A More Violent World? Global Trends in Organised Violence

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1.
Introduction[1]

In his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech of late 2009, US President Barack Obama stated that "the resurgence of ethnic or sectarian conflicts; the growth of secessionist movements, insurgencies, and failed states; have increasingly trapped civilians in unending chaos" (Obama 2009). Claims that the world is becoming an ever more violent place have widespread currency in the media and in policy communities, but there is little evidence to support them. On the contrary, cutting-edge data show that most forms of organised violence around the world have been declining, not increasing.

The importance of quantitative data in monitoring trends in armed conflict and organised violence has grown, as pressures for evidence-based policy intensify among donor governments, international agencies and non-governmental organisations. The study of global and regional security trends can enhance our understanding of why and where conflicts occur, and, in turn, how they may be resolved. This is essential in formulating effective conflict prevention and resolution policies. In addition, conflict data can also help us evaluate the impact of such policies. Patterns in the frequency and location of conflicts can indicate which conflict mitigation and prevention strategies are succeeding and which are not.

This chapter presents and analyses the most systematically compiled and updated set of quantitative data on global organised violence.[2] The discernable trends challenge some popular beliefs about war and peace in the contemporary world and can inform evidence-based conflict prevention and resolution policy. In *section 2*, we will introduce the different methods of collecting and coding conflict data. In *section 3*, we will highlight some of the most salient results of our descriptive data analysis. The number of conflicts has been declining since the end of the Cold War, and there has been a downward trend in battle-related deaths since 1950. However, the data also reveal that there are several challenges ahead. Conflict numbers have begun to increase again in recent years and there are a significant number of conflicts that seem to defy attempts at long-term resolution, recurring regularly. Finally, *section 4* will conclude with proposed explanations of the trends presented and policy recommendations to meet some of the challenges uncovered by the data.

2.
Quantifying Trends in Organised Violence

The data presented in this chapter use fatality counts as the primary indicator for conflict activity and intensity. Obviously, death tolls are not the only measure of conflict and its effects, and "peace" certainly means more than the absence of killing. Yet, we are convinced that in order to discern global trends and to compare developments across countries and regions, counts of battle deaths, defined as deaths resulting directly from armed combat, are the method of choice. Battle deaths are the most basic and universal indicator of conflict intensity and they are a proxy for other war costs.

The number of battle deaths is a necessary (though not sufficient) component of the definition of what constitutes an armed conflict. Various organisations and research projects use different battle death thresholds to define armed conflict; these differences are important because they can produce divergent conclusions about the trends in armed conflicts. For example, if one focuses only on conflicts that lead to at least 1,000 battle deaths in a year, the net decline in conflicts from the end of the Cold War to 2008 is 75 percent. But if the threshold for defining a conflict is decreased to 25 battle deaths a year, there is a decline of just 46 percent between 1992 and 2003, followed by a 25 percent increase in the period up to 2008. Some datasets even include conflicts that have not resulted in violence, which has a profound impact on the trends. There is little consensus on how conflict should be defined, which leaves individual data projects to collect and code data according to what they believe to be the most sound criteria.

2.1
What Types of Fatalities to Measure?

Battle deaths are not the only category of conflict fatalities. Deaths from armed conflict can be roughly put into two categories: direct and indirect. Direct deaths are deaths resulting, as the name implies, directly from violent combat. Indirect deaths, on the other hand, are deaths from disease and malnutrition. While not violent in nature, these indirect deaths are nevertheless the result of displacement and the destruction of health services and livelihoods that accompany armed conflict, particularly in poorer countries where such systems and services are fragile to begin with.

Indirect deaths are extremely difficult to estimate. This is because they result from the same diseases, as well as malnutrition, that often exist both in peacetime and in wartime in poor and fragile countries, where most armed conflicts occur today. It is impossible to determine with any certainty whether someone who died of malaria during wartime, for example, would still have died from the disease in the absence of war. Researchers must estimate the number of indirect deaths in a given conflict using various survey techniques. While surveys are currently the only feasible way to estimate these important types of deaths, their use has so far confronted numerous serious challenges in practice, which indicate that much work remains to be done before surveys – which remain important to the field of conflict and health research –

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can be considered sufficiently reliable.[3] For these practical reasons, many research organisations, including the Human Security Report Project (HSRP), exclude indirect deaths from their reports on the numbers of armed conflicts and resulting deaths.

Direct (i.e. violent) deaths from armed conflict are in principle much easier to estimate than indirect deaths, since their causes are clearly linked to violence – deaths resulting from gunshot wounds, for example, are much more straightforward to attribute to warfare than deaths resulting from malaria infections. However, practical challenges also exist with respect to estimating direct deaths. Most current methods rely on examining various reports on armed conflict from a wide variety of sources including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), media, detailed military histories, and the like.[4] But insurgencies in remote areas do not receive the same attention as more high profile conflicts like, for example, that in Israel/Palestine. In addition, the available sources of information come with varying levels of credibility, and must be evaluated critically. These and other challenges mean that what is simple in principle is still very difficult in practice. Yet, if sources are reviewed rigorously and if coding rules are applied consistently, report-based methodologies can produce reliable trend data, even if absolute death tolls are sometimes underestimated.

2.2
What Types of Violence to Capture?

As mentioned above, most systematic efforts to quantify deaths from armed conflict focus only on direct deaths, given the impracticality of attempting to count indirect deaths with the current levels of resources dedicated to such research. Today, the most reliable data on armed conflict come from the efforts of both the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) and the Centre for the Study of Civil War at the Peace Research Institute of Oslo (PRIO). The principal datasets from these institutions define armed conflicts that involve at least one government of a state based on three criteria: stated incompatibilities (the issue(s) over which the conflict is being fought); the participation of at least two formally organised warring groups; and a minimum of 25 verifiable battle deaths during a given year (UCDP 2010, 1-2).[5] A "war" is defined as an armed conflict causing 1,000 or more battle deaths in a given year. These definitions are analytically more useful and applied more consistently than those used by various other conflict datasets (Lacina et al. 2006). Some of the most comprehensive and systematically coded datasets based on these definitions are used in this chapter (see also *Box 1*):

3   See, for example, the detailed discussion provided in the *Human Security Report 2009/2010* (forthcoming).
4   Recently, some efforts have been made to use survey data to estimate direct death tolls. Here also, however, the use of surveys confronts a number of challenges, which have yet to be overcome before the analyses based on these data can be considered reliable. See for example the discussion of the use of surveys versus report-based methodologies to estimate violent deaths in Spagat et al. 2009.
5   In addition to excluding indirect deaths, UCDP and PRIO's data exclude certain types of direct deaths. Deaths occurring from spontaneous riots are excluded since they form part of a phenomenon different from the type of organised, and usually premeditated, violence that is tracked in their data. Extrajudicial killings and killings in custody are also excluded. Gang violence is included only if its participants form part of an organised group and if its activities in opposition to another armed group – be it governmental or non-state – lead to at least 25 reported battle deaths in a year.

