David Rose / Panos Pictures

The changing nature of warfare

Today's conflicts tend to be low-intensity civil wars, or 'asymmetric' wars in which high-tech forces fight poorly armed opponents. The world's armies are changing too, relying more on child soldiers, paramilitary forces and private military firms.

Warfare has evolved dramatically in the last few decades. The major wars of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s—the Chinese Civil War, the Korean War and the wars in Indochina—involved huge armies that deployed heavy conventional weapons and engaged in major battles. The warring parties were sustained by the superpowers, and the death tolls were high.

> Low intensity conflicts kill few people compared with conventional wars.

By the end of the century the nature of armed conflict had changed radically.

Most of today's armed conflicts fall into one of two categories. The vast majority are so-called 'low-intensity' civil wars, almost all of which take place in the developing world. They are typically fought by relatively small, ill-trained, lightly-armed forces that avoid major military engagements but frequently target civilians.

While often conducted with great brutality, these low-intensity conflicts kill relatively few people compared with major conventional wars.

Wars in the second category are very different. Often called 'asymmetric' conflicts, they involve US-led 'coalitions of the willing', using high-tech weaponry against far weaker opponents who have few or no allies. The Gulf War, Kosovo, and the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan fall into this category.

Due to the extreme power imbalances that favour the US-led coalitions, the battle phase of these wars usually ends quickly—within weeks rather than years—and with relatively few combat deaths compared with the major wars of the Cold War period.

Changes in the scope and deadliness of armed conflicts have been paralleled by other global shifts in military recruitment and organisation. These have been driven in part by economic imperatives and in part by political changes. This section examines three such changes: a reliance on child soldiers, the increasing use of paramilitary forces, and the privatisation of warfare.

Child soldiers

The deployment of children in war is hardly a new phenomenon, but it is widely believed to be a rapidly growing one. It is also illegal. Recruitment of children (persons under 18) into military forces is prohibited by the UN's 2000 Convention on the Rights of the Child, while the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court defines conscripting children under 15, or deploying them in battle, as a war crime.[27]

> Children have been used for terrorist missions in Northern Ireland, Columbia and Sri Lanka.

According to Brookings Institution analyst Peter Singer, the use of child soldiers has become so common that it can be thought of as 'a new phenomenon of warfare'.[28] Children fight in almost 75% of today's armed conflicts and the numbers serving in—or recently demobilised from—government and rebel forces engaged in war have been estimated at 300,000.[29] A further half-million are thought to be serving in militaries that are not at war.[30]

Nearly a third of the militaries that use child soldiers include girls in their ranks. 'Underage girls have been present in the armed forces of 55 countries; in 27 of those countries, girls were abducted to serve and in 34 of them, the girls saw combat.'[31]

Children have been used for terrorist missions in Northern Ireland, Colombia and Sri Lanka. Children as young as 13 have been recruited by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas organisations for suicide operations.[32]

The recruitment of children is driven by a number of factors. First, the ready availability of cheap, easy-to-use light weapons such as the AK-47 more than offsets children's major drawback as fighters in earlier eras: their lack of physical strength. Now that many weapons are 'child-portable', children can often be as effective as adults on the battlefield.

Second, in the less-developed countries where most wars now take place, burgeoning youth unemployment creates a pool of potential recruits who may have few other survival options. Military recruiters, particularly those who work for rebel groups, see children as both cheap and expendable.

Third, 'otherwise unpopular armies and rebel groups have been able to field far greater forces than they would otherwise, through strategies of abduction or indoctrination.'[33]

Despite increasingly active NGO campaigns against the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and some rhetorical support for action at the UN Security Council, this abuse continues—and has in some cases increased.

The impact of recruitment and military service on children is examined in more depth in Part III.

The rise of paramilitaries

Usually more heavily armed than the police, though more lightly armed than the military, paramilitaries can be disciplined forces under effective government control—or private armies operating outside legal constraints, responsible only to themselves, and operating death squads and torture camps.

Like child soldiers, paramilitaries are inexpensive to arm, quick to train and require little logistical support. Their rapid recent growth has been driven in part by the same economic imperatives that have swelled the ranks of child soldiers.

The term paramilitary embraces a wide variety of organisations: armed police, border guards, counter-insurgency specialists, internal security forces, riot squads, intelligence agencies, militias and even privatised armies. Most exist outside regular police or traditional military command structures—and almost all fall into one of three broad categories:

- Militarised police forces (such as China's People's Armed Police).
- Militias (such as Colombia's self-defence groups).
- Intelligence agencies (such as the former Soviet Union's KGB and Pakistan's Inter Service Intelligence).

