, Kristian Berg Harpviken, and Arne Strand, *Conflictual Peacebuilding: Afghanistan Two Years after Bonn,* Report 2004:4 (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 2004), p. 45. In a not-for-attribution conversation with the author in Kabul in May 2004, a top Western aid official said that U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad frequently suggested in multilateral strategizing meetings that key warlords should receive cash in return for their cooperation with central governmental laws.

United States initially supported some warlord factions in the hope that they would work together to overcome the anarchy that prevailed in the country in the early 1990s. More recently, the United States reportedly gave military and economic assistance to warlords fighting the UIC, as part of the war on terrorism, because the UIC was thought to be harboring pro-al-Qaida elements.[12]

The United Nations also supported warlord-dominated political negotiations in Somalia and Afghanistan in the early 2000s that led to the creation of new national governments in both countries.[13] Warlords were given top ministerial posts and other influential positions (such as governorships and police chief roles) with the blessing of the international community, even though this allowed them to continue with impunity activities that undermined the states' authority. Ironically, by supporting the warlords, both the United States and the broader international community weakened the state institutions they were helping to create.

A Definition of Warlordism

Several analysts have offered definitions of warlordism,[14] but none has been well delineated or rigorous, and none has been adopted as standard usage.

THE EXISTING LITERATURE

William Reno's groundbreaking work on African warlordism has made him perhaps the most widely cited scholar in the warlordism genre. Reno does not, however, offer a clear definition of warlordism as a system to distinguish it from other types of rule. In particular, he blurs the distinction between

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12. For an inside description of U.S. policy in the early 1990s, see John L. Hirsch and Robert B. Oakley, *Somalia and Operation Restore Hope: Reflections on Peacemaking and Peacekeeping* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1995). For reports of more recent U.S. support for Somali warlords, see International Crisis Group, "Counter-terrorism in Somalia: Losing Hearts and Minds?" Africa Report, No. 95 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, July 11, 2005); and Craig Timberg, "Mistaken Entry into Clan Dispute Led to U.S. Black Eye in Somalia," *Washington Post*, July 2, 2006.
13. For critiques of this process in Afghanistan, see Laura Secor, "The Pragmatist," *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 294, No. 1 (July/August 2004), p. 44; Kathy Gannon, "Afghanistan Unbound," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 3 (May/June 2004), pp. 35–46; and Suhrke, Harpviken, and Strand, *Conflictual Peacebuilding*.
14. Prominent examples include Sasha Lezhnev, *Crafting Peace: Strategies to Deal with Warlords in Collapsing States* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington, 2005); Paul Jackson, "Warlords as Alternative Forms of Governance," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Summer 2003), pp. 131–150; Gordon Peake, "From Warlords to Peacelords?" *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (Spring 2003), pp. 181–191; William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1998); and William Reno, "Mafiya Troubles, Warlord Crises," in Mark R. Beissinger and Crawford Young, eds., *Beyond State Crisis? Postcolonial Africa and Post-Soviet Eurasia in Comparative Perspective* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

warlordism that threatens state control over territory and states that are ruled by former warlords, such as Charles Taylor of Liberia. Limiting the label to actors who fundamentally undermine attempts at state consolidation is more useful; warlords who become state leaders are no longer warlords.

Reno instead defines warlords by their style of political economy.[15] He argues that they are self-interested actors out for their own wealth and power, who avoid acquiring fixed assets that they have to guard, and who fail to provide any public goods (e.g. security, infrastructure, and education). He asserts that warlords are interested only in providing private goods and services to recipients who have been carefully chosen. In his view, warlords do not want to be hampered by either free riders or competitors who might use public goods against them and thereby sap their power. Yet his own case studies of Sierra Leone and Congo indicate that diamond mines and timber forests (i.e., fixed, location-bound assets that require at least some provision of territorial security to hold) were an important source of power for warlords in those countries.[16]

Sasha Lezhnev similarly argues that warlords are self-interested, portraying them as one-dimensional thugs who engage in indiscriminate violence against the population they control.[17] Yet other studies have found that warlords are likely to provide at least the limited public good of security. For example, Mancur Olson notes in his classic discussion of "stationary bandits" (in a study he says was inspired by the Chinese warlords of the Republican era) that "bandit rationality" leads warlords to seize domains and provide some security within them, because to do so encourages local investment by their subjects and in turn increases their own wealth.[18] These stationary bandits gain the resources to overcome more predatory "roving bandits," who merely pillage and spoil. Both Reno's and Lezhnev's warlords resemble Olson's "roving bandits."

Reno and Lezhnev, however, underestimate the role of loyalty and reciprocity in sustaining the power of the most successful warlords. Warlords need militias to support them, and they have a hard time maintaining those militias if their men leave when someone offers them more money. Also, warlords are better able to husband their resources if they command the respect (or at least the obedience) of the population they control, rather than waging constant battles to defend their right to rule. Weber noted that the legitimacy of warlords, unlike the legitimacy of modern states, stems from their personal charisma

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15. Reno, "Mafiya Troubles, Warlord Crises," p. 106.
16. Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States.*
17. Lezhnev, *Crafting Peace,* pp. 2–3.
18. Olson, "Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development," p. 568.

and the devotion of followers. This devotion in turn depends on the warlords' ability to bestow favors and recognition on those who support them.[19]

In contrast to Reno and Lezhnev, Paul Jackson and Gordon Peake claim that warlords create an alternative type of localized governance structure in the wake of state collapse.[20] Both agree with Olson that warlords provide at least minimal protection for local inhabitants. But unlike Reno and Lezhnev, they do not address warlord motives or characteristics in any depth, nor do they distinguish warlords from ideological combatants or secessionist guerrillas in a civil war, who can also hold territory and challenge state hegemony.

AN INDUCTIVE DEFINITION OF WARLORDISM

A more precise definition emerges by examining the common factors that make up warlordism in the four cases considered here. Warlordism shares four major characteristics across these cases. First, trained, armed men take advantage of the disintegration of central authority to seize control over relatively small slices of territory. Second, their actions are based on self-interest, not ideology. Third, their authority is based on charisma and patronage ties to their followers. Fourth, this personalistic rule leads to the fragmentation of political and economic arrangements across the country, disrupting the free flow of trade and making commerce and investment unpredictable. Savvy actors react by limiting their economic activity to local regions.

Cases of Warlordism

In this section, I describe the onset and characteristics of warlordism in the four cases under review, showing how the definition above fits in practice. The secondary literature in all four cases reflects striking agreement about how warlordism works as a system.

AN INITIAL CAVEAT

In some ways, warlordism was unique in medieval Europe because it lasted for several centuries: from the fall of the Carolingian (or Frankish) empire at the turn of the first millennium until the emergence of sovereign kings in France during the Renaissance in the 1400s. Thus the rise and fall of warlordism in Europe was gradual, and feudal social structures became embedded in the dominant culture.

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19. Lassman and Speirs, *Weber*, pp. 313–314.
20. Jackson, "Warlords as Alternative Forms of Governance"; and Peake, "From Warlords to Peacelords?"

In contrast, warlordism in China was a temporary phenomenon, beginning after the fall of the Manchu Qing empire in 1911 and ending with the mainland victory of Mao's Communist revolution in 1949. Although Chinese and western scholars have debated whether warlordism existed in previous eras when Chinese dynasties failed, and was therefore somehow culturally embedded in the Chinese political psyche,[21] its absence for several hundred years before 1911 is undisputed. Instead, the dominant culture in China was Confucianism, which centered on familial hierarchy and obedience to authority, privileging scholarship over brute force in service to a legitimate central ruler under a universal system of laws.[22]

Similarly, in both Somalia and Afghanistan warlordism is a new phenomenon. Civil war in both countries gave men who controlled weapons and militias the power to subvert and displace traditional clan or tribal elder authority and seize control over land.[23] Warlord rule in the other three cases was not as culturally entrenched as it was in medieval Europe. This peculiarity of the European system, however, is not crucial to either the definition of warlordism or the causal story the case tells.