> **Box 1**
> **UCDP and PRIO Datasets on Organised Violence**
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> **UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (1946-2008)**
> www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets or www.prio.no/CSCW/Datasets/Armed-Conflict/UCDP-PRIO/
>
> **PRIO Battle Deaths Dataset (1946-2008)**
> www.prio.no/CSCW/Datasets/Armed-Conflict/Battle-Deaths/The-Battle-Deaths-Dataset-version-30/
>
> **UCDP/HSRP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset (2002-2008)**
> www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets
>
> **UCDP/HSRP Conflict Termination Dataset (1946-2007)**
> www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets
>
> **UCDP/HSRP Non-State Conflict Dataset (2002-2008)**
> www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets
>
> **UCDP/HSRP One-Sided Violence Dataset (1989-2008)**
> www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets

The *UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset*, one of the most widely used, results from a collaborative effort between the two institutions. It counts the number of armed conflicts around the world, based on the three-part definition cited above, starting from 1946. It forms the foundation for other, related datasets from both institutions and is updated annually. The *PRIO Battle Deaths Dataset* is an invaluable complement to the UCDP/PRIO dataset, coding battle death tolls for the conflicts identified therein.[6] These datasets are further supported by the *UCDP/HSRP Conflict Termination Dataset*, which, for the first time, systematically codes information on how these armed conflicts have ended and on the stability of different conflict outcomes, such as victories or negotiated settlements.

The UCDP/PRIO dataset and those associated with it, however, only include conflicts in which at least one party is the government of a state. This definition of armed conflict does not include conflicts fought solely between non-state actors – such as rebel groups or warlords – or deadly, unilateral attacks on civilians. In fact, until recently, no consistent efforts had been made to measure these latter forms of violence. To address these omissions, the Human Security Report Project commissioned the UCDP to collect data on non-state armed conflicts and assaults on civilians. The result was the *UCDP/HSRP Non-State Conflict Dataset*, which includes conflicts between non-state actors that result in at least 25 battle deaths in a year, and the *UCDP/HSRP One-Sided Violence Dataset*, which includes attacks on civilians by a formally organised group that result in at least 25 deaths in a year.

6   The UCDP has also begun collecting and coding data on state-based battle deaths, using a slightly different, but also report-based, methodology. The HSRP has tended to use UCDP figures from the *UCDP/HSRP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset* for more recent years, but uses the PRIO data to check how robust the arguments are.

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These new conceptions of conflict have widened the scope of conflict analysis. The three types of violence – state-based armed conflict (including conflict terminations), non-state armed conflict and one-sided violence – form what the HSRP calls "organised violence". Studying all three types of violence, as we will do in the present chapter, provides a more complete picture of global trends in human security than has previously been attainable.

3.
The Global Picture of Organised Violence since 1946

3.1
State-Based Armed Conflict

In 2005, the *Human Security Report* (HSR) – drawing on data from PRIO and UCDP – challenged the commonly held assumption that armed conflict around the world had become more widespread and more violent.[7] The 2005 HSR showed that the number of state-based armed conflicts – those in which a government is one of the warring parties – had declined dramatically since the end of the Cold War. Since its publication, the number of state-based armed conflicts has somewhat increased again.

This development is cause for concern and raises questions about its causes and implications. At the same time, however, it is clear that the recent increase does not throw into question the longer-term decline in *major* conflicts. Nor does it cast doubt on the uneven but clear decline in battle deaths that began in the 1950s and has largely continued until today. The increase we observe since 2004 is almost exclusively due to minor armed conflicts, while the number of high-intensity conflicts has continued to decline. As a result, armed conflicts are on average still much less deadly than they used to be.

Also, although conflict numbers have recently increased, this does not mean that we are seeing increased numbers of *new* conflicts. The increase in conflict numbers is due primarily to conflicts that have restarted again after having stopped for a period of time. This does not mean that the world is becoming more conflict-prone, but that preventing armed conflicts from restarting is a major challenge for policy-makers.

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7   Other research publications, notably the *Peace and Conflict* reports (see Center for International Development and Conflict Management (CIDCM) at the University of Maryland, USA; www.cidcm.umd.edu/pc/), had come to similar conclusions using different datasets.

3.1.1 Global Trends in State-Based Armed Conflicts

The number of state-based armed conflicts around the world increased from 1946 until the end of the Cold War, when the trend reversed dramatically. Between 1992 and 2003, the number of conflicts declined by 46%. In addition, there has been a shift in the prevailing types of conflicts. By the mid-1970s, all "extrastate" conflicts between colonial powers and local nationalist movements had come to an end. The armed conflicts of today are predominantly intrastate conflicts – civil wars over territories or government authority – a few of which are internationalised intrastate conflicts. Examples of the latter include the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, in which foreign armies are involved in civil wars.[8]

Conflicts between states, which tend to be more deadly than any other type of conflict, have become somewhat of a rarity. From 2004-2007, no conflicts were fought between states; the only interstate conflict recorded since then was a small border conflict between Eritrea and Djibouti in 2008.[9]
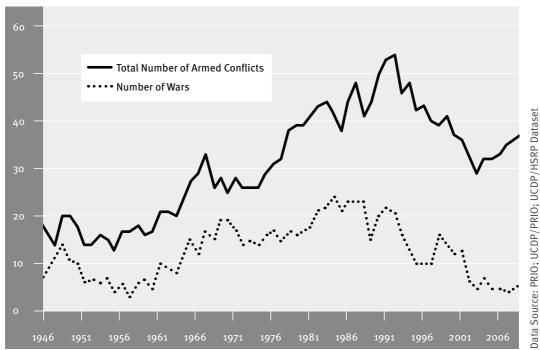
Figure 1 — Total Numbers of State-Based Armed Conflicts and Numbers of Wars, 1946-2008

Data Source: PRIO; UCDP/PRIO; UCDP/HSRP Dataset

8   For the years 2004 and onwards, the conflict in Iraq has been coded as an internationalised intrastate conflict in which the post-Saddam Hussein Iraqi government and the various rebel groups are the primary warring parties while the members of the US-led multinational coalition support the Iraqi government as secondary warring parties. The conflict in Afghanistan is also coded as an internationalised intrastate conflict. When the 'coalition' invaded in 2001, a civil war was already ongoing; coalition forces initially participated on the side of the United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan (UIFSA) rebels. When the Taliban government was overthrown in 2001, the coalition participated in support of the new government.
9   2003 saw two interstate conflicts: The recurring conflict between India and Pakistan, and the invasion of Iraq by the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia.

