The return of Omnibalancing?
A multi-level analysis of strategies for securing agency in post-genocide Rwanda

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Abstract
Reflecting the contention that politics should be seen in systemic perspective, and the need to embed analysis of African states’ policies within multiple relevant contexts, this paper adopts a multi-level approach. It will specifically explore the Rwandan regime’s interactions with donors, civil society and other African states, arguing that specific policy choices and careful image management since the 1994 genocide have allowed Rwanda to maximise agency in spite of aid dependence. The post-genocide period has seen Rwanda seek to carefully redefine itself, from being considered a source of regional insecurity to a contributor to African peace and security and a bastion of political stability. Though the substance of this redefinition has been questioned, I argue that the process has allowed the Rwandan regime considerable power in a relationship which in pure monetary terms is characterised by extreme inequality. The paper explores how this has been achieved by highlighting policies at three inter-related levels: relationships with donors; relationships with other African states; and relationships with civil society, reflecting a tightly managed political space and a stagnating political settlement. The paper argues that though relationships at each of the levels may be characterised by particular pressures and opportunities for the Rwandan government, they cannot be separated from each other in analysing Rwanda’s search for agency. Rwanda’s strategy for securing agency and greater independence in decision making instead reflects a degree of ‘omnibalancing’ with policies at each ‘level’ designed to send signals to actors working in the others, and overall to create space for greater independence in decision-making.

Introduction
This paper attempts to revive and update a relatively dormant and somewhat dated concept, Steven David’s ‘omnibalancing’, designed to explain Third World states’ alignment decisions during the Cold War, to explore Rwanda’s search for agency since the 1994 genocide. The first part of the paper will outline the theory of omnibalancing as put forward by David, discussing some of its shortcomings and suggesting modifications which will improve its explanatory value when analysing the policies undertaken by a small group of African leaders to maximise their agency. The rest of the paper is split into 3 sections. First it will briefly set out broad trends and developments in Rwanda’s policies at the national, regional and international levels. It explores the impact of the genocide on Rwanda’s post genocide politics, and identifies threats and opportunities for the Rwandan regime that emerge at each of the three levels. It ends with a summary of how threats emanating from different actors at the different levels have aligned to constrain the regime’s agency. The following section will apply David’s concept of omnibalancing, bearing in mind the modifications made earlier in the paper, to show how the Rwandan regime has sought to appease threats at some levels to allow itself greater freedom, and greater agency, in dealing with others. Finally, the paper concludes by reviewing the usefulness of omnibalancing in explaining how particular African states attempt to enhance their agency, reflecting on the importance of alignment and the extent of African agency in the contemporary international system.

¹ This paper is a work in progress, please forward any comments or feedback to d.beswick@bham.ac.uk
1. The theory of omnibalancing

Omnibalancing is a theory put forward by Steven David (1991). At its most basic, it draws on balance of power theories but aims to correct the aspects of existing balance of power theory which he judges to be of limited relevance in studying developing (in his terms, ‘third world’) countries. It is intended to better explain and understand why developing countries- more specifically their leaders- make particular choices about ‘alignment’. Through better understanding of this process it is hoped that observers will be able to predict and attempt to influence future alignment decisions. Before we can examine the usefulness of omnibalancing in explaining Rwanda’s attempts to maximise its agency in relationships at the national, regional and international level, it is necessary to explain the theory of omnibalancing in more detail. In particular, it is important to recognise the roots of omnibalancing in a reformulation of realist and neo-realist balance of power theories. We must also consider what modifications may be necessary to increase the explanatory value of this theory, which is limited by the waning but still powerful Cold War thinking prevalent when it was written. This section therefore outlines and critically examines the central tenets of omnibalancing, including: why and how it departs from realist and neorealist theories; its claim to be of relevance to ‘third world states’ a grouping which David argues contains enough similarities between members to make such a category a useful unit of analysis; and what it claims to be able to explain which other theories have not.

David’s paper stems from a frustration with existing balance of power theories as espoused by realist thinkers such as Morgenthau and neo-realists like Waltz. Realism sees international politics as an anarchic arena with no overall sovereign power to enforce and guarantee conformity to rules of behaviour between states. In this anarchic environment, lacking an overarching authority, states are regarded as unitary actors who seek to maximise their relative power compared to other states in order to guarantee their own survival. The actions of states are constrained only by the potential and actual reactions of more powerful states, hence Realism places considerable emphasis on the role of great powers in an anarchic system in maintaining a balance of power. Realism also takes a particular reading of human nature as selfish, interested primarily in maximising power and resources, and applies this to states. Conflict, in this realist analysis, results from states trying to maximise their power, particularly by building up their military capabilities or aligning with other powers to improve their own power. Where cooperation occurs it is about meeting these goals. The uncertainty about another states intentions, and absence of an enforcing body in the international system, precludes other ‘un-selfish’ motives for co-operation. Neo-realism, by contrast, suggests that though states are indeed unitary and the international system in which they operate is anarchic, this lack of certainty acts as an organising principle and structural constraint on state behaviour. For neorealists, the system is defined by the distribution of power. In this system the likelihood of conflict changes depending on how many great powers exist at a given time and on their relative strength.