THE ARMS TRADE, DEFENCE BUDGETS AND TROOP STRENGTHS

With the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, international arms transfers, world military expenditures and troop numbers all declined.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's *SIPRI Yearbook 2004*, the annual value of major arms transfers worldwide in 2003 was approximately half that of 1987—although there has been a modest increase since 2000. Russia was the major exporter in 2003, responsible for almost 37% of all weapons deliveries. The United States came second with almost 24%. Asia, led by India, was the major recipient region.[34] (SIPRI uses the term 'arms transfers' rather than 'arms trade' because some major transfers of arms are in effect gifts, or are made on terms that are not strictly trade.)

Figure 1.10 shows only transfers of major conventional weapons—tanks, aircraft, ships—not transfers of the small arms and light weapons that kill most people in most of today's wars. There are no good data on transfers of small arms, but according to Peter Batchelor (formerly of the Small Arms Survey), 'the value and the volume of the legal international trade [in small arms] has appeared to decline since the 1990s. This has been led by a dramatic fall in the trade of military weapons, and also certain categories of civilian firearms.' Speaking in 2003, Batchelor added that the illicit trade is believed to be worth about $1 billion, some 20% of the legal trade in small arms.[35]

NGO campaigns to staunch the flow of these smaller weapons to conflict zones have had only modest success. And even if the transfer of these weapons could be cut back radically, this would not reduce the number of small arms and light weapons already out there. A 2003 estimate suggested that there were 639 million small arms and light weapons in circulation around the world—238 to 276 million of them in the United States.[36]

World military spending in the 1990s followed the same trend as global arms transfers. According to the US State Department, it dropped from $254 for every man, woman and child on the planet in 1989, to $142 per person in 1999, a decline of 43%. As a share of world GDP it fell from 4.1% to 2.7% in the same period. Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union's share of global military spending fell by 34%, while East Asia's share more than doubled. Numbers serving in armed forces around the world dropped some 26%, from 28.6 million to 21.3 million.[37]

In the new century, global arms spending has again been heading up, led by the United States. Washington requested $420.7 billion for fiscal 2005, an 8% increase—and plans to spend $2.2 trillion over the next five years. China and Russia each spent around $50 billion in 2003, Japan and the UK $41 billion each.[38]

The UN, by contrast, currently spends some $4.47 billion a year for all its worldwide peacekeeping operations.[39] This compares with the $5.6 billion *a month* that the US is spending on the occupation in Iraq.[40]
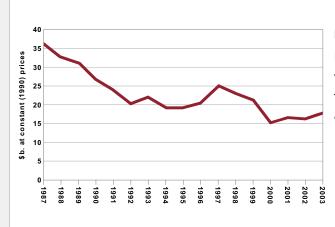

Figure 1.10 Major arms transfers, 1987–2003
International transfers of major conventional weapons fell steadily after the end of the Cold War, though they have been rising again since 2000.

Source: SIPRI 2004[41]

The growth of paramilitary forces is one of the most significant recent changes in the global security landscape. In Russia, China and India—three of the five countries with the largest armed forces in the world—paramilitary forces now account for between one-third and one-half of total military personnel.[42]

A 1999 study of Asian militaries found that between 1975 and 1996 the ratio of security forces to population had risen by 29% in Thailand, by 42% in Burma, by 63% in China, by 64% in Pakistan, by 71% in India, and by 81% in Sri Lanka.[43] Most of these increases were the result of a build-up of paramilitary forces.

Many paramilitaries are official or semi-official agents of the state, and subject to similar disciplines and constraints as the police or army. Some paramilitaries function as internal security forces and are used to secure regimes, including democratic ones, from internal threats such as military coups and separatist rebellions.

Paramilitaries may also perform other functions for the state, such as riot control, border security, and even the elimination of political opponents. Many paramilitaries have developed deservedly sinister reputations, and some have been responsible for horrific acts of violence in Colombia, Indonesia, the Balkans, Rwanda and elsewhere.

Armies on the cheap

For governments, paramilitaries offer many advantages. They can be recruited rapidly, often from groups that are politically sympathetic to the regime. They are lightly equipped and do not need the complex weapons systems of conventional military forces.

The significance of paramilitaries lies in their institutional location outside of regular military and police commands and ministries. Indeed, there are often no formal lines of authority between state authorities and paramilitary leaders. This relative independence allows national governments to shrug off responsibility for human rights violations perpetrated by paramilitaries.