Figure 1 shows that the strong downward trend in state-based conflicts since the end of the Cold War has not continued in recent years. As of 2008, the data show a 25% increase from the post-Cold War low of 29 conflicts seen in 2003. Even though this represents a significant recent increase, the number of state-based armed conflicts active in 2008 is still lower than during most years since the late 1970s.

Figure 1 also demonstrates that the number of wars – defined as armed conflicts resulting in 1,000 or more battle deaths per year – has seen a continued, if uneven decline since the year 1999. Wars have made up an average of only 20% of all active armed conflicts per year in the new millennium compared to roughly 45% during the period from 1946-1999.

3.1.2 Battle Deaths from State-Based Armed Conflicts

The total number of active conflicts tells us little about the severity of warfare around the world; examining battle death tolls from active conflicts helps to fill out the picture. In this respect the trend data are encouraging, despite an increase in 2008. The dramatic long-term decline in the deadliness of warfare has not been reversed, despite the increase in the number of conflicts since 2004.

Figure 2 shows the total number of reported battle deaths from 1946-2008. Global battle deaths peaked in 1950, largely as a result of the Korean War, the anti-colonial war in Vietnam and the Chinese civil war. Since then, there has been an overall decline in state-based battle deaths – the fatality toll in 2008 amounted to less than 5% of the toll in 1950.[10] The average conflict in the new millennium has killed 90 percent fewer people each year than the average conflict in the 1950s did.
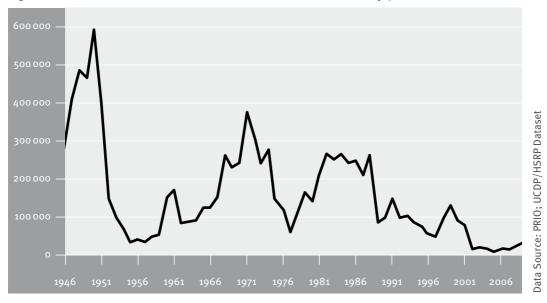
Figure 2 — Number of Battle Deaths from State-Based Conflict, 1946-2008

Data Source: PRIO; UCDP/HSRP Dataset

10   Using PRIO's battle death estimate for 2008, the figure is just over 8%.

This decline, however, has been uneven and punctuated by occasional upsurges. The most recent peak was in 1999, when more than 130,000 battle deaths were recorded – driven in large part by the wars in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia and Eritrea, Angola, Russia (Chechnya), Sierra Leone and Afghanistan. Since then, state-based battle deaths have declined quite dramatically; in 2007, there were approximately 17,000 battle deaths recorded worldwide. The global battle death toll rose to almost 27,000 in 2008; a significant jump that is mostly attributable to the escalation of violence in Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

The share of battle deaths among different regions has changed over time. From 1946 until the mid 1970s, the vast majority of battle deaths occurred in East and Southeast Asia. In the 1970s, however, battle deaths in the region dropped significantly, while the late 1970s and early 1980s saw increased violence in the Middle East and North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, Central and South Asia and the Americas.

By the late 1990s, sub-Saharan Africa was experiencing more battle deaths than any other region. In the new millennium, however, most of the major conflicts active in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s have come to an end. Both the number of conflicts and the number of battle deaths declined in this region, and this has been reflected in the global totals.

3.1.3 Explaining the Recent Increase in Minor Armed Conflicts

Even though the decline in the deadliness of conflicts has largely continued, it is important to understand what has caused the recent global increase in the numbers of armed conflicts. One possible answer lies in the major international events that roughly coincided with the turnaround in 2004: the rise of militant Islamism culminating in the attacks of September 11, 2001 and the US-led reaction that became known as the "Global War on Terror" – or "GWOT".

Since the 9/11 attacks, the perceived threat of Islamist terrorism has dominated the security agendas of the US and other western powers. The GWOT, in turn, is widely seen in the Muslim world as war on Islam. As a result, these tensions have been associated with an increase in Islamist violence in some countries – even though civilian support for Islamist extremism has declined in many Muslim countries.[11] There are examples of conflicts where radical Islamist armed groups have stepped up their activities, such as the escalation of violence in Somalia since 2006 or the new conflict in the Caucasus, which has resulted from a re-organisation of the conflict dynamics in Chechnya that combined this conflict with increasing violent activity in neighbouring republics Dagestan and Ingushetia.

The evidence suggests that approximately half of the increase in conflict numbers may be directly or indirectly attributed to Islamist violence or the US-led campaign against it. Much of the recent increase in conflict numbers occurred in Central and South Asia as well as the Middle East and North Africa. The war in Afghanistan, for example, has violence spilling over into neighbouring countries. The turmoil in Pakistan since 2004 is the most prominent example of the cross-border effects of an armed conflict linked directly to 9/11 and the GWOT. The US-led

11 See, for example, the discussion of declining support for suicide bombings shown by PEW Global Attitudes Survey data in HSRP 2008.

invasion of Iraq, while not motivated primarily by the GWOT, was perceived as part of a confrontation between Islam and the West and it has arguably contributed to a destabilisation of the Middle East in subsequent years.

Our data, however, clearly show that radical Islamism and the GWOT cannot explain all of the recent increase in conflict numbers. The conflicts that erupted or restarted in Sri Lanka, Burundi, Peru or the DRC have had nothing to do with Islamist extremism or the reactions to it. Instead, the occurrence of these conflicts indicates that the downward trend since the mid-1990s has stalled because fewer conflicts are ending, and if they end, they tend to recur. This underlines the continued need, despite the relatively low levels of organised violence in the new millennium, to develop and extend the research agenda on what causes armed conflicts to persist, and on how they may be resolved.

3.1.4 New Conflicts versus Recurring Conflicts

Despite increased efforts to prevent the outbreak of conflicts and the resumption of violence since the end of the Cold War, there has been no significant reduction of conflict onsets. *Figure 3* compares the number of new and recurring conflicts by decade, with the sum of the two representing the total number of conflict onsets in that decade.[12]
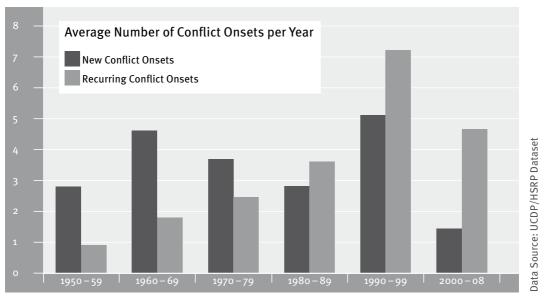
Figure 3 — New and Recurring Conflict Onsets, by Decade, 1950-2008

12 Recurring conflicts are those which have been inactive for at least one year, following which conflict activity resumes to the extent that it causes 25 or more deaths in a subsequent year.