In terms of alignment, for balance of power theorists, this ‘occurs when a state brings its policies into close cooperation with another state in order to achieve mutual security goals’ (1991: 233). In this analysis, states are regarded as internally similar enough that it is not necessary to consider their internal characteristics as a factor in foreign and security policy decisions. It is the condition of international anarchy which instead dictates state behaviour, including alignment. It argues that states do not align unless it is in the face of a common threat, and that states align in order to help them counter threats from other states.
David rejects some of these common views of balance of power theorists, including those associated with both realism and neorealism. His alternative theory, omnibalancing, focuses on threats to state leadership, rather than threats to states as a unit. It also departs from existing balance of power approaches by emphasising internal and external threats, whereas balance of power only recognises external threats as significant, it being presumed that the state is largely able to regulate threats and control the use of force in the domestic arena. David asserts that balance of power cannot explain alignment decisions by the third world leaders because of its reliance on a distinction between international anarchy and domestic/national order. In reality, in many states considered to be ‘Third World’, the state is unable or unwilling to guarantee stability, order and security for its citizens. Omnibalancing therefore suggests that leaders align in particular ways primarily to help them deal with threats at national level- threats within their state to their rule, and even their survival. In short, the state does not act as an enforcing power and this renders the national arena similarly anarchic to the international arena. Omnibalancing accepts the realist view of the international system as anarchic, and it accepts the primacy of power, rationality and interests, which will inevitably conflict (1991: 236). It also subscribes to the realist view of human nature, emphasising survival as the most important goal however this interest is imputed to leaders rather than states. David argues the ‘most powerful determinant of third world alignment behaviour is the rational calculation of Third World leaders as to which outside power is most likely to do what is necessary to keep them in power’ (1991: 235). In sum, he departs from balance of power in three ways: first, in his contention that leaders will appease or align with secondary threats to allow them to focus their efforts on dealing with primary adversaries; second, arguing that leaders seek to divide those who threaten them by appeasing the international allies who may support their domestic opponents; finally, in arguing they may act in ways which protect their own security at the expense of the best interests of the state (1991: 235-6).

There are obviously a number of shortcomings of this theory, not least its claim to be applicable to all ‘Third World’ states, to allow us to predict how leaders will behave, and its rooting in a bipolar Cold War view of the world. In order to make this theory more useful for examining the policies of particular states or groups of states it is necessary to narrow the focus to a smaller range, update the understanding of what constitutes a threat to leaders, and reframe the theory in a post Cold War context. In other words, this paper disagrees fundamentally with some aspects of the theory of omnibalancing. However I believe the core of the theory (focus on threats to leaders, and on the careful balancing of internal and external threats to maximise the power and ensure survival of the regime) is extremely useful in helping us to understand the policy decisions made by certain leaders. The remainder of the paper will therefore explore how omnibalancing can be modified to become a more useful tool in explaining the policy decisions of one state in particular, Rwanda. What we arrive at through this analysis is twofold: firstly, a novel explanation for why the Rwandan regime makes the decisions it does, in order to maximise its agency; and secondly a somewhat refined theory of omnibalancing, which claims substantially less than the original (and little by way of predictive ability) but has enhanced explanatory power albeit in relation to substantially fewer states.

**Modifying omnibalancing: Beyond a bipolar world order**

The explanatory power of omnibalancing as a theory is limited by the Cold War thinking prevalent when it was written. The examples given by David to evidence his theory of omnibalancing are Ethiopia and Egypt, and both of the instances he describes occurred during the Cold War and were fundamentally linked to the bipolar context. To use omnibalancing as
a way of exploring the search for agency by developing states, it is necessary to adapt it to a more contemporary international context. This can be achieved by challenging and modifying three aspects of omnibalancing: re-visiting the use of the broad category of the third world; re-assessing the forms which the most significant threats to leaders now take; and further challenging the notion of developing states as weak and lacking agency. In David’s defence on the latter point, omnibalancing is fundamentally concerned with the ways leaders maximise their power though alignment, gaining agency, but it is also premised on the notion that these leaders are inherently illegitimate and weak. In a changing international security environment where states are able to gain agency and power to deal with internal challengers by aligning with a range of global narratives, such as the war on terror, African Solutions to African Problems, or democratisation, David’s Cold War rendering based primarily on pro-Soviet or US alignment is too simplistic.

