The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse:
African Security in the Second Half of the 20th and Early 21st Centuries

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'Dawn, and as the sun breaks through the piercing chill of night on the plain outside Korem it lights up a biblical famine, now, in the Twentieth Century'. This is how the BBC's Michael Buerk reported on the Ethiopian famine on 24 Oct 1984.[1] It seemed then that the Continent of Africa could be described in biblical terms and so there is no surprise that analogous questions are posed. John, in the Book of Revelations, describes the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse as the manifestation the first of the Seven Seals, bringing the fate of Earth with them. Interpretation largely agrees that the Four Horsemen represent 'the lust for conquest [first horseman] which is commonly the cause of war [second]', the third horseman bringing famine, whilst 'the fourth seal describes death by sword, famine [and] plague. The fourth horse summarises the first three and is distinctly evil'.[2] This essay will interpret the understanding of the Four Horsemen, for the African Continent, in the following manner: Conquest will refer to the legacy of European colonization. War will cover civil or inter-state conflict and the involvement of external influences. The elucidation of Famine will be taken to mean that brought on by resource shortages, whilst Pestilence will be drawn to represent the threat from HIV/AIDS.

European colonisation lasted into the late 20th Century, until a combination of growing African nationalism and the war's economic effects on ruling Europe led to the accelerated process of independence. For Britain, this period lasted, roughly, from 1956 to 1968, and although brief in historical terms, it had a long-lasting effect on Africa. Before European intervention, the continent

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[1] The Road Taken by Michael Buerk, (2011)
[2] The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, (2011)

had an established history of tribal nationhood, although not in the European sense which was, therefore, largely ignored during the 'Scramble for Africa'.[3] Boundaries were arbitrarily drawn and split many existing societies, whilst also drawing distinct peoples together under single nations. It wasn't until decolonisation that this became palpable as the colonial powers had held the upper hand and had generally not engaged the local population *en masse* in nation-building. 'Britain was the only colonial power even to contemplate the possibility of self-government for its African territories…But with plans for political advancement, The British government was cautious. A long apprenticeship was envisaged.'[4] Thus, whilst the transition to self-rule was expected to be long and ordered, the reality was that impatience both in Africa and Europe brought hastened independence; with this acceleration came un-preparedness for the responsibility of power. Several nations made a successful transition to independence, whilst others, notably the Belgian Congo, descended into chaos and war almost immediately. For those European nations that held on to power, the emergence of liberation movements drew them into costly and destructive counter-insurgency struggles. In the case of Angola and Mozambique, this struggle was to out-last independence from Portugal and to destroy infrastructure and the living standards of the populace. 'The honeymoon of African independence was brief'; many nations were built upon a monoculture such as cocoa growing or copper mining, which sustained the countries during an economic boom in the immediate post-independence period but which was ultimately unsustainable.[5] Ambitious industrialisation plans, aimed at diversification, faltered once foreign trade incomes plummeted. Independence for several nations saw *coup d'états* or rigged elections and the rise to power of the despot, owing to the contrived boundaries and the multitude of differing societies and to the 'durable imprint of…authoritarian regimes in which governors and their officials wielded enormous personal power.'[6] Democracy was a European concept that hadn't transferred into Africa before the handover of power; many nations had to learn after the fact. Throughout the 1970s, war raged in many African nations as a result of hurried European withdrawal from empire. The Biafran War

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[3] Thomson (2010), p. 14
[4] Meredith (2005), p.10
[5] ibid, p. 141
[6] ibid. P 154

in Nigeria is a case in point. Following two military coups in 1966, the eastern region and its

disenfranchised ethnic group attempted to secede and declare independent Biafra; three years of

war resulted in the death of two million 'Biafrans', mainly through starvation.[7] Another direct

consequence of false boundaries and the colonial authority's preference of one tribal group over

another was the 1994 Rwandan genocide which resulted in the death of approximately 10 per cent

of the population in a 100-day period.[8]

