

## ARMED CONFLICT: TRENDS AND DRIVERS

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Gareth Evans cautions against universalizing the roots and causes of armed conflict. They are always context specific, he says:

“For every case of religious or ethnic or linguistic difference erupting in communal violence, there are innumerable more cases around the world of people and groups of different cultures and backgrounds living harmoniously side by side; for every group economic grievance that erupts in catastrophic violence there are innumerable more that don’t; for every instance of economic greed – for control of resources or the levers of government – generating or fuelling outright conflict, there are innumerable more that don’t...”<sup>2</sup>

He continues with multiple examples and reminds us that there are in fact myriad reasons why political conflict frequently morphs into armed conflict, and also many reasons why political conflict even more frequently does not descend into war. War and peace are not subject to any political/military determinism and the language of causation needs to be approached with considerable caution, but there are clearly some conditions and circumstances under which war is more likely to occur and to persist. The objective is to develop a clearer sense of the structural or chronic conditions that heighten the risks of war, and, conversely, the more urgent objective is to identify the conditions that should be fostered in order to significantly reduce the risks of war.

The kind of war focused on here is intrastate, politically-driven, armed conflict. Intrastate armed conflict is but one manifestation of organized armed violence and violent crime (others include inter-state war, terrorism, organized crime, gang violence, murder, suicide). Intrastate war is not necessarily the most destructive form of violence as measured in direct deaths (for example,

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<sup>2</sup> Gareth Evans, “What We Know About Preventing Deadly Conflict: A Practitioner's Guide,” 2 January 2006, International Crisis Group. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/commentary/prevenir-les-conflits-un-guide-pratique.aspx>.

annual global traffic deaths are about 10 times higher than combat deaths in wars;<sup>3</sup> murders and suicides also exceed direct war deaths annually), and it is certainly not the only violence that requires an urgent and more effective response. Nevertheless, armed conflict warrants special attention because it is in many ways unique in its humanitarian and political/social/economic consequences.<sup>4</sup> Entrenched or ongoing armed conflict (many of today's civil wars are decades old), accompanied by periodic mass atrocities, produces devastatingly persistent conditions of humanitarian crisis, chronic underdevelopment, and extreme political distortion – the consequences of which are literally incalculable, but which are at the same time vividly apparent in the fate of the people who endure them. Ending intrastate armed conflict, and preventing it where it threatens, is in each of its locales essential to furthering economic development and accountable governance, and thus to meeting basic human needs.

## **I. COUNTING WARS: THE NATURE AND TRENDS IN ARMED CONFLICT**

While war<sup>5</sup> and its consequences are eminently recognizable, defining war is not straight forward. Because contemporary intra-state wars are not declared, and because in most cases they do not follow from a clear or official decision to go to war, it is often not at all obvious whether a country is in fact “at war.” Thus, any effort to count wars, and thus discern trends, must obviously include the application of some reasonably objective, measurable criteria for determining when a war begins and when it ends. The point of counting wars, after having defined them according to particular and necessarily arbitrary criteria, is not to determine which conflicts “make the cut” and thus imply that only those warrant diplomatic are conflict resolution attention. The point is to consider trends and patterns in order to inform peacebuilding efforts.

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3For 2009 estimates see: [http://www.photius.com/rankings/road\\_traffic\\_deaths\\_country\\_rankings\\_2009.html](http://www.photius.com/rankings/road_traffic_deaths_country_rankings_2009.html).

4 Namsuk Kim and Pedro Conceicao, “The Economic Crisis, Violent Conflict, and Human Development,” UNDP Office of Development Studies, May 2009. [http://www.undp.org/developmentstudies/docs/hd\\_conflict\\_2009.pdf](http://www.undp.org/developmentstudies/docs/hd_conflict_2009.pdf).

5 The term “war,” as used here, is interchangeable with “armed conflict,” as defined in the text.

Since 1987 Project Ploughshares has tracked global armed conflicts for an annual *Armed Conflicts Report*,<sup>6</sup> defining<sup>7</sup> armed conflict on the basis of three key characteristics:<sup>8</sup>

- It is a political conflict,
- It involves armed combat by the armed forces of a state or the forces of one or more armed faction seeking a political end,
- at least 1,000 people have been killed directly by the fighting during the course of the conflict and there are at least 25 combat deaths annually (thus, an armed conflict is added to the annual list of current armed conflicts in the year in which the death toll reaches the threshold of 1,000, but the starting date of the armed conflict is shown as the year in which the first combat deaths included in the count of 1,000 or more occurred).<sup>9</sup>

An armed conflict is deemed to have ended if there has been a formal ceasefire or peace agreement and, following which, there are fewer than 25 combat deaths per year; or, in the absence of a formal cease-fire, a conflict is deemed to have ended after two years of such dormancy (in which fewer than 25 combat deaths per year have occurred).

The Human Security Report uses a definition of state-based armed conflict, as developed by Uppsala University's Department of Peace and Conflict Research in which one of the warring parties is the government of a state and in which there are more than 25 reported battle deaths in the calendar year. This means that certain politically-rooted identity conflicts are not included (such as pastoralist wars in Africa) because government forces are not usually involved. It also

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6 Available on the Project Ploughshares website at: <http://www.ploughshares.ca/libraries/ACRText/ACR-TitlePage.html>. Hard copies of the annual Armed Conflicts Map are also available from Project Ploughshares.

7 Project Ploughshares, <http://www.ploughshares.ca/libraries/ACRText/ACR-DefinitionArmedConflict.htm>.

8 The Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Sweden's Uppsala University defines Armed Conflicts as follows: "A conflict, both state-based and non-state, is deemed to be active if there are at least 25 battle-related deaths per calendar year in one of the conflict's dyads. ... A one-sided actor is deemed to be active if an organized group incurs at least 25 deliberate killings of civilians in a year." Uppsala Conflict Date Program – <http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/UCDP/index.htm>). Summaries of conflict trends are published in the yearbook of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (for the most recent report, in the 2010 yearbook, see Appendix 2A: Patterns of major armed conflicts, 2000–2009 – by Lotta Harbon and Peter Wallensteen; <http://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2010/02/02A>).

9 This is essentially the SIPRI/Uppsala definition of "major armed conflict." SIPRI/Uppsala define a "major war" as one in which there are 1,000 combat deaths each year. A "minor armed conflict" is one in which there are at least 25 battle-related deaths each year.

means that more war beginnings and endings are recorded (which in turn results in a higher recidivism rate than does the PP methodology).<sup>10</sup> A “major armed conflict” in the Human Security Report definition is one in which cumulative deaths have reached 1,000. A “war” is an armed conflict in which there are 1,000 battle deaths each year.

It is critically important to understand that the use of these necessarily arbitrary numerical criteria for defining war is strictly an attempt to develop a reasonably consistent way of looking at trends. It is certainly not for the purpose of deciding which conflicts warrant urgent attention – i.e. the point is not to ignore a conflict with 999 deaths, but engage when it’s 1001. Of course, an incident in South Sudan that produces 200 deaths and drives 20,000 people from their homes is an armed conflict that should and has focused attention on efforts toward stability there. The way it is handled statistically and is categorized by the research community has nothing to do with how it should be handled by the diplomatic and peacebuilding communities.

While there are important variations in definitions of politically-based armed conflicts, there is broad agreement on the post- World War II trend – a steady climb in conflicts throughout the final decades of the Cold War and into the early post-Cold War years, followed by a fairly steady decline to the present. Current levels are now well below the peak reached toward the end of the last Century.<sup>11</sup>

SIPRI reviews the pattern of major armed conflict from 2000-2009 and finds a decline in the number of conflicts over the decade – there had been a 25 percent reduction by mid-decade, but after that there was a slight increase again toward the end of the decade.<sup>12</sup>

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10 *Human Security Report 2009/2010*, Part III: Trends in Human Insecurity.  
<http://www.hsrgroup.org/docs/Publications/HSR20092010/20092010HumanSecurityReport-Part3-TrendsInHumanInsecurity.pdf>

11 *Human Security Report 2009/2010*, Part III: Trends in Human Insecurity.  
<http://www.hsrgroup.org/docs/Publications/HSR20092010/20092010HumanSecurityReport-Part3-TrendsInHumanInsecurity.pdf>

12 SIPRI, p. 61.

According to the Ploughshares definition and tabulations, in 1987, there were 37 wars taking place on the territories of 34 states – Indonesia, the Philippines, and Iran were each the scene of two separate armed conflicts. There was a spike in conflicts in the mid-1990s related to the end of the Cold War, in the former Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union, followed by a steady decline to 28 wars in 2010 on the territories of 24 countries – with the Philippines and Sudan both the scene of two separate wars, while Indian territory hosted three such conflicts.<sup>13</sup>

One-third of the conflicts that were underway in 1987 are still active today – testifying to the longevity of contemporary war. Of the current 28 conflicts, only six are less than a decade old. Six have been underway for more than three decades, seven more for more than two decades, and another nine for more than one decade.

One prominent feature of contemporary armed conflicts is that the fighting is intermittent and involves widely varying levels of intensity. Afghanistan and Iraq experience persistent and ongoing armed clashes and attacks. Rwanda went from political tension to unprecedented levels of violence and back down again in a very short period of time. The wars in the Philippines and Burundi are examples of ongoing but relatively low-level conflicts, with annual combat deaths often below 100 – but, of course, with political, economic, and social disruption well out of proportion to the intensity of action on their actual battlefields.