WARLORDISM IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE

The feudal warlords of medieval Europe began as members of the landed nobility during the Carolingian empire. This empire had established a unified system of coinage and administration across much of the European continent by the 700s, and thereby served functions similar to those of a state. As the empire gradually collapsed at the close of the first millennium, however, the social system of loyalty that characterized the old regime became less hierarchical and more fragmented, and the lords began to set separate policies for the administration of justice and taxation over the lands they controlled.[24] Each vassal could have bonds of loyalty to more than one lord, and each lord

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21. Arthur Waldron, "The Warlord: Twentieth-Century Chinese Understandings of Violence, Militarism, and Imperialism," *American Historical Review,* Vol. 96, No. 4 (October 1991), pp. 1073–1100.
22. See Lucian W. Pye, *Warlord Politics: Conflict and Coalition in the Modernization of Republican China* (New York: Praeger, 1971), pp. 6–9; and James E. Sheridan, *China in Disintegration: The Republican Era in Chinese History, 1912–1949* (New York: Free Press, 1975), pp. 12–16.
23. Barnett R. Rubin, "The Political Economy of War and Peace in Afghanistan," *World Development,* Vol. 28, No. 10 (October 2000), pp. 1789–1803; Sayed Yaqub Ibrahimi, "Land Disputes Unsettle the North," Afghan Recovery Report, No. 124 (London: Institute for War and Peace Reporting, July 5, 2004); Terrence Lyons and Ahmed I. Samatar, *Somalia: State Collapse, Multilateral Intervention, and Strategies for Political Reconstruction* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1995); Jarat Chopra, Åge Eknes, and Toralv Nordbø, "Fighting for Hope in Somalia," Peacekeeping and Multinational Operations Report, No. 6 (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 1995), as reprinted in *Journal of Humanitarian Assistance,* June 2000, http://www.jha.ac/articles/a007.htm; and Menkhaus, "Somalia: Political Order in a Stateless Society," p. 222.
24. Joseph R. Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univer-

could be beholden to more than one prince, king, or bishop.[25] These warlords therefore represented a challenge to centralized order.

Warlords levied arbitrary taxes on jurisdictions that often overlapped. Because these taxes were onerous and unpredictable, merchants hid their goods to prevent the lords from figuring out who had made a profit.[26] This uncertainty made long-distance trade difficult, because a merchant from one area had little information about what to expect in others.

Lords skilled in the use and command of force were able to exert the greatest authority in this era of uncertainty, because they could protect their populations and merchants from bandit raiders.[27] A warlord's legitimacy was cemented by his charismatic relationship with his vassals, which was based on bonds of mutual loyalty and affection.[28] While ordinary people were not parties to the bargain made between the warlord and his men, their relationship to their overlords also had elements of reciprocity and emotionalism,[29] helping to make local trade more predictable than trade over longer distances.

The system of loyalty was tempered by the vassals' ability to resort to force to ensure their self-interest.[30] Relationships depended on the personal success of the lord, as well as on the lord's ability to win in battle and deliver the spoils to his followers. Dissatisfaction with a lord's performance would lead to the emergence of new warlords, as followers struck off on their own and shed their vassal status.[31]

WARLORDISM IN REPUBLICAN CHINA

The fall of imperial China witnessed the emergence of a similar political system, based on self-interested rule by men who used force and charisma to dominate separate, local political economies.

In 1911 the Qing Mongol dynasty collapsed during a revolution led by provincial armies, whose men were disgusted with the regime's inability to stave off the threat of foreign encroachment. The warlords who emerged in the aftermath were mostly former imperial military officers. Some were gang-pressed into local leadership roles by the enlisted men who had led the revolts, in the

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sity Press, 1970), pp. 13–18; and Gianfranco Poggi, *The Development of the Modern State: A Sociological Introduction* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1978), pp. 19–21.
25. Poggi, *The Development of the Modern State,* pp. 27–28; and Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 38–39.
26. Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors,* pp. 89–90.
27. Ibid., p. 37; and Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State,* pp. 13–14.
28. Poggi, *The Development of the Modern State,* p. 19.
29. Ibid., p. 24.
30. Ibid., p. 31.
31. Ibid., p. 27; and Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors,* p. 37.

belief that the revolution would be taken more seriously if high-ranking officials were seen to be in control.[32] Others were appointed to military governorships in the provinces by the first revolutionary government of President Yuan Shikai (himself the head of the imperial Beiyang Army) to help maintain order.[33] Such steps were necessary because large numbers of undisciplined soldiers went on the rampage when they deserted or were demobilized.[34]

Successful warlords were good politicians who wooed local economic elites to gain control over provincial and municipal tax collection.[35] Geographical boundaries dividing warlord areas of rule in China were often nonexistent; relationships between warlords and their men were complex and included overlapping loyalties.[36] The same warlord could sometimes act as a military governor on behalf of Beijing, and at other times as an anti-Beijing insurgent.[37] For example, warlords collected municipal taxes on territory they controlled by government decree, but they also led local tax revolts if it was to their personal advantage.[38] In addition, they extorted unofficial "taxes" from illegal checkpoints, including along railroad lines. Sometimes they forced residents to grow opium poppies or to pay a "laziness tax" for refusing to do so.[39] There was no standard currency, and the varying exchange rates across provinces created barriers for merchants. As a result, it was most profitable to keep business local and avoid the difficulties of long-distance trade.[40]

In his classic study of warlordism in Republican China, Lucian Pye describes a social system remarkably similar to that of medieval western Europe (although he does not note the resemblance himself). Warlords were successful to the extent that they maintained the loyalty of their men, and this depended not merely on the availability of money but also on the warlords' ability to maintain their men's morale and general welfare.[41] This loyalty was necessary not only to achieve victory in battle, but also to help prevent counterrevolutionary plots against the new military governors.[42] Loyalty was often based on

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32. Sheridan, *China in Disintegration,* pp. 41–42.

33. Pye, *Warlord Politics;* and Edward A. McCord, *The Power of the Gun: The Emergence of Modern Chinese Warlordism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

34. McCord, *The Power of the Gun,* pp. 134–149; and Diana Lary, "Violence, Fear, and Insecurity: The Mood of Republican China," *Republican China,* Vol. 10, Nos. 2–3 (1985), pp. 57–58.

35. McCord, *The Power of the Gun.*

36. Pye, *Warlord Politics,* p. 77.

37. Mary Backus Rankin, "State and Society in Early Republican Politics, 1912–18," *China Quarterly,* No. 150 (June 1997), p. 270.

38. Hans J. van de Ven, "Public Finance and the Rise of Warlordism," *Modern Asian Studies,* Vol. 30, No. 4 (October 1996), pp. 829–868.

39. Sheridan, *China in Disintegration,* pp. 86–87.

40. Lary, "Violence, Fear, and Insecurity," p. 60.

41. Pye, *Warlord Politics,* pp. 41–44.

42. McCord, *The Power of the Gun,* p. 109.

a teacher-student relationship that had been established when the warlords were officers in the imperial army; it could also be based on family or marriage ties or friendship. Yet it was maintained by the warlord's continuing success. Those who overreached in their efforts to control territory lost their men, who would strike out on their own if their expectations were unmet.[43] Warlordism had such a personalistic dimension that assassination was a common tool to change political power balances.[44]

The Chinese warlords differed greatly in their effectiveness as governors. Some pillaged the holdings of their subjects and allowed their troops to engage in horrific levels of violence. But others were reformists, working to overcome crime and corruption and to build educational systems.[45] One, Yan Xishan, of Shanxi, even set up a society to discourage foot-binding in women and launched a literacy campaign, financed from the provincial budget, that provided four years of basic schooling to residents.[46] Less conscientious warlords who overtaxed their populations would have difficulty fighting other warlords, because they had to fight their own people simultaneously.[47]