If paramilitaries grow and their influence expands, they can compete with formal state forces, often seeking to assert exclusive control over areas such as internal se-curity. Where the decentralisation of security is unchecked, as has happened in Colombia with the growth of rightist paramilitaries, the state's monopoly of the use of force can be eroded, posing major problems for governments. In extreme cases paramilitaries may become renegades.

> Paramilitaries often survive long after the regimes that created them have been swept aside.

Their power and independence means that paramilitaries can—and often do—survive long after the regimes that created and sustained them have been swept aside. Unless they are reincorporated into the new regime, they can become a source of violent disruption and pose serious threats to the new political order.

Outsourcing war

One consequence of the end of the Cold War was a sharp downturn in defence spending around the world and equally sharp reductions in military aid to developing countries. Defence ministries—and rebel leaders—began seeking ways to increase efficiencies and reduce costs. The reliance on child soldiers and paramilitary organisations is in part a response to these pressures. So too is the growing drive to 'outsource' war.

Over the past decade more and more states have contracted key military services out to private corporations.

So-called privatised military firms, or PMFs, are the modern corporate variant of the mercenary armies of earlier eras. They sell war-related services rather than weapons (though some are arms traders as well). A small PMF may offer the advice of a few retired generals; a large transnational PMF may lease fighter jets complete with pilots.

Hundreds of PMFs have operated in more than 50 countries, and their global revenue has been estimated to exceed US$100 billion a year.[44]

This booming industry grew rapidly in response to the military downsizing that followed the end of the Cold

War in 1989. Around the world, 6 million military personnel were retired, and a huge market was created in surplus military equipment.[45]

The end of the Cold War also meant that US and Soviet military support to governments or insurgents fighting 'proxy wars' in the developing world largely dried up. This withdrawal of support created a demand for external military expertise that the private sector was quick to accommodate.

The drive towards privatisation

The growth of PMFs reflects a broader global trend toward the privatisation of public assets. Recent decades have been marked by greater outsourcing of government services, including those once perceived as defining the nature of the modern nation state: education, welfare, prisons and defence manufacturing. The privatised military industry has drawn its precedent, model and justification from the wider 'privatisation revolution'.[46]

The most obvious parallel to military outsourcing is found in domestic security services. In some countries, the number of personnel working in private security forces, and the size of their budgets, now greatly exceed those of public law-enforcement agencies.[47]

Privatised military firms are found in every continent except Antarctica,[48] and their growing influence is evident in both developed and developing countries. Saudi Arabia's military, for example, relies heavily on PMFs for operating its air defence system and for training and advising its land, sea and air forces.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo, though far poorer and less strategically important than Saudi Arabia, also depends on a private company, the Israeli corporation Levdan, to help to train and support its military.

PMFs have influenced the process and outcome of numerous recent conflicts, including those in Angola, Croatia, Ethiopia-Eritrea and Sierra Leone.

Even the world's dominant military power has become increasingly reliant on this industry. From 1994 to 2002 the US Defense Department entered into more than 3,000 contracts with US-based PMFs.[49] Halliburton (formerly guided by US Vice-President Cheney) and its subsidiary KBR now provides logistics for every major US military deployment. Halliburton runs, or has run, US military bases in Georgia, Uzbekistan, Haiti, Rwanda, Somalia and the Balkans. Other firms have taken over much of the US military's training and recruiting—including the Reserve Officers Training Corps programs at more than 200 American universities.

> PMFs have influenced the outcome of numerous recent conflicts, including those in Angola, Croatia, Ethiopia-Eritrea and Sierra Leone.

Many Americans might be surprised to learn that they carry PMF shares in their personal portfolios or pension funds, because of the purchase by L-3 (a Fortune 500 company) of Military Professional Resources Inc, a PMF that has trained the militaries of Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia and Nigeria.

Iraq, Ethiopia, West Africa

PMFs played a significant role in the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, which the *Economist* magazine described as 'the first privatised war'.[50] Private military employees handled tasks from feeding and housing US coalition troops to maintaining complex weapons systems, such as the B-2 stealth bomber, F-117 stealth fighter and U-2 reconnaissance aircraft. The ratio of personnel employed by private contractors to US military personnel was roughly 1 to 10, compared to about 1 to 100 during the 1991 Gulf War.

