Sven Torfinn / Panos Pictures

A new global dataset

Commissioned by the Human Security Centre, and published here for the first time, this dataset provides the most comprehensive picture yet of the incidence, scope and intensity of political violence around the world.

Counting wars is a complex and often contested business. Most datasets that measure the incidence of armed conflict, including the 1946 to 2003 Uppsala/PRIO dataset that provided much of the data for Part I of this report, only count the number of 'state-based' conflicts—those in which a government is one of the warring parties.

> One-sided violence is distinguished from armed conflict because it involves the slaughter of defenceless civilians rather than combat.

But relying solely on counts of state-based conflicts means ignoring the very large number of conflicts in which a government is *not* involved—intercommunal conflicts between ethnic and religious groups, or fights between rival warlords, for example. The Uppsala Conflict Data Program describes these as 'non-state' conflicts.

Similarly, most armed conflict datasets don't count cases of what Uppsala calls 'one-sided' violence—the unopposed killing of 25 or more civilians during a calendar year. This category is distinguished from armed conflict because it involves the slaughter of defenceless civilians rather than combat.

To gain a more comprehensive picture of the incidence and intensity of political violence around the world, the Human Security Centre commissioned the Uppsala Conflict Data Program to collect data on the two previously uncounted categories, *as well as* on the number of deaths associated with the three types of political violence.

Although the new dataset thus far only covers two years, it has already produced some surprising findings. Some examples:

- *All* categories of political violence declined between 2002 and 2003.
- There were more non-state conflicts than state-based conflicts in both 2002 and 2003.
- Non-state conflicts killed two to five times fewer people on average than did state-based conflicts. The reported deaths from one-sided violence were lower still.

- In 2003 less than 5% of all armed conflicts were fought between states.
- In 2003 sub-Saharan Africa experienced more cases of political violence of all types than any other region.

Figure 2.1 records a modest worldwide decline (10%) in cases of political violence of all types (armed conflicts and one-sided violence) between 2002 and 2003.

Regionally, Africa and then Asia experienced the greatest number of cases of political violence. But while Asia showed a small increase (4%) from 2002 to 2003, there was a significant decrease (21%) in Africa.

In 2002 only one of the 66 armed conflicts (that between India and Pakistan) was coded as an interstate conflict.[3] In 2003 two of the 59 ongoing armed conflicts were coded as interstate conflicts (the fighting between India and Pakistan and the US-led invasion of Iraq).

Figure 2.2 tells us about the number of *countries* in each region that suffered from political violence in 2002 and 2003. Since some countries experience several conflicts

WHAT'S NEW ABOUT THE UPPSALA/HUMAN SECURITY CENTRE DATASET?

The Uppsala/Human Security Centre dataset covers the three main categories of political violence. This report publishes the new data for 2002 and 2003.[4] The *Human Security Report 2006* will publish the data for 2004 and 2005.

Category of political violence[5]

State-based armed conflicts

Conflicts between states or between a state and a non-state actor, with at least 25 battle-related deaths per year. Includes all interstate wars and those civil wars where the state is a warring party. Updated data on the number of state-based armed conflicts compiled by the Uppsala Data Program are published each year in the *Journal of Peace Research* and the *SIPRI Yearbook.*

What's new? Data on the number of reported battle-related deaths for each conflict and the death rate (fatalities per 100,000 population) for each country experiencing conflict.

Non-state armed conflicts

Conflicts in which none of the warring parties is a government and which incur at least 25 battle-related deaths per year.

What's new? Data on the number and location of non-state conflicts and the numbers killed have never before been systematically collected and published annually.

One-sided violence

The deliberate unopposed slaughter of at least 25 civilians in one year by a government or political group. Includes genocides, politicides and other violent assaults on civilians.

What's new? Barbara Harff's dataset (see Part I) counts genocides and politicides and the death tolls associated with them. However, the one-sided violence considered in the new dataset is a broader category that goes beyond genocide and politicide.

What's counted?