WARLORDISM IN SOMALIA

Similar patterns of warlordism were repeated in Somalia. The military took over the country in a bloodless coup when the last functioning civilian president was assassinated in 1969. Maj. Gen. Mohammed Siad Barre became the new state ruler, but he lost domestic legitimacy after an ill-fated military campaign against Ethiopia for control over the disputed Ogaden region in the late 1970s. He relied increasingly on support from his own clan and various subclan factions to retain power. Barre paid these clan members off from state coffers, packed government positions with his own people, and fomented interclan rivalries to divide his opponents. As a result, the army fragmented into clan-based militias, each supporting its own interests with armaments left over from the competitive Soviet and U.S. assistance packages that had been offered to Somalia in the past. The factions vaguely followed traditional clan lines but maintained tactical fluidity in their membership and alliances.[48]

In the late 1980s armed factionalism led to civil war, and in 1991 Barre was overthrown by an alliance led by members of the Hawiye clan. The resulting

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43. Pye, *Warlord Politics*, p. 54; and Sheridan, *China in Disintegration*, pp. 78–79.
44. Sheridan, *China in Disintegration*, p. 89.
45. Ibid., pp. 62–74.
46. Ibid., p. 76.
47. McCord, *The Power of the Gun*, p. 292.
48. For the best description of this process, see Chopra, Eknes, and Nordbø, "Fighting for Hope in Somalia."

anarchy spurred the new warlords to begin fighting for territorial control in the major cities, where the most important points of contention were the harbors and airports. While violence caused legal domestic trade to come to a standstill, control over transport hubs allowed warlords to loot foreign aid for resale.

The Somali Transitional Federal Government, formed in October 2004, was the latest of more than a dozen attempts to re-create a functioning state out of this morass. It sought to bring various warlord clan factions together, yet remained unable even to establish a base in Mogadishu because of the threat of internecine violence. Kidnapping was an accepted way of solving commercial disputes and clan rivalries.[49] Piracy surged off the Somali coast.[50] Currency was illegally printed by various factions, causing rampant inflation in the absence of a central bank;[51] stolen automatic rifles and fake passports were sold openly on the street in three widely accepted but differently printed local currencies.[52] A booming charcoal export trade devastated the country's acacia forests despite an official ban on tree cutting.[53]

Somalia's warlords gained much of their popular support by using clan identification to create bonds of loyalty. Barre's use of clan identification to punish detractors caused his opposition to form along clan lines.[54] Areas of the country that had clear clan dominance (such as the unrecognized but de facto autonomous Somaliland and Puntland republics in the north) became the most peaceful, because clan elders were able to reassert authority over the warlords. Areas where clan rivalry was strongest, or where clans were unable to control teenage bandits who did not recognize clan loyalty and sought war booty, were the most violent, because military force remained the dominant form of authority.[55] Men who controlled the guns in those areas also controlled political life.[56]

Because clan identity in Somalia is fluid and subject to political manipula-

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49. Marc Lacey, "U.N. Loses Patience with Somali Custom of Kidnapping," *New York Times,* May 21, 2002.
50. "U.S. Company Somalia-bound to Fight Pirates," Reuters, November 26, 2005.
51. Little, *Somalia: Economy without State,* pp. 145–147.
52. Joseph Winter, "Living in Somalia's Anarchy," *BBC News,* November 18, 2004; and Joseph Winter, "Somalia: Where the Gun Rules," *BBC News,* February 9, 2005.
53. Marc Lacey, "Mogadishu Journal: To Fuel the Mideast's Grills, Somalia Smolders," *New York Times,* July 25, 2002.
54. Lyons and Samatar, *Somalia,* p. 18.
55. Ibid., pp. 21–22, 45–46; and Ameen Jan, "Somalia: Building Sovereignty or Restoring Peace?" in Elizabeth M. Cousens and Chetan Kumar, eds., *Peacebuilding as Politics: Cultivating Peace in Fragile Societies* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2001), pp. 53–54.
56. William J. Durch, "Introduction to Anarchy: Humanitarian Intervention and 'State-building' in Somalia," in Durch, ed., *UN Peacekeeping, American Policy, and the Uncivil Wars of the 1990s* (New York: St. Martin's, 1996), p. 329.

tion, rather than being fixed by parental lineage, individuals with the right combination of charisma and military force have sometimes invented previously unknown subclans on the spot.[57] This fluidity has made the warlord alliances and the security arrangements they entail particularly fractious.[58] Security arrangements come and go, and Somalis who wish to engage in long-distance trade have had to negotiate multiple agreements for safe passage.[59] A BBC correspondent in November 2004 reported having to cross seven checkpoints to get from the landing strip where his plane touched down to his hotel in the capital, each run by a different warlord charging a separate "entry fee."[60]

A great deal of commercial activity remained possible in this era (including cattle trade over the border to Kenya, banana exports, the sale of cellphones, and the use of internet cafés for business transactions), but long-term investment was limited by the enormous risks faced by entrepreneurs. Business contracts were enforced through informal protection pacts, and business owners armed their own militias for this purpose.[61] The cost of security effectively priced small, independent entrepreneurs out of the market, leaving them easy prey for bandits.[62]

WARLORDISM IN AFGHANISTAN

Warlordism in Afghanistan has been structurally similar to that found in medieval Europe, Republican China, and Somalia. The initial uprisings against the Soviet-backed state government in the late 1970s (and against the actual Soviet invasion in 1979) had diverse origins and were often spontaneous. Pakistan, which had a long-standing interest in trying to dominate its neighbor, selected sympathetic Islamic religious leaders to become some of the major commanders of the mujahideen resistance, and the organizational patterns of their troops and tactics often reflected those of traditional tribal warfare. But revolts within the state's armed forces also spawned well-trained, independent resistance groups. This was the case in the western region of Herat near the Iranian border, where Ismail Khan became a prominent militia commander, and in the northern border area near Soviet Central Asia, where Abdul Rashid Dostum

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57. Little, *Somalia: Economy without State,* p. 47.
58. Ibid., pp. 49, 151.
59. Ibid., p. 152.
60. Winter, "Living in Somalia's Anarchy."
61. International Crisis Group, "Somalia: Continuation of War by Other Means?" Africa Report, No. 88 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, December 21, 2004); and Menkhaus, *Somalia: State Collapse and the Threat of Terrorism.*
62. Ian Fisher, "Mogadishu Journal: Somali Business Thwarted by Too-Free Enterprise," *New York Times,* August 10, 2000.

began as a pro-Soviet commander and then switched sides to the opposition. After the war began, refugee camps spawned new insurgent groups.[63]

In regions where the insurgents successfully fought off the state and Soviet forces, their commanders planted opium poppies as a source of independent income and took control over transportation checkpoints to collect unofficial taxes from travelers.[64] As in Somalia, these new resource bases allowed the commanders to take authority away from traditional tribal elders and become the de facto governors of the districts they dominated, since they provided both security and jobs.

Popular disgust against warlordism in the mid-to-late 1990s helped the radical Islamist Taliban movement capture and hold territory. Some warlords formed the Northern Alliance to fight against it. Although this alliance was marked by brutal infighting, many of its members joined forces to fight alongside the United States in the 2001 war to oust the Taliban and its al-Qaida clients from the country. Northern Alliance leaders were rewarded by being named local commanders of the government-supported militia in the 2002 transition period.[65] Militia units were officially disbanded after the new Afghan National Army was formed, and their heavy arms were cantoned. Nevertheless, they continued at an unofficial level to control both politics and commerce throughout much of the country.