An important finding is that the number of recurring conflicts has generally increased over time, both in absolute numbers and relative to new conflicts. The share of new conflicts – those that have never been recorded before – has decreased concomitantly over the last decades and in recent years has been lower than ever before. The proportion was relatively high in 2008, when 3 of the 5 conflict onsets were new conflicts, namely the clash between Eritrea and Djibouti and the conflicts in India over the territory of Dimaraji and an Islamic State in the Northeast. However, the average since 2004 has been as low as 22%. Just over one quarter of all conflict eruptions since the year 2000 were new conflicts – a significantly lower figure than in the 1990s or any other decade since 1946. The fact that we are faced with many recurring conflicts has important implications for conflict prevention and resolution, which we discuss in the context of conflict terminations below.

3.1.5 How Conflicts End

In order to make sense of global trends in armed conflict we need to understand not only where, when and why conflicts erupt, but also how they end. The conflict termination dataset compiled for the Human Security Report Project by UCDP researchers indicates how and when state-based armed conflicts end. A conflict is considered terminated once fighting has either stopped or dropped below the threshold of 25 battle deaths for one full calendar year.[13]
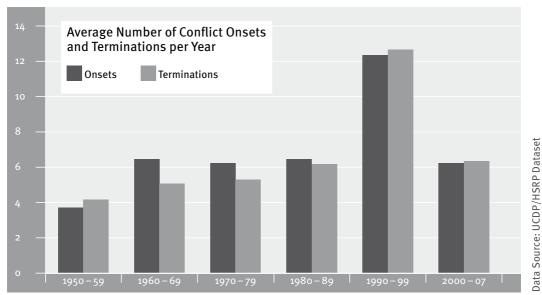
Figure 4 — Conflict Onsets and Terminations, by Decade, 1950-2007

Data Source: UCDP/HSRP Dataset

13   Strictly speaking, the UCDP termination dataset records the end of conflict *episodes*. A conflict that was inactive for one year or more may restart any time; see Kreutz 2010a. Because UCDP coding rules require a full year of inactivity before a conflict is considered terminated, the most recent data on conflict terminations always lag one year behind the most recent conflict data, and so the commentary on conflict terminations will refer to events up until 2007.

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Conflict numbers in any one year are determined by the difference between conflict onsets in that year and terminations in the previous year. So if there are two new onsets in a given year, but three terminations in the previous year, the net number of conflicts in the year in question will be one fewer than the previous year.

Figure 4 shows the average number of conflict onsets by decade. It is clear the 1990s was a remarkable decade. The average number of onsets per year in the 1990s was double that of the 1980s. *Figure 4* also shows the average number of conflict terminations by decade. The increase in terminations during the 1990s was even greater than the increase in onsets, which decreased the *net* number of conflicts by almost 20% during the decade. The 1990s were the first decade in which there were more terminations than onsets, but this trend has continued into the new millennium.

In the conflict terminations dataset, conflicts can terminate in one of four ways: by victories, by ceasefires, by peace agreements, and by a fourth category labelled "other" that refers to situations where the fighting simply dies down and the number of recorded battle deaths drops below 25, in a manner that does not fit with the definitions of the three termination types listed above.

Over time, the types of conflict outcomes have changed: From 1946-1989, far more conflicts were terminated by victories than by peace agreements or ceasefires, as *Table 1* demonstrates. After the Cold War ended, this balance shifted. In the 1990s the average conflict was almost as likely to end in a peace agreement as in a victory (17% vs. 18%). Since 2000, the average conflict has been almost twice as likely to end in a peace agreement as in victory (24% vs. 12%). This supports the finding of other researchers that conflicts have become more difficult to win (Kreutz 2010a, 246). *Table 1* also shows the increase in "other" terminations relative to the remaining types in the post Cold War period – the vast majority of conflicts become inactive without a negotiated settlement or a victory.

Table 1 — State-Based Armed Conflict Terminations, 1950-2003

Years	Peace Agreements			Ceasefires			Victories			Other			Total Terminations		
	Total Number	Number restarted in under 5 years	% restarted in under 5 years	Total Number	Number restarted in under 5 years	% restarted in under 5 years	Total Number	Number restarted in under 5 years	% restarted in under 5 years	Total Number	Number restarted in under 5 years	% restarted in under 5 years	Total Number	Number restarted in under 5 years	% restarted in under 5 years
1950–1959	7	0	0.0	2	0	0.0	18	3	16.7	14	5	35.7	41	8	19.5
1960–1969	5	1	20.0	7	0	0.0	21	2	9.5	18	4	22.2	51	7	13.7
1970–1979	9	1	11.1	8	1	12.5	23	7	30.4	13	3	23.1	53	12	22.6
1980–1989	3	1	33.3	6	0	0.0	22	4	18.2	31	21	67.7	62	26	41.9
1990–1999	22	10	45.5	22	9	40.9	23	2	8.7	59	35	59.3	126	56	44.4
2000–2003	7	1	14.3	4	2	50.0	3	2	66.7	15	12	80.0	29	17	58.6
Total 1950–2003	53	14	26.4	49	12	24.5	110	20	18.2	150	80	53.3	362	126	34.8

Data Source: UCDP/HSRP Dataset

A single year of inactivity alone may represent merely a lull in fighting followed by renewed violence in a subsequent year. *Table 1,* therefore, tests for the durability of conflict terminations and shows the relative success of each type of outcome.

From 1950 to 2003, victories proved to be the most stable type of termination – i.e. the least likely to relapse into violence. Less than 20% of conflicts that terminated in victory during this period restarted within five years. Peace agreements and ceasefires, on the other hand, have had a higher failure rate. From 1950 to 2003, 26% of conflicts that ended with peace agreements and 25% of those that ended with ceasefires restarted within five years. Not surprisingly, conflicts that end without a settlement or a decisive victory on the battlefield are by far the most likely to recur.

The failure rate of negotiated settlements was at its highest in the chaotic 1990s, when more peace agreements and ceasefires were signed than ever before. During this decade, almost half of the peace agreements failed in less than five years and more than 40% of conflicts that ended with a ceasefire restarted. In contrast, only 9% of victories saw a resurgence of violence within five years.