Armed conflicts are also prone to mass atrocities – mass killings are defined in a Stanley Foundation report as a minimum of 5,000 civilians killed intentionally. While about one-third mass atrocity “episodes” since 1945 have taken place outside of armed conflict, since the end of the Cold the proportion has dropped to about 15 per cent, and most of these were in the context of recent armed conflict. The report thus concludes that: “There is clearly a strong correlation between mass atrocities and armed conflict, one that has increased since the late Cold War.

Armed conflict provides an enabling context for most atrocities. This lends support to the view

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<sup>13</sup> That overall decline of some 25 percent in the number of active armed conflicts since the end of the Cold War masks a dynamic quarter century of combat. While the 24-year period of Ploughshares tracking opened with 37 conflicts in 1987, 44 new conflicts were added. Of those 81 conflicts, 58 ended, but in 11 of those cases (a recidivism rate of just under 20 per cent ) the peace didn't last and war resumed. Then, of the 11 resumed wars, six subsequently ended. All told, the planet thus hosted a total of 92 armed conflicts or wars during the last quarter century. Of those 64 have ended, leaving 28 current wars.

that preventing armed conflict strengthens efforts to prevent mass atrocities.”<sup>14</sup> Most contemporary armed conflicts do not produce mass atrocities, but the overwhelming majority of mass atrocities take place in the context of armed conflict, suggesting that prevention of mass atrocities must necessarily focus on preventing armed conflict.

The definition of “political conflict” obviously cannot be technically precise. The distinction between political and criminal violence, however, is significant and discernable, even though the trend in current intrastate armed conflicts is to increasingly obscure that distinction. It is common, for example, for armed bands or factions, as well as some government forces, to take advantage of the “fog of war” to engage in criminal activity (e.g., theft, looting, extortion). In some instances these activities are pursued in order to fund political/military campaigns, but frequently they are also pursued for the personal enrichment of the leadership and the general livelihood of the fighting forces. All of these activities, for example, were present among both state and non-state forces in the Sudanese north-south civil war, but it was still clear that the fundamental conflict in Sudan was a political one that contested the future shape and governance of the country.

At the same time, there are clear instances in which escalating violence that is clearly criminal becomes so extensive that it takes on significant political overtones and complications. The Mexican drug “war” is perhaps the most prominent case in point. The fundamental dispute is clearly not political – it is an extreme case of organized crime – but the impact on the country and on Mexico’s relations with its neighbors, especially the US, is such that it engages government at the highest level, as well as the armed forces of Mexico. While Mexico has actively militarized the response to the drug cartels, at least in part, say some analysts, for political reasons,<sup>15</sup> the conflict nevertheless remains fundamentally a law-enforcement challenge.

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14 The Stanley Foundation, “Mass Atrocities and Armed Conflict: Links, Distinctions, and Implications for the Responsibility to Prevent, appendices to, Alex J. Bellamy, “Mass Atrocities and Armed Conflict: Links, Distinctions, and Implications for the Responsibility to Prevent,” Policy Analysis Brief, The Stanley Foundation, February 2011. <http://www.stanleyfoundation.org/publications/pab/BellamyPAB22011.pdf>; <http://www.stanleyfoundation.org/publications/pab/BellmayAppendices22011.pdf>.

15 Alexis Okeowo, “Mexico’s Drug Fiasco,” *The Atlantic*, February 2010. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/print/2010/02/mexico-s-drug-fiasco/7942/>.

The involvement of Mexico's armed forces is thus really an example of military aid to the civil authority. This rising violence obviously reflects a weak state capacity to control it and thus has elements of state failure,<sup>16</sup> but, again, the resulting violence or armed combat are generally not a response to grievance and are not guided by a political program or a set of politically motivated or defined combat objectives. Effective progress toward containing or ending the sway of drug cartels requires national and international action, but it is also the case that organized crime has long had international dimensions and has involved full-out armed combat.

These characterizations and distinctions are not entirely satisfactory, but they are an attempt at consistency. The Mexican drug "war," therefore, has to date not been included in the Ploughshares list of current armed conflicts (even though the number of deaths in the Mexican violence is of course well over the threshold of 1,000 combat deaths). On the other hand, other conflicts that present a major law enforcement challenge are included if they involve a communal or political response to failed state structures – for example communal violence in Kenya.

SIPRI suggests there is a case for looking at political armed conflict and criminal violence together, because it encourages "a more active integration of the study of organized crime, especially transnational, and criminal violence into the broader analysis of collective organized armed violence." But, at the same time, SIPRI concludes in its review that "the main global trends in armed conflict and other forms of organized political violence display different dynamics to those shown by global trends in criminal violence." While there is sometimes a high degree of collusion between transnational criminal and politico-military non-state actors in some conflict-affected regions, it is much less in others. "Even where highly profitable and transnational forms of organized crime emerge in unstable, conflict-torn countries, such as piracy off the Somali coast, this may not have direct links with an armed insurgency."<sup>17</sup>

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16 Bill Whitaker, "Mexico's Drug War Adopts Al Qaeda Tactics: Car Bombs, Mass Killings Part of Increasing Violence Related to Drug Cartels," CBS News, 23 July 2010.  
<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/07/23/eveningnews/main6707471.shtml>.

17 SIPRI, pp. 37, 59, 60.

So SIPRI emphasizes that both political armed conflict and high levels of criminal violence “are manifestations of the same weakness, dysfunction or absence of state structures.” Protracted armed conflict contributes to the further entrenchment of organized crime – and the latter can be addressed only when armed conflict is finally resolved and some basic elements of law and order are restored. Thus, “finding political solutions to armed conflicts should take priority in the most complex and protracted conflict settings, as it is the *sine qua non* for rebuilding or extending functional state capacity and thus essential for effectively tackling organized crime.”<sup>18</sup>

Criminal violence thus remains distinct from the armed conflict of war. Analysts at the Berghof Centre for Conflict Management are right to argue that, “however much insurgency and criminality overlap in today’s conflicts, they are not the same.” Criminal organizations employ violence in the pursuit of profit, not in pursuit of a political program. And while groups engaged in politically driven combat sometimes, even often, pursue criminal activities for economic gain, the more basic objective of such groups, and the basic point of the violence they pursue, is still in pursuit of military and political goals.<sup>19</sup> The point is not to argue that criminal violence is less consequential, rather it is to recognize it as a distinct phenomenon with distinct remedies.

Global terrorism is also not an armed conflict; terrorism is a tactic used in many armed conflicts or wars in very specific locations and settings. The term “war on terror” was used by Washington at one time to signal an overall strategy for countering or preventing anti-western acts of terror in many parts of the world. Such acts, whether by governments or non-state groups, are one of the tactics employed in war, and inasmuch as such terrorist acts involved deliberate attacks on civilians and are designed to intimidate or spread a sense of terror throughout the broader civilian population, they are by definition violations of the laws of war. Such violations are nevertheless a ubiquitous presence in modern warfare: suicide bombers in Afghanistan, rapes in the DRC, rocket attacks on Israeli residential communities, US airborne attacks on residential homes (on the basis of unreliable intelligence reports of the presence of suspected Al Qaeda or Taliban

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18 SIPRI, p. 60, 37.

19 Karen Ballentine and Heiko Nitzschke, “The Political Economy of Civil War and Conflict Transformation,” Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management. 2005.  
[http://www.berghof-handbook.net/documents/publications/dialogue3\\_ballentine\\_nitzschke.pdf](http://www.berghof-handbook.net/documents/publications/dialogue3_ballentine_nitzschke.pdf).  
pp. 4-5.

leaders), or Israel's attack on a civilian ship in international waters – the list of examples is practically endless. Put another way, the laws of war are among the earliest casualties of contemporary warfare.

### *Types of War*

A relatively simple typology of armed conflict relies on four basic categories: international or inter-state war, plus three overlapping types of intrastate war (state control, state formation, and state failure) – see Appendix I.<sup>20</sup> Of the 81 wars that occurred during the last 24 years (28 of which are still ongoing – at the end of 2009), 51 per cent included state control objectives, 35 per cent included state formation objectives, 25 per cent reflected failed state conditions, and eleven per cent were inter-state wars. In SIPRI's review of conflicts in the last decade it found that about 75 percent were over “governmental power” and about 25 percent over territorial issues.<sup>21</sup>

In Africa there are currently armed conflicts in 11 states. In six of these there is fighting for what is essentially control of the state, or part of it (Algeria, Burundi, Chad, DRC, Somalia, Sudan), but eight also include failed state conflicts – that is, more localized conflict that is focused neither on overthrowing the current government nor in reshaping the state but is rooted in the state's lack of capacity to maintain order and mediate local disputes (Chad, DRC, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda). Notably, only three of Africa's current wars can be said to be about state formation. This is noteworthy because Africa has typically been regarded as a continent carved up into states with boundaries to suit imperial interests rather than local coherence, with the assumption that this colonial legacy is behind much of its enduring conflict. But in fact only Ethiopia (which faces a small, for the moment, rebellion from its Ogaden Somali population seeking greater autonomy) and Sudan (which is in the process of dividing into two states) are engaged in armed conflicts in which the opposition has an explicit aim of redefining the state. The conflict in Somalia also includes state formation elements – the northern part of the country has since 1991 functioned as an independent state (Somaliland) – though it is not

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20 These types were drawn from the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Sweden's Uppsala University, although it does not now use them. [http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/UCDP/data\\_and\\_publications/definitions\\_all.htm](http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/UCDP/data_and_publications/definitions_all.htm).

21 SIPRI. P. 61.

internationally recognized as a state. Other areas, such as Puntland in the north east, also function autonomously and it is not clear how these quasi-separatist states will link to Somalia as a whole once the fighting ends.