In the mid-2000s, Afghanistan had a functioning state, at least on paper. President Hamid Karzai issued proclamations from the capital of Kabul and managed the state budget. Yet the danger of assassination kept him largely confined to the presidential palace, and the national government barely had a presence even within Kabul. The state's expenditures far exceeded its revenues, and tax collection was negotiated with powerful local warlords rather than regularized.[66] The police worked for the highest local bidder,[67] and the plurality of the country's gross national product (GNP) came from the illegal opium trade that militia leaders controlled.[68] The second greatest contributor

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63. Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System,* 2d ed. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 184–191.
64. Ibid., p. 256.
65. Jon Sawyer, "Most Afghan Warlords Ignore Calls to Disarm before Elections," *St. Louis Post–Dispatch,* June 16, 2004.
66. William Byrd and Stéphane Guimbert, "Afghanistan: Managing Public Finances for Development," Vol. 1, Report 34582-AF (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, December 22, 2005).
67. Bashir Babak and Sayed Yaqub Ibrahimi, "Afghanistan: When Cops Become Robbers," Afghan Recovery Report, No. 170 (London: Institute for War and Peace Reporting, April 29, 2005).
68. Sayed Salahuddin, "Trade in Afghan South Seen Hurt by Anti-drug Drive," Reuters, June 9, 2005; and N.C. Aizenman, "Opium Trade Not Easily Uprooted, Afghanistan Finds," *Washington Post,* July 16, 2005.

to GNP appears to have been profits associated with cross-border transit trade to and from Iran, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan. This trade was also controlled by militia leaders who exacted customs and tolls at unofficial checkpoints, and who dominated the trucking industry in a country where most goods are immediately shifted to different trucks as soon as they cross the border.[69]

Elections in September 2005 created a sitting parliament, but a combination of intimidation and fraud meant that local strongmen simply used them to give a false democratic patina to their de facto rule. Some 80 percent of the new members of parliament had links to illegal armed groups.[70] When individual warlords are sidelined by the central authorities, often through appointments to governmental positions in Kabul as a way to remove them from their territorial bases, their chosen successors step in to take over local leadership.[71]

A societal divide that more or less follows the line of the Hindu Kush mountains has given warlordism in Afghanistan an ethnic component. The Pashtun ethnic group, with roots in Pakistan, dominates the areas stretching south and east of Kabul; a variety of other ethnic groups (including Tajiks with long ties to Iran, Uzbeks, and Hazara Shiites) dominate the areas north and west of the capital. This difference is crucial in understanding the social structures that underpin warlordism in the country. Most observers who use the term "warlords" are referring to the prominent military commanders of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance. Some traditional clan leaders of the Pashtun tribes, however, have joined the "warlord" category because of their frequent armed battles.

Throughout Afghanistan, local government has always mattered more than the central government, and traditionally it was dominated by authority figures who represented the interests of prominent families. But in contrast to the experience of the groups in the northern and western areas, the Pashtuns of the south and east have managed to keep much of this traditional social structure intact. As a result, their political loyalties are more intense, smaller in scale, and oriented more toward the village level than they are in the north and west; long-standing family loyalties (and feuds) define who will provide security for whom. The harsh terrain separating many Pashtun areas from the

69. William McCarten and Javier Suarez, "Trade and Regional Cooperation between Afghanistan and Its Neighbors," Report No. 26769 (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, February 18, 2004).
70. "Rights Body Warns of Warlords' Success in Elections" (Geneva: United Nations International Regional Information Networks, October 18, 2005), http://www.irinnews.org.
71. For the example of warlord Sher Mohammed Akhunzada in Helmand Province, see Ahmed Rashid, "Chief Ousted as British Troops Head for Afghan Drug Region," *Daily Telegraph* (London), December 23, 2005.

modernizing capital of Kabul, combined with the easy and early victories of
the Taliban (whose strength rested on traditional Pashtun mores), protected
them from outside influences.

The warlords of Afghanistan's Northern Alliance, on the other hand, sub-
verted traditional clan social structures, displacing tribal elders because of
their superior ability to fight. Frequent battles for territorial control among
warlords, including in Kabul itself, have resulted in land grabs and arbitrary
local rule that thwarts state control. Merchants flock to industrial parks that
are sponsored by the Afghan government with U.S. aid; unlike other locations,
they promise clean land titles and perimeter security.[72]

The Northern Alliance exhibits huge variation. Some of its warlords have
commanded large regional armies and overseen economic fiefdoms that span
several Afghan provinces. They provide a wide range of public goods to resi-
dents, using the economic levers they control to share the wealth. For example,
Ismail Khan of Herat (bordering Iran) controlled the international trade that
passed through his region, making vast sums of money from the customs du-
ties his men collected. In December 2004 he was shunted to Kabul to become
the minister of power and water, after being forced to call on U.S. assistance
during summer battles with a rival; U.S. and Afghan government officials por-
trayed this as a sign of the demise of his authority. Yet from the capital, Khan
used the policy levers at his disposal to continue to favor Herat at the expense
of other regions. He is famous for having run a tight ship in Herat, providing a
relatively high degree of security and economic opportunity for residents, and
forbidding poppy cultivation because it offended his deeply held Islamic reli-
gious beliefs. After his relocation to Kabul, though, he appeared to be behind
several instances of local rioting, perhaps with the goal of demonstrating that
his men are needed to provide security in a way that the U.S. and NATO pres-
ence cannot guarantee.[73]

In contrast, the Uzbek warlord Dostum, who controls the northern border
area of Mazar-i-Sharif, has never provided much stability for his population.
He has fought regularly with his Tajik rival, Atta Mohammed, for control, and
both have waged battle against central government appointees to the region,
leaving the safety of local residents in doubt. Yet Dostum's longevity under-
scores the loyalty his troops feel for their leader. Although also appointed to a
position in Kabul, Dostum refused to relocate, despite numerous attempts on

72. "Creeping towards the Marketplace," *Economist,* February 4, 2006, p. 58.
73. "Soldiers and Police Clash in Afghan City," *New York Times,* May 1, 2005; and Griff Witte,
"Some See Hand of Former Governor behind Muslim Clash in Afghanistan," *Washington Post,* Feb-
ruary 21, 2006.

his life by local adversaries. The Balkh and Mazar area is an important source of Afghanistan's poppy trade, and observers believe that control of this trade is a major motivation for the infighting of the region, as well as the source of Dostum's patronage to his followers.[74]

Other warlords in Afghanistan operate on a much smaller scale, controlling perhaps several dozen troops within a rural district. These warlords tend to act more like bandits, terrorizing the local populations who in turn have called for the central government to do more to disarm and punish them for human rights violations.[75]

Overcoming Warlordism: Economic Interests and Transformative Ideas

Wise warlords share the wealth to maintain personal loyalty. The medieval Europe, Republican China, Somalia, and Afghanistan cases demonstrate the similarity of warlordism as a system of political economy across time and space. They also demonstrate its intertwined consequences: warlordism undermines broad stability and limits large-scale trade and long-term investment; yet given their control over the means of violence, their charisma, and their role as providers of local order, warlords manage to maintain the loyalty of their men and often of the surrounding populations. As a result, warlordism is both pernicious and tenacious. In both medieval western Europe and Republican China, nonetheless, warlordism was eradicated by forces for change, and stable states eventually emerged in the aftermath.

DISTINGUISHING CAUSAL CONSEQUENCES

I identify two factors that were necessary for the eradication of warlordism in medieval Europe and Republican China: (1) the emergence of aggrieved domestic interest groups that had strong incentives to take revolutionary collective action against warlord dominance; and (2) the emergence of transformative ideas from outside sources about what proper governance entailed. These ideas helped motivate a newly educated class of people to support those with economic grievances by taking political action against the old system. These perspective-shifting ideas were communicated across wide spaces in

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74. Andrew North, "Following the Afghan Drugs Trail," *BBC News,* June 4, 2004; and an untitled report in *Eqtedar-e Melli,* a weekly newspaper, July 15, 2004, translated from Dari into English and reprinted in the Moby Capital Updates daily email news service, July 15, 2004.
75. Sayed Yaqub Ibrahimi, "Standing Up to the Warlords," Afghan Recovery Report, No. 153 (London: Institute for War and Peace Reporting, December 17, 2004).

both cases because of the spread of literacy, and in the Chinese case, with the help of new propaganda tools that reached the illiterate.

These factors on their own may not have been sufficient for the establishment of stable governance structures in the aftermath of warlordism, but they were crucial for movement in that direction. Hendrik Spruyt convincingly argues that the end of feudalism (what I call warlordism) in Europe was a process that is causally distinct from the rise of sovereign states, and that alternative governance structures (such as city leagues and city-states) endured for centuries before giving way to what are recognized today as states.[76] Furthermore, as Charles Tilly points out, state formation is a violent process that harms the interests of many actors who rebel against it. The process often ends in failure.[77] Both medieval Europe and Republican China were racked by years of civil war in the transition from warlordism to what followed, and it was ultimately the actors who controlled the most force who won.