However, it must be emphasised that post-conflict environments following peace agreements are more susceptible to the resurgence of violence than those following victories. It is difficult for conflicts to restart if one of the warring parties has been militarily defeated, as is usually the case when a victory is recorded in the data. In post-conflict settings following a peace agreement, however, former combatants often retain some degree of military capacity and thus the potential to become 'spoilers' of peace. In addition, victories tend to end shorter conflicts while peace agreements tend to terminate longer conflicts where neither side has been able to prevail on the battlefield (see also Kreutz 2010a, 246). This finding is significant, as long periods of warfare often generate entrenched feelings of hostility that can make sustaining peace agreements difficult. Moreover, the relatively low success rate of peace agreements in the 1990s perhaps reflects the fact the agreements may not have been well crafted and certainly were not as well supported than those of the following decade.

Yet, peace processes appear to have improved with practice; better agreements are now being negotiated and more support is given to the implementation of the agreements. *Table 1* reveals that the percentage of peace agreements that were followed by a resumption of conflict within five years appears to be on the decline. It is too early to compare the recent figures with the 1990s, but the early signs are encouraging. From 2000-2003, seven conflicts were terminated by peace agreements, and only one restarted in less than five years. Two out of three victories failed over the same time period.[14]

The increasing stability of peace agreements is exemplified by the fact that through 2007 and 2008, the peace agreements that ended several notorious wars – including Liberia (2003), Sierra Leone (2000), Eritrea and Ethiopia (2000), Angola (2002), Côte d'Ivoire (2005), Aceh

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14 The failed peace agreement was the 2003 settlement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The conflict restarted in 2006 with a rebel group different than those which had fought in earlier episodes of this conflict – Laurent Nkunda's Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple (CNDP). The two conflicts that restarted after victories were the ones in Afghanistan and the Central African Republic.

(2005) and Nepal (2006) – have all held. In many of these countries, major challenges have yet to be overcome, but the start of a peace process is a necessary condition for overcoming them – and it has saved countless lives.

3.1.6 Are Conflicts Becoming More Intractable?

Notwithstanding progress made on the stability of peace agreements, there is a clear trend towards higher failure rates of conflict terminations on the whole. As *Table 1* (above) reveals, almost one in two terminations recorded since 1990 was followed by renewed violence within less than five years. This begs the question of whether conflicts are in fact becoming more intractable. The answer to this is more complex than a first glance at the data suggests. There can be no doubt that, when all armed conflicts are considered together, the average duration of active conflicts as well as the proportion of recurring conflicts has increased. This tells us that recent active conflicts have been going on for a larger number of years – often interrupted by phases of tranquillity – than the conflicts active in earlier decades (Fearon 2004). A number of decades-long conflicts such as in Israel/Palestine, Sri Lanka or between India and Pakistan illustrate this. It follows that several conflicts that started decades ago appear to be unaffected by whatever forces were driving the strong decline in the number of conflicts since the mid-1990s. With lower overall numbers of conflicts today, these protracted – and intractable – conflicts represent a larger share of the total. This lends some credibility to the argument that the "low-hanging fruits" of conflict resolution may have been picked since the mid-1990s and we are now left with conflicts that are more difficult to end (Hampson et al. 2005).

But while some conflicts appear to be intractable, this is only part of the picture. Among the conflicts that have ended in recent times were protracted armed struggles like in Angola or Nepal. Moreover, conflicts that started during the 1980s and 1990s have so far tended to be shorter than the conflicts that started in earlier decades. Of course, we cannot see into the future to tell whether a conflict starting in 2007 will last for several decades or not. But if we take a look at the duration and recurrence of conflicts depending on their start date, there is no indication that conflicts have become more intractable over time. *Figure 5* shows that less than 5% of all conflict onsets in the 1950s were followed by 10 or more consecutive years of fighting. By the 1970s this share had increased almost tenfold, but it decreased markedly in the 1980s. The downward trend continued in 1990-1998, with less than 10% of conflicts lasting more than 10 years in this period. If 10 or more cumulative active years are considered, i.e. if recurrence is taken into account, the trend stays virtually the same.[15]

15 These findings hold true even if only intrastate (i.e. civil) conflicts, which tend to last longer than interstate conflicts, are considered.
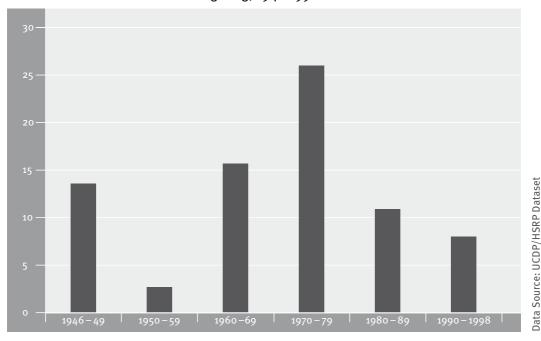
Figure 5 — Percentage of Conflict Onsets Followed by
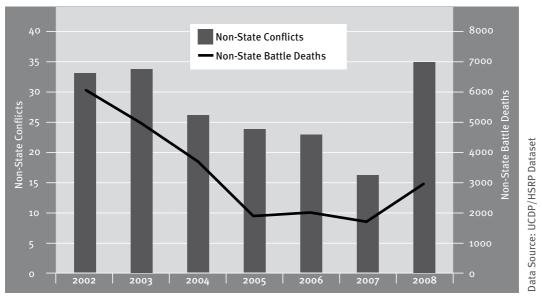at Least 10 Consecutive Years of Fighting, 1946-1998

Data Source: UCDP/HSRP Dataset

3.2
Conflicts Without Government Participation

As mentioned above, conflict research has traditionally focused on armed struggles in which at least one party is the government of a state. Conflicts between non-state armed groups – warlords, clans or rebel groups, for example – are not included in traditional conflict datasets. This knowledge gap is currently being addressed by a dataset commissioned by the HSRP and produced by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program that collects data on non-state armed conflicts. Data on non-state conflicts are now available for the period 2002-2008.

Non-state conflicts are defined as "the use of armed force between two organized groups, neither of which is the government of a state, which results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in a year" (Sundberg 2009, 2). There are two broad categories of cases captured by the non-state dataset: First, fighting between different rebel groups or splinter groups, such as the conflict between the Palestinian groups Hamas and Fatah; second, clashes between ethnic, religious or other social groups that are generally not involved in a state-based conflict, as for example the multiple conflicts between Luo and Kikuyu in Kenya (Sundberg 2008, 167).