- **The number of cases of political violence (armed conflicts plus cases of one-sided violence).**
- **The number of countries experiencing political violence.**
- **The number of reported deaths from political violence.**
- **The number of reported deaths per 100,000 population.**

Figure 2.1 Cases of armed conflict and one-sided violence, 2002–2003

	State-based			Non-state			One-sided			Total: All types		
	2002	2003	Change	2002	2003	Change	2002	2003	Change	2002	2003	Change
Africa	15	10	-5	26	25	-1	17	11	-6	58	46	-12
Americas	2	1	-1	2	2	0	2	1	-1	6	4	-2
Asia	12	14	+2	5	2	-3	11	13	+2	28	29	+1
Europe	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	2	0
Middle East	2	3	+1	1	1	0	2	4	+2	5	8	+3
Total	32	29	-3	34	30	-4	33	30	-3	99	89	-10

Source: Uppsala/Human Security Centre dataset, 2005[6]

Between 2002 and 2003 there was a small decline in cases of political violence around the world.

Figure 2.2 Number of countries experiencing political violence, 2002–2003

	State-based			Non-state			One-sided			Total: All types		
	2002	2003	Change	2002	2003	Change	2002	2003	Change	2002	2003	Change
Africa	13	9	-4	8	7	-1	11	9	-2	18	13	-5
Americas	2	1	-1	2	2	0	1	1	0	3	2	-1
Asia	6	8	+2	3	1	-2	5	5	0	7	9	+2
Europe	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0
Middle East	2	3	+1	1	1	0	1	4	+3	3	4	+1
Total	24	22	-2	14	11	-3	19	20	+1	32	29	-3

Source: Uppsala/Human Security Centre dataset, 2005

Worldwide there was a small decline in the number of countries experiencing political violence in 2003.

in a single year, the figures are significantly lower than in Figure 2.1.

Africa was the only region to show a marked year-on-year change. Between 2002 and 2003 Africa became significantly more secure, with 28% fewer countries being affected by political violence.

As Figure 2.3 indicates, the seven countries that had the highest number of conflicts and cases of one-sided violence in 2002 were India (10), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (9), Somalia (8), Nigeria (7), Ethiopia (6) and Sudan and Burma (Myanmar) (with 5 each).

In 2003 India again suffered the highest number of armed conflicts and cases of one-sided violence (15), followed by Uganda (7), the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ethiopia (with 6 each), and Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan (with 5 each).

Has the number of conflicts really declined?

The armed conflict statistics that Uppsala/PRIO update each year, and that are published in the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's *SIPRI Yearbook* and the *Journal of Peace Research,* have become a valued and trusted source of information on the trends in armed conflict around

Figure 2.3 Cases of armed conflict and one-sided violence by country, 2002–2003[7]

	State-based		Non-state		One-sided		Total	
	2002	2003	2002	2003	2002	2003	2002	2003
Africa								
Algeria	1	1	0	0	1	1	2	2
Angola	2	0	0	0	1	0	3	0
Burundi	1	1	0	1	3	2	4	4
CAR	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Chad	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Congo-Brazzaville	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	0
DRC	0	0	5	4	4	2	9	6
Eritrea	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Ethiopia	2	1	3	4	1	1	6	6
Ghana	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Côte d'Ivoire	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	1
Liberia	1	1	0	0	1	1	2	2
Madagascar	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Morocco	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Nigeria	0	0	6	4	1	1	7	5
Rwanda	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Senegal	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1
Somalia	1	0	7	5	0	0	8	5
Sudan	1	2	2	2	2	1	5	5
Uganda	1	1	0	5	1	1	2	7
Americas								
Colombia	1	1	1	1	2	1	4	3
Ecuador	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Mexico	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Asia								
Afghanistan	1	1	2	2	0	0	3	3
India	6	7	1	0	3	8	10	15
Indonesia	1	1	0	0	3	2	4	3
Myanmar (Burma)	2	1	2	0	1	0	5	1
Nepal	1	1	0	0	2	0	3	1
Pakistan	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	2
Philippines	2	2	0	0	2	1	4	3
Sri Lanka	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Thailand	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Europe								
Russia	1	1	0	0	1	1	2	2
Middle East								
Iraq	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	2
Israel and the Palestinian Territories	1	1	0	0	2	2	3	3
Saudi Arabia	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Turkey	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	2

Source: Uppsala/Human Security Centre dataset, 2005

Individual country counts of state-based conflicts, non-state conflicts and cases of one-sided violence provide a detailed picture of the location of political violence around the world.

the world. Yet few, if any, non-specialists will have been aware that a whole category of conflict was excluded from these publications.