I am therefore not making an argument about the causes of successful state building. Instead I am arguing that if historical patterns retain their relevance today, both economic grievance and the spread of revolutionary ideas are necessary for warlordism to end.

THE CASE OF MEDIEVAL EUROPE

Scholars agree about why the dominance of feudal lords in medieval Europe was overcome.[78] The process began when a sudden rise in productivity and the profitability of long-distance trade empowered a new merchant class to seek markets farther from home. Merchants had an incentive to find alternatives to the arbitrary and parochial rule of feudal lords who otherwise made the transaction costs of trade too high. These incentives created new opportunities for political coalitions between merchants and kings, who needed to take the power of taxation away from local lords to secure their own rule; and these coalitions in turn provided new and more efficient governance structures over broader geographical areas. This revolution in political economy was supported by the rediscovery of classical Roman law, whose universal sense of justice and respect for private property challenged the previously domi-

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76. Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors.*
77. Charles Tilly, "Reflections on the History of European State-Making," in Tilly, ed., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 3–83.
78. This includes the classic philosopher Max Weber, in "The Profession and Vocation of Politics"; the Marxist Perry Anderson, in *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (New York: Verso, 1974); the historian Joseph Strayer, in *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State;* the sociologist Gianfranco Poggi, in *The Development of the Modern State;* and the political scientist Hendrik Spruyt, in *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors.*

nant ideas of reciprocal loyalty that had been championed by the Medieval Church.

ECONOMIC CHANGE AND GRIEVANCE IN EUROPE. The economic surge across Europe at the turn of the first millennium created new opportunities for long-distance trade. Merchants thus had an incentive to take political action to lower the transaction costs associated with doing business. The overlapping taxes and incompatible monetary systems of the feudal system gave them reason to escape to territory where they could conduct their business without interference from feudal lords. Merchants who were able to form or settle in self-regulating towns, where impersonal legal codes protected their property rights and set predictable tax rates, prospered. In turn, this prosperity gave them the power and means either to form their own armies for self-defense against warlord predation, or to bargain with kings who promised them protection and universal fair trade rules that extended over larger territories.[79] Hence, "legal rationalism" was a necessary condition for the formation of the modern bureaucratic state, defined as a governance system legitimated by abstract legality rather than personalistic loyalty to a feudal lord.[80]

Spruyt makes an argument about this era that will become important for the case of Somalia: merchants whose trade enjoyed the lowest profit margins had the strongest incentive to cut transaction costs as trade opportunities improved. As a result, areas of Europe that were dominated by high-volume, low-value-added enterprises (such as agricultural and other bulk shipment businesses) were the first to see the spread of common governance structures over large areas, whether that meant the nation-state of France or the city leagues of Germany. Italian merchants, by contrast, dealt in low-volume, high-value-added luxury goods, and because each shipment was precious and unique, they had a stronger incentive to provide for their own security on a smaller scale. The Italian city-states were dominated by the kind of personalistic lord system that more resembled feudalism, long after northern Europe had fundamentally changed course.[81]

A TRANSFORMATIVE OUTSIDE IDEA IN EUROPE. Medieval Europe witnessed a revival of the study and appreciation of ancient Roman law. This tradition of law differed from that of the feudal system because it recognized the sanctity of private property, rather than decreeing that property control depended on personal fealty. It also distinguished public law from civil law, suggesting the

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79. Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State,* p. 18; and Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State,* pp. 35–40.
80. Lassman and Speirs, *Weber,* pp. 314, 329; and Poggi, *The Development of the Modern State,* pp. 1, 37.
81. Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors.*

idea of a sovereign entity that was separate from its subjects and forming the ideological basis for the notion of a centralized state.[82] Also, the idea of an abstract civil authority challenged the interpretive dominance of the Medieval Church over people's business.[83]

One of the chief stimulants to the growth of the modern state was the growth of an educated laity.[84] Literacy beyond the clergy, even if it remained a skill available only to the elite, was a necessary component of the spread of ideas. It was also crucial to the acceptance of an impersonal, codified legal system, because abstract rules that endure beyond individual rulers must be written down to be enforced. Those ideas came from outside the immediate culture and required a look back into an ancient past that challenged the present order. They were nurtured by a small, educated lay class that could make common cause with those who held revolutionary economic interests.

A SIDE NOTE ON TOKUGAWA JAPAN

Perry Anderson points out that the ability of merchants to govern themselves in cities was a unique attribute of western Europe. In Tokugawa Japan, in contrast, feudal lords were granted continued dominion over urban merchants, so the rise of towns did not change merchants' incentives. The Japanese empire was a string of islands closed off from the outside world, and merchants remained dependent on local feudal lords for their economic well-being, with no opportunity to find alternative trading partners through long-distance trade.[85]

Furthermore, the sealed borders of Tokugawa Japan, designed to prevent most contact with foreigners, meant that no new political ideas could circulate about alternative systems of governance.[86] Instead it was a return to the historical idea of the emperor's supremacy that eventually challenged the dominant culture of Tokugawa rule.

Warlordism in Japan did not end until economic discontent and foreign pressure enabled the Meiji emperor to adopt radical change from the top down. Previously, Japan lacked the two crucial variables—a new set of strong and aggrieved economic interests, and a widely shared transformative idea that challenged the old order—that most scholars associate with the anti-

82. Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, pp. 24–27.
83. Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State*, pp. 21–23; and Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, p. 426.
84. Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State*, p. 24; and Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors*, p. 104.
85. Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*.
86. Ibid., pp. 420–454.

warlord revolution in medieval Europe. This case provides further evidence that these two factors were crucial in precipitating change.

THE CASE OF REPUBLICAN CHINA

The subject of state building in twentieth-century China is complex and much more heavily contested among scholars than is that of medieval Europe. This may be because the events are more recent, and discussion of the Chinese revolution remains caught up in scholarly arguments about the continuation of communism and competition against the United States.[87] This is especially true of questions about why Mao Zedong eventually won the battle for state formation in 1949. The ultimate triumph of Mao's version of communism depended on the financial and political support he gained from Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union. It also depended on Japan's decision to invade Manchuria in 1931, and in turn on the decision of the Nationalist leader, Chiang Kai-shek, to buy time for his fight against the Communist Party of China (CPC) by appeasing the Japanese instead of joining the CPC to fight them. That combination of events cost Chiang his legitimacy. Mao's success may also have benefited from his violent intimidation tactics.[88] Yet the Communists won adherents because they focused more on overturning China's crushing social and economic inequalities than did their Nationalist opponents.[89]

Mao's triumph—as in the case of successful state building in Europe—is nonetheless causally distinct from the question of why people turned against the warlord system. As in Europe, the first major factor in this process was the mobilization of economic interests against the existing system. Warlords were seen to support economic inequality and arbitrary rule-making, which was associated in the minds of urban residents with foreign imperialism, and in the minds of peasants with landlordism and an unfair land distribution system that kept them locked in poverty. The initial spark in China came when labor interests were violently quashed by an emerging coalition of foreign firms and the local warlords who supported them in the early 1920s. These labor interests were able to find common cause with intellectuals, students, and even merchants, first in Sun Yat-sen's Nationalist Party (the Kuomintang or KMT), and later in the CPC. The ranks of the discontented swelled in the 1930s, as

87. Kathleen Hartford and Steven M. Goldstein, eds., *Single Sparks: China's Rural Revolutions* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1989).

88. This is the claim made by Jung Chang and Jon Halliday in their highly controversial volume *Mao: The Unknown Story* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005).

89. This is a theme throughout Lloyd E. Eastman, Jerome Ch'en, Suzanne Pepper, and Lyman P. Van Slyke, *The Nationalist Era in China, 1927–1949* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991). See also Edgar O'Ballance, *The Red Army of China: A Short History* (New York: Praeger, 1962), p. 19.