### *How Wars End*

The Human Security Report, using Uppsala University data, notes that conflicts end by peace agreements, by ceasefire, by military victory, or by other means or circumstances – with most, 64 percent, ending by these “other” means (that is, conflicts simply go dormant). The high proportion that end in this way may be due largely to the fact that by its definition a conflict begins with 25 combat deaths – so this high “other” category to some extent simply reflects the fact that conflicts are sporadic. Many new conflicts begin as a result of the low 25 deaths threshold, but when they go dormant they are deemed to have ended. That would also explain the recidivism rate of 44 percent in the 1990s. The data used is heavily tilted toward very low intensity conflicts – in fact they make this point. Thus peace agreements account for less than a quarter of conflict terminations in the Human Security Report analysis.

The Ploughshares data show that of the 64 wars that ended during the past 24 years, just over half, 52 percent, ended through negotiated settlements, and 22 percent essentially dissolved (roughly equivalent to the “other” category above). This does not mean that what happened on the battlefield was not a significant factor in shaping the outcomes of those that ended in negotiations. Military force certainly influenced or even determined the nature of eventual settlements – for example, in many cases rebel groups would never have gained a place at a negotiating table without an armed campaign. But, in the end, in these instances there was not a decisive conclusion reached on the battlefield. Rather negotiators took over and found a political conclusion.

Then in 22 (34 percent) of the cases the fighting essentially dissolved – the conflicts became dormant but without a formal resolution. The conflicts themselves were not resolved, but the fighting gradually dissipated. One might argue these were really military defeats of insurgencies,

but in wars that simply gradually dissolve the issue remains unresolved as communities involved seek other remedies. In northern Ghana, for example, fighting flared in the late 1990s over local land issues, exacerbated by Muslim/Non-Muslim differences, but the fighting died down and ended without anyone being defeated or anyone signing a peace accord. Both the Government and NGOs did subsequently pursue conflict resolution processes that may have been instrumental in preventing recurrences. In Guinea fighting by the Revolutionary United Front was supported by Liberia, but as conflicts in both Liberia and Sierra Leone subsided so did support for RUF rebels, leading to a gradual decline and the conflict went dormant. Similarly, Indonesian disputes in West Papua and Molucca gradually ebbed without a decisive conclusion either on the battlefield or at the negotiating table.

In about 15 percent of the wars that ended, the outcomes largely decided on the battlefield (e.g. overthrow of Mengistu in Ethiopia, Georgia in 1996, Kosovo, Iraq/Kuwait, Iraq and the Shia revolt). That modern armed conflicts are only rarely decided unambiguously on the battlefield is confirmed by other studies – notably by the *2010 Yearbook on Peace Processes* at Spain's School for a Culture of Peace, and by the Rand Corporation's study, *How Terrorist Groups End*. The Spanish study reports annually and most recently looked at 82 armed conflicts since the 1990s, 52 of which had ended by the end of 2009. Of these, seven, or 14 per cent were settled through a military victory, 28 (54 per cent) ended through formal peace agreements, and 17 (33 per cent) were dormant but without a formal resolution.<sup>22</sup> The Rand study looked at 648 terrorist groups that existed between 1968 and 2006. The focus was not on specific conflicts and how they ended, but on the duration of non-state groups engaged in terrorist acts. In 43 per cent of the cases the groups transitioned to a political process, while 40 per cent were terminated through police and intelligence work. Ten per cent of the groups ended by achieving their aims, and in seven per cent of the cases the groups were terminated through military action.<sup>23</sup>

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22 Vicenc Fisas, *2010 Yearbook on Peace Processes*, School for a Culture of Peace, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2010, pp. 13-14. <http://escolapau.uab.cat/img/programas/procesos/10anuarii.pdf>.

23 Seth G. Jones and Martin C. Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End: Lessons For Countering Al Qaeda*, Rand Corporation, 2008, Summary, pp. xiii-xiv. [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_briefs/RB9351/index1.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9351/index1.html).

## II. COUNTING THE VICTIMS: THE HUMAN TOLL OF WAR AND NON-WAR VIOLENCE

The 2008 report on the *Global Burden of Armed Violence* (GBAV)<sup>24</sup> puts the average annual death toll from armed combat, actual combat deaths (combatants and civilians), at 52,000, or 1,000 per week. That figure is roughly confirmed by the informal count maintained by Project Ploughshares (Ploughshares does not publish combat death figures due to the fact that it is impossible to be comprehensive, nevertheless it maintains tabulations from public sources in order to give a broad assessment of the severity of each conflict). Ploughshares' unpublished figures from 2006 through 2009 also range from about 45,000 to 50,000 per year.

But counting direct combat deaths is a very imprecise enterprise. It must rely on public reports and these vary greatly. In 2009 reports on casualties in the fighting that climaxed in Sri Lanka ranged from 7,000 to 40,000 combat deaths that year. And it is at least intuitively obvious that many clashes and deaths that occur in remote places are never reported.

Epidemiological surveys do not count individual deaths but measure pre-mature deaths and estimate proportions of direct deaths by combat and indirect deaths due to war. The GBAV report, in reviewing such epidemiological surveys done in the DRC, concludes that combat deaths there alone could be averaging 50,000 per year.

It is therefore possible that the global estimate of an average of 1,000 war combat deaths per week is a low estimate, but even at that it is only about one-quarter of the total annual death toll due to war. Conservative estimates in the *Global Burden of Armed Violence* (GBAV) report indicate that some 200,000 die annually in war, not by being shot or caught in a bombing raid or suicide attack, but by virtue of the extraordinarily harsh conditions imposed by war. Again,

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<sup>24</sup> *Global Burden of Armed Violence*, a detailed study of armed violence in all its form, is a 2008 publication of the "Geneva Declaration." The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development is a diplomatic initiative by more than 100 countries aimed at addressing the interrelations between armed violence and development. <http://www.genevadeclaration.org/fileadmin/docs/Global-Burden-of-Armed-Violence-full-report.pdf>.

surveys in the DRC, where people in the fighting zones are subjected to the most heinous of conditions, estimate that it is more likely that about 400,000 people have died each year in recent years due to war.<sup>25</sup>

Despite these extraordinary human costs exacted by politically rooted (and therefore avoidable) armed conflict (i.e. war), war is still not the primary source of death by armed violence.

Individual murders and suicides by firearms on average kill almost twice as many people each year as do the world's wars. The GBAV report summarizes the death count in this way:

- 740,000 have died due to armed violence every year in recent years;
- 50,000 have died in combat;
- 200,000 have died in combat zones as the result of war;
- 490,000 have died violently outside war zones due to homicides, suicides, extra-judicial killings, gang conflicts, kidnappings, disappearances, and so on.

The Human Security Report<sup>26</sup> offers thorough and lengthy challenges to some published figures on indirect war deaths as being much too high. It also challenges the GBAV figures, arguing that

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25 The Canadian *Human Security Report* undertakes a detailed analysis of war death toll estimates in the DRC and questions the reliability of the data and methodology used in some studies. Accordingly the *Human Security Report* concludes that the number of deaths attributed to war have been significantly overstated. That the death toll in the DRC is extraordinarily high is not disputed; rather the point is that the pre-war death rate was already much higher than the African average, so it is not appropriate to describe the current high rate of death as being a consequence of war.

Human Security Report 2009, "Shrinking Costs of War," The Human Security Report Project (an independent centre at Simon Fraser University), Chapter 3: The Death Toll in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. [http://www.hsrgroup.org/docs/Publications/HSR2009/2009HumanSecurityReport\\_Pt2\\_3\\_DeathTollDemocraticRepublicCongo.pdf](http://www.hsrgroup.org/docs/Publications/HSR2009/2009HumanSecurityReport_Pt2_3_DeathTollDemocraticRepublicCongo.pdf)

26 The Human Security Report 2009/10, Chapter 5. <http://www.hsrgroup.org/docs/Publications/HSR20092010/20092010HumanSecurityReport-Part2-ShrinkingCostsOfWar.pdf>.

The Canadian *Human Security Report* says of the GBAV estimates: "More recently, the wide-ranging *Global Burden of Armed Violence* report published by the Geneva Declaration Secretariat estimated that for every person who died violently in wars around the world between 2004 and 2007, another four died from war-exacerbated disease and malnutrition. 4The report did not claim there was a consistent ratio between the two, simply that *on average*, the indirect-to-direct war death ratio was 4:1. This ratio is certainly not implausible, but the evidence base used to calculate it is far too narrow and uncertain to place any confidence in its accuracy."

*Human Security Report 2009*, "Shrinking Costs of War," The Human Security Report Project (an independent centre at Simon Fraser University), Chapter 1, "Deadly Connections: Wartime Violence and Indirect Deaths." [http://www.hsrgroup.org/docs/Publications/HSR2009/2009HumanSecurityReport\\_Pt2\\_1\\_DeadlyConnectionsWartimeViolenceIndirectDeaths.pdf](http://www.hsrgroup.org/docs/Publications/HSR2009/2009HumanSecurityReport_Pt2_1_DeadlyConnectionsWartimeViolenceIndirectDeaths.pdf)

while elements of the methodology are “not implausible,” there is no basis for confidence in the published figures.