**Modifying omnibalancing 2: The questionable category of ‘Third World’**

For an Africanist, or indeed for anyone who has ever lived or worked in or on a developing country, it is perhaps impossible to accept David’s contention that there are fundamental similarities between Third World states which despite their differences justify considering them as a coherent category of analysis. David asserts that internal threats are more likely to ‘challenge a Third World leader’s hold on power than are threats from other states’ (1991: 238). He blames this on creation of states by colonial powers, states which he describes (1991: 239) as often more ‘artificial construct than a coherent unit’. He also highlights the tendency of groups within such states to identify with their tribe, ethnicity, religion or other marker before nationality. This may work to the advantage of leaders, particularly through harnessing the loyalty of their kin through patronage. Decision making is, in his analysis, the preserve of an individual or small elite and unlikely to be significantly tempered by domestic institutions or, one assumes, civil society. David also highlights the inter-relationship between internal and external threats to third world leaders- the leaders themselves as well as their challengers will seek out allies in the national and international sphere. This encourages leaders to seek to appease external challengers in order to concentrate its resources on internal threats. There is much here which is of merit when considering a wide variety of states, but whether these characteristics apply equally and consistently to all Third World states is debatable. The term itself, Third World, is a product of Cold War thinking- designed to capture all those states who were not explicitly allied with the US or Soviet Union. Indeed, if we look at where omnibalancing has used by scholars as an explanatory tool to explain foreign policy since the end of the Cold War, it is immediately clear that most have chosen to focus on particular regions- especially the Middle East. There are existing works applying David’s theory to, amongst others, Saudi Arabia (Nonneman, 2005), Syria (Hinnebusch, 1995) and the Kurdish Movement (Freij, 1998). Despite the fact David’s own two examples are from Africa- on Sub Saharan and one Saharan, it appears that no other attempts have been made to relate the theory to the continent. However, mindful of the limited utility of the category of ‘third world’, it is possible that the Middle East has features which make omnibalancing as conceived by David an appropriate tool (see Nonneman, 2005). To apply it in the region we are interested in, namely sub Saharan Africa requires modification of the theory due to three broad characteristics of sub Saharan African states: varying degrees of dependency on aid; post-Cold War transitions to various forms of multiparty democracy; and the post-2001 global security narrative which identifies the characteristics of underdevelopment as a threat to global peace and stability (Duffield, 2001). It is therefore suggested that for omnibalancing to be of use it is necessary to take into account this changed context and to focus on modifications of the theory which will allow it to be more applicable to sub Saharan Africa generally, though this itself is a very problematic category, but more
specifically to countries whose leadership stems from a (formerly armed) rebel movement. This again could apply to a range of states, including Rwanda, Uganda, Ethiopia and DR Congo. The intention however is not to provide a perfect theory which can be applied to any or all of these cases, but merely to highlight that the central tenets of omnibalancing, once these modifications are taken into account, provide a potential guide to examine the decisions regimes make and explaining them in terms of this framework.

**Modifying omnibalancing 3: What is a threat?**

If we take David’s step of focusing on leaders or regimes rather than nominally equal sovereign and unitary states, and narrow the focus to Sub Saharan Africa, then history and context means that a number of threats are thrown into sharp relief. Threats to the survival of a regime may come from challengers internally. During the Cold War the very survival of a leader was in question as challenges often came in the form of armed rebellion or coup. However, since the end of the Cold War, many developing states have adopted some form of multiparty democracy. These newly opened democratic avenues have allowed challengers to the regime to use ‘ballots not bullets’ to attempt to wrest control form ruling parties, with varying degrees of success. However in practice political opposition movements often retain links to armed factions, rendering a simple demarcation of armed and peaceful opposition problematic. Other forms of threat may come from neighbouring states and others in the region. They may have designs on territory nominally under the control of the threatened leader. Alternatively they may regard the threatened leader as being a threat to their own security, due to their inability or unwillingness to tackle armed groups operating from within the threatened leader’s territory. Already it becomes clear why the central African region, and indeed sub-Saharan Africa more broadly is a suitable context for examining the ways that leaders seek to balance these different types of threat. It would however be disingenuous to describe these threats as purely internal or external.

As David’s analysis suggests, internal challengers frequently seek support from external powers, whether in the region or beyond. This is not only true of those attempting to use force to challenge a ruling party- opposition movements and parties have burgeoned in Africa since 1991, and will often appeal to donor states for assistance in developing their challenge to existing regimes, expanding their support base or mounting political campaigns, as part of a process of democratisation. The significant emphasis placed by donors on promoting multiparty democracy, space for political expression, and increased accountability of governments to their citizens in countries to which they provide aid has underpinned this process. All of the threats above therefore potentially have internal and external dimensions. In the case of aid dependent states, of which there are many in Sub Saharan Africa, it is perhaps also more useful to split the category of external/international into two: the region and the international. Though these categories remain inherently problematic, much work has been carried out on the importance of regional dynamics in explaining policy decisions in developing regions. It is also difficult to dispute that for many African leaders, the possibility of removal from office by a military invasion is much more likely to emanate from a neighbouring state than from an extra-continental force.