CPC leaders from urban areas convinced Chinese peasants to rebel against unfair local land arrangements. The second factor, again paralleling events in Europe, was the emergence of a new transformative idea: in this case, nationalism imported from the West and Japan, whose emphasis on a common identity of citizens across a vast geographic space against both foreign intervention and parochial disarray helped support the intertwined goals of anti-imperialism and anti-warlordism.

ECONOMIC CHANGE AND GRIEVANCE IN CHINA. China's warlords were as arbitrary as those of medieval Europe, and certainly their particularistic rule and their habit of constant battle impeded long-distance trade. But China's merchants did not rise up to challenge warlord rule in the early twentieth century by themselves, even though they supported the anti-warlord labor movements of the 1920s. In part, this may have been because traditional Confucian norms did not place merchants at the top of the social hierarchy; instead it was village culture that received society's greatest respect. In part, it may also have reflected the lack of economic opportunity in China at the time of warlord rule; there was no spike in productivity as there had been in medieval Europe. Control of the national railroad—a crucial piece of infrastructure for the expansion of long-distance trade—was subject to constant battles between the provinces and the center,[90] and provincial merchant elites often made common cause with local warlords against the state in conflicts over taxation and resource distribution.[91] The railway system and the commerce that moved along it were also a prime target for both banditry and warlord territorial battles.[92] Only the port towns protected by foreign commercial interests had a chance of spawning much trade.

Labor and intellectual interests, initially supported by merchants and later joined by peasants, led the tide against warlord rule. The dominance of several key warlords was tangled up with the presence of foreign troops on Chinese soil to protect the economic interests of foreign firms. Their brutality toward Chinese laborers, and their unfair practices against local merchants, helped spark initial protests in the cities.

The story begins with the May 4 Movement of 1919. The Chinese government in Beijing, dominated by the Beiyang Army warlord faction, was poised to sign a provision of the Versailles treaty (ending World War I) that would have made the wartime Japanese occupation of parts of China a permanent transfer of sovereign territory. Students in Beijing protested against this deci-

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90. Sheridan, *China in Disintegration,* p. 39.
91. Van de Ven, "Public Finance and the Rise of Warlordism," pp. 860–861.
92. Lary, "Violence, Fear, and Insecurity," p. 59.

sion on May 4, seeing it as a bow to foreign domination, and one that was especially galling because the 1911 Republican revolution against the Manchu dynasty had been motivated by nationalism against foreign rule.[93] The student movement was put down by force, causing great consternation across urban Chinese society and helping to galvanize a general strike of both laborers and merchants.[94] Resentment was already running high because foreigners dominated most industries, treating their workers terribly, taking business away from both rural craftsmen and traditional urban merchants, and living privileged lives protected by a separate legal system based on anti-Chinese racism.[95] While the labor movement was small, it was concentrated both geographically and according to industry, giving it great visibility and political power in the big cities.[96] The movement was diverse, but its adherents shared the belief that Chinese society faced three interrelated problems: warlordism, foreign imperialism, and an exploitative landlord system in the countryside.[97]

Sun Yat-sen, the first leader of the KMT and one of the original catalysts of the 1911 revolution, had been pushed out of power in Beijing by the warlords. He utilized anti-warlord and anti-foreigner sentiment in the country to legitimize the creation of an alternative government in the southern city of Guangzhou in April 1921. His movement targeted both imperialists and warlords,[98] a direction that strengthened when foreign powers insisted on recognizing the Beijing warlord-dominated government instead of Sun's alternative.[99] While real foreign support for the warlords was weak, warlords bought foreign weapons and were careful not to attack foreign property in their skirmishes.[100] Warlord armies were often used to support foreign business interests against worker uprisings.[101] The only foreign power that would give

93. The Manchu were ethnically distinct from the majority Han Chinese, and although nationalism over time transformed itself into the idea of Chinese citizens rising up against foreign imperialism, it was first expressed as a Han ethnic movement. See Suisheng Zhao, *A Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004); and Suisheng Zhao, "Nationalism's Double Edge," *Wilson Quarterly,* Vol. 29, No. 4 (Autumn 2005), pp. 76–82.

94. Sheridan, *China in Disintegration,* pp. 119–120, 150; and Edward A. McCord, "Warlords against Warlordism: The Politics of Anti-militarism in Early Twentieth-Century China," *Modern Asian Studies,* Vol. 30, No. 4 (October 1996), pp. 795–796.

95. Jean Chesneaux, *The Chinese Labor Movement, 1919–1927,* trans. H.M. Wright (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1968).

96. Ibid., p. 142.

97. Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), p. 313.

98. Zhao, *A Nation-State by Construction,* p. 74.

99. Ibid., pp. 82–83.

100. Brantly Womack, "Warlordism and Military Regionalism in China," in Richard H. Yang, Jason C. Hu, Peter K.H. Yu, and Andrew N.D. Yang, eds., *Chinese Regionalism: The Security Dimension* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1994), p. 26.

101. Chesneaux, *The Chinese Labor Movement, 1919–1927,* pp. 206–213.

aid to Sun was Soviet Russia, in large part because the Soviets feared that a warlord-dominated China would be easy prey for the Japanese empire, whereas a pro-Soviet nationalist government would serve Moscow's interests.[102]

The link between anti-warlordism and disgruntled workers was cemented when the labor movement tried to hold a conference in Beijing in 1923. By that time the city was controlled by the warlord Wu Peifu, who was known as a particularly cruel man who disdained his subjects.[103] Wu prevented the conference from meeting, leading the local labor movement to call a general strike; his troops then opened fire on its participants even though the strike was peaceful. This violence helped foster a united front between the KMT and the CPC,[104] under the direction of Soviet adviser Mikhail Borodin, that aimed to overthrow both foreign imperialism and the warlords who supported it.[105]

These events were followed by a long series of violent labor conflicts throughout China's major cities, especially in Shanghai. The May 30 Incident of 1925 was especially significant; it was brought to a head by an altercation between Chinese textile workers and their Japanese supervisors.[106] Japanese security forces at the mill opened fire on the workers, killing one. This led to a massive demonstration across the city, and a crowd shouting anti-imperialist slogans began to converge on the International Settlement on Nanking Road (governed by a separate set of laws and institutions from the rest of China). When some in the crowd began to chant "Kill the foreigners," the British police commander responsible for the Settlement area's security feared that the crowd would storm his post and so ordered his officers to open fire.

The resulting deaths spawned a nationwide protest; more foreign troops began patrolling the streets, which in turn led to more protests and violence, including a firefight between Chinese and British forces in Hong Kong. In Beijing a month later, approximately 100,000 demonstrators demanded that the British be expelled. These events gave popular strength to Chiang's Northern Expedition, which was launched in 1927 in an attempt to seize warlord territory for the KMT government and take over the country. The official anthem of the Expedition, sung to the tune of "Frère Jacques," was "Down with the [Imperialist] Powers and Eliminate the Warlords."[107]

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102. O'Ballance, *The Red Army of China*, p. 19.
103. Sheridan, *China in Disintegration*, pp. 62–63.
104. Ibid., p. 152.
105. Zhao, *A Nation-State by Construction*, p. 83
106. The following description is drawn from Sheridan, *China in Disintegration*, pp. 152–155; and Arthur Waldron, "War and the Rise of Nationalism in Twentieth-Century China," *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 57, No. 5 (October 1993), pp. 90–93.
107. Chang and Halliday, *Mao*, p. 40.