Almost any military service or capability is now available on the global market. PMFs typically delay recruiting military specialists until after they have negotiated a contract with clients, which can range from governments and multinational corporations to humanitarian aid organisations and even suspected terrorist groups. The vast majority of recruited personnel are recently retired soldiers, already trained and ready to work. This means savings for

the PMFs and their customers, since training costs have already been paid.

Once requiring huge investments in training, time and resources, the entire spectrum of conventional forces can be obtained today in a matter of weeks. Barriers to military strength have been dramatically lowered for those who can afford it. Clients with deep enough pockets can write out a cheque for military operations that previously would have been impossible to mount.

In Africa the armies of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) lack certain core military capacities, such as air support and logistics, that are critical to peace-keeping interventions. ECOWAS was able to intervene effectively in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s with help from International Charters Inc. of Oregon, which supplied assault and transport helicopters and former US Special Forces and Soviet Red Army veterans.

Andrew Testa / Panos Pictures

In Afghanistan, road travel between cities often requires armed convoys. Sustained insecurity creates a lucrative market for private military contractors.

Similarly, in 1998 Ethiopia leased from the Russian company Sukhoi an entire fighter wing of the latest Su-27s (roughly equivalent to the US F-15 fighter), along with pilots, technicians, and mission planners. This private air force helped Ethiopia win its war with neighbouring Eritrea.

Types of private military firms

Different PMFs offer different services: each has its own capabilities and efficiencies.

- *Military provider firms* offer direct, tactical military assistance to clients, including servicing front-line combat operations. An example is Executive Outcomes, which in 1995 rescued the Sierra Leone regime from defeat in exchange for diamond concessions.
- *Military consulting firms* are not directly involved in combat. Instead, they employ retired senior officers and non-commissioned officers to provide strategic and training advice and expertise.
- *Military support firms* carry out multi-billion-dollar contracts to provide logistics, intelligence and maintenance services to armed forces, allowing soldiers to focus on combat duties.

There is even a US-based organisation, the International Peace Operations Association, that lobbies for PMFs to take over future UN peacekeeping operations, claiming that the private sector will provide more efficient and effective peacekeepers than often ill-trained and ill-equipped national forces.[51]

Paul Lowe / Panos Pictures

Targeting civilians

Many people believe that international terrorist attacks, genocides and other mass killings of civilians have increased in recent years. In fact genocides have declined remarkably since the end of the Cold War. Data on international terrorism are too unreliable to permit any confident statements about trends. However, the available evidence suggests that overall numbers of terrorist incidents have declined, while high-casualty attacks have increased.

Genocide

The year 2004 marked the 10th anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda, when government-backed militia drawn from the majority Hutu ethnic group systematically slaughtered an estimated 800,000 Rwandans, mainly from the minority Tutsi community.

In 2005 Europe marked the 10th anniversary of another genocide. In July 1995 Bosnian Serb forces rounded up and murdered more than 7,000 Muslim men and boys from the small town of Srebrenica, a UN-designated 'safe haven'.

In neither case did the international community intervene until well after the slaughters had stopped.

Genocide has recently become an issue of profound political concern. But despite Rwanda, Srebrenica and a host of lesser massacres, the 1990s saw a steep worldwide *decline* in the number of mass killings of civilians.
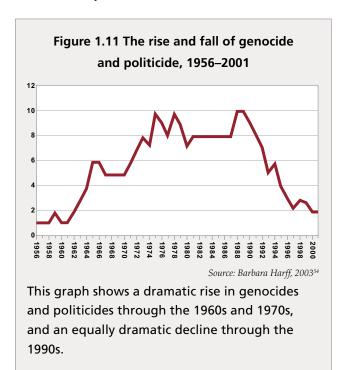
As the debate about Darfur demonstrates, determining exactly what constitutes genocide is often problematic. The UN Genocide Convention defines genocide as 'acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group'. But if strictly applied to Cambodia (1975–79), the UN's definition could mean that only those ethnic Chinese, Vietnamese and Chams who were killed could properly be considered victims of genocide—and not the 1 million ethnic Khmers (Cambodians) who were also slaughtered.[52]

What is politicide?

Some scholars have argued that the UN's definition of genocide is too limited, and have coined the term 'politicide' to describe policies that seek to destroy groups because of their *political* beliefs rather than their religion or ethnicity.[53] US Naval Academy political scientist Professor Barbara Harff defines genocides and politicides as acts perpetrated by governments (or in civil wars, by their opponents) that are 'intended to destroy in whole or in part a communal, political or politicized ethnic group'.

