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PART I

THE CHANGING FACE OF GLOBAL VIOLENCE

Part I of this report describes global and regional trends in contemporary political violence around the world. Examining the period since the end of World War II, it focuses on armed conflicts, genocides, and international terrorism. In the absence of official data it draws on research from universities, think tanks and NGOs. Its findings challenge conventional wisdom.

PART I

THE CHANGING FACE OF GLOBAL VIOLENCE

Introduction

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Introduction

The opening words of the United Nations charter signed in 1945 contained a pledge 'to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war'.

In the past decade and a half, the UN has been more successful in reaching this goal than many critics allow. Since the end of the Cold War, armed conflicts around the world have declined dramatically. But the steep drop in the number of wars and international crises, the even steeper decline in the number of genocides and other mass slaughters, and the longer-term decline in battle-death rates, have passed largely unnoticed by policymakers, the media and the public alike.

Part I of this report reviews trends in armed conflicts, battle-deaths, and genocides in the post–World War II era, and the dramatic changes in the nature of warfare and military organisation that have accompanied these trends. It also examines changing patterns in international terrorist attacks and core human rights violations, and concludes with a review of public opinion poll findings on security fears around the world.

Part I begins with an analysis of the reasons why so few people realise that there has been a radical decline, not just in the numbers of wars, but in other assaults on human security as well. The absence of official statistics on global security trends provides a major part of the explanation.

The review of armed conflict trends that follows is based on data from Uppsala University's Conflict Data Program and the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO). It tracks the post–World War II rise in the number of armed conflicts and the subsequent decline following the end of the Cold War. The data also show that the overwhelming majority of today's armed conflicts are fought within, not between, states and that most take place in the poorest parts of the world.

> The steep drop in the number of wars has passed largely unnoticed by policymakers, the media and the public alike.

Civil war is extraordinarily rare in the industrialised world, but the major powers have been involved in a large number of armed conflicts overseas since World War II—almost all in the developing world. The UK, France and the

US have the dubious distinction of having fought more international wars since World War II than any other countries.

Warfare in the 21st century is far less deadly than it was half a century ago. A new dataset created by Bethany Lacina and Nils Petter Gleditsch reveals that the steep but uneven decline in battle-deaths began at the beginning of the 1950s.

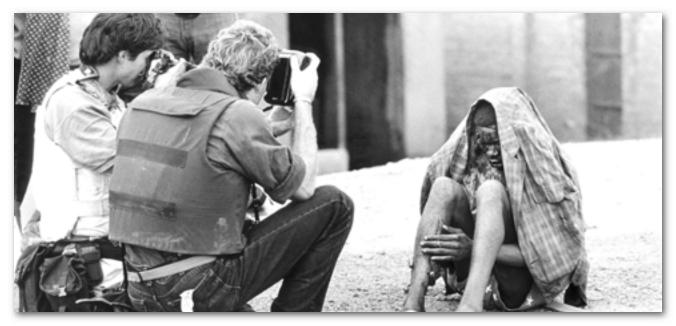> Genocides increased steadily from the 1960s until the 1980s, but have since declined dramatically.

Why have wars become so dramatically less deadly? The key lies in the changing nature of warfare: from the huge, externally supported, conventional wars of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, to today's predominantly low-intensity conflicts. The discussion of the profound changes in the character of war draws on research by Peter W. Singer and Sunil Dasgupta. These changes include a greatly increased reliance on child soldiers, and a growth in paramilitary organisations and private military firms.

Political violence encompasses more than simply warfare. It also includes genocide and international terrorism. A comprehensive dataset created by Barbara Harff shows that genocides and other cases of mass murder increased steadily in number from the 1960s until the end of the 1980s, but have since declined dramatically, notwithstanding the atrocities in Rwanda and the Balkans.

The trend in international terrorist attacks is much less clear. Several datasets suggest that the number of terrorist attacks of all kinds has declined over the past 20 years, but the most recent data from the US government indicate a significant increase in both the number of attacks and casualties in 2004.

Part I concludes with an examination of how people around the world perceive security both at the international level and at home. It includes an analysis by Don Hubert of the importance of determining popular perceptions of security and draws on recent global opinion surveys, including a major poll commissioned especially for this report.

The survey data reveal that people are more worried by violent crime than by warfare, and more scared by terrorism than its limited incidence warrants. But these fears can drive political responses.

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Getting it wrong about war trends

Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a dramatic and sustained decline in the number of armed conflicts. And an uneven but equally dramatic decline in battle-deaths has been under way for more than half a century. Yet these facts remain largely unknown, in part because there are no reliable, official global statistics.

Most people believe that the number of armed conflicts has risen over the past decade, not that it has declined radically. They are wrong.

This misperception is not restricted to the media or the general public. A surprising number of government officials and scholars are also unaware of the decline. Some, indeed, believe that political violence has increased.[1]

In fact, in terms of battle-deaths, the 1990s was the least violent decade since the end of World War II. By the beginning of the 21st century, the probability of any country being embroiled in an armed conflict was lower than at any time since the early 1950s.

Why has this dramatic and sustained global decline in the number and deadliness of armed conflicts received so little attention? There are several reasons:

- First, the world's media pay more attention to new eruptions of political violence than to wars that end quietly. Between 1989 and 2002, some 100 armed conflicts came to an end.[2] Very few of these endings were widely reported.
- Second, new conflicts broke out in a number of post-communist states in the 1990s, especially in the Balkans and the Caucasus. They attracted widespread media attention because they were associated with the dramatic collapse of the Soviet Union, and because the fighting took place on the borders of Western Europe. Other conflicts—Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan—involved the United States, a fact that alone ensured massive coverage by the US-dominated global media. The media focused on the new wars—largely ignoring those that were ending.
- Third, and most important, *official* statistics on global armed conflict trends do not exist.

> Why has this dramatic and sustained decline in the number and deadliness of armed conflicts received so little attention?

Why no official data?

The contrast with data collection and analysis on other major global issues could hardly be greater. Every year, tens of thousands of government officials around the world collect economic, health, education, and environmental data that are forwarded for collation and analysis to the relevant international organisations.

Nationally, regionally, and globally, these collated data provide information that help governments and international organisations formulate and evaluate policy.[3] It would be inconceivable for the World Bank to make broad policy recommendations that were not backed by official cross-national trend data. Yet the UN, the international organisation charged with protecting and enhancing global security, has no comparable data on armed conflict to help it formulate and evaluate its security policies.

A huge collaborative project involving the UN, the World Bank, and other international organisations, with governments from around the world, is currently collating data to measure progress toward meeting the Millennium Development Goals—which include the target of halving global poverty by 2015. But no data is being collected on armed conflicts—even though war is a major driver of poverty in many parts of the world.

The political constraints

Why are there no official datasets on armed conflicts, genocides or core human rights abuse? The short answer is politics (See: 'Why there are no official statistics on political violence').

> The UN has no data on armed conflict to help it formulate and evaluate its security policies.

In the last decade, 95% of armed conflicts have taken place within states, not between them. And few governments are anxious to divulge details of violent conflicts within their own borders. Intent on denying their violent political adversaries any legitimacy, many governments label them as criminals—and criminal violence is not warfare, of course. Political leaders invoke national security and sovereignty to justify non-disclosure. But the real cause of their reluctance is often a desire to avoid domestic and external criticism.

> Policymakers have missed the dramatic downturn in political violence.

The existing unofficial datasets on war and genocide are compiled by a handful of modestly-funded research institutes and individual scholars. Only a fraction of them—in Sweden, Germany, Canada, and the United States—update and publish their data regularly.

Lacking outreach budgets or official status, these research institutes are unable to attract much attention to their findings. The fact that they mostly write in the technical language of the social sciences and publish in little-read scholarly journals, does little to help them gain a wider audience.

For all these reasons, it is not surprising that so many policymakers, focused of necessity on the crises of the day, should have missed the dramatic downturn in political violence described in this report. The media and the public are even less well informed.

What to measure?

Measuring armed conflict is a complex and often contested business. Definitions of what constitutes a conflict vary widely, as do data collection methods, accuracy and coding rules. Few of the existing datasets are kept up-to-date. Many are one-offs, created for a specific project and then allowed to languish; none has any official status.

Some data projects count only wars: usually defined as high-intensity conflicts with more than 1,000 battle-related deaths per year. The difficulty with this approach, long used by the influential Correlates of War (COW) project to count civil wars, is that some notable armed conflicts such as that

WHY THERE ARE NO OFFICIAL STATISTICS ON POLITICAL VIOLENCE

International organisations collect statistics from governments on health, education, development and the environment. But there are no official data on armed conflicts or human rights abuse.

It is a little known fact that no international organisation collects data on regional or global political violence trends. The contrast with the international efforts now being made to track global progress toward development and ecological sustainability goals could not be greater.

Five years ago, at the United Nations Millennium Summit, world leaders committed themselves to achieving eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.[4] The ambitious targets included the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger and the achievement of universal primary education.

In order to track global, regional and national progress towards the MDGs, a huge international monitoring effort has been created that draws on the expertise of the UN and its many agencies, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. But no effort was made to track the incidence and severity of armed conflicts, even though war clearly threatens the achievement of the MDGs.

In fact, the threat that armed conflicts poses to the MDGs was completely ignored in the UN's Millennium Declaration, despite the fact (1) that reducing the incidence and costs of armed conflict is clearly a development as well as a security priority, (2) that war, in the words of the World Bank, is 'development in reverse', and (3) that the average civil war costs some $54 billion.[5]

Why didn't the international community also set numerical targets for major reductions in political violence along with the targets for poverty reduction in 2000? Member states of the UN cannot agree on what constitutes terrorism, human rights abuse or even armed conflict. In many parts of the world, the claim that 'one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter' still resonates. And defining armed conflict can be just as controversial. Some governments argue that violent political opposition to their rule is simply criminal violence.

It is impossible to *count* events if there is no agreement on how to *define* them. It is also impossible to create official conflict datasets without the cooperation of governments. And governments, particularly in the developing world, have made it clear that such cooperation will not be forthcoming. Various proposals to create a professional in-house analytic and data collection capacity in the UN Secretariat that would focus on security issues have been repeatedly blocked by member states in the General Assembly.

The World Bank, the World Health Organization and other international agencies can draw on a wealth of official data to track global and regional trends, formulate evidence-based policies and evaluate their outcomes. It is ironic that the United Nations, the international organisation charged with preventing 'the scourge of war', has no comparable data to draw on.

in Northern Ireland never get counted at all because they fail to reach the 1,000-deaths-a-year threshold. Moreover, if the number of deaths in an ongoing civil war dips below 1,000 a year, the conflict ceases to exist according to the COW methodology. If a year later the number of deaths climbs back above the 1,000 threshold, a new conflict is recorded when in fact the original conflict never ended.

Other projects measure different *types* of political violence. The Political Instability Task Force (formerly called the State Failure Task Force), for example, divides political violence into revolutionary wars, ethnic conflicts and genocides.

Individual researchers often modify existing datasets to suit their current research purposes—or because they disagree with the coding rules of the original data compilers. There may well be good reasons for doing this, but the consequence is that there is great disparity between the different datasets. Policymakers have good reason to feel confused.

Simply counting the number of conflicts is relatively straightforward. It is generally not that difficult to establish whether a threshold number of battle-related deaths has been crossed. Arriving at accurate figures of total battle-related deaths is far more difficult for several reasons.

First, those who collate battle-death data can only record those events that are reported—and many are not. This is particularly true in conflicts such as Chechnya, where journalists are denied access to the war zone. The result is that death rates in some conflicts will be considerably under-reported. Such problems are generally more serious in developing countries than in developed ones, and in authoritarian states as opposed to democracies.

Second, government and rebel forces often exaggerate the death tolls they claim to have inflicted on their adversaries, creating the possibility of over-counting.

Third, different counting methods can produce quite different estimates of death tolls. These issues are discussed in more detail in Part II of this report.

One way to minimise these problems—they can never be completely resolved—is to collect as many different accounts of battle fatalities as possible. Technology can help here. Researchers at Uppsala University's Conflict Data Program, for example, cull conflict data from many sources, including the 9,000 news outlets in the electronic Factiva news database. Factiva is scanned automatically, and the violent incidents that are tagged are then reviewed by the researchers, coded and entered into the database.

Defining armed conflict

One of the primary sources of the *Human Security Report*'s armed conflict data is the dataset created jointly by the Uppsala University's Conflict Data Program and the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO). The main Uppsala/PRIO dataset now covers the entire period from 1946 to 2003.

The Uppsala/PRIO dataset was selected for a number of reasons.

- Unlike other datasets, it is updated annually.
- It is widely used within the research community.
- It is becoming increasingly recognised in the policy community.
- It relies on more sources than other data collection projects.

- Its definitions are precise and coding of conflict events can be checked by other researchers. (This is not the case in some conflict datasets.)
- With the new data commissioned for the Human Security Report (see Part II) the Uppsala/PRIO dataset is the most comprehensive single source of information on contemporary global political violence.

The Uppsala/PRIO dataset has traditionally counted only 'state-based' conflicts: armed disputes in which control over government and/or territory is contested, in which at least one of the warring parties is a state, and which result in at least 25 battle-related deaths in a year.[6] The category 'battle-related deaths' includes not only combatants but also civilians caught in the crossfire. The data on most conflicts do not permit distinctions between civilian and combatant deaths to be made consistently.

Conflicts are also categorised according to their intensity. 'Conflicts' have at least 25 battle-related deaths per year; 'wars' at least 1,000 battle-related deaths per year.

Finally, the Uppsala/PRIO dataset divides conflicts into four types. The two primary categories—*interstate* and *intrastate* (civil)—are self-explanatory.

The third type is *extrastate,* a conflict between a state and a non-state group outside of the state's own territory. This definition applies primarily to wars fought to gain independence from colonial rule.

The last category used by Uppsala/PRIO is *internationalized internal conflict.* This type of conflict is essentially an intrastate conflict in which the government, the opposition, or both, receive military support from another government or governments, and where the foreign troops actively participate in the conflict.[7] The war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in which a number of foreign military forces were operating within the country, is a recent example. Internationalized internal disputes rarely make up much more than 10% of the total number of conflicts worldwide.

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New data, new questions

The definition of armed conflict that Uppsala and PRIO have traditionally used excludes conflicts waged exclusively between non-state actors—such as violent clashes between warlords or intercommunal conflicts between religious or ethnic groups. Uppsala calls these 'non-state conflicts'.

> There were more non-state conflicts in both 2002 and 2003 than state-based conflicts—though the non-state conflicts involved considerably fewer casualties.

Since it was unclear how many of these conflicts were taking place, or how deadly they were, the Human Security Centre commissioned Uppsala to collect data on non-state conflicts for 2002 and 2003. To be counted as a non-state conflict, fighting between non-state actors had to cause at least 25 battle-related deaths within a year.

The new data proved instructive. There were actually more non-state conflicts in both 2002 and 2003 than state-based conflicts—though the non-state conflicts involved considerably fewer fatalities.

The fact that the Uppsala/PRIO dataset had never previously recorded non-state conflicts raised an obvious question: If a major category of political violence had not been counted before, how could anyone be sure that armed conflicts overall had indeed declined during the 1990s? This question is addressed in Part II of this report, where the findings of the new Uppsala/Human Security Centre dataset are presented.

Uppsala's traditional definition of conflict also excluded genocides and massacres—what Uppsala calls 'one-sided violence'. However, the Uppsala/Human Security Centre dataset includes data on the number of cases of one-sided violence in 2002 and 2003 as well as the numbers killed.

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