Chiang gave local warlords along the way the chance to switch sides and join him, and many took advantage of that opportunity.[108] They continued to command their fully intact units, and some became ministers in the KMT regime when it gained control over most of the country and operated from the newly declared capital of Nanking. But Chiang was unable to maintain discipline over these units, many of whose officers distrusted him. Over time his government and military forces fragmented and were weakened by the same kinds of corruption and inefficiencies as the fiefdoms they were supposed to have replaced.[109] Chiang and the Communists increasingly saw each other as competitors for control, and the two movements split. Each accused the other of allying with warlords who supported their movements,[110] and indeed some prominent warlords did join the Communists. The CPC succeeded in controlling these men, while the KMT fragmented when warlord units joined its ranks, because the Communists harshly enforced strict party unity and stayed focused on the ideological goal of empowering the underclass.[111]

A TRANSFORMATIVE OUTSIDE IDEA IN CHINA. In an interesting twist, it was the very people who ended up becoming (or at least supporting) the warlords who brought the transformative idea of nationalism into Chinese society. Qing military forces had lost miserably to foreigners many times in the nineteenth century, and in an attempt to learn from their opponents, the Manchu court sent its top recruits to study abroad. The most literate of these young Chinese recruits pursued higher military education in Japan, where their nationalist consciousness was strengthened, imbuing them with the ideas that would lead them to revolt against the very court that had sent them abroad.[112] Nationalism was so strong among the Chinese community in Japan at least in part because many Chinese political exiles, including Sun Yat-sen, resided there during this period.

The Soviet advisers who came to China to help both the Communist Party and the KMT in the anti-warlord revolution were an additional important source of outside influence. Newspaper images of Chinese warlords were based on Soviet civil war propaganda.[113] During the Northern Expedition,

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108. Sheridan, *China in Disintegration*, p. 186.
109. Lloyd E. Eastman, "Nationalist China during the Nanking Decade, 1927–1937," in Eastman et al., *The Nationalist Era in China, 1927–1949*, pp. 8–11; and Ramon H. Myers, "The Chinese State during the Republican Era," in David Shambaugh, ed., *The Modern Chinese State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 42–72.
110. McCord, "Warlords against Warlordism," p. 824.
111. O'Ballance, *The Red Army of China*, pp. 57–63; and Gregor Benton, *New Fourth Army: Communist Resistance along the Yangtze and the Huai, 1938–41* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 102.
112. McCord, *The Power of the Gun*, pp. 35, 56.
113. Waldron, "The Warlord," p. 1088.

Chiang used the sloganeering of his Soviet advisers, not simply military force, to gain new adherents.[114]

The warlords themselves often claimed to be nationalists (and even against warlordism), arguing that the provincial autonomy they sought was the way to achieve the rebirth of a strong China.[115] Yet the warlords' association with foreign imperialism was what gave both the KMT and the Communists their popularity and foothold. As in the case of medieval Europe, literacy, at least among the urban elite, was key to the spread of this alternative idea, because university students led the charge.[116]

Implications for Somalia and Afghanistan

Because warlordism exhibits many commonalities across the four cases under examination, the defeat of warlordism in medieval Europe and Republican China may hold causal implications for eradicating warlordism in contemporary Somalia and Afghanistan.

SOMALIA

Powerful interest groups have had a strong sense of economic grievance in contemporary Somalia, and the international cellphone networks of Somalia's large diaspora have become a means for outside ideas to penetrate the country. Somalia may thus be ripe for a successful anti-warlord revolution.

ECONOMIC CHANGE AND GRIEVANCE IN SOMALIA. Economic grievance permeates the areas of Somalia outside of Somaliland and Puntland. For example, in the south of the country, cattle herders and cattle merchants are the dominant economic interest group. Years of civil war and warlord control have disrupted their prewar trading patterns.[117] The cross-border herding of cattle for sale in neighboring Kenya, through the use of reliable subclan security arrangements, has actually increased, but this has occurred because two larger traditional sources of trade—domestic sales and exports to the Arabian Peninsula—were severely curtailed. Domestic trade became difficult because of rampant cattle thieving in areas where security was uncertain, and because warlord infighting made the traditional large marketplaces in the cities of Kismayo and Mogadishu unsafe. Exports to Somalia's largest cattle trading partner, Saudi Arabia, were ended by a Saudi import ban, which was put in

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114. Waldron, "War and the Rise of Nationalism in Twentieth-Century China," p. 95.
115. McCord, "Warlords against Warlordism."
116. Hans Van de Ven, "The Military in the Republic," *China Quarterly,* No. 150 (June 1997), p. 360. His argument is supported by Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, p. 312.
117. Little, *Somalia: Economy without State.*

place because Somalia lacked state veterinary controls over diseases such as Rift Valley Fever.

As a result, cattle merchants have been active in the Somali peace process, because they have an incentive to decrease the costs they face from having to negotiate multiple agreements with various warlords whose territories lie along cattle trading pathways.[118] While the merchants adapted creatively to warlord rule by forming sophisticated trading networks, their pressure on political actors to establish open roads allowing long-distance trade has been a major stimulus to the attempted peace processes in the country.[119] Internet cafés and telecommunications companies have managed to thrive in the midst of factional disputes, at least in part because traders use them to work out their business arrangements; but they, too, would prefer some form of centralized government to improve security and to provide a central bank system to facilitate foreign transactions.[120] They currently use the traditional *halawa* credit system, which is based on personal trust established between currency traders around the world, but the relative inefficiencies of this system markedly increased when the major transnational remittance companies came under pressure from the U.S. government under accusations that al-Qaida had funneled terrorist financing through them.[121]

This is the kind of economic interest that Spruyt's analysis predicts would lead to the demise of warlordism. A relatively bulky, low-value commodity by world standards—herds of cattle[122]—could be sold much more easily to a broader network of buyers if there were a universal system of trade and reliable veterinary health laws across Somali territory, and if traders were protected by a functioning police force. Somali cattle traders have found ways to conduct business even under warlord rule, but their interests would be better served if warlordism were eradicated.

THE POTENTIAL FOR OUTSIDE IDEAS IN SOMALIA. Somalia may also have the necessary conditions for creating a coalition between merchants and the intelligentsia to oust the warlords, though this is not because education or literacy levels in the country are high. The civil war has virtually destroyed the education system, and by 2004 only 15 percent of children were attending primary

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118. Ibid., p. 152.
119. Menkhaus, "Somalia: Political Order in a Stateless Society," p. 224.
120. Joseph Winter, "Telecoms Thriving in Lawless Somalia," *BBC News,* November 19, 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4020259.stm.
121. Little, *Somalia: Economy without State,* p. 143; and International Crisis Group, "Counter-terrorism in Somalia," p. 16.
122. Ownership of cattle originally set apart the wealthy elite in many sub-Saharan African social systems, so at an ethnographic level they may not be considered low value.

school.[123] Instead new ideas may originate within Somalia's thriving diaspora. About 7 percent of the country's population, more than 450,000 people, lived abroad as of 2003. Many are migrant laborers elsewhere in Africa and the Middle East, but there are also large, thriving communities, including many trained professionals, located in prosperous Western democracies such as Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom.[124] Although distance and time in a new environment may eventually sever the strong kinship ties that define Somali culture, for now the diaspora retains strong links to home, making transfer payments that form a significant share of Somali income and keeping in touch via Somalia's thriving cellphone networks. Many would like to return to Somalia if a stable regime emerges there, and are hopeful that a moderate Islamic faction may emerge to lead the UIC.

Predicting whether transformative ideas will filter back home through this diaspora intelligentsia is impossible. Still, Somalia (unlike Tokugawa Japan, for example) is not cut off from the outside world, and it has ready access to up-to-date information about countries where centralized government structures function well. This may spur local businesspeople to act on their interests politically, especially if the diaspora continues to provide economic support.

Somalia remains in a state of flux, and it is too early to know whether it is on a permanent path to ending warlord control. Some U.S. decisionmakers fear that the UIC will be overtaken by Taliban-like extremism. Yet both the economic interests favoring revolutionary change and the potential for Western-influenced intellectual support of those interests exist in the country, which could potentially prevent a radical form of political Islam from becoming entrenched.

AFGHANISTAN

In contrast to Somalia, contemporary Afghanistan lacks both strong national economic interest groups that are aggrieved by warlordism, and reliable mechanisms for the widespread communication of transformative ideas.