The threats to regimes have therefore been expanded since the end of the Cold War. In particular the preoccupation amongst both bilateral and multilateral donors with democratisation and good governance, along with the loss of military and financial support from superpowers which could be used for internal disciplining, has left leaders and regimes in many African states vulnerable to challenge. The institutionalisation of election cycles within almost all African states also provides a regularised potential flashpoint for dissent and
a window of increased threat. It must therefore be remembered that each of these threats takes place in an international context offering threats and opportunities of its own. For example donors may maintain, withdraw or offer new aid or military assistance, this may be conditioned on governance reforms, a greater move to neoliberal democratic practises, or on changes in a country’s foreign policy. The threats David identifies- of coup and armed rebellion- are not entirely diminished, but in updating and tailoring omnibalancing we must foreground the alignment of interests of donors and domestic challengers, both using the broad banner of democracy (however ill a representation that may be of their aims) to pressure third world regimes and pose a challenge to their rule.

Modifying omnibalancing 4: The apparent ‘weakness’ of leaders and regimes

David suggests that the usefulness of omnibalancing as a theory rests on the assumption that third world leaders are weak and illegitimate. Whilst the Rwandan regime, and other counterparts for example in Ethiopia and Uganda, cannot reasonably be said to be weak in the domestic arena, legitimacy is an increasing question for such leaders. In particular where a former rebel group has supplanted another regime to take power, there are often strong ties between military, civilian and economic power. Through neo-patrimonial practises, the regime becomes inextricably bound up with the core institutions and power centres of the state. The unwillingness to allow a level playing field for political competition, evident in all the three states mentioned above, reflects this contention that the fate of the state and that of the party or regime are intertwined. Along with a good old-fashioned desire to hang onto the power, prestige, resources and opportunities to distribute largesse to followers that come with government office, these processes also underpin some current political trends in Africa: Third-termism, whereby leaders seek to change constitutions to extend their term in power; and coalition governments, whereby leaders of opposition and government alike simply refuse to accept electoral defeat, buoyed by knowledge that elections are rarely substantially free and fair and the preference of the international community for a non-violent resolution favours a compromised solution. Whilst such leaders may be considered by some to be illegitimate, due to a lack of level playing field for opposition or actions taken to prolong their power, David’s image of a leadership cowering in fear of coup and insurrection is not universally appropriate. Leaders in sub Saharan Africa can be relatively powerful domestically, with a good control over security services which can be used to inspire fear in potential opponents, and enough success in development and governance reform to win some support from citizens and powerful groups such as the private sector. This is not to say that such leaders are not, as David asserts, vulnerable to threats, but even in seemingly powerful and entrenched leaders like Museveni, Kagame and Meles, this vulnerability is itself a resource and the very quality that drives omnibalancing. It is by emphasising the centrality of ‘their’ regime, or even their personal influence, to a country’s stability and wider security that they are able to encourage external actors to support them. David also observed in 1991 that ‘were the Soviets to abandon their efforts to expand their influence throughout the world, the Third World would be left as the principle threat to international stability’ (1991: 254) As he predicted, the developing world is indeed of growing importance for international security, especially in terms of energy security but also as site of intrastate conflict, perceived failures of international aid to tackle human insecurity and the threat of terrorism. The fear of instability and insecurity if a particular regime falls is an influence on the policies and alignment decisions of donors, and through emphasising their vulnerability African leaders can use this as a resource to prevent alignments against them.

In summary, so far we have looked at the theory of omnibalancing as put forward David, discussed some of its shortcomings and suggested modifications which will improve its
explanatory value when analysing the policies of a small group of African leaders. The rest of this paper is broken into 3 sections. First it will briefly set out broad trends in Rwanda’s policies at national regional and international level. It explains the impact of the genocide on Rwanda’s post genocide politics, and explores the threats to and opportunities for the Rwandan regime that emerge at each of the three levels. It ends with a summary of how threats emanating from different actors at the different levels have aligned to constrain the regime’s agency. The following section will apply David’s concept of omnibalancing, bearing in mind the modifications above, to show how the Rwandan regime has sought to appease some threats to allow itself greater freedom, and greater agency, in dealing with others. Finally, the paper concludes by reviewing the usefulness of omnibalancing in explaining how particular African states attempt to enhance their agency, suggesting areas for future research.