Though war was often a result of the retreat of European powers, it was not exclusively so; it is

true that the preponderance of war in Africa has been civil war and that much of this has been a

result of European withdrawal and the subsequent internal power-struggles which followed from

the colonial policies. African war has generally stemmed from either *coup d'états* or from rebellion

and insurrection. 'There were 71 military *coup d'états* in Africa between 1952 and 1990. These

resulted in the toppling of governments in 60 per cent of the continent's states'.[9] The definition of a

coup d'état is 'a sudden violent seizure of power from a government.'[10] Therefore, by definition,

coups are short-term, but the effects on nations can be prolonged. A common feature of all post-

coup nations is that a military authority is inclined to increase spending on themselves, the military,

in order to sate the appetite of fellow soldiers who may be inclined to counter-*coup*.[11] Excessive

expenditure on arms will always mean that 'money…is not available for a range of other uses

including social development.'[12] For Africa, short of resources and resilience, this will have

profound effect. 'Ghana's defence spending…increased by 22 per cent after 1966. This was

despite ongoing economic hardship that resulted in social services to the countryside being cut by

28 per cent in the same period.'[13]

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[7] Thomson (2010), p. 76
[8] Dallaire (2003), p.478
[9] ibid, p. 134
[10] Soanes & Stevenson (2006), p. 328
[11] Thomson (2010), p. 142
[12] Whiteside (2004), p. 7
[13] Thomson (2010), p. 143

Whilst *coups* have been prolific, by far the bigger threat to security has been insurgencies and rebellions. Often originating from the pre-colonial independence struggle, the coincidental Cold War helped to fuel many insurgencies beyond their natural conclusion, thus robbing the nascent nations of the state-building period enjoyed by many of the more successful emergent nations, such as Kenya and Botswana. In particular, Portugal's desire to hold on to Angola and Mozambique, beyond the self-determination of their neighbours, gave rise to intense and destructive civil wars, which persisted into independence. Given that these struggles were considered ideological ones by the Superpowers, succour, in the form of arms, helped sustain the wars and these arms were to endure in the hands of insurgents. Additionally, defensive armaments, such as land-mines, of little military value, went on to become a major cause of civilian deaths. 'The most severe impact in Africa has been on Angola, which has about 23,000 amputees (one out of every 470 people) and Mozambique, where land mines have claimed over 10,000 lives'.[14] Following the end of the Cold War in 1990, Superpower patronage swiftly evaporated, and with it, the aid given. This withdrawal of patronage deprived some of the formerly favoured rulers, such as Zaire's Mabuto, of the benefaction needed to continue. Before long, a new wave of insurrection had again contributed to insecurity in a range of African countries, such as Uganda, Somali, Liberia and Sierra Leone.[15]

Africa is abundant in resources, both renewable, such as fresh water, forests and fertile soils, and in non-renewable, as in oil and iron ore; however, in renewable, its distribution is unequal and not commensurate with its population. A lack of resilience, particularly economic, means that resource shortages play a destructive role in the security of African nations. Since 1945, resource shortages in areas such as the Horn of Africa have caused a volatile environment where conflict is more likely or where famine is an inevitable consequence of conflict. The Sahel region, between the Sahara and the fertile south of western Africa, was accustomed to long periods without rain,

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[14] Impetus towards a mine-free world, (2011)
[15] Thomson (2010), p. 225

yet was largely self-sufficient in food. Prolonged drought during the period 1968-73 caused the death of an estimated 250,000 people and the desertification of vast areas. Whilst the lack of rain had resulted in famine, it had been 'over-grazing, over-cultivation and deforestation on a catastrophic scale' that had precipitated the disaster; food production had not kept pace with population expansion. International aid was plentiful but much was directed 'to keep civil servants, soldiers and the police content. Some aid was squandered by local elites in conspicuous consumption of goods and services.'[16] Ethiopia's 1984 famine was exacerbated by Mengistu's Marxist 'collective' agricultural policies, to the detriment of the peasant farmer, and by his desire to celebrate the tenth anniversary of his revolutionary accession to power. 'On his orders, relief efforts were obstructed. No mention was to be made during the celebrations of the masses starving to death north of the capital.'[17] Counter-insurgency campaigns during the preceding ten years had used scorched-earth tactics and had displaced nearly 500,000 civilians in the affected area; the army 'requisitioned food and enforced blockades of food and people. Food was routinely used as a weapon of war.'[18] Comparably, a long-term study by the UN Environment Programme 'revealed strong links between climate change and the crisis in Darfur'.[19] A decline in precipitation, land-degradation and resultant desertification, coupled with an exponential population increase led to the conditions for conflict, which has been sustained by political and tribal differences.[20] More recently, reports of the latest famine in Somalia quote ideological differences between Al-Shabab Islamists, who control much of the ungoverned country, and UN aid agencies, who Al-Shabab believe to be US-controlled and operating politically. It is reported that 10 million people in the region are in need of food aid.[21]