The single most important finding from the new Uppsala/Human Security Centre dataset is that in 2002 and 2003 there were more non-state conflicts than there were state-based conflicts.

- Of the 66 armed conflicts in 2002, 34 (52%) were non-state conflicts, and 32 (49%) were state-based.
- Of the 59 armed conflicts in 2003, 30 (51%) were non-state conflicts, and 29 (49%) were state-based.

This raises an important question about one of the central claims made in Part I of this report—namely, that the number of armed conflicts has declined quite dramatically in the past dozen years. That claim was based on trends revealed in the Uppsala/PRIO dataset on state-based conflicts.

How can we be sure that there has been a major decline in *all* armed conflicts since the end of the Cold War if the Uppsala/PRIO dataset counts only state-based conflicts?

> In 2002 and 2003 there were more non-state conflicts than there were state-based conflicts.

It is at least theoretically possible that non-state conflicts increased more than state-based conflicts decreased during this period. If this were true, there would have been a net *increase,* not decrease, in armed conflicts of all types over the past decade, and the central thesis of this report could not be supported.

But we *can* be confident that non-state conflicts declined in the post–Cold War era. Indeed, the decline may well be steeper than the drop in state-based conflicts. Why?

First, there are the findings of the Minorities at Risk Project at the University of Maryland on violence between communal groups from 1990 to 1998. Project director Ted Robert Gurr concluded that during this period 'serious intercommunal conflict [i.e., non-state conflict] followed the same rise-and-fall path of violent ethnic challenges to states [i.e., state-based conflict]'. The intercommunal conflicts examined in Gurr's study declined by more than 50% between 1993 and 1998.[8]

Second, Monty G. Marshall of the Center for International Development and Conflict Management has created a dataset that counts the number of countries experiencing all forms of warfare—including non-state conflict—each year from 1946 to 2004.[9] Marshall's data reveal an even steeper decline since the end of the Cold War than the Uppsala/PRIO state-based conflict dataset.[10]

Together, the studies by Gurr and Marshall indicate that non-state conflicts have followed the same downward trend in the post–Cold War years as state-based conflicts—and that the decline in non-state conflict has likely been greater than the decline in state-based conflict. It follows that the number of armed conflicts of all types has declined.

Can we trust the death toll data?

In addition to tracking the number of armed conflicts and cases of one-sided violence around the world, the Uppsala/Human Security Centre dataset provides a count of reported, verifiable and codable deaths from political violence in every country each year.

The dataset also records whether the deaths were caused by governments or non-state armed groups, and whether the conflict was about the struggle for control of the government or over territory.[11]

Estimating the number of armed conflicts or cases of one-sided violence is relatively easy. Determining the numbers killed by political violence is both more difficult and requires more resources.

Once it was possible to count bodies on the battlefield when an engagement was over. Not any more. The typical conflict today is spread over huge areas and many months—sometimes years. Fighting, particularly between non-state actors, often takes place in remote areas.

Many of the estimates of war deaths that get publicised in the media and used by governments, NGOs and even UN agencies are simply guesses—and are often greatly exaggerated.

In 1995, for example, there were widely publicised claims that some 200,000 people had been killed in the fighting in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This figure was not based on any serious assessment of the evidence and was subsequently found to be hugely inflated.[12]

Many of the estimates of war deaths that get publicised in the media and used by governments, NGOs and even UN agencies are simply guesses.

Uppsala's approach to data collection is cautious, conservative and subject to stringent coding rules that inevitably lead to a degree of under-counting. However, Uppsala's methodology is currently the only one that can produce annual national, regional and global trend data for all three categories of political violence and publish them in a timely manner.

Three approaches to estimating war deaths

A number of different methodologies are currently used to measure war deaths in a systematic manner. Each of the following approaches has advantages and disadvantages—and each serves different analytic and policy purposes.