Two important characteristics distinguish the non-state dataset from its state-based counterpart. First, the number of non-state conflicts tends to fluctuate more, on an annual basis, than the number of state-based conflicts does. This is mostly because the vast majority of non-state conflicts last only one year. Non-state conflicts, in other words, are often characterised less by protracted armed struggles than by brief violent clashes that rarely repeat between the same groups.

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Secondly, non-state armed conflicts tend to kill substantially fewer people on average than state-based conflicts, so even if the numbers of conflicts are at a similar level, the death toll from state-based conflict will mostly be higher than that for non-state conflict, often appreciably so. For example, for the period for which both types of data are available (2002-2008), the total battle death toll from non-state armed conflict is roughly 20 percent of the total battle death toll from state-based armed conflict.

Figure 6 shows the number of non-state conflicts and non-state battle deaths from 2002 to 2008. The figure demonstrates the volatility of the annual numbers of non-state conflicts. A strong decline in conflicts from 2004 to 2007 ended, with the year 2008 showing the highest number of conflicts recorded so far. Non-state conflicts around the world had decreased by 52% from 2002 until 2007; the 16 conflicts counted in 2007 represented the lowest annual number in the dataset thus far. The decline was, however, offset by a strong increase in the number of non-state conflicts to 35 in 2008.

Figure 6 — Non-State Armed Conflicts and Battle Deaths, 2002-2008

The sharp increase in non-state conflict numbers in 2008 was driven primarily by just two countries – Kenya and Pakistan. With 8 and 6 non-state conflicts respectively, these two countries account for 40% of the 2008 total and for almost two thirds of the overall increase compared to 2007. In Kenya, the number of non-state conflicts increased from zero in 2007 to 8 in 2008. Much of this non-state violence was associated with the contested re-election of President Mwai Kibaki in December 2007. In Pakistan, the number of non-state conflicts increased from 2 in 2007 to 6 in 2008, as the security situation in the country deteriorated.

Non-state battle deaths, however, remain low despite the increase in conflicts. Between 2003 and 2007, falling numbers of non-state conflicts were associated with decreasing battle death tolls. As *Figure 6* shows, the global non-state death toll had dropped by 70% from 2002 to 2007.

The elevated death toll for 2008 was still less than half of what had been recorded at the highest point in 2002.

Non-state conflicts since 2002 have been highly concentrated in a small number of countries, while large parts of the world remain unaffected. Non-state conflicts have occurred in 28 countries, but 50% of all country-years of conflict recorded between 2002 and 2008 occurred in only four countries: Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan and Nigeria. The same countries are also among the deadliest in terms of non-state conflict, only surpassed by DRC's war-torn eastern region, which showed the highest total death toll for the whole 2002-2008 period. Together, these five sub-Saharan African countries accounted for two thirds of all deaths from non-state armed conflict recorded worldwide since 2002.

Considering that a number of sub-Saharan African countries are heavily featured in the dataset, it is not surprising that the relatively low numbers of non-state conflicts between 2003 and 2007 were due to a large extent to improvements in this region. Notwithstanding these positive developments, however, sub-Saharan Africa still accounts for most of the active non-state conflicts.

3.3
Assaults on Civilians

Attacks against civilians are conceptually different from both state-based and non-state conflicts. Conflicts involve at least two warring parties, but assaults on civilians involve a single armed group attacking unarmed civilians who are largely unable to fight back. It is commonly believed that more civilians are being deliberately targeted than ever before. However, the evidence available suggests that this is not the case.

The UCDP, from whom the Human Security Report Project commissions data, uses the term "one-sided violence" for attacks against civilians. One-sided violence refers to the lethal use of force against civilians by a government or an organised non-state armed group that results in 25 or more reported deaths in a year (Kreutz 2010b, 2).[16] The data demonstrate that, while one-sided violence represents a significant threat to the security of many people, this threat is no greater today than it was at the starting point of our dataset in 1989 and the subsequent years.

3.3.1 Cases of One-Sided Violence and Deaths from One-Sided Violence, 1989-2008
Figure 7 illustrates the number of cases of one-sided violence and the global death tolls from one-sided violence from 1989 to 2008. The figure shows that, despite the rapid post-Cold War decline in state-based conflicts, there was an uneven upward trend in cases of one-sided violence until early in the new millennium. From 1989 to 2002, the number of cases of one-sided violence rose by 71%. Since 2002, however, cases of one-sided violence have been gradually declining, with the exception of a peak in 2004. In 2008, UCDP recorded 26 cases of one-sided violence around the world – the second lowest number of cases recorded in the 1989-2008 period.

16   The 25 deaths need not occur at the same time but they must occur during a single calendar year for a case to be recorded.
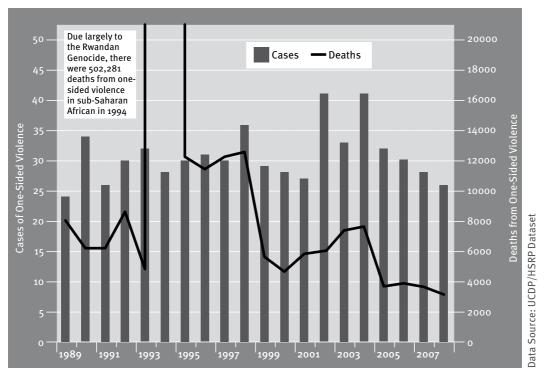
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Figure 7 — Cases of One-Sided Violence and Deaths from One-Sided Violence, 1989-2008

The decline of one-sided violence in recent years was largely driven by developments in sub-Saharan Africa, East and Southeast Asia, Oceania and the Middle East and North Africa. Despite a reduction in the number of cases by some 30% in sub-Saharan Africa in recent years, the region has seen the most one-sided violence since 1989.

The line portion of *Figure 7* represents annual death tolls from one-sided violence. Estimating death tolls from one-sided violence can be problematic. In addition to the huge challenges faced in gathering comprehensive and credible information about such events, UCDP's stringent coding rules require identification of the perpetrator of deaths, and this information is often missing. The result is that many civilian fatalities cannot be included in the one-sided violence dataset. Thus, while the one-sided violence fatality data can indicate broad global, regional and national trends, specific death tolls must be viewed with caution.

Figure 7 shows a peak in civilian deaths in 1994; this was the result of the Rwandan genocide, when an estimated 500,000 civilians were killed in just a few months.[17] Absent Rwanda, deaths from one-sided violence have been declining unevenly for roughly the last ten years. The year 2008 saw the lowest death toll from one-sided violence in the period for which data are available. This decrease was partially driven by modest improvements in the Middle East and North Africa, specifically in Iraq. In 2007, civilian fatalities in Iraq alone accounted for about 46% of the global total of deaths from one-sided violence. In 2008, however, one-sided activity in Iraq decreased somewhat, bringing down the regional and global tolls for that year.