According to SIPRI, the most recently available homicide data (for 2004), show that the three subregions with the highest homicide rates are South Africa, Central America and South America (with 25-35 murders per 100,000 people). In the Caribbean and Eastern Europe the range is 15-25 per 100,000. In North Africa, North America and Central Asia it is 5-10 per 100,000. The Middle East, Oceania, South Asia and Sout Eastern Europe all have lower rates than North America, and the lowest rates are in East Asia and Western and Central Europe. Violent crime is only 10-15 percent of all global crime – and while crime rates have been increasing globally, homicide rates have remained constant, suggesting that overall crime is becoming less violent. But homicide deaths are much higher than armed conflict deaths (in sub-Saharan Africa in 2004 it was a ratio of 10:1).<sup>27</sup>

There is, however, a significant difference in the impacts of murders and armed conflict deaths. The impact of murder goes well beyond the particular life lost. It affects families and communities, but the social and political impact of combat deaths are much more far-reaching. Only a small number of combat deaths can paralyze communities, cause flight, and displace large numbers of people. Recent fighting in Jonglei state in South Sudan killed just over 200 people – a terrible loss of life that also led to 20,000 people being displaced.<sup>28</sup> In late October, fierce factional fighting in Somalia near the border with Kenya forced an estimated 60,000 people from their homes in a matter of a few days.<sup>29</sup>

Displacements of large groups of people inevitably lead to further deaths due to the extraordinarily harsh conditions. These are the deaths, the number of which, as we have already

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<sup>27</sup> SIPRI, p. 40.

<sup>28</sup> “South Sudan clashes force 20,000 to flee: official,” AFP, 18 February 2011. <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5haSqr-d2ijxQdv4isxZ24ZpmNjYQ?docId=CNG.9e7fe2533379600587a5ef13cdfb59e7.c61>.

<sup>29</sup> “Tens of thousands displaced by clashes in Somalia,” UNHCR news release, 26 October 2010. <http://www.unhcr.org/print/4cc6f6d29.html>.

seen, cannot be determined with precision, but to them must be added the consequences for the survivors. There are the injured, many of whom suffer lifelong physical disabilities and psychological scars, there are families without income earners, and so on.

The declines in armed conflict, along with the possibility that combat deaths in those wars are also declining, mean that overall or globally the human costs of war are also declining. Even so, armed conflict as defined here remains a prime producer of humanitarian disaster. The relatively low level of direct combat deaths actually reflects the nature, but not the full impact, of most contemporary wars. The objective, with the obvious and tragic exception of Rwanda, is not to maximize the number of deaths but is, in effect, to produce the greatest possible levels of public unease and political disruption, or public intimidation, with relatively low levels of direct violent engagement. It does not take major military engagement to force the displacement of people, as the Sudan and Somalia incidents show. The UN reports that at the end of 2009 there were 43.3 million people under forced displacement (refugees and IDPs) due to conflict – the highest number since the 1990s. More than a million people were newly displaced during the course of 2009.<sup>30</sup> The top source countries are the scenes of the world's most prominent wars: Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, DRC, Myanmar, Colombia, and Sudan. Similar numbers of people are also displaced as a result of natural disasters.

### **III. THE DRIVERS OF ARMED CONFLICT**

In the context of reviewing contemporary armed conflict, the more interesting question about Egypt and Libya may not be, what led to revolt?, but, why did revolt lead to war in Libya but not in Egypt? Questions about the conditions that lead to rebellion, state collapse, and regime overthrow are obviously important, but as important are questions about the conditions that tip political conflict and violent clashes over into war.

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<sup>30</sup> “2009 Global Trends: Refugees, Asylum-seekers, Returnees, Internally Displaced and Stateless Persons,” UNHCR (The UN Refugee Agency), 15 June 2010. <http://www.unhcr.org/4c11f0be9.html>.

As a broad generalization, the kind Gareth Evans warns against, one can credibly say that armed conflict is more likely to occur when communities are imbued with deeply held reasons for rejecting the status quo, when they have access to physical and political/social resources for violence, and when they are convinced or can credibly claim that such violence is their only hope for change. Ohlson puts it this way: “The onset of intra-state armed conflict requires a combination of three things: Reasons in the form of motivating grievances, Resources in the form of capabilities and opportunity, and Resolve in the form of a perception that nothing short of violence will allow you to achieve your goals.”<sup>31</sup> Bellamy adds issues of identity<sup>32</sup> – when political grievances are linked to particular communities and regions both the intensity of the grievances and the calculations of capacity are increased.

With those broad categories in mind, the following four basic conditions offer a framework for exploring the drivers of armed conflict:

1. The presence of heightened political, economic, and social grievances (grievance);
2. Intergroup competition and conflict (identity);
3. Preparedness and capacity (of at least one party) to use violence and violate human rights (capacity); and
4. The perceived absence of effective pathways for nonviolent conflict resolution (the lack of alternatives).

The focus is not on the broad range of sources of political conflict; instead, it is the particular conditions that are more likely to lead from political conflict to sustained violent confrontation. The point is to assess, not the roots of conflict, but the conditions that increase the risks of armed conflict.

### ***Grievances: Economic, political, and social conditions and armed conflict***

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31 Thomas Ohlson, “Understanding Causes of War and Peace,” *European Journal of International Relations*, 2008 14:133 (Sage, <http://www.sagepublications.com>).

32 Alex J. Bellamy, “Mass Atrocities and Armed Conflict: Links, Distinctions, and Implications for the Responsibility to Prevent,” Policy Analysis Brief, The Stanley Foundation, February 2011. <http://www.stanleyfoundation.org/publications/pab/BellamyPAB22011.pdf>.

### *Economic*

“The most robustly significant predictor of [armed] conflict risk and its duration is some indicator of economic prosperity. At a higher income people have more to lose from the destructiveness of conflict; and higher per-capita income implies a better functioning social contract, institutions and state capacity.”<sup>33</sup>

This correlation between underdevelopment and armed conflict is confirmed in a 2008 paper by Thania Paffenholz<sup>34</sup> which notes that “since 1990, more than 50% of all conflict-prone countries have been low income states.... Two thirds of all armed conflicts take place in African countries with the highest poverty rates. Econometric research found a correlation between the poverty rate and likelihood of armed violence....[T]he lower the GDP per capita in a country, the higher the likelihood of armed conflict.” Of course, it is important to point out that this is not a claim that there is a direct causal connection between poverty and armed conflict. To repeat, the causes of conflict are complex and context specific, nevertheless, says Paffenholz, there is a clear correlation between a low and declining per capita income and a country’s vulnerability to conflict. It is also true, on the other hand, that there are low income countries that experience precipitous economic decline, like Zambia in the 1980s and 1990s, without suffering the kind of turmoil that has visited economically more successful countries like Kenya and Cote d’Ivoire. Referring to both Zambia and Nigeria, Paffenholz says these are cases in which “the social compact” has proven to be resilient. Both have formal and informal mechanisms that are able to address grievances in ways that allowed them to be aired and resolved or managed without recourse to violence.

A brief review of literature on economics and armed conflict, published in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, indicates the complexity and imprecision behind the question, “does

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33 Murshed, S.M., and Tadjoeeddin, M.H., 2007, “Revisiting the Greed and Grievance Explanations for Violent Internal Conflict,” MICROCON Research Working Paper No. 2, MICROCON, Brighton.  
[http://www.un.org/esa/policy/wess/wess2008files/mansoob\\_postconflict.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/policy/wess/wess2008files/mansoob_postconflict.pdf).

34 Thania Paffenholz, “Underdevelopment and Armed Conflict: Making Sense of the Debates.” Paper presented at the International Studies Annual Convention San Francisco, 26-29 March 2008. *Centre for Conflict, Peace and Development*, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva.

poverty cause conflict?” While many of the “world’s poorest countries are riven by armed conflict,” and while poverty, conflict and under-development set up a cycle of dysfunction in which each element of the cycle is exacerbated by the other, it is also the case that “conflict obviously does not just afflict the poorest countries” – as Northern Ireland and the former Yugoslavia demonstrate. “Many poor countries are not at war; shared poverty may not be a destabilizing influence. Indeed, economic growth can destabilize, as the wars in countries afflicted by an abundance of particular natural resources appear to show.”<sup>35</sup>

Another review of the literature makes the general point that “the escalation of conflict during economic downturns is more likely in countries recovering from conflict, or fragile states.” That makes Africa especially vulnerable on two counts: economic deprivation and recent armed conflict are present in a relatively high number of states, making the continent especially vulnerable to economic shocks. As a general rule, “weak economies often translate into weak and fragile states and the presence of violent conflict, which in turn prevents economic growth.” One study argues that “the risk of war in any given country is determined by the initial level of income, the rate of economic growth and the level of dependency on primary commodity exports.” Changes in rates of economic growth thus lead to changes in threats of conflict. As unemployment rises in fragile states this can “exacerbate conflict due to comparatively better income opportunities for young men in rebel groups as opposed to labour markets.”<sup>36</sup>

The concentration of armed conflict in lower income countries is also reflected in the conflict tabulation by Project Ploughshares over the past quarter century. The 2009 Human Development Index ranks 182 countries in four categories of Human Development – Very High, High, Medium, Low. Of the 98 countries in the Medium and Low categories of human development in 2009, 55 per cent experienced war on their territories in the previous 24 years. In the same period, only 24 per cent of countries in the High human development category saw war within their borders, while just two (5 per cent) countries in the Very High human development ranking

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35 Maria Kett and Michael Rowson, “Drivers of violent conflict,” *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, September 2007, Vol. 100, No. 9, pp. 403-406.

36 Bakrania, S., and Lucas, B., 2009, ‘The Impact of the Financial Crisis on Conflict and State Fragility in Africa’, Emerging Issues Paper commissioned by AusAID, Governance and Social Development Resource Centre (GSDRC), University of Birmingham <http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/EIRS6.pdf>.

had war on their territory (the UK re Northern Ireland and Israel). The wars of the recent past were overwhelmingly fought on the territories of states at the low end of the human development scale.