The final aspect of the Four Horsemen analogy is pestilence, which for Africa has been varied but, ultimately and overwhelmingly, means the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This pestilence has had a

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[16] Meredith (2005), p. 290
[17] ibid, p. 332
[18] ibid, p. 334
[19] Garcia (2008), p. 7
[20] ibid
[21] Somali Islamists Maintain Aid Ban and Defy Famine, (2011)

devastating effect on Africa, particularly sub-Saharan Africa. According to UNAID, up to 2009, AIDS has accounted for 1.3 million dead and 22.5 million infected in this region; up to 90% of children orphaned by AIDS live south of the Sahara.[22] Whilst these statistics highlight the spread of this disease, they do not show that the greatest effect has been upon what should be the most productive groups of people, the young and the working-age population of countries. A sharp reduction in the working population brings problems of economic stability and of drawing in mobile workers from the rural areas and from further afield. This category of worker is credited as having one of the highest rates of HIV/AIDS infection, probably due to being away from home, with all 'the situations they encounter and the behaviors [sic] in which they may engage while they are travelling and living away from home.'[23] Internally, health and the police or security services are the agencies most burdened with the effects of AIDS in society. 'Strains on the health care system are obvious in that the health care system in South Africa will be pressured to deal with the pandemic as it progresses' but the high death-rate has caused another phenomenon, that of orphans without parental guidance and an 'extended suicide' attitude manifesting itself in 'crime, fear, depression and hopelessness'.[24] Control of this problem falls to the state security services; escalating crime has been an unwelcome aspect of post-*apartheid* South Africa and it is easy to see that under-resourced police services might, in any affected country, call upon the support of the military. This would have an unsettling and destabilising effect, especially if the army is untrained in civil policing. Couple this with armies whose are soldiers are liable to be carrying a higher proportion of HIV-affected personnel and with a propensity to sexual violence and the circle is complete.[25] Tackling AIDS has been problematic in many areas of this region where discussion of sex and curtailment of promiscuous attitudes, through the use of condoms or monogamous activity is still taboo.[26] Not all areas are affected equally and some quote Uganda as a country seemingly overcoming the worst of the pandemic, yet Lyons doubts the veracity of this and argues

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[22] Worldwide HIV & AIDS Statistics Commentary, (2011)
[23] Poku & Whiteside (2004), p. xx
[24] Ostergard & Tubin (2004), p. 110
[25] Akeroyd (2004), p. 93
[26] Poku (2005), p.74

that declining infection rates could reflect the 'impact of heavy mortality' and that fewer 'HIV-infected women are becoming pregnant'.[27] Whatever the truth, AIDS in Africa has contributed to a fall in prosperity and will continue to do so long after the virus has been eradicated.[28]