Report-based methodologies

The Uppsala/Human Security Centre and Correlates of War datasets and the International Institute of Strategic Studies' Armed Conflict Database[13] all rely on *reports* of deaths from political violence.

In Uppsala's case, the relevant information is culled electronically from the huge Factiva news database using purpose-built automated software.[14] The selected data are then reviewed and coded. This approach, as noted above, has a systematic bias toward under-counting. There are two main reasons for this.

First, some deaths simply never get reported. This is particularly true of conflicts where the media are excluded, such as in Chechnya. Deaths that are not reported cannot be recorded.

Second, Uppsala's stringent coding rules require:

- That there be a minimum of 25 deaths per year.
- That the cause of death be identified as political rather than criminal violence.
- That the group responsible for the deaths be reliably identified.

The case of Iraq clearly shows the effect this last requirement can have on battle-related death counts.

Most of the killings that have taken place during the post-war insurgency in Iraq have been carried out by unidentified perpetrators and cannot, therefore, be coded. This means that thousands of instances of what are very likely acts of political violence have gone unrecorded.

The coding difficulties in the Iraq case are unusual, but they highlight the need to record a new category of deaths—those that are likely due to political violence but are not codable for lack of sufficient information. This category will be included in future *Human Security Reports.*

Epidemiological surveys

Epidemiological surveys in wartorn countries are mostly undertaken to provide information for humanitarian agencies whose primary interest is the health *consequences* of war, not its causes. But such surveys are increasingly used to estimate death tolls from combat-related violence, as well as deaths from war-exacerbated disease and malnutrition.

Standard population health survey methodologies based on a randomly chosen sample of the population are used to establish death rates from various causes. Death rates during or after the conflict are then compared with pre-conflict death rates to determine the war-induced 'excess' death rate. ('Excess' deaths are those that would not have occurred had there been no conflict.)

When the sample size is large enough and appropriately selected, researchers can have considerable confidence in the accuracy of the extrapolated death toll estimates.

In-depth historical investigations

Another approach to counting war deaths, one developed by Patrick Ball and colleagues at the Human Rights Data Analysis Group,[15] relies on exhaustive historical investigations of particular conflicts using painstakingly cross-checked reports from human rights organisations, data from exhumations, extensive interviews and other relevant sources. In-depth historical investigations have been carried out in Guatemala, Peru, Kosovo, East Timor and Haiti, and their findings are typically used to provide information on gross human rights abuses for truth and reconciliation commissions[16] or as evidence for war crimes tribunals.

These studies tend to uncover large numbers of deaths that have not been previously reported.

The strengths of report-based methodologies

In June 2005 the *Small Arms Survey 2005* (SAS)[17] published a comparison of estimates of death totals compiled by various report-based datasets (including Uppsala's) with those of epidemiological surveys and in-depth historical investigations. It found that the death estimates of the report-based methodologies were two to four times lower than death estimates produced by the other methodologies.

> Neither epidemiological surveys nor in-depth historical studies can be used to produce timely global and regional death toll data.

While the SAS analysis of Uppsala's data was problematic for a number of reasons,[18] its claim that report-based methodologies under-count battle-related deaths was clearly correct.

So if epidemiological surveys and in-depth historical analyses like those undertaken by the Human Rights Data Analysis Group produce a more complete picture of the numbers of people killed by political violence, why doesn't the *Human Security Report* rely on them to provide death toll data?

The short answer is that neither epidemiological surveys nor in-depth historical studies can be used to produce timely global and regional death toll data. There are a number of reasons for this:

- **Global coverage.** Only methodologies like Uppsala's record deaths for all conflicts in all countries each year.
- **National coverage.** Many epidemiological surveys carried out in post-conflict societies, or those still at war, focus only on the areas that are of greatest concern to humanitarian agencies. But the findings of surveys of a particular region of a country cannot be extrapolated to generate national death toll estimates.
- **Comparability.** Different epidemiological surveys have different coding rules, which makes comparisons problematic. For example, some surveys lump murders and combat-related deaths together under a single descriptive category of 'violent deaths'. Others distinguish between deaths caused by political violence and those caused by criminal violence.
- **Timeliness.** In order to establish comparable annual death toll estimates, data for each country in conflict must be collected and published in a timely manner. Only report-based methodologies currently do this.
- **Cost.** Nationwide epidemiological surveys and in-depth historical studies are expensive (relative to report-based methodologies). Currently, there is simply no funding available to conduct them annually for every country experiencing political violence.
- **Feasibility.** Even when funding is available, epidemiological surveys and in-depth historical analyses normally require the permission, if not the cooperation, of governments. Sometimes that permission will not be granted. Report-based approaches are not similarly constrained.