2. The impact of genocide: Outlining Rwanda’s domestic, regional and international policy

The experience of the 1994 genocide is a primary influence on the domestic and foreign policy of the country. The genocide was ended not by the UN force based in Rwanda but by a rebel group, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), made up largely of former Rwandan refugees who had returned to the country in 1991. This group, led by Paul Kagame, were primarily the children of Rwandan Tutsi refugees, a minority population exiled after the move to majority Hutu rule following the departure of Belgian colonial administrators in 1962. The RPF invaded in 1990, proving militarily capable and resilient. In 1993 the Rwandan Government agreed to allow them to operate as a political party in Rwanda, with the question of return of thousands of Tutsi refugees in exile still to be resolved. However before this agreement could be implemented the Hutu President, Juvenal Habyarimana, was killed in a suspicious plane crash. Hutu hardliners in his administration subsequently rolled out a programme of mass extermination to kill all Tutsi in Rwanda. The genocide, which led to the deaths of over 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu, was ended in July 1994 when the RPF took the capital Kigali.

Since 1994, the RPF have dominated Rwandan politics. Some political parties and leaders were quickly arrested or barred from politics due to their actions during or association with the forces involved in genocide. From 1994-2003, a national unity government ruled Rwanda, led by a Hutu RPF member, Bizimungu, with Kagame as Vice-President. Kagame, who many suspect was more powerful than Bizimungu in government despite his lesser title, took over as President in 2000 when Bizimungu resigned. Bizimungu’s later proclamations that the regime had become too intolerant of dissent, and that this could lead to a backlash from Hutu, led to his arrest in 2001 on charges of threatening state security. The first post-genocide parliamentary elections in 2003 saw an RPF-led coalition take almost 75% of votes; in a Presidential election that year Kagame won over 95% of votes. In subsequent parliamentary elections in 2008 the RPF led group increased its share of the vote to almost 80%, and in recent 2010 Presidential elections Kagame won over 93% of votes. The support shown for Kagame in the presidential elections is extremely high, and the dominance of the RPF led coalition is clear from the numbers. There is not the space in this article to discuss all

2 He was pardoned and released by Kagame in 2007 and has since remained out of politics.

the factors which explain the RPF dominance of Rwandan politics, but to understand the range of threats to the regime it is necessary to note a few key features of Rwandan politics and RPF rule.

**Domestic**

The dominant narratives of the RPF since coming to power have been ‘never again’, in reference to the possible return of genocide, and the need for ‘national unity’ underpinned by ‘Rwandanness’ to ensure peace, security and development. These narratives are dominant at the national level but also feature in Rwandan foreign policy, permeating discussions with other African states and donors. The attempt to build a national identity has been accompanied by a parallel determination to delegitimize ethnicity as a form of identity, outlawing discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity as well as religion, gender and other identity markers (Hintjens, 2008; Eltringham and van Hoyweghen, 2000). The government has also passed legislation against genocide ideology, to prevent anyone from revisionism, trivialisation, or denial of genocide.

However, critics have labelled genocide ideology a nebulous term which has been used to discredit opponents of the RPF and those who have, for example, highlighted the need for RPF fighters who killed Hutu during the genocide to be brought to justice (Frontline, 2005). There is little tolerance of dissent and the coalition system means most political parties are affiliated with the RPF. The dominance of the RPF is therefore achieved by a combination of legislation which tightly circumscribes acceptable political behaviour, and shadow methods (Beswick, 2010a). The latter are by their nature hard to directly attribute to government agents, but the government has often been implicated in the death or disappearance of opponents and critics of its policies. It seems at the national level that though there is much to commend in Rwanda’s post-genocide recovery-stability, relative security and some development achievements- there is also only one acceptable political view, that which supports the RPF (Christian Aid, 2004). This is underpinned by the moral authority the RPF gained by ending the genocide and their contention that the same measures which work to narrow politics and keep them in power are necessary to prevent a return to genocide (Reyntjens, 2011).

**Regional**

The Sub Saharan African region, particularly East/Central Africa, has also been a key stage for the Rwandan regime. The Rwandan regime has close ties to Uganda as the RPF primarily comprised Tutsi refugees living in Uganda. Many of these had served in the rebel force which brought President Museveni to power, and subsequently in his army. Having been brought up and educated in Uganda, and often leaving behind family members settled there, senior figures in the regime have retained links with the neighbouring state. Relations have not always been smooth however. The propensity of Museveni to refer to Kagame’s RPF, rather patronisingly, as ‘his boys’ has irked the Rwandan regime, and in 2005 their forces clashed in Congo, apparently over control of mineral resources. The DR Congo is perhaps the other most important regional player which the Rwandan regime must take into account when formulating foreign policy. From 1996-2003 Rwanda invaded the DRC repeatedly to force those who fled during the genocide, both Hutu refugees and those who committed genocide, back into Rwanda (Prunier, 1997; Cyrus Reed, 1998). The first invasion, in concert with Uganda, led to the ousting of DRC (then Zaire) President Mobutu and his replacement by Laurent Kabila, whose son rules today. Born of a refugee movement in exile, the RPF interventions in Congo show it has no intention of ignoring a substantial rebel force on its border. These interventions were widely seen as a cover for the exploitation of DRC mineral
wealth, with Rwanda and Uganda, amongst others, profiting from the export of large quantities of coltan, gold and diamonds despite lacking significant reserves in their own territory (Olsson and Congdon, 2004). Since the official withdrawal of Rwandan its troops in 2003 relations with DRC have been rocky, with Rwanda accusing the DRC government of not doing enough to track down rebels who threaten the Rwandan regime, and Rwanda accused of backing insurgent groups who operate in East DRC. A 2010 leaked UN report (UNOHCHR, 2010) also accused RPF troops of committing genocide against Hutu civilians in DRC during the post-genocide wars. It is clear even from this brief outline that there are significant threats to the regime which emanate from the region.