Whilst it has been demonstrated that the constituents of the Four Horsemen, conquest, war, famine and pestilence, have all contributed to the insecurity and the impoverished nature of sub-Saharan Africa, the true damage comes with the multiplying effect of two or all of the above; as Fields states, 'When the apocalyptic horsemen of famine and pestilence appear, war can't be far behind'.[29] Indeed, rarely has any one of the 'Horseman' been present in isolation. As has been stated, the 1984 Ethiopian famine was exacerbated by a prolonged counter-insurgency campaign that damaged, through scorched earth tactics and displacement of population, the ability of the people to endure through the drought period. The key to the linkage being so devastating is the fact that there is such little resilience throughout sub-Saharan Africa. This has been the Achilles Heal of a wide range of African nations and has magnified the effects of strife, whether man-made or natural. Generally originating from a lack of investment in infrastructure and diversification during the colonial period, the swift transition to power often had an exacerbating effect. Reliance on monocultures developed by the Metropolitan nations, for the Metropolitan nations, proved vulnerable to economic variations in the wider global market. A lack of political experience often brought forth conflicting groups, who resorted to violence in the form of *coups d'état* or uprisings, rather than the use of the ballot box, as would be expected in more politically settled nations. All of this occurred in states where GDP was amongst the lowest in the world and where investment in infrastructure was a necessity. Borrowing from the west was the only option and when commodity prices of monocultures plummeted, the spiral of debt continued, thus further reducing the ability of a country to cope with catastrophic events.[30]

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[27] Lyons (2004), p. 175
[28] Poku (2005), p.69
[29] Continental Divide: Why Africa's Climate Change Burden Is Greater, (2005)
[30] Thomson (2010), p.194

A case study of the events in Rwanda in 1994 can be used to illustrate what happens when more than one of the 'Horsemen' come together. The Belgian rulers had favoured the Tutsi minority during their rule, causing tension with the Hutu majority. Belgian policies of regarding Hutus and Tutsis as different races boiled over into a revolution in 1959, where the Hutus continued to use the language of hatred…against the Tutsi minority.'[31] Following independence and a coup in 1973, Rwanda enjoyed a period of growth but trouble had been fomenting over the borders, in the large refugee camps that had grown from 1959. Since the revolution, over 130,000 refugees had fled to camps around the borders and here 'Tutsi exiles formed small insurgent groups.'[32] From 1990 onwards, faced with invasion from the southern Ugandan camps, the Rwandan government increased its army expenditure by an estimated $100 million, money which came from international funds intended for economic development, and which coincided with a 'sharp drop in world coffee prices [which] cut farmers' income by half. Drought blighted food production.'[33] Some have suggested that AIDS contributed to the atmosphere of increasing tension and political instability by the start of the *Interahamwe* in 1994, although it is accepted this was a minor factor.[34] However, rape as a weapon, by soldiers and insurgents in an area prevalent with HIV, will undoubtedly have contributed to the spread of the pandemic. Regardless of the origins, a combination of pestilence, in the form of AIDS, the legacy of conquest by the colonising powers and underinvestment magnified by drought, all helped to set the conditions for war and for the Rwandan genocide which killed an estimated 800,000 in 100 days. 'More people had been killed more quickly than in any other mass killing in recorded history…According to the World Bank, the genocide had left Rwanda the poorest country on earth'[35] However, the events in Rwanda had left some 1,500,000 facing a humanitarian crisis in Zaire, a country which had effectively ceased to function under its despotic Mobutu; this influx of refugees was to drag Zaire into civil war and with it, the armies of Uganda, Angola and Zimbabwe, in a war that this impoverished region could ill-afford.

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[31] Meredith (2005), p.487
[32] ibid
[33] ibid, p. 490
[34] Lyons, (2004), p. 177
[35] Meredith (2005), p.523

As has been stated, a lack of resilience leads to instability and insecurity. It takes little to spark a crisis but it usually takes more than two or more of the 'Horsemen' to combine to make the crisis catastrophic. According to the UN Human Development Report in 1994, 'Human Security means, first, safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression; and, secondly, it means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the pattern of daily life'.[36] The term security has evolved from a purely military description, yet it must primarily apply to prevention of war. It is war, therefore, which has most affected African security as it has been omnipresent and has contributed to the magnified effects of the other three Horsemen of the Apocalypse. 'The challenge for Africa is to reduce the convergence of multiple stressors such as the impact of widespread health pandemics like HIV/AIDS and poor governance, as well as conflict and the excessive availability and proliferation of arms.'[37]

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[36] Kuwali (2008), p. 19
[37] Garcia (2008), p. 9

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