Each of the three approaches to measuring death tolls reviewed here serves a different purpose and each adds to our understanding of political violence around the world.

But while in-depth historical studies and epidemiological surveys provide the most detailed picture of the human costs of political violence in individual conflicts, they cannot be used to create annually updated datasets that track national, regional and global trends in deaths from political violence. And it is the data on *trends* that are of greatest importance to policymakers and to researchers investigating the causes of war and peace. A systematic bias in the recorded death toll data toward under-counting does not compromise their value in tracking trends.

Trend data are important not only because they help policymakers determine whether or not their policies are working, but because they also reveal long-term changes that might otherwise be overlooked. For example, the rapid rise in the number of armed conflicts around the world during the 'Long Peace' of the Cold War passed largely unnoticed by a scholarly community that were focused on relations between the major powers and the East-West confrontation. This dramatic shift only became obvious when reliable trend data were published. The same trend data revealed the subsequent substantial drop in armed conflicts in the post–Cold War era.

The 1946 to 2002 Lacina and Gleditsch battle-death dataset reviewed in Part I provides another example of the utility of trend data. While the accuracy of many of the individual death tolls, for particular countries in particular years, can certainly be challenged, the finding that there has been a dramatic decrease in the deadliness of conflict over the past 50-plus years is not in question. This surprising finding helps us understand how changes in the modes of combat during this period have made warfare much less deadly.

Trend data are important because they help policymakers determine whether or not their policies are working.

Deaths from political violence: The new dataset

Globally, state-based conflicts killed more people (57% of the total in 2002, and 75% in 2003) than either non-state conflicts (26% in 2002, 14% in 2003) or one-sided violence (18% and 10%). But as Figure 2.4 shows, there was considerable regional variation.[21]

Remarkably, in spite of the Iraq war in 2003, the reported global death count from all forms of political violence held virtually steady from 2002 to 2003.

Figure 2.4 Numbers of reported deaths from political violence, 2002–2003*

	State-based			Non-state			One-sided			Total: All types		
	2002	2003	Change	2002	2003	Change	2002	2003	Change	2002	2003	Change
Africa	6659	5935	-724	4556	3464	-1092	3217	1584	-1633	14432	10983	-3449
Americas	1157	487	-670	595	129	-466	188	115	-73	1940	731	-1209
Asia	5979	4854	-1125	1778	149	-1629	1138	812	-326	8895	5815	-3080
Europe	753	480	-273	0	0	0	34	59	+25	787	539	-248
Middle East[19]	1027	8817	+7790	200	181	-19	306	248	-58	1533	9246	+7713
Total	15575	20573	+4998	7129	3923	-3206	4883	2818	-2065	27587	27314	-273

Source: Uppsala/Human Security Centre dataset, 2005

*Fatality figures are 'best estimates'[20]

From 2002 to 2003 total reported deaths from all categories of political violence decreased in all regions except the Middle East, where the Iraq war drove deaths from state-based conflict dramatically upward.