Genocides and politicides often take place during civil wars, as happened in Rwanda in 1994, or in their aftermath, as happened in Cambodia in 1975–79, where most of the mass killings were perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge *after* the fighting had stopped.

Figure 1.11 is drawn from Barbara Harff's genocide-politicide dataset. It plots the number of *events* that are classified as genocides or politicides, not the number of people killed. The trend is very similar to that of armed conflicts: an uneven rise until the end of the Cold War, followed by a sharp decline. But the drop in genocides and politicides in the 1990s is twice as steep as the decline in armed conflicts over the same period.

Figure 1.11 The rise and fall of genocide and politicide, 1956–2001

Source: Barbara Harff, 2003[54]

This graph shows a dramatic rise in genocides and politicides through the 1960s and 1970s, and an equally dramatic decline through the 1990s.

Distinguishing civil wars from genocides and politicides is not easy—except in the small number of cases where the latter take place in times of peace. But while parties in a civil war usually seek to *defeat* their politically defined enemy, politicide only occurs if they attempt to physically *eliminate* that enemy.

The considerable overlap between civil wars and politicides in the Harff dataset has led some researchers to argue that the distinction should be abandoned.

The numbers of genocides and politicides fell dramatically in the 1990s. But was there a similar fall in the number of people killed? No one knows with any certainty because until 2002 there was no systematic collection of data on deaths from genocides and politicides. (Part II of this report reviews the findings of the new Uppsala/Human Security Centre dataset that examines 'one-sided' political violence, a term that encompasses genocide and other slaughters of civilians, in 2002 and 2003.)

Excluding genocides and politicides can have a huge impact on war death tolls. In the case of Rwanda, for example, Uppsala estimates that fewer than 1,000 people were killed in actual combat between government forces and rebels in 1994. By most estimates, 800,000 or more were slaughtered in the genocide.

Democide

Even genocide and politicide fail to encompass all the deaths from what the University of Hawaii's Rudolph Rummel calls 'death by government' or 'democide'.

'Democide' includes not only genocide, politicide and other massacres, but also deaths that arise from government actions (or deliberate failures to act) that kill people indirectly. Deaths from starvation in government-run forced labour camps would, for example, be an unambiguous example of democide.

> The drop in genocides and politicides in the 1990s is twice as steep as the decline in armed conflicts over the same period.

Measuring democides is difficult because it requires knowledge of the *intentions* of political leaders.

The 1932-33 famine in Ukraine, which may have killed 7 million people, is a case in point. There is little doubt that the famine was a direct consequence of Stalin's agricultural policies, but it would only count as democide

if those policies were intended to kill, or were knowingly pursued with a disregard for life.

Rummel estimates that between 1900 and 1987, 170 million people died as a consequence of intended government policies, or a 'knowing and reckless' disregard for life.[55] His democide database only extends to 1987, however, so we cannot determine whether the government-induced death tolls from indirect causes declined in tandem with deaths from combat in the 1990s.

But Rummel's research shows that autocratic regimes have by far the highest rates of 'death by government'. Given this, and given that there has been a steep decline in the number of autocracies since 1987, it would seem reasonable to assume that there has been a parallel decline in democide deaths as well.

Is international terrorism increasing?

So far, this report has shown that the numbers of armed conflicts, crises, battle-deaths, and genocides have all declined in recent years. Can the same be said of international terrorism? In April 2004 a US State Department report argued that this was indeed the case.

This report—*Patterns of Global Terrorism 2003*—claimed that the 2003 total of 190 international terrorist attacks was the lowest since 1969, and that such attacks had declined by 45% between 2001 and 2003 (Figure 1.12).[56] Deputy US Secretary of State Richard Armitage asserted that the findings were 'clear evidence' that the US was prevailing in the war against international terrorism.[57]
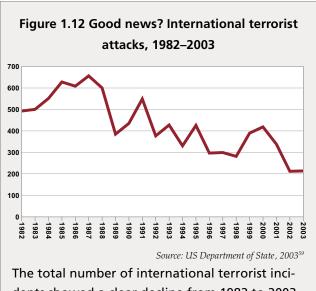
Spinning the figures?

A month later, these claims were strongly contested when the *Washington Post* published a damning critique of *Patterns of Global Terrorism*. 'The only *verifiable* information in the annual reports', wrote Alan B. Krueger of Princeton University and David Laitin of Stanford University, 'indicates that the number of terrorist events has risen each year since 2001, and in 2003 reached its highest level in more than 20 years.'[58]

The Krueger-Laitin criticism placed a huge question mark not only against the claim that the US was 'winning

the war on terror', but also against the whole system of data collection that the State Department had been using to map terrorism trends.