ECONOMIC CHANGE AND GRIEVANCE IN AFGHANISTAN. In Afghanistan there is little economic incentive for merchants to rebel against the warlords, because there are no major sources of income that are independent of warlord control. Warlords control both the opium poppy and transit trades. In that sense, Afghanistan resembles Tokugawa Japan more than medieval Europe, because warlords hold the economic levers that control merchant activity.

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123. Winter, "Living in Somalia's Anarchy."
124. Little, *Somalia: Economy without State,* p. 147.

Prospects for immediate change in this situation appear to be slim. Afghanistan's largest traditional source of profit was the export of dried fruit and nuts, which were known for their high quality and unusual varieties, but war destroyed most of the country's orchards. Replanting has started, and when the trees and grapevines mature in a decade or two, they may provide a significant source of export income. Yet the lack of developed infrastructure will make it costly for Afghan growers to compete effectively against their neighbors, who rushed to fill the market void when the fighting began.[125]

U.S. policy toward Afghanistan's drug trade initially centered on destroying the country's poppy fields and processing laboratories. This will do little for Afghanistan's long-term political stability, however, because it threatens the survival of both subsistence farmers and armed warlords in a land where the central government has almost no authority. Although observers have highlighted the need to create alternative livelihood opportunities for poppy growers, it is unlikely that other employment can equal poppy's profitability, especially because poppies do relatively better than most other agricultural products in Afghanistan's frequent droughts. The Senlis Council, a European drug-policy research think tank, has proposed a solution: legalize poppy production in Afghanistan and turn its opium into cheap, generic, pain-relief medication for impoverished countries suffering from the HIV/AIDS epidemic.[126] Yet because the world's legal opiate trade is dominated by a few states with an incentive to maintain their market share, the viability of this plan is unclear. Also unclear is how the state could compete against warlords in paying for poppy purchases from farmers, given that the heroin trade is so much more profitable.

As in the case of Republican China, the people of Afghanistan have reason to resent the economic inequalities that have become entrenched by warlord rule, especially in the area of land seizure and distribution. The general absence of legal documentation because of widespread illiteracy (estimated to be 75 percent) is one of the factors making it easy for warlords to expropriate land at will, helping to ensure the continuation of a personalistic system of rule. Yet so far no party has risen up to mobilize popular support against this. Given Afghanistan's sparse population outside a few big cities, with villages isolated from each other by harsh terrain, such mass mobilization is unlikely—a conclusion that is further supported by the devastation of Afghanistan's highway

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125. International Programs Office, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, University of California, Davis, *Rehabilitating Agriculture in Afghanistan: Horticultural Market Survey* (Aleppo, Syria: International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas, October 2003).
126. Maia Szalavitz, "Let a Thousand Licensed Poppies Bloom," *New York Times*, July 13, 2005.

system during the civil war (only now slowly being rebuilt), and by the absence of a railroad in the country.

LITTLE ACCESS TO OUTSIDE IDEAS. Unlike Somalia, Afghanistan does not have a far-flung and cohesive diaspora. The huge population that migrated abroad to escape the civil war tended to seek jobs or concentrate in refugee camps in nearby Iran and Pakistan, which were not fertile sources of alternative ideas about good governance. Many of those who fled farther abroad—for example, to the United Kingdom—have had difficulty adapting to their new circumstances,[127] and do not seem to have formed large, thriving communities to rival the Somali diaspora.

Much of Afghanistan's prewar elite lives abroad, and some high-profile diaspora members who were educated or employed in Western countries returned to become government technocrats in the new regime in 2002, with strong support from the international community. Yet they were often viewed at home as outsiders who were out of touch with local realities. As time has gone on, they have been politically marginalized.[128] Meanwhile, much of the population remains illiterate and essentially cut off from the outside world except for traditional employment migration to Pakistan and Iran. One million cellphones have been sold in Afghanistan, but even big cities lack the reliable electricity needed to charge them.

There are thus few means for transformative ideas to penetrate Afghanistan's population and motivate large numbers of people to take risky political action. It is perhaps not an accident that the most powerful idea to challenge warlord rule in Afghanistan was the Taliban's version of Islam, an idea drawn not from the outside world but from Pashtun village culture. The popular media in the United States has often billed Afghanistan as a country on its way toward creating a stable democracy, given its recent history of successful elections. The analysis presented here suggests that such optimism is premature.

Conclusion

This study suggests that the international community cannot successfully form alternative and enduring governance institutions inside countries dominated by warlords simply by writing constitutions and holding elections. Successful

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127. Shirazuddin Siddiqi, "Film Sheds Light on Afghan Exodus," *BBC News*, February 13, 2006.
128. A prominent example was the September 2005 resignation of Interior Minister Ali Ahmad Jalali, who was prevented from making headway in sidelining warlords and prosecuting the opium trade. N.C. Aizenman, "Afghan Interior Minister Quits after Complaining of Graft," *Washington Post*, September 28, 2005.

system change requires deep domestic roots in a country's political economy and ideational culture, if it is to be sustained. Warlordism works and endures as a system because it brings profit to powerful people who keep the population sufficiently satisfied to prevent rebellion. Change will occur only when people believe that transforming the status quo is worth the cost.

This assessment does not mean that the international community is powerless to encourage change in countries dominated by warlords. It does suggest, though, that a different set of strategies is needed from what has been traditionally pursued, especially by the United States. In particular, efforts to promote stability in states where warlordism is prevalent by buying off the warlords are illusory and self-defeating. What causes warlordism to fall is revolution, not stability, and warlordism does not bring enduring political order or growth; support for warlordism merely undermines central state strength. That supporting warlords economically and militarily does not lead to long-term security or stability is shown not merely by the recent experiences of Somalia and Afghanistan, but also by the failure of Chiang Kai-shek's efforts to integrate warlords into the KMT to create national stability in China. History demonstrates that when warlords are given resources—including money, weapons, and free reign over territory—they will use those resources to support their parochial interests in competition against each other and in defiance of centralized authority.

Instead, transformation requires that citizen interest groups be empowered to rise up against warlordism. There are three kinds of external assistance that this study suggests will be most helpful to that process. First, economic groups that are most aggrieved by the warlord system and have the greatest hope of bettering their circumstances if a stable state emerges can be targeted for support. Which groups matter in any one context depends on the particular political economy of the country in question; but Soviet support for both the KMT and the CPC demonstrates the power that external assistance can have in making a difference.

Second, building reliable infrastructure that furthers both transportation and communication inside warlord countries is vital. Both long-distance trade—which motivated merchants to rebel against warlordism in medieval Europe—and mass mobilization—which lay behind anti-warlord action in Republican China—can occur only when the fragmentation of warlord rule is overcome. Highways, railroads, and nationwide electricity grids should receive the highest possible priority in international rebuilding efforts; in areas where peace operations are deployed, this includes protecting that infrastructure from vandalism and banditry.

Third, the spread of literacy is crucial. While literacy alone is not a driver of

change—and countries with relatively high literacy rates sometimes have warlords, such as the regions of Chechnya in Russia and Adjaria in post-Soviet Georgia—the absence of literacy supports the stagnation and arbitrary rule of warlordism. Without literacy, new ideas cannot spread easily. Perhaps even more important, without literacy there is no way for a population to oversee governance and ensure that laws are rational, enforced, and institutionalized, and hence beyond the control of individual charismatic leaders.

Economic development assistance, political mobilization efforts, infrastructure building, and literacy campaigns are all standard elements of existing international aid projects in postconflict societies. These, however, are often not well coordinated or given sufficient priority. If the international community better understands the roles that each piece plays in transforming the political economy of warlordism, then it may be possible to better target these efforts with the goal of reaching the particular strategic end of system change.

State formation is by nature a combative process. Therefore, if stable, statelike governance structures are ever to form in Somalia and Afghanistan, it will be necessary to deploy long-term, robust international peace enforcement missions to limit the resulting violence. The warlords on the losing end will otherwise try to fight change, and recent history has shown just how tenacious those warlords remain. Whether the international community wishes to pursue such efforts will therefore depend on its capacity for risk. Successfully replacing warlordism with more extensive stable governance structures requires a degree of continuing attention and resource allocation that the international community may not be willing to provide.