3.3.2 Perpetrators of One-Sided Violence

Over the time period covered, the data reveal a shift in the type of perpetrators of one-sided violence. In the early years covered by the dataset, governments perpetrated the greater share of annual deaths from one-sided violence, but since early in the new millennium, most deaths each year have been caused by non-state armed groups.
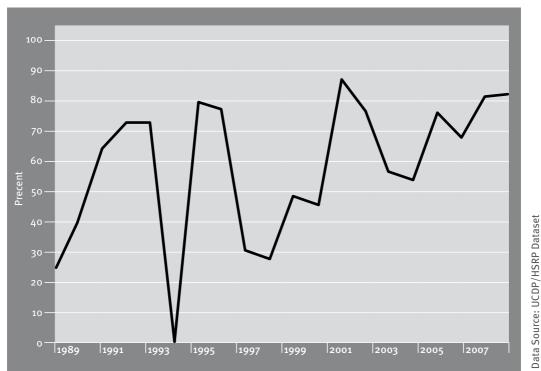
Figure 8 — Percentage of Total Annual Deaths from One-Sided Violence
Perpetrated by Non-State Actors, 1989-2008

Data Source: UCDP/HSRP Dataset

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17   This is UCDP's best estimate; their high estimate is 800,000.

Figure 8 shows the annual percentage of civilian fatalities perpetrated by non-state actors from 1989 to 2008 and illustrates this clear, though uneven, upward trend.[18] In 1989, non-state actors perpetrated only 25% of civilian deaths. By 2008, however, non-state actors were responsible for 83% of deaths from one-sided violence. Non-state actors were especially active in Central and South Asia as well as the Middle East and North Africa – in 2008, all reported one-sided deaths in these regions were perpetrated by non-state actors.

4.
Summary and Policy Recommendations

Organised violence remains a formidable obstacle to peace and human security in today's world. But the data reveal a reality rarely discussed in the global media. Even though the number of minor armed conflicts and non-state conflicts has been on the rise again in recent years, there are still fewer conflicts active today than during most years since the late 1970s – and *far* fewer high-intensity conflicts. The data also suggest that the conflicts starting more recently tend to be shorter than before. But perhaps most important is the remarkable, if uneven decline in the deadliness of warfare around the world. The average war in the 1950s killed some 10,000 people per year. Today the average war kills one tenth of that number.

The aim of peace and conflict research is not only to monitor trends in organised violence, but also to provide a knowledge base for policy-makers and practitioners, and so the question remains of what to make of the findings presented above? As this chapter has analysed trends at the aggregated, global level, and for three broad categories of violence, it is clear that specific recommendations for individual conflict settings cannot be distilled from it. Beyond broad patterns and similarities, the causes and characteristics of threats to human security can vary markedly from case to case and across national and regional boundaries.

To assess which measures work best to transform armed conflict under specific circumstances and which do not, new, systematically collected data are necessary. As of today, comparative and large-n studies often have to rely on proxies that measure crucial variables only insufficiently. A prominent example is the common use of income inequality as a proxy for grievances. In addition, more research and resources are needed to further develop existing datasets on organised violence. While datasets based on national-level statistics will remain important in the future, disaggregating conflict data to capture trends at the sub-national level and across borders allows for more fine-grained analyses and robust results. Breaking down conflict data that is currently structured by calendar year into smaller time-units would help deepen our understanding of conflict dynamics. Adding new sources and monitoring methods will enhance the reach and reliability of data collection. In addition, there is an evident need for systematic data on conflict prevention, peacemaking as well as peacebuilding efforts.

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18   The outlier in 1994 with a value near zero is a result of the fact that the Rwandan genocide, perpetrated by the Rwandan government, accounted for nearly 100% of all deaths from one-sided violence in that year.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the trends identified by using existing data can tell us a great deal about what broader dynamics have helped reduce the level of organised violence in recent times and which challenges remain. Some of them are due to structural changes, while others can be more closely related to human agency.

The reduced deadliness of conflicts that declining battle death tolls reveal is largely due to the changing nature of warfare. The major armed conflicts of the Cold War years – the Chinese civil war, the Korean War, the French and American wars in Indochina, the Iran-Iraq War and the Soviet war in Afghanistan – all generated massive annual death tolls. These wars involved military intervention by the great powers and were mostly fought with very large armies, with at least one side deploying heavy conventional weapons. The mostly poor-country wars of the post-Cold War era, by contrast, are typically fought with small arms and small armies that tend to avoid major engagements. The changing nature of warfare has also reduced the geographical extent of wartime violence. And even though warring parties often resort to indiscriminate violence and frequently prefer to attack civilians rather than their armed opponents, there is no indication that civilians are being targeted more frequently than before.

When we look not only at overall battle death tolls, but also at the number of active conflicts, it is more difficult to identify precisely what has caused the frequency of armed conflict to decline in many parts of the world. The single most important finding of the quantitative literature on the causes of war is that economic development is positively correlated to peace (Hegre/Sambanis 2006). On the other hand, though, we do not know very clearly how to induce economic prosperity – which is why development assistance can, but will not in every case be an effective means of long-term conflict prevention. Nor can we say for sure whether development *causes* peace or whether peace, as John Mueller argues (2004), is rather the condition for development.[19] Yet, there are strong indications that broadly spread economic development is conducive to peace. The trend in East and Southeast Asia provides a striking example of a region that used to suffer heavily from armed conflict, but has seen fewer and fewer conflicts since the end of the 1970s while economic growth increased dramatically. Moreover, the wars of today are concentrated overwhelmingly in the least developed countries.

However, the drop in the number of conflicts around the world and particularly in the number of wars since the early 1990s is too steep to be explained by slow-changing economic factors. The end of the Cold War, and the changes that followed it, provide the most compelling explanation for the decline. This global political shift first resulted in a significant number of new, but comparatively short-lived conflicts. In the long run, however, the removal of a major source of ideological tension from the international system dramatically reduced superpower interventions that had fuelled various civil wars around the world. What is more, the number of inclusive democracies has more than doubled during the 1990s, a type of political regime that is unlikely to suffer from civil war. The positive effect of democratisation, however, may have been weakened by the parallel rise of "anocracies" – political systems that are neither stable democracies nor autocracies and, therefore, most prone to internal armed conflict (Hegre et al. 2001).