How could the State Department claim that there had been a 45% decrease in terrorist incidents between 2001 and 2003, while Krueger and Laitin—*using exactly the same data*—could assert that there had been a 36% increase?

Figure 1.12 Good news? International terrorist attacks, 1982–2003

Source: US Department of State, 2003[59]

The total number of international terrorist incidents showed a clear decline from 1982 to 2003, according to the US State Department.

The State Department quickly conceded that there were numerous inaccuracies in the original 2003 report. For example, it had inexplicably failed to count terrorist acts that occurred after November 11, 2003—missing a number of major attacks. In June 2004 the State Department released revised statistics. The overall number of terrorist attacks was increased from 190 to 208.

But inclusion of the revised data made little difference to the previous trends and US officials did not respond to Krueger and Laitin's most telling criticism, which concerned the State Department's definition of international terrorism, and the way it subdivides terrorist acts.

The State Department defined international terrorism as premeditated acts of political violence perpetrated by clandestine sub-national groups against

non-combatants and involving the citizens or territory of more than one country. Only attacks on 'civilians and military personnel who at the time of the incident were unarmed and/or not on duty', are judged as terrorist attacks.[60]

This definition excludes acts of terror perpetrated by states. And it also excludes the many car bomb and other attacks against *on-duty* US forces in Iraq since 2003, which President George W. Bush has routinely referred to as 'terrorism'.
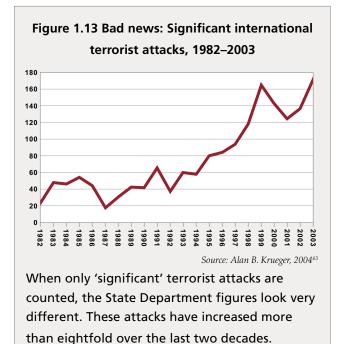
The State Department also divided terrorist attacks into two categories:

- 'Significant' attacks were those that involved loss of life, serious injury or major property damage (more than US$10,000). These incidents were listed individually in the annual terrorism reports.
- 'Non-significant' attacks which are neither defined nor listed.

Krueger and Laitin went back over the State Department's annual reports, and extracted only those attacks that met the State Department's own criteria for 'significance'. Their findings are shown in Figure 1.13. 'The alleged decline in terrorism in 2003', they noted, 'was entirely a result of a decline in non-significant events.'[61]

The authors argued that when the State Department combined 'non-significant' together with 'significant' terror attacks it created a deeply misleading impression that allowed administration officials to claim that the 'war on terror' was being won. This was as true of the revised data published in June 2004 (which is presented in Figure 1.12) as it was of the flawed data released in April.

- The State Department's revised interpretation of its data (Figure 1.12) shows an apparently encouraging trend: the total number of recorded terrorist incidents declined from around 665 in 1987 to 208 in 2003.
- But Krueger and Laitin's re-examination of the data (Figure 1.13) shows a steady if uneven increase: from 17 'significant' terror attacks in 1987, to more than 170 in 2003.

Figure 1.13 Bad news: Significant international terrorist attacks, 1982–2003

Source: Alan B. Krueger, 2004[63]

When only 'significant' terrorist attacks are counted, the State Department figures look very different. These attacks have increased more than eightfold over the last two decades.

Although there have clearly been problems with the way the State Department collected data in the past, what made *Patterns of Global Terrorism* so misleading was the manner in which the data were presented—in particular the failure to separate 'significant' from 'non–significant' attacks. But it is important to note that the trends presented in the State Department's reports are broadly consistent with another much-cited terrorism database, International Terrorism: Attributes of Terrorist Events (ITERATE).

Like *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, ITERATE's data map a downward trend in terrorist incidents of all types since the early 1980s.[62]
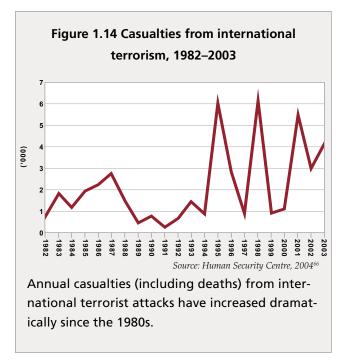
Casualties from international terrorism

Another way to determine the global impact of terrorism is to count not individual attacks but casualties—the numbers killed and wounded in international terrorist attacks each year. Figure 1.14 shows an uneven but clear upward trend from 1982 to 2003.