At the same time, the region and sub Saharan Africa more widely have proved arenas in which the Rwandan regime is keen to build its reputation and increase its power. Rwanda has been instrumental in the resurrection and promotion of a revitalised East African Community. The current President of the African Development Bank is Rwandan. A Rwandan soldier is the Force Commander of the hybrid African-Union United Nations Assistance Mission in Darfur, Sudan (UNAMID). Such examples of regional prestige are cited frequently by the regime as proof of the growing role of Rwanda on the African political, economic and military stage. The involvement in UNAMID is particularly feted, with Rwanda the second largest contributor to the force and in the top 10 country providers of peacekeeping troops to UN missions worldwide (Beswick, 2010b). The allegations that genocide has been committed in Darfur have further raised this aspect of Rwanda’s foreign policy in the domestic and international sphere- highlighting the role of the RPF in fighting genocide not only at home but also abroad.

**International**

Immediately following the genocide the RPF made it clear they wanted to cultivate closer relationships with Anglophone donors and with European donors, but relations with France and Belgium were tense. This reflected the role that France played in providing military support for the pre-genocide government, and in the case of Belgium the divisive policies pursued during the colonial period which later made the swift genocide possible. Since 1994, the relationship with the US and UK has been particularly strong, and the EU and Scandanavian donors have also provided a significant proportion of Rwanda’s aid portfolio. The country’s achievements in governance reform and development have led some donors to move to budgetary support, a less tied form of aid which signals trust in the RPF and confidence in its development plans. Immediately following the genocide donors were almost uniform in their public support for Rwanda, and praising of the regime’s achievements in the following years, but over time this became tempered by concern at Rwanda’s military involvement in DRC and increased pressure on the RPF to hold elections and end the transition period. The Rwandan regime has sought to portray itself, and by some donors has been somewhat accepted as, a model for post conflict reconstruction. It has won a reputation as a development-minded, determined government which possesses a strong military and a stable, if tightly managed, political system. It is regarded as a strong partner in African security, evidenced by its contribution to UNAMID, and also as a country which is business friendly and welcomes foreign investment.

From this brief overview of Rwanda’s domestic, regional and international politics it is clear that there are threats that emanate from each of the three levels and could overlap. Both international donors and regional powers are concerned at Rwanda’s role in creating insecurity in DRC. Both domestic opponents of the governmet and some international donors are also concerned by the lack of space for political debate in Rwanda and the fate of
opposition activists and politicians, even in exile. Omnibalancing theory would suggest that the Rwandan regime’s main interest would lie in securing itself and its own power primarily from internal threat. The second of these potential alignments however – between domestic opponents and international donors- would therefore seem the most important for Rwanda to avoid. However, demonstrating the importance of regional dynamics in contemporary omnibalancing, as the example below will show, reducing the possibility of a perfect storm of alignment between domestic and international pressure requires an alignment not directly with the greater power, international donor(s), but instead with a regional actor, the DRC. It is through careful balancing and re-orienting of its regional stance that Rwanda is able to secure greater agency in its dealings with donors in order to more robustly defend against challenges at home.

3. The role of omnibalancing in Rwanda’s search for agency
To explore the usefulness of omnibalancing, and whether it makes us look at particular alignments differently to how we might otherwise, it is useful to consider a specific example. This section will explore Rwanda’s surprising decision in early 2009 to align with the DRC on two core regional security issues affecting both states: the presence of genocidal militia in the DRC threatening Rwanda, and the presence of Tutsi militia in Congo threatening the Congolese government. To understand how this alignment allows Rwanda greater agency in dealing with challengers at home it is necessary to briefly outline the domestic political situation in Rwanda during this period, in the run up to 2010 presidential elections.