Figure 2.5 Numbers of reported deaths from political violence by country, 2002–2003*

	State-based		Non-state		One-sided		Total		Death rate**	
	2002	2003	2002	2003	2002	2003	2002	2003	2002	2003
Africa										
Algeria	150	198	0	0	156	25	306	223	1.0	0.7
Angola	729	0	0	0	57	0	786	0	5.7	0.0
Burundi	460	955	0	43	385	144	845	1142	12.0	16.2
CAR	159	0	0	0	0	0	159	0	4.2	0.0
Chad	418	0	0	0	0	0	418	0	5.1	0.0
Congo-Brazzaville	116	0	0	0	55	0	171	0	5.4	0.0
DRC	0	0	3184	2063	877	91	4061	2154	7.6	4.2
Eritrea	0	57	0	0	0	0	0	57	0.0	1.3
Ethiopia	50	25	138	143	226	56	414	224	0.6	0.3
Ghana	0	0	36	0	0	0	36	0	0.2	0.0
Côte d'Ivoire	600	121	26	0	0	0	626	121	3.7	0.7
Liberia	500	1589	0	0	200	369	700	1958	21.2	59.4
Madagascar	0	0	79	0	0	0	79	0	0.5	0.0
Morocco	0	0	0	0	0	45	0	45	0.0	0.2
Nigeria	0	0	490	206	45	50	535	256	0.4	0.2
Rwanda	59	0	0	0	0	0	59	0	0.7	0.0
Senegal	0	40	0	0	33	0	33	40	0.3	0.4
Somalia	132	0	512	368	0	0	644	368	6.9	3.9
Sudan	2254	2321	91	309	74	173	2419	2803	7.5	8.5
Uganda	1032	629	0	332	1109	631	2141	1592	9.2	6.5
Americas										
Colombia	1157	487	569	99	188	115	1914	701	4.4	1.6
Ecuador	0	0	0	30	0	0	0	30	0.0	0.2
Mexico	0	0	26	0	0	0	26	0	0.0	0.0
Asia										
Afghanistan	400	168	187	149	0	0	587	317	2.1	1.1
India	2008	1899	1500	0	538	531	4046	2430	0.4	0.2
Indonesia	112	429	0	0	252	88	364	517	0.2	0.2
Myanmar (Burma)	230	40	91	0	37	0	358	40	0.7	0.1
Nepal	2425	1064	0	0	233	0	2658	1064	11.0	4.4
Pakistan	265	144	0	0	0	54	265	198	0.2	0.1
Philippines	539	1085	0	0	78	65	617	1150	0.8	1.4
Sri Lanka	0	25	0	0	0	0	0	25	0.0	0.1
Thailand	0	0	0	0	0	74	0	74	0.0	0.1
Europe										
Russia	753	480	0	0	34	59	787	539	0.6	0.4
Middle East										
Iraq[22]	0	8313	200	181	0	0	200	8494	0.8	35.1
Israel and the Palestinian Territories	971	425	0	0	306	148	1277	573	13.2	5.8
Saudi Arabia	0	0	0	0	0	43	0	43	0.0	0.2
Turkey	56	79	0	0	0	57	56	136	0.1	0.2

Source: Uppsala/Human Security Centre dataset, 2005

*Fatality figures are 'best estimates'.

**Number of fatalities per 100,000 of population, rounded to the nearest decimal. Population data come from the World Bank's *World Development Indicators* database and are for 2002.

Reported death counts and death rate data for individual countries reveal a more detailed picture of the costs of political violence.

As it was, the Iraq war meant that the body count for the Middle East increased at least sixfold, and likely much more. Elsewhere, deaths from political violence fell substantially from 2002 to 2003: in the Americas by a massive 62%, in Europe by 32%, in Asia by 35% and even in wartorn Africa by 24%.

Most of the increase in the battle-related death toll in the Middle East is attributable to state-based conflict in Iraq. In all other regions, deaths from state-based conflict dropped significantly—down 11% in Africa and 58% in the Americas.

Non-state conflict death tolls were down everywhere, from a 10% fall in the Middle East to a massive 92% drop in Asia.

And from one-sided violence, reported deaths fell in all regions except Europe. The decrease ranged from 19% in the Middle East to 51% in Africa.

Figure 2.5 shows that in 2002 the five countries with the highest number of reported deaths from all three forms of political violence were the DRC, India, Nepal, Sudan and Uganda.

In 2003 the picture had changed significantly. The five countries with the highest number of reported deaths from political violence were Iraq,[28] Sudan, India, the DRC and Liberia.