The peak for casualties in the mid-1980s was associated with a large number of terrorist attacks around the world. The 1995 peak, however, was due mostly

to a single event, the Aum Shinrikyo cult's attack with sarin gas on the Tokyo subway. But the data on the Japanese attack are somwhat misleading. Although there were more than 5000 'casualties' from this attack, only 12 of them were deaths, and most of the others were people who attended hospital for relatively brief check-ups.

The peak in 1998 was due primarily to the two terror bombings of US embassies in East Africa; the peak in 2001 was due to the September 11 World Trade Center attack, in which most of the casualties were deaths.

Figure 1.14 Casualties from international terrorism, 1982–2003

('000)

Source: Human Security Centre, 2004[66]

Annual casualties (including deaths) from international terrorist attacks have increased dramatically since the 1980s.

After the 2001 spike associated with September 11, the casualty total dipped in 2002, but even this relatively low point is higher than the highest point in the 1980s. In 2003 casualty numbers again increased.[64]

A new upsurge of international terrorism?

In April 2005 the State Department announced that *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2004*, due for release at the end of the month, would not include any quantitative data on terrorist incidents and that the task of compiling statistics would be taken over by the newly created National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC).[65]

At the end of April, responding to criticism that the Bush Administration was hiding information that showed the US was losing the war on terrorism, the NCTC released the new data. It revealed a huge increase in 'significant' international terror attacks in 2004 compared with 2003—from 175 to 651. The casualty toll, at nearly 9000, was double that of 2003.[67]

South Asia experienced most of the attacks (327), followed by the Middle East (270), with just 54 attacks in the rest of the world. Most of the South Asian attacks were associated with the conflict over Kashmir, while most of the Middle East attacks taking place in Iraq.[68]

Administration officials were quick to argue that no conclusions should be drawn from the greatly increased totals for 2004, since the NCTC had made much greater efforts to collect data than the State Department. Administration critics disagreed, arguing that the threefold increase in 'significant' attacks in 2004 compared with 2003 could not be explained simply by better reporting.

In October 2003, in a secret memo to senior Administration officials, US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld complained that, 'we lack metrics to know if we are winning or losing the global war on terror.'[69] Given the billions of dollars being spent by the US on the war against terrorism this was a remarkable admission. But there is now little doubt that the new data, taken with the earlier trend data on 'significant' terrorist attacks, indicate that the 'war on terror' is far from being won.

The indirect effects of terrorism

Far more people can die from the *indirect* consequences of major terror attacks than from the attacks themselves. According to the World Bank, the slowdown in the world economy that followed the September 11 terror attacks on the US in 2001 likely led to the deaths of 'tens of thousands' of children under the age of five.[70]

Anti-terrorist measures can also have unintended—and lethal—consequences. For example, in August 1998 the US launched a missile assault that destroyed the Shifa pharmaceutical factory in Sudan. The Clinton administration justified the attack on the grounds that the factory

was producing precursors for chemical weapons. (No evidence has yet been published to demonstrate the truth of this charge.)

The strike was launched at night when no workers were on duty, so the number of direct casualties was minimal. But because the Shifa plant had been producing 50% of Sudan's drugs—medicines to treat malaria, tuberculosis and other endemic diseases in that desperately poor and conflict-ridden country—the attack caused a scarcity of vital medical supplies that likely caused thousands of Sudanese deaths.

Terrorists and weapons of mass destruction

Just how great a threat will international terrorism pose in the future? Worst-case scenarios see terrorists using nuclear or biological weapons to kill millions of people. William Perry, former US Secretary of Defense, has argued that there is an even chance of a nuclear terror strike within this decade. 'We're racing toward unprecedented catastrophe', he warned.[71]

> Fears that terrorists could acquire an 'off-the-shelf' nuclear weapon have yet to be realized.

While not impossible in the long term, such an event appears unlikely in the short and medium term, not because terrorists would be unwilling to use nuclear weapons, but because they lack the technological capacity to build them. Moreover fears that terrorists could acquire an 'off-the-shelf' nuclear weapon have yet to be realised.

In the late 1990s there were a number of claims, notably by General Alexander Lebed, former Secretary of the Russian Security Council, to the effect that Russia could not account for several of its 'suitcase bombs'.[72] In the hands of terrorists, these portable weapons would obviously pose a major threat. Without maintenance, however, small nuclear devices rapidly lose their effectiveness.[73]

More recently, David Albright, president of the Institute for Science and International Security in Washington DC, has estimated that there is a 10% to 40% chance that terrorists will build and detonate a 'dirty bomb' within the next 5 to 10 years.[74]

A dirty bomb is a conventional explosive device used to scatter radioactive material. But while such radiological weapons are relatively simple to make and use, and would generate considerable popular alarm, the damage they cause is minimal compared with a nuclear weapon.

Albright's estimates, like those of William Perry, are little more than educated guesses. But, at the very least, they suggest reasons for concern.

Biological weapons in terrorist hands may present the greatest potential threat to the greatest number of people in the short to medium term. Anthrax spores sprayed from an aircraft over a major city could kill hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people. But manufacturing and effectively dispersing weapons-grade biological agents is very difficult.

The Aum Shinrikyo cult in Japan launched at least nine attacks with biological agents, including anthrax, in the 1990s to absolutely no effect.[75] Despite ample resources, cult members failed to get access to agents of sufficient virulence, and lacked the technology or expertise to create the aerosols needed to disperse the agents effectively.

Terrorist assaults using even the most basic chemical and biological agents are, in fact, very rare. Worldwide there were just 27 such attacks reported in 1999, 49 in 2000, 25 in 2001, and 23 in 2002.[76] None of the agents deployed was capable of causing mass casualties, and the overwhelming majority were simple poisonous chemicals such as arsenic and chlorine. New developments in bio-technology may, however, lead to 'designer' biological weapons that would be easier for terrorists to acquire and use, and would have a far more devastating impact.

For many terrorist organisations, a car or truck bomb made out of fertiliser (usually ammonium nitrate) and diesel fuel remains the weapon of choice for mass-casualty attacks. The explosive ingredients are relatively easy to obtain and the bombs themselves are simple to make.

Fertiliser-diesel bombs were used in the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing (168 dead), the 1998 Real IRA attack in Omagh, Northern Ireland (29 dead), the 2002 Bali bombing (202 dead), and the November 2003 attacks in Turkey (53 dead).[77]

A small cargo ship loaded with fertiliser-diesel explosive and detonated in the port of a major city could kill hundreds, perhaps thousands.

What about domestic terrorism?

While most attention in the West focuses on *international* terrorism, *domestic* terrorism is far more deadly. There is widespread agreement that many more people die from domestic than international terrorism. But the highest numbers of domestic terrorist attacks take place in the context of civil wars where they are sometimes categorised as war crimes and not as terrorist attacks.

> A small cargo ship loaded with fertilizer-diesel explosive and detonated in the port of a major city could kill thousands.

The issue is further complicated because what insurgents describe as legitimate combat, governments typically see as terrorism. One man's terrorist—as a well-worn cliché puts it—is another man's freedom fighter. That the UN has consistently failed to agree on how terrorism should be defined underscores just how contested the term is. Without an agreed definition of terrorism, measurement is impossible.

Domestic terrorist groups are more likely to be found in large countries than small and—perhaps surprising to many—more often in democracies than in authoritarian states.[78] A 1999 FBI report revealed that 239 of the 327 terrorist attacks in the United States

between 1980 and 1999 were perpetrated by domestic groups, most of them ideologically aligned with the extreme right.[79] Almost all these organisations were small—sometimes involving only a handful of individuals—and ineffectual.

It is sometimes claimed that democracy is to terrorism what oxygen is to life—that the very freedoms that characterise democratic states facilitate terrorist survival. This may be true, but surviving is very different from winning. No terrorist organisation has come close to overthrowing a democratic state.

Why international terrorism matters

In terms of numbers killed, international terrorism poses far less of a threat than do other forms of political violence or violent crime, but it remains a critically important human security issue for several reasons:

- The attacks of September 11, 2001, led to the most radical shift in Western security policy since the end of the Cold War.
- The 'war on terror' provided part of the rationale for two major conventional wars—in Afghanistan and Iraq.
- The anti-terror campaign has been associated with an extraordinarily high level of anti-Western sentiment in much of the Muslim world.[80]
- The number of 'significant' international terrorist attacks appears to have increased dramatically in 2004.
- The 'war on terror' has major implications for human security.

Finally, the global economic impact of a mass-casualty terror attack with weapons of mass destruction could push tens of millions of already poor people deeper into poverty, greatly increasing death rates from malnutrition and disease.

International terrorism is a human security issue for poor countries as well as rich.