19 For an extensive review of the research see "The Causes of Peace" in HSRP 2011 (forthcoming).

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The end of superpower rivalry also allowed international organisations, foremost the United Nations, to dramatically expand their roles in peacemaking, peacebuilding and peacekeeping. Indeed, the rapid decline in conflict numbers is probably best explained by the increased international activism led by the UN but strongly supported by other international agencies, major donors and NGOs.

Proving a causal relationship is extremely difficult because of the complex interplay of many different factors, but the sharp increases in UN peacemaking efforts – such as the preventive diplomacy of special envoys, plus the growth of contact groups and Groups of Friends – strongly suggest that these and other initiatives have played an important role in reducing conflicts and violence around the world (Mack 2008). As an example, the number of Special Representatives of the UN Secretary General has increased from around 10 in the late 1980s to 70 in the new millennium.[20] Where diplomatic initiatives failed, the international community has become increasingly ready to use coercive measures against perpetrators of violence. The UN Security Council has been more willing to address conflict situations and impose economic sanctions on states or use force against 'spoilers' of peace efforts (see, for example, Cockayne et al. 2010).

International activism has been accompanied, and in some cases driven by, normative change. This is reflected in various international treaties – the convention to ban the use of landmines is a prominent example. The number of signatories to this and other treaties has increased significantly and often comprises the vast majority of UN member states (UNTC 2010). It is difficult to determine whether the development of international law, and not least international criminal law, can help deter war crimes. Still, most state actors today care to at least some extent about the negative repercussions that aggressive behaviour will have in the international arena. This provides the UN and others with a useful tool to influence the behaviour of states (Fortna 2004). The increasing reluctance of government actors to target civilians shown above could be an indicator of such change.

Increased international activism, however, is not limited to diplomacy, spreading norms and sanctioning their violation. Peacekeeping and peacebuilding in conflict settings by the UN and other organisations has seen an unheralded upsurge since the end of the Cold War. Both the number of peacekeeping missions and personnel deployed has increased manifold since 1989, and more recently the focus of these missions has shifted towards building sustainable peace.[21] In the 1990s, UN interventions failed spectacularly in trying to impose peace on warring parties. But lessons learned and examples of successful peacebuilding – as for example in Mozambique or the more recent, if modest achievements in Liberia – have created a different image. A number of independent studies have shown that the UN's efforts to mediate peace processes, to monitor the implementation of agreements and to support post-conflict reconstruction on a broad basis have made a critical difference in facilitating peace and preventing the recurrence of violence.

The research suggests that peace missions diminish the risk of war recurrence by 50% or more than 80%, depending on the type of mission (Fortna 2004, 283).[22]

Our data confirm that increased peacemaking efforts helped foster a growing number of negotiated settlements and have started to pay off. Lessons learned from many failed peace agreements in the early 1990s, and especially the augmented support for post-conflict peacebuilding, has likely contributed to more stable agreements being reached. The failure rate of peace agreements has been declining in recent years; 8 out of 10 of those signed since the year 2000 are still holding. This increasing stability tells us that addressing grievances is important for resolving armed conflict. The data further indicate that in the case of many failed peace agreements violence is reignited by groups that were not part of the settlement. By contrast, any two parties that have signed an agreement are very unlikely to resume hostilities against each other.

Despite these positive developments there are still reasons for concern. The fact that the downward trend in conflict numbers has recently been reversed reminds us of how fragile peace can be. As discussed above, international terrorism and the so-called Global War on Terrorism appear to have had a detrimental effect on peace and stability in many regions of the world. At the same time, a number of conflicts unrelated to the GWOT have become active again, showing that whatever forces drove down the number of armed conflicts in the world since the 1990s, they have apparently lost momentum. Peacemaking has not been successful in every case and even though many long-standing conflicts have come to an end in recent years, there is a significant proportion of conflicts that defy resolution and tend to recur regularly. Together with small numbers of new conflicts, this means that as many conflicts are starting or restarting today as in the 1980s. Thus, the extent of existing conflict prevention efforts is apparently not sufficient to bring down the number of annual conflict onsets.

The high rate of conflict recurrence is, however, at least in part a result of the reduced deadliness of armed conflict. Many of today's low-intensity conflicts account for only a few dozen casualties a year, which means they hover just above the 25 deaths threshold for inclusion in our dataset. Not much needs to change for such a conflict to become inactive and to restart a year later. Beyond this rather technical explanation, there may be another reason for why these low-intensity conflicts remain unresolved: not only do they result in relatively few casualties, but they often affect only a small, peripheral proportion of a country's territory. Therefore, they simply do not pose a big enough challenge for a state government to seek a solution. While the rebels have no prospects of making significant progress in their struggle, the status quo may be less costly for the government in power than a decision on the battlefield or at the negotiation table (Fearon 2004, 289). Not only are guerrilla-type insurgencies in remote areas notoriously difficult for government forces to defeat, but the relatively limited costs for both sides will also reduce the incentives to start negotiations.[23]

Where do these positive developments and challenges to human security leave us? As noted above, it is difficult to draw "hands-on" policy recommendations from such aggregated trends.

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22 See also, among others, Doyle/Sambanis 2006 and Collier et al. 2008.
23 While there may not be a moment when a conflict is indeed "ripe for resolution", Walter has shown among others that high costs of war can help initiate negotiations (Walter 2002, 160).

In some cases, as for example the recent upsurge in smaller conflicts, we will have to await further developments to better understand the dynamics at play. Yet, a few implications are clear: conflict prevention efforts are a cost-effective means to support peace and always a less costly option than the outbreak of violence – but they are notoriously difficult to mobilise resources for (Brown/Rosecrance 1999). More and better data on conflict prevention issues are therefore urgently needed to see what measures are most successful and to build support for corresponding policies.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned achievements of peacebuilding, UN and other multilateral missions face important challenges. Among other things, the coordination of different interests and actors involved needs to be improved. What is more, the UN in particular has difficulties in mobilising peacekeeping troops, which not only prevents timely responses to crises, but also limits the quality of the forces deployed (Dobbins 2004/2005). In addition, the failure to protect civilians in areas where UN peacekeepers operate, as for example in Darfur and the DRC, has pointed to critical shortcomings in the conduct of these missions.

The increasing focus on evidence-based policy-making means that success in mobilising resources for conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and their effective allocation, will depend on the availability of qualitative and quantitative data. While the pool of available data on various dimensions of organised violence and human security is improving, there is a whole host of research areas that have only scarcely been explored. As described above, there is a strong indication that international activism, conflict prevention and peace support can make a crucial difference. Yet it is a better understanding of the causes of war and peace and our practical responses to organised violence that will drive further success in the field and help sustain the remarkable improvements seen in recent years.

5.
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Useful Online Resources

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