A country's income level is thus a strong indicator of its risk of being involved in sustained armed conflict. Low income countries lack the capacity to create conditions conducive to serving the social, political, and economic welfare of their people. And when economic inequality is linked to differences between identity groups, the correlation to armed conflict is even stronger. In other words, group based inequalities are especially destabilizing.<sup>37</sup> These failures in human security are of course heavily shaped by external factors, notably international economic and security conditions and the interests of the major powers (in short, globalization),<sup>38</sup> and these factors frequently combine with internal political/religious/ethnic circumstances that create conditions especially conducive to conflict and armed conflict.

### *Natural Resources*

Both scarcity and abundance in natural resources can increase the risks of armed conflict. Resource scarcity in some instances foments violent competition (for example, in Somalia and Darfur where the boundaries between arid and semi-arid or cultivatable land are shifting). Resource abundance can also lead to violent competition in the exploitation of those resources for the wealth that they bring. The conflict diamonds story testifies to the contribution of natural resources extraction to the occurrence and durability of armed conflict. A study of the role of forestry also finds that in a number of conflict settings (Burma, Cambodia, Cote d'Ivoire, DRC, Liberia) logging has fueled corruption, financed weapons purchases, has drawn workers into conflicts, generated militias, and helped to launder funds from other criminal activity. Conflicts can escalate into violent disputes over land ownership and logging concessions.<sup>39</sup> Another study

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37 Maria Kett and Michael Rowson, "Drivers of violent conflict," *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, September 2007, Vol. 100, No. 9, pp. 403-406.

38 See Francisco Gutierrez and Gerd Schönwälder, eds., *Economic Liberalization and Political Violence: Utopia or Dystopia?* (Pluto Press and the International Development Research Centre, 2010, p. 339.

39 Blundell, A., 2010, 'Forests and Conflicts: The Financial Flows that Fuel War', Program on Forests (PROFOR), Washington D.C.  
[http://www.profor.info/profor/sites/profor.info/files/Forests-fuelwar\\_Blundell.pdf](http://www.profor.info/profor/sites/profor.info/files/Forests-fuelwar_Blundell.pdf).

suggests that while “natural resources do not always play a primary role in starting armed violence,” they are instrumental in keeping it going. Thus “conflict erupts for a variety of inter-related reasons, but they can be perpetuated by greed when a state is weak and unable to protect its porous borders from state and non-state armed combatants.” Scholars tend to agree “that weak, weakened and/or unaccountable states with natural resources such as minerals, diamonds and oil are more prone to conflict.” In some instances “conflict is used as a strategic tool so the resources can be unlawfully extracted with impunity.”<sup>40</sup> A number of studies document the exacerbation and extension of armed conflict through drug markets.<sup>41</sup>

On the grievance vs greed debate, it can be said that grievances are often at the root of the development or beginning of conflicts, while greed may become more involved in ensuring that conflicts persist. Even in conflicts begun to redress injustice, economic opportunity or greed can take over as combatants have opportunities to loot, sell valuable minerals, trade drugs and weapons, and so on.<sup>42</sup>

### *Political*

A focus on the structural conditions that clearly foster or are conducive to the outbreak of prolonged armed conflict has a tendency to depoliticize it, to understate the place of human decision-making and the role of charismatic leadership in either rejecting or choosing and persisting in violence and war.<sup>43</sup> South Africa in the immediate post-apartheid years had all the

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40 Kok, A., Lotze, W., and Jaarsveld, S.V., 2009, ‘Natural Resources, the Environment and Conflict’, ACCORD/Madariaga College Foundation, Durban.  
[http://www.accord.org.za/downloads/reports/Natural\\_Resources\\_Conflict.pdf](http://www.accord.org.za/downloads/reports/Natural_Resources_Conflict.pdf).

41 Felhab-Brown, V., 2010, ‘The Drug-Conflict Nexus in South Asia; Beyond Taliban Profits and Afghanistan’, in ‘The Afghan-Pakistan Theater: Militant Islam, Security, and Stability’, Foundation for Defense of Democracies.  
[http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/papers/2010/05\\_regional\\_counternarcotics\\_felbabbrown/05\\_regional\\_counternarcotics\\_felbabbrown.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/papers/2010/05_regional_counternarcotics_felbabbrown/05_regional_counternarcotics_felbabbrown.pdf)

Studies and Threat Analysis Section, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2008, ‘Drug Trafficking as a Security Threat in West Africa’, UNODC, Vienna.  
<http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Drug-Trafficking-WestAfrica-English.pdf>.

42 Murshed, S.M., and Tadjoeuddin, M.H., 2007, “Revisiting the Greed and Grievance Explanations for Violent Internal Conflict,” MICROCON Research Working Paper No. 2, MICROCON, Brighton.  
[http://www.un.org/esa/policy/wess/wess2008files/mansoob\\_postconflict.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/policy/wess/wess2008files/mansoob_postconflict.pdf).

43 Atack, I (2009) ‘Peace studies and social change: The role of ethics and human agency’ in Policy & Practice: A Development Education Review, Vol. 9, Autumn 2009, pp. 39-51, available:  
<http://www.developmenteducationreview.com/issue9-focus3>.

structural conditions associated with the onset of armed conflict – extreme grievances, communal suspicion and a long history of politicized identity, and opportunity in the form of a mobilized and energized population. The crucial fact that the population became convinced that there was a non-violent alternative was not that they trusted the country’s public institutions to now deliver justice, rather it was because of one charismatic leader who embodied the alternative.

The rather extreme antithesis of the charisma of Nelson Mandela is that of Cambodia’s Pol Pot.<sup>44</sup> Jonas Savimbi in Angola led his rebel group for decades, despite few prospects for success, in persistent and destructive war. Six weeks after his death a ceasefire was signed. Strong personalities help to drive armed conflict in contemporary Afghanistan and Libya. An examination of the structural correlates to war is essential to improving war prevention strategies, but it should not verge toward structural determinism. Human beings shape their material and social surroundings, and they also shape “the conceptual framework and the ideas through which they understand the social order and what is possible within it.”<sup>45</sup>

The absence of charismatic leadership in Government can of course hasten the loss of credibility for any regime that manifests structural conditions of instability. Ohlsen refers to “vertical legitimacy” as public acceptance of governmental authority and the voluntary acceptance of the prevailing order, and “horizontal legitimacy” as mutual acceptance at the popular level – that is, a high degree of tolerance and acceptance across racial, cultural, ethnic, and economic lines. But the two are linked and a lack of vertical legitimacy contributes to horizontal suspicions inasmuch as distrust of public institutions can lead to the search for stability and security through loyalty to one’s own group. The vertical “legitimacy gap” is the difference between citizen expectations of the state (i.e. protection of political and cultural freedom, socio-economic well-being) in exchange for their taxes and loyalty, and what the state is actually willing or able to deliver. The

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44 Socheat Som, “Pol Pot’s Charisma,” *Cambodia: Beauty and Darkness*, December 2001.  
[http://www.mekong.net/cambodia/pol\\_pot1.htm](http://www.mekong.net/cambodia/pol_pot1.htm).

45 Atack, I (2009) ‘Peace studies and social change: The role of ethics and human agency’ in *Policy & Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 9, Autumn 2009, pp. 39-51, available:  
<http://www.developmenteducationreview.com/issue9-focus3>.

horizontal “legitimacy gap” relates to the absence of tolerance and mutual respect between communities.<sup>46</sup>

The wider these gaps the greater the risk of intrastate violence. Government actions that contribute to both vertical and horizontal delegitimization include exclusionary and discriminatory governance arrangements, especially when the discrimination is against particular communities or classes. Thus political and economic inequality linked to regional or communal disparity is divisive and conducive to instability. When these conditions are joined by demographic factors, like high levels of young males in the population, changing environmental conditions, or other external stresses, the threat of conflict escalating to violence is intensified. On top of that, it is not uncommon for weak states to seek to bolster their authority and to hold onto power by politicizing identity and promoting group-based loyalties. Thus, as the Human Security Report notes, “high levels of political discrimination are a key cause of violent ethnic conflict.”<sup>47</sup>

Historical grievances, especially when linked to identity, can fester over generations and rise quickly to the fore in response to triggering events. In the clashes that engulfed Kenya in the aftermath of the 2007 election, some of the violence was prominently linked to unresolved land and property issues going back to the colonial period, issues that have been routinely exploited by Kenyan politicians to win support from particular ethnic communities.<sup>48</sup> In the Middle East, history is obviously central to ongoing conflict. Robert Fisk makes the point, in the current Libyan crisis, that Libyans also are not disconnected from history. “Their grandfathers – in some cases their fathers – fought against the Italians; thus a foundation of resistance, a real historical narrative, lies beneath their opposition to Gaddafi; hence Gaddafi’s own adoption of resistance –

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46 Thomas Ohlson, “Understanding Causes of War and Peace,” *European Journal of International Relations*, 2008 14:133 (Sage, <http://www.sagepublications.com>).

47 Human Security Report Project. Human Security Report 2009/2010: The Causes of Peace and the Shrinking Costs of War. Pre-publication. Vancouver: HSRP, 2010. (Forthcoming in print from Oxford University Press). <http://www.hsrgroup.org/human-security-reports/20092010/text.aspx>.

48 “Kenya violence: Deadly mix of politics and old grudges,” AlertNet, <http://www.trust.org/alertnet/crisis-centre/crisis/kenya-violence>.

to the mythical threat of al-Qaida's 'foreign' brutality – is supposed to maintain support for his regime.”<sup>49</sup>

### ***Identity: Intergroup competition and armed conflict***

Historical grievances that become focused by one community on another are thereby intensified. They foster the vilification of the “other,” making that part of a community’s culture and story, and thus a strong mobilizing instrument. Furthermore, grievances that are politicized along communal and geographic lines are especially conducive to long-term or extended armed confrontation because they carry all of the emotional, political, and financial resources that are available through such communities. Recruitment to the cause, whether for groups that hold power or those that seek it, is facilitated through group loyalty appeals, and the same goes for raising financial resources. Compromise is difficult and “winning” is not necessarily associated with immediate gains but is understood to be a long-term goal, generations long perhaps, that is worth fighting for, “if not for me then for my children.”

When grievances over poverty and inequality parallel or are identified with particular ethnicities or regions they come to be perceived as group-based inequalities, thus increasing the potential for conflict as particular communities link their aspirations and identity to collective action in response to concrete grievances. The politicization of such grievances through specific communities escalates the potential for violent confrontation, especially when those same communities are effectively marginalized in the national political process.

Religion and ethnicity are prominent factors in the majority of contemporary wars (e.g. Iraq, Israel, Russia, Afghanistan, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Algeria, Libya, Burundi, Kenya, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda). But religious and ethnic conflicts are as much a product as a cause of conflict. When states fail to produce the security that their citizens

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49 Robert Fisk, “The historical narrative that lies beneath the Gaddafi rebellion,” *The Independent*, 3 March 2011. <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/fisk/robert-fisk-the-historical-narrative-that-lies-beneath-the-gaddafi-rebellion-2230654.html>.

need, many are led to appeal to other political and social units or entities, such as ethnic communities, through which to pursue individual and collective security. Ethnic or "identity" conflicts – that is, conflicts in which the rights and political/social viability of ethnic groups or national communities are central issues – are invariably reflections of a more fundamental social conflict, borne out of a community's experience of economic disparity, political discrimination, human rights violations, pressures generated by environmental degradation and other factors. Identity conflicts emerge with intensity when a community loses confidence in mainstream political institutions and processes and, in response to unmet basic needs for social and economic security, resolves to strengthen its collective influence and to struggle for political/legal recognition as a community. Failure to address grievances makes group solidarity an increasingly attractive political strategy, and when easy-to-use and easy-to-get small arms are thrown into the mix (the matter of resources or capacity), the result, not surprisingly, is often persistent armed conflict.

“Conflicts that develop around issues of identity, ethnicity, religion, or culture are often grounded in unmet human needs.” And human needs are broad, obviously including food and shelter, certainly safety and security are basic. But less tangible values like dignity, freedom and self-esteem are also relevant and consequential.<sup>50</sup> The extent to which identity revolves around particular ethnic, religious, or cultural communities, the antidote will inevitably include the creation and nurture of a civic identity – essentially citizenship that is shared with a mix of communities.

### *Intractable conflict*

Maise argues persuasively that conflicts are more likely to become intractable when they involve multiple parties and issues such as historical, religious, cultural, and economic grievances. The more they involve issues or questions that have become central to a party's identity, the less amenable they are to negotiation and thus the more intractable, and sometimes the more violent

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50 Michelle Maiese, “Causes of Disputes and Conflicts,” BeyondIntractability.org, October 2003. [http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/underlying\\_causes/](http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/underlying_causes/).

because of the sense that there are no alternatives.<sup>51</sup> “The polarization of unchallengeable certainties” is a phrase used by Drew Gilpin Faust, president of Harvard,<sup>52</sup> in another context, but it nicely describes the impossible stand-off when deeply held and opposing moral convictions come to lodge at the roots of political conflict, or when competing identities hold opposing positions that both sides consider to threaten their very existence. It is part of the phenomenon of intractable conflicts. What is common to all such conflicts “is that they involve interests or values that the disputants regard as critical to their survival” and critical to their identity. “These underlying causes include parties’ moral values, identities, and fundamental human needs.”<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, such conflicts are not amenable to win-win solutions. Indeed, “those involved in moral conflict may even regard perpetuation of the conflict as virtuous or necessary. They may derive part of their identity from being warriors or opponents of their enemy and have a stake in the continuation of the conflict because it provides them with a highly desirable role.”<sup>54</sup>

### *Diaspora groups*

For “conflict-generated diaspora groups” the homeland “often takes on a high symbolic value and becomes a focal point for mobilisation.” Thus “diasporas often support militants and tend to frame conflicts in uncompromising and categorical ways that influence political strategies of parties (largely those opposing government) at home. These parties also rely on “diaspora supporters for resources and access to international media, international organisations, and powerful host governments.” And this in turn “gives diaspora groups influential roles in the adoption of strategies relating to conflict.”<sup>55</sup>

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51 Michelle Maiese, “Causes of Disputes and Conflicts,” BeyondIntractability.org, October 2003. [http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/underlying\\_causes/](http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/underlying_causes/).

52 Interview, The PBS News Hour, 12 February 2007. [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/education/jan-june07/harvard\\_02-12.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/education/jan-june07/harvard_02-12.html).

53 Michelle Maiese, “Causes of Disputes and Conflicts,” BeyondIntractability.org, October 2003. [http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/underlying\\_causes/](http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/underlying_causes/).

54 Michelle Maiese, “Causes of Disputes and Conflicts,” BeyondIntractability.org, October 2003. [http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/underlying\\_causes/](http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/underlying_causes/).

55 Lyons, T., 2007, 'Conflict-generated Diasporas and Transnational Politics in Ethiopia', Conflict, Security and Development, vol. 7, no. 4, pp. 529-549. <http://www.gsdrc.org/go/display&type=Document&id=3411>.

That influence means, of course, that diaspora communities can also be mobilized for peacebuilding purposes and to minimize risks of armed conflict.

### ***Capacity: Preparedness and capacity for armed conflict***

Even though political and economic conditions may be in place to threaten the onset of armed conflict in a particular context, generating the capacity to undertake armed conflict is not easy. It is significantly challenging to assemble the financial, combat, and political/psychological resources needed to mount a sustained effort to challenge existing authorities by means of violence.

Unfortunately, however, that challenge is mitigated by the abundance of weapons in most regions of prolonged conflict. Thus, many non-state groups, as well as states, have the means to build the capability for armed conflict – which doesn't mean they have the capacity to prevail. These ubiquitous small arms and light weapons (from assault rifles to locally fashioned explosive devices) employ relatively simple technologies that are not only widely available but are readily useable by non-military combatants, including the children that are forced to become child combatants.<sup>56</sup>

Demographic factors can further add capacity and opportunity. Half of the population of the Arab world is under 30 years of age.<sup>57</sup> In Egypt, with two-thirds of the population under 30, educated, urbanized, and unemployed young people were key to the extraordinary revolution there.<sup>58</sup> Sub-Saharan Africa is even younger, with some countries like Uganda with 70 percent of the population under 30.<sup>59</sup> The advent of liberal democracies is associated with older

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56 Many thousands of children, some as young as nine years, are mobilized in today's wars. Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers: <http://www.child-soldiers.org/childsoldiers/questions-and-answers>.

57 Bobby Ghosh, "Rage, Rap and Revolution: Inside the Arab Youth Quake," *Time Magazine*, 17 February 2011. <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,2049808,00.html>.

58 Duncan Green, "What caused the revolution in Egypt?" PovertyMatters Blog, guardian.co.uk. 17 February 2011. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/poverty-matters/2011/feb/17/what-caused-egyptian-revolution>.

59 Jennifer Wells, "Young and restless means Africa is at risk," *Toronto Star*, 27 February 2011.

populations, meaning that as Arab and African populations age, the prospects for less combat and for more stability and accountable governance increase, but in the meantime a large, young, male population adds an extra layer of volatility.

In a sense, small arms facilitate what can be described as the demilitarization of war – without any particular expertise or training required, small arms and light weapons have helped to transform armed combat from the “profession of war,” carried out by professional military organizations and soldiers, or even volunteer soldiers trained and commanded by professionals. Most armed conflicts involve the armed forces of a Government on one side, but some don’t and in many cases antigovernment forces are civilian or citizen fighters rather than trained soldiers. Civilians are the primary victims of contemporary war,<sup>60</sup> but they have also become the principle combatants. The UN Secretary General reports regularly on the plight of civilians in combat situations, and the most recent report concluded that “civilians still account for the vast majority of casualties and continue to be targeted...,”<sup>61</sup> and at least part of what lies behind this is the fact that the distinctions between civilians and civilian combatants is blurred.

In addition to basic military capabilities, organizational capacity and governance structures within affected communities become important means of mobilizing and retaining popular consent for armed struggle. Access to media, including of course modern social media to influence an international constituency, comes into play, as does foreign assistance (sometimes through diaspora communities). What are referred to as “opportunity structures” (that is, the environmental or contextual opportunities or restraints) can play a major role. Such factors as terrain on which to battle (e.g. mountains available for hideouts), opportunities to “loot” or

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60 The ICRC challenges the commonly advanced figure that 80 to 90 per cent of war casualties are civilians. The ICRC uses two sources to produce more conservative estimates. Its own surgical database, begun in 1991, shows that, reports of persons admitted for weapons injuries showed 35% to be female, or males under 16 and over 50 years of age – in other words, 35% of injuries were to persons could properly be assumed to be non-combatants. A second ICRC study found that 64% of fatalities tabulated were considered to be civilians. The ICRC concludes that, in any case, both figures for civilian casualties highlight the need for greater efforts toward special protection for civilians in conflict, and secondly, the evidence suggests the proportion of civilian deaths in conflicts has been increasing over the twentieth century. [ICRC, pp. 16-17] ICRC, *Arms Availability and the Situation of Civilians in Armed Conflict* (ICRC: Geneva, 1999), 80 pp.

61 Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, Security Council (S/2009/277), 29 May 2005. <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/343/97/PDF/N0934397.pdf?OpenElement>

commandeer resources, a supportive diaspora, sympathetic foreign governments or rebel groups – all of these and other factors contribute to or restrain the military option.

In advanced armed campaigns there inevitably emerge benefits that flow to actors in war that are not available in peace (employment, spoils of war). In that sense, “war does not represent anarchy, but an alternative order for obtaining and distributing power and profit.”

The presence of strong identity groups can also be understood as a conflict “resource” or “opportunity” inasmuch as an identity group offers an alternative to the state for a social compact.

### ***Absence of alternatives:***

A key element in developing a collective resolve to resort to overt violence through an armed campaign is the genuinely perceived or credibly claimed absence of alternatives to violence. If the absence of alternatives is pervasively felt, then when triggering events occur, the aggrieved are likely to turn much more readily to armed options that are available, than to spend a lot of time trying to construct alternatives in an environment that they believe has offered them none.

As the power and sovereignty of states erode in the face of economic, cultural, environmental, and security conditions that transcend national boundaries (globalization), it is those same increasingly dependent and essentially weakened states that bear the primary responsibility for maintaining local, and thus ultimately global, security. Inasmuch as the main contemporary threat to global security is not the threat of war between states but of war within states, it is national governments even more than international systems that find themselves on the front lines of war prevention. To meet that responsibility, according to the *OECD Guidelines on Conflict, Peace and Development Cooperation*, each state needs “institutions capable of

managing socio-political tensions and avoiding their escalation into violence.”<sup>62</sup> But, of course, states that are failing, where the threat of disintegration into armed violence threatens directly, are the states that also have the weakest political institutions and are the least likely to find means of effectively mediating national conflict. And it is a measure of the dysfunction (or underdevelopment) of modern states that there have been times in the past quarter century when almost one in five had failed so badly in managing their socio-political affairs that tension had escalated into a level of violence sufficient to define them as a location of ongoing war – currently it is down to one in eight.

Even though armed conflict is heavily correlated with underdevelopment, meaning especially institutional underdevelopment that results in the absence of conflict management capacity, the international community has been very slow to recognize that the promotion of human development – not only moving states into higher categories of human development, but also building trusted mediating institutions – needs to become a strategic security objective.

The international community has come to understand the strategic threats that are inherent in failures in human security and in the local conflicts that ensue. Even before 9/11 it had become “clear that isolating chaos with a *cordon sanitaire* was not a realistic option in a world in which the movement not only of people, but also that of information could not be stopped.”<sup>63</sup> Global strategic stability cannot be separated from the promotion of stability and accountability within states. But there is not yet sufficient recognition that armed conflict mitigation actions need to be focused much more prominently on the final of the four conditions identified above – notably, the absence of alternatives to violence in getting grievances addressed.

The pervasive sense or claim that there is no alternative to armed resistance in the effort to get grievances heard, and no alternative to armed confrontation in pursuing equitable solutions to inter-group competition/conflict, is at the root of transforming political conflict into armed

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62 DAC Guidelines on Conflict, Peace and Development Co-Operation, OECD, Paris, 1997, p. 9. Available at: <http://www.fas.org/asmp/campaigns/smallarms/eguide.pdf>.

63 Jean-Marie Guehenno, “The Impact of Globalization on Strategy,” *Survival* (IISS Quarterly, Winter 1998-99), p. 10.

conflict. Gerd Schönwälder, in the new IDRC publication on neoliberalism and armed conflict, makes the point that “the prevention of political violence must include fundamental improvements to the quality of democracy as such. Creating more opportunities for political participation – including for expressing dissent – will help, especially when accompanied by institutional channels and capacities to deliver on legitimate demands.”<sup>64</sup>

In a sense, of the four basic drivers of armed conflict – grievances, competing identities, capacity, and the lack of alternatives – it is the latter that is most amenable to short-term change. Grievances rooted in structural inequities require long-term attention. Inter-group conflict, usually with deep historical roots, may be amenable to short term measures and policies available to ease tensions, but such tensions are linked to serious and structural economic and political conditions that require generations to shift. What has to, and can, change is a group’s perception that its best option is armed conflict. Changing that perception or resolve cannot, obviously, be premised on persuading an aggrieved group to accept or acquiesce to inequity. Rather, the focus needs to be on addressing the perception/conviction that there are no alternatives. That requires the demonstration and the construction, in the short-term, of genuine alternatives. Such measures might include:

- demonstrable international political solidarity with aggrieved populations;
- external economic and political pressures on regimes;
- third party mechanisms for addressing the conflict.

The international community has been especially weak, and in many cases actively counter-productive, in demonstrating political solidarity with aggrieved populations. Rather than generating ideas and conditions conducive to seeking diplomatic and non-violent remedies for vulnerable populations, too often the international community has focused on the opposite. In Egypt and Libya, before the recent crises, the international community was in fact fully concentrated on sending messages to the Egyptian and Libyan people that the regimes that oppressed them had the backing of the international community, that the regimes served the interests of powerful international interests and were regarded as agents of stability. The message

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<sup>64</sup> Francisco Gutierrez and Gerd Schönwälder, eds., *Economic Liberalization and Political Violence: Utopia or Dystopia?* (Pluto Press and the International Development Research Centre, 2010, p. 339).

was that the Mubarak and Gadhafi regimes had powerful friends and backers – and that the people of Egypt and Libya could expect no help from the international community in seeking peaceful change. The same goes now for Saudi Arabia, and for Zaire before that, but the examples are legion. The international community’s withdrawal of support from the Mubarak and Gadhafi regimes were belated but important gestures in the pursuit of a non-violent end to the crisis. In Libya, obviously, many other factors – not least its deep regional and ethnic cleavages – served to drive it increasingly toward violence.

To reverse that pattern the international community will have to find new approaches, multilaterally and locally. On the macro diplomatic front there is a requirement for sustained measures and efforts to delegitimize dictatorial regimes and create external pressures for change that are supportive of internal efforts. In short, at the national and local levels there is a requirement for measures that build a sense that alternatives to violence can become available.

### ***Triggering war:***

Armed conflict is rooted in political and economic conditions that typically build up over a long period of time, that take a long time to alter, and that typically don’t lead to violence without a significant triggering event. Such an event can, for example, be specific economic or political decisions that are perceived by a particular group or segment of the population to be egregiously unjust or discriminatory (e.g. sharp food price increases, infrastructure projects that threaten the livelihood or homes of a particular region or group). Triggering events can also be external, like a drought or other natural catastrophes, adding extraordinary stress to an already fragile political/economic environment and thus also building toward a tipping point.

One survey<sup>65</sup> identifies several such key triggers that are distinct from underlying causes or conditions. Climate change, migration, and conflict are inextricably linked – climate change is seen to be a root cause of migration (water scarcity, for example); a triggering event can be extreme drought, flash floods, and so on. Dependence on foreign aid and investment leads to

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65 Helpdesk Research Report: Global Drivers of Conflict and Instability, Governance and Social Development Resource Centre. UK. <http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/HD739.pdf>.

instability when “aid shocks” occur. Aid can obviously reduce the likelihood of armed conflict by helping a state to credibly address economic grievances. But “sudden aid shortfalls make governments relatively less able to make enough side-payments or military investment to preserve the peaceful status quo in the future.”<sup>66</sup> Water scarcity and consumption patterns, for example, can generate conflict over long periods – as reflected in urban/rural divisions, competition among agricultural communities, nomad/settler divisions, the conflicting interests of users and managers of water supplies, conflicts related to large water projects (dams, export plans, etc.).

### ***Preconditions for mass atrocities:***

It is not possible to predict whether or when an armed conflict will involve mass atrocities, but it is clear that there are governments as well as non-state groups that are prepared to engage in mass killings under certain conditions – but it is not predictable when that point will be reached or what the triggering event will be. Thus the prevention of mass atrocities is fundamentally the prevention of armed conflict itself (although there are instances of mass atrocities outside of armed conflict).

A recent Stanley Foundation Report<sup>67</sup> identifies “preconditions of genocide and mass atrocities.” These are to be understood as “necessary but insufficient risk factors” that should be addressed in the context of armed conflict prevention generally. “The presence of one or more of these conditions is necessary for the future commission of genocide or mass atrocities, but their presence does not mean that genocide or mass atrocities are inevitable or that these crimes will occur within a given period of time.” These are assessments of the likelihood of mass atrocities –

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66 Helpdesk Research Report: Global Drivers of Conflict and Instability, Governance and Social Development Resource Centre. UK. <http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/HD739.pdf>.

Nielson, R.A., Findley, M.G., Davis, Z.S., Candland, T., and Nielson, D.L., 2010, ‘Foreign Aid Shocks as a Cause of Violent Conflict’, University of Harvard, Cambridge MA. [http://politicalscience.byu.edu/mfindley/assets/aid\\_shocks\\_war.pdf](http://politicalscience.byu.edu/mfindley/assets/aid_shocks_war.pdf).

67 Alex J. Bellamy, “Mass Atrocities and Armed Conflict: Links, Distinctions, and Implications for the Responsibility to Prevent,” Policy Analysis Brief, The Stanley Foundation, February 2011. <http://www.stanleyfoundation.org/publications/pab/BellamyPAB22011.pdf>.

and likelihood increases in the context of certain conditions, such as the politicization of religious or ethnic conflict, the absence of democracy and the rule of law, low and unequal national income, and the presence of armed conflict and multiple armed groups (see Appendix II for the Stanley Foundation summary).

At the outset we asked why the rebellion in Egypt, while it involved violent episodes, did not descend into full-scale war, while in Libya it did. Both were obviously grievance-based revolts, but in Libya ethnic and regional cleavages were much more important. In Libya the opposition had basic capacity for violence through access to arms while the regime showed a capacity, willingness, to resort to mass attacks on civilians (while in Egypt the Army played a moderating role). And in Egypt, the protestors, with international support, had opportunities for negotiation – in other words, saw political alternatives to violence.

#### **IV. ARMED CONFLICT PREVENTION: MITIGATING RISK**

##### ***Why the Decline in Armed Conflict?***

Armed conflict as defined here is in welcome decline, and perhaps the best indication of appropriate conflict prevention measures will come from trying to understand some of the factors behind this decline.

Wars within underdeveloped states are fewer, but still common, wars within wealthy states are extremely rare, and attacks by prosperous, successful states on other thriving states are essentially extinct. The latter is due in part to effective international mechanisms for dealing with serious conflicts between states, but it is especially due to the twofold reality of the high costs and declining benefits of high-intensity inter-state war. Wars fought with an abundance of state-of-the-art military equipment are, and promise to be, extraordinarily destructive, with nuclear war only the most irrational extreme. Conventional weaponry, in the accumulations made possible by the hundreds of billions spent on it each year, is capable of reversing decades of development and destroying infrastructure in mere weeks of bombardment. And the benefits,

whether in territorial conquest, political domination, or strategic advantage tend to be short-lived and politically discredited. National aggrandizement and advancing the national interest obviously remain as prominent as ever as objectives of state policies and institutions, but the resort to overt military conflict with other advanced states toward those ends is now properly seen to be unambiguously counter-productive. States certainly continue to prepare for all-out military confrontation with well-armed adversaries, but those large and highly sophisticated forces tend to be used against only those states that have little capacity to resist (and often, ironically, with little long-term success). The resort to major military force can certainly and “efficiently” destroy regimes, but winning the peace under the replacement regimes proves to be well beyond the capacity of the major powers.

Intra-state wars are also in decline, and some of the same logic may apply. From the point of view of already weakened governments, the costs of counter-insurgency campaigns are immeasurable. They are also highly destructive of the national infrastructure, to national cohesion, the economy, and much more. And here, too, the outcomes are far from certain.

The Human Security Report (2009/10) looked at length at this question of why there have been important declines in armed conflict – both international and civil or intra-state wars:

*The decline of international war in the latter decades of the last century is linked to a number of long-term global trends:*

- *An increase in the number of democracies;*
- *Increased economic interdependence;*
- *A decline in the utility of war: a nation’s prosperity cannot now be advanced through wars of conquest of land and resources (cheaper to buy resources – the end of colonialism a significant factor in the reduction of war);*
- *Growth in international institutions;*
- *The Cold War added “the caution-inducing effect” of nuclear weapons .*

(p. 148)

- *A normative shift away from war (for example, the progressive outlawing of forms of violence – human sacrifices, witch-burning, lynching, slavery, vigilantism, duelling, war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide);*
- *Changing public attitudes toward war reflected in UN Charter limit on war to self-defence or Security Council sanctioned responses to threats to international peace and security;*
- *Ideologies that glorify war and preach ultra-nationalism and so on now regarded as extremism;*
- *Democracies avoid wars because they have constituencies that are averse to war*  
(pp. 149-150)

*The decline in civil wars:*

- *While decolonization increased the number of wars, and many newly independent states had civil wars focused on internal struggles for power, by the end of the 20th century many of these had been exhausted;*
- *Democratization;*
- *Levels of state capacity (this is confirmed by the fact that most civil wars take place in the poorest countries – states with the least capacity, so capacity is the issue, not income);*
- *Declines in ethnic discrimination;*
- *Recognition of minority rights;*
- *End of the Cold War: reduction in ideological conflict, reduction in proxy wars sponsored by super powers, surge in UN and international activism (conflict management and prevention, peacebuilding);*
- *Preventive diplomacy, UN peacemaking, peace support operations, use of force against spoilers, economic coercion, emphasis on reconciliation, addressing root causes.*  
(pp. 150-155)<sup>68</sup>

In general terms, the explanation for declines in the number of intrastate wars is prominently linked to developments that mitigate the four basic sets of structural conditions identified here as generating armed conflict – grievances, identity conflicts, capacity for fighting, and the absence

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68 “Why the Dramatic Decline in Armed Conflict?” Human Security Report 2005  
(<http://www.hsrgroup.org/docs/Publications/HSR2005/2005HumanSecurityReport>).

of alternatives. Gareth Evans also turns to the Human Security Report to agree that “the best explanation [for the decline in armed conflict] is the one that stares us in the face, even if a great many do not want to acknowledge it. This is the huge increase in the level of international preventive diplomacy, diplomatic peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations, for the most part authorized by and mounted by the United Nations that has occurred since the end of the Cold War. In particular there has been:

- a six-fold increase in UN preventive diplomacy missions (to stop wars starting);
- a four-fold increase in UN peace operations (both to end ongoing conflicts and reduce the risk of wars restarting); and
- an eleven-fold increase in the number of states subject to UN sanctions (which can help pressure warring parties into peace negotiations).”<sup>69</sup>

The US analyst and academic Michael Mandelbaum optimistically makes the point that the mandate of states has shifted “from warfare to welfare.” In Europe and North America at least there exists a popular “conviction that war [within those regions] is both abnormal and undesirable, and that it is usually illegitimate to fight for the goals on behalf of which wars have been waged in the past: wealth, territory, glory.”<sup>70</sup>

### ***Prevention***

Prevention thus requires a conflict mitigation toolkit that contains a broad range of policy measures and concrete actions designed to spread and entrench that shift from “warfare to welfare.” While wars emerge out of various and complex factors and circumstances, the broad strokes of conflict prevention are clear enough: being responsive to grievances, alleviating poverty, building community-to-community engagement and trust, promoting economic equity, employment, education, and building national institutions that have the demonstrated capacity to mediate conflict and thus earn the confidence of populations. That is essentially the broad,

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69 Gareth Evans, “What We Know About Preventing Deadly Conflict: A Practitioner's Guide,” 2 January 2006, International Crisis Group. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/commentary/prevenir-les-conflits-un-guide-pratique.aspx>.

70 Michael Mandelbaum, “Learning to be Warless”, *Survival* (IISS Quarterly, Summer 1999), p. 150.

traditional, peacebuilding agenda. Development itself needs to be overtly “conflict sensitive” – otherwise “interventions may inadvertently exacerbate or reinforce conflicts by increasing competition for resources, introducing new institutions that challenge existing ones, or by helping to perpetuate structures of dominance.”<sup>71</sup> And, it bears repeating, at the core of armed conflict prevention is the construction of genuine political alternatives to armed conflict.

Practitioner and research communities have generated extensive lists of prevention measures – Appendix III offers an extensive list of structural and direct measures proposed by the Stanley Foundation report,<sup>72</sup> and Appendix IV is another list of suggestions recently presented to the Norwegian Foreign Affairs ministry.<sup>73</sup>

### ***The Social Compact<sup>74</sup> and Individual Risk***

When the four primary conditions of armed conflict (grievance, competing identities, capacity for armed action, and the absence of credible alternatives) are present, we can say that the social contract has been broken. And a social compact can be said to exist when the majority of citizens voluntarily commit to conforming to state legal and political conventions in exchange for benefits the state has to offer in return. “Typically, the state acts to reduce people’s risks – through law and order, services and infrastructure – in return for their commitment to the state (including a willingness to finance it through taxation).” When this “social compact” is weak and there are not trusted national institutions through which to settle disputes, stability is

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71 Maria Kett and Michael Rowson, “Drivers of violent conflict,” *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, September 2007, Vol. 100, No. 9, pp. 403-406.

72 Alex J. Bellamy, “Mass Atrocities and Armed Conflict: Links, Distinctions, and Implications for the Responsibility to Prevent,” Policy Analysis Brief, The Stanley Foundation, February 2011. <http://www.stanleyfoundation.org/publications/pab/BellamyPAB22011.pdf>.

73 John Tirman, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, n.d. Memo to Norwegian Department of Foreign Affairs.  
<http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/ud/kampanjer/refleks/innsjutt/engasjement/tirman.html?id=492899>

74 Addison, T. et al., 2008, ‘Ending Violent Conflict and Building a Social Compact’, Chapter 6 in *Escaping Poverty Traps*, Chronic Poverty Research Centre, Manchester.

compromised, the risk to the well-being of people increases, and the risks of confrontation and violence climb.

Central to conflict prevention is therefore a viable social contract – “a set of mutual obligations between the citizen and their state.” Elements of a social contract include an effective and accountable system of public finance (including revenue generation), along with governmental credibility (confidence in public institutions, governance). Governmental credibility in turn depends in large measure on its commitment to state policies and practices that reduce people’s risks (advance human security), through the rule of law and the provision of services.

Thus, a “fragile state is one that does nothing to reduce individual risk.” Indeed, “in the worst cases, the state is violently predatory – dramatically increasing people’s risks, and impoverishing them” (e.g. Myanmar, Zimbabwe). In a sense, the opposite of a fragile state is one that embodies a governmental commitment to measures that reduce individual risk. The economic system is of course central to mitigating personal risk (e.g. employment, education, and the kind of social safety net that many of course cannot afford, health services for the poor, health insurance for others, and so on). Schönwälder’s summary of the conclusions drawn from recent IDRC studies finds that neoliberal reforms, while of mixed impact, generally do have a “corrosive impact” on the stability of states. “Part of the remedy,” he says, “lies in stepping up governance efforts around neoliberalism’s most obviously ‘blind spots’: greater emphasis on fighting crime and improving public security; [and] more effective regulation and law enforcement to clamp down on illicit economic activities.”<sup>75</sup>

Defining the primary function of the state as “reducing individual risk” is a more inclusive and citizen oriented approach than