These, the second presidential elections since the 1994 genocide, were won by Kagame with over 93% of the vote. Despite this seemingly overwhelming uniformity of political preference the elections were not without incident. In the lead up to elections, the media along with Rwandan and international human rights observers reported that opposition candidates and their supporters faced intimidation, harassment and even assault. Critical local newspapers were banned and the most high profile candidate planning to contest the presidency, Victoire Ingabire, was barred from doing so. The vice Chairman of another opposition part, the Democratic Green Party, was killed in July. Outside Rwanda, furore erupted when a dissident Rwandan General was shot in South Africa. On election day there were 4 candidates remaining, Kagame and three others representing parties which form the RPF led coalition in parliament. In short, there was limited opposition. However despite significant press coverage of these events, international criticism of Kagame and his party was muted. This may reflect a number of factors, including the promotion of Rwanda as something of a model for post conflict reconstruction, and its heavy involvement in peacekeeping in Darfur. However I argue it also reflects the success of the Rwandan Government in omnibalancing: maximising space for agency domestically to preserve its position by splitting the threats which could coalesce into an alignment against it. Criticisms of Rwanda’s lack of political space for opposition are not new, they began to emerge in 1995 with the departure of Hutu minister Seth Sendashonga from the Unity Government (he was later killed in 1998 in Nairobi after forming an opposition party). However, at election times, when the media spotlight is on Rwanda, critics have perhaps more power to reach a greater audience and to attempt to influence those reporting on Rwanda and those supporting the RPF-led regime. The primary concerns of the international community with regards to Rwanda fall into two areas: the RPF’s intolerance of opposition to its rule and policies; and Rwanda’s involvement in a series of destabilising conflicts up to and beyond its official withdrawal from Congolese territory in 2003. To understand how the RPF has created space to act with greater agency in the former it is necessary to better understand the latter.
The conclusion of a series of peace agreements between the main protagonists, a substantial UN peacekeeping presence and a programme to incorporate armed factions into the new Congolese Armed Forces have failed to fully stabilise the Great Lakes region. Since official withdrawal from the DRC in 2003, Rwanda, and others in the region, are believed to have retained links with illegal mineral extraction operations on Congolese territory. In Rwanda’s case this was partly achieved by working with proxy forces who claimed to be fighting on behalf of Tutsi in DRC threatened by Rwandan Hutu militia, the FDLR. One such Tutsi militia group, the CNDP led by Laurent Nkunda, broke away from the Congolese army after nominal integration and in 2008 threatened to take the city of Goma and to mount a campaign to depose the Congolese President. Around the same time, allegations surfaced in a leaked UN document of links between Nkunda and the RPF in Rwanda, namely that Nkunda protected Rwanda’s investments in DRC in return for financial and other support and the freedom to recruit fighters in Rwanda. The ineffectiveness of the UN force in eastern Congo was increasingly apparent, and an outcry continued over human rights abuses and large scale sexual violence committed by many groups, including Nkunda’s CNDP and the new Congolese Armed Forces. By late 2008 this combination of events meant that Rwanda was facing threats at all 3 levels discussed earlier. Domestically, the regime faced renewed pressure from civil society to allow more open political debate, particularly after disappointment with the level of competition in parliamentary elections and a critical EU Election Observer report released on this in September, and in the run up to 2010 presidential elections. Regionally, the direct threat from Nkunda meant the Congolese government could no longer afford to ignore his activities, and the links between Nkunda and Rwanda, and became increasingly belligerent in their rhetoric towards Kigali. Meanwhile the international community, mindful of the catastrophic consequences of previous interventions by Rwanda in DR Congo feared that the gains made in Congo since 2003 would be destroyed. Having supervised in 2006 the first parliamentary and presidential elections for over 40 years, the incentive to pressure Rwanda to mend its relations with DRC was significant. When the Nkunda crisis began, DRC issued statements accusing Rwanda of backing the insurgency in order to create a buffer between the two countries. Its criticisms and accusation were however concentrating on Rwanda’s actions towards DRC. By comparison, when Rwanda’s bilateral donors pressured Rwanda to withdraw support for Nkunda, this issue was linked both implicitly and explicitly with Rwanda’s domestic intolerance of criticism. The image grew of Rwanda as a country which relied heavily on donor support and funds but operated with little or no regard for the sensitivities and wishes of its supporters, in either domestic or foreign policy.

In January 2009, to almost universal surprise, Rwanda announced that Nkunda had been arrested in Rwanda following a joint-operation with the Congolese government. This cooperation and alignment was unprecedented, and was followed by the further announcement of time-limited joint operations between Rwanda and DRC to root out interahamwe fighters in eastern DRC. This can on one level be seen as an attempt by the Rwandan regime to tackle a threat emanating from the regional level- the interahamwe and especially the FDLR. However, given that these forces are believed to number less than 10,000, and considering Rwanda’s military strength, it seems unlikely this group could pose an acute challenge. Instead, I believe the decision to arrest Nkunda and work with DRC on regional security was intended to prevent further alignment of threats against the Rwandan regime. The EU election report, along with many other reports of violence and intimidation against critics of the RPF around the parliamentary elections raised Rwanda’s profile in a negative way. International criticism over Rwanda’s involvement in DRC could combine with concerns over its domestic policy, encouraging and, through international media and persistent civil society lobbying,
pressuring donors to be more critical in their dealings with Rwanda. Of course, donors- even ‘like minded’ donors- do not always act in a uniform way. The Netherlands and Sweden suspended aid to Rwanda during the Nkunda crisis,” whereas the UK and US expressed concern but fell short of outright censure and using their economic and other forms of potential leverage to pressure Kagame’s regime (Human Rights Watch, 2011). By taking the foreign policy that most animated the international community off the table, through making a deal with DRC and arresting Nkunda, Rwanda was able to limit the scope for its domestic challengers to align with international donors with the potential leverage to pressure Rwanda for changes in its domestic policies. By reducing Rwanda’s association with ongoing instability and human rights abuses in DRC, the regime was left only to defend itself against charges of lacking tolerance on dissent- something it has done successfully since 1995 by referring to the ‘special circumstances’ in a post-genocide state (Hayman, 2008). This as has been pointed out by observers, leads inevitably to a reluctance on the part of the international community to press for greater opening of political space due to: their failure to prevent or halt genocide in 1994; the perceived potential for regional instability without a strong regime in Kigali; and the need to support ‘developmental’ regimes (Booth and Golooba Mutebi, 2011) which can serve as proof that donor-favoured policy prescriptions and reforms can be ‘successful’ given the right conditions and enlightened leadership.

Using the lens of omnibalancing therefore allows us to see these policy alignment decisions taken with regards to regional relations (in this case with DRC) as a way of preventing alignment between international actors and domestic threats to the regime. This echoes David’s original analysis in one sense- that omnibalancing is about dealing with threats at one level in a way that provides greater policy space for a regime to deal with greater challenges. However, it suggests that aligning with the ‘greater power’ embodied by superpowers or international donors may not always be the right strategy, and that regional dynamics must also be taken into account. Omnibalancing therefore encourages us to look at policy decisions and ask how alignments- particularly when they seem counter-intuitive or surprising- could be the product of a regime trying to prevent threats to its rule which could stem from other, more dangerous, alignments.

4. Conclusions: Revisiting the limits of omnibalancing
The theory as put forward by David has clear limitations, as discussed earlier. Its claim of relevance to all ‘third world’ states, its claim that all politics is international or national-effectively excluding the region as a category of analysis- and its claim to predictive ability are all problematic in relation to a region which displays such diversity within a complex global system. One might also claim that Rwanda is a somewhat unique case; its history of genocide and the moral authority of the ruling party are not replicated in exactly the same way elsewhere in Africa. However, there are other strong ruling parties in the region which have grown from rebel movements and make similar claims of being the only possible bulwark against conflict or instability- Uganda and Ethiopia are perhaps the most obvious examples. Omnibalancing may therefore not explain all alignment decisions taken by leaders in sub Saharan Africa, but where an alignment seems surprising, or defies conventional analyses and logic, it may provide a useful tool in unpacking policy decisions and provide an insight into how African leaders and regimes perceive threats to their rule and develop strategies for maximising both their security and their agency.

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This paper has shown how the theory of omnibalancing could be revised and updated to increase its usefulness in analysing African alignment and the search for power and agency in spite of multi-level threats, constraining structures and aid dependency. It argues that by acknowledging that for some regimes the primary goal of alignment is to secure their own power and position, we can highlight how nominally ‘weak’ African leaders, seemingly lacking in agency, play off threats at different levels in order to prevent a perfect storm of alignment between domestic threats and international actors with significant leverage to push for change. In the case of Rwanda, as with many states in sub Saharan Africa, the levels are extremely intertwined, with the regime using resources gained through alignment and relationships at one level to diminish threats at other levels. Omnibalancing is therefore useful as it allows a focus on ‘internal’ factors when exploring alignments at other levels, recognising that the interests of elites and regimes making such decisions are more important to know than those of the notionally unitary state which pervaded realist and neo-realist approaches. There may also be broader applicability in other states sometimes labelled ‘donor darlings’ or states which tend to avoid censure for their domestic policies in part due to alignment decisions at other levels such as involvement in peacekeeping (e.g. Uganda or Ethiopia and Somalia). This perhaps suggests that agency is maximised where alignment decisions chime with narratives that appeal to powerful states in the international system, such as the war on terror, or African solutions to African problems. This raises again a question which is beyond this paper- whether examples of African state and regime agency, such as those identified and discussed in this series, will remain bounded by broader structures which they do not have the power to define, but can manipulate and interact with through strategies such as extraversion (Bayart, 2000) and omnibalancing, and what an African influence on these structures, or a strategy of agency which transcends rather than subverting them, might look like?

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