However, these reported death-count figures overstate the significance of high absolute numbers of deaths in more populous countries. A different picture emerges

THE MYTH OF CIVILIAN WAR DEATHS

In World War I, 5% of fatalities were civilian; in World War II, fatalities rose to 50%; and in the 1990s, 90% of war deaths were civilian.

Similar claims are regularly made by UN agencies (including UNDP[23] and UNICEF[24]) and are quoted in the European Union's security strategy.[25] Many journalists, NGOs, academics and policymakers accept the 90% figure as an uncontested truth.

And yet it has no basis in fact.

The claim can be traced back to two sources. In 1991 Uppsala University published *Casualties of Conflict,*[26] which contained the claim that 'nine out of ten victims (dead and uprooted) are civilians'. On the back cover of the book, however, the parenthetical words were dropped, leaving only the statement that 'nine out of ten victims of war and armed conflict today are civilians'.

For Uppsala, the category of 'victim' included refugees as well as war dead. But some readers wrongly equated 'victim' with 'fatality'. What the Uppsala data suggested was far less dramatic: approximately 67% of those killed in conflicts during 1989 were civilians. Today the figure is likely much lower.

The other contemporary source of the myth—also from 1991—is Ruth Leger Sivard's *World Military and Social Expenditures.*[27] Sivard wrote that 'in 1990 [the proportion of civilian to combatant deaths] appears to have been close to 90%'. But Sivard's estimate included fatalities from war-related famines, which is not what most people have in mind when they talk about civilians being *killed* in war. Moreover, there are no global data on deaths caused by war-related famine and (more importantly) disease—so it is not clear what sources Sivard used to arrive at her conclusion.

What then can be said about civilian fatalities in war? Prior to 1989 information was so poor that it was virtually impossible to make even crude estimates of the global civilian death toll. Even today, our estimates of civilian deaths are based on information that is never complete and is rarely accurate. Data collected by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program suggest that between 30% and 60% of fatalities in 2002 were civilians.

It is precisely because it is so difficult to distinguish between combatant deaths and civilian deaths that Uppsala embraces both in its 'battle-related deaths' category.

Indeed, the only claim we can make with any confidence is that the oft-cited 90% civilian death rate for the 1990s is a myth.

when countries are ranked by their death *rates*. In 2002 the countries with the highest death *rates* were Liberia (21.2 deaths per 100,000 of the population), Israel and the Palestinian Territories (13.2), Burundi (12.0), Nepal (11.0) and Uganda (9.2).

And in 2003 the countries with the highest death rates were Liberia (59.4), Iraq (35.1), Burundi (16.2), Sudan (8.5) and Uganda (6.5).

For state-based conflict, the five countries with the most reported battle-related deaths in 2002 were (in order) Nepal, Sudan, India, Colombia and Uganda; in 2003 they were Iraq, Sudan, India, Liberia and the Philippines.

For non-state conflict, the five countries with the most reported battle-related deaths in 2002 were the DRC, India, Colombia, Somalia and Nigeria; and in 2003 they were the DRC, Somalia, Uganda, Sudan and Nigeria.

And for one-sided violence, the five countries showing most reported deaths in 2002 were Uganda, the DRC, India, Burundi, and Israel and the Palestinian Territories; in 2003 they were Uganda, India, Liberia, Sudan, and Israel and the Palestinian Territories.

The findings of the new dataset suggest that governments kill far fewer civilians than do rebel groups. In 2002, 23% of those who died in one-sided political violence were killed by governments, while 77% were killed by non-state groups. In 2003, 32% were killed by governments and 68% by non-state groups. These figures should be viewed with some caution, however, as they may reflect government control over local media as much as real differences in death rates.

Conclusion

The new Uppsala/Human Security Centre dataset has already generated a number of important and surprising findings, but its full potential will not be realised until annual data have been collected for some years and clear trends can be ascertained.[29] The *Human Security Report 2006* will publish the 2004 and 2005 data, enabling the presentation of four-year trends in all categories for the first time.

As the previous discussions have shown, we can be confident about the accuracy of data on the number of armed conflicts and cases of one-sided violence, but obtaining good data on the number of battle-related deaths and deaths from one-sided violence will always pose a much greater challenge.

Data collection on the human costs of war remains a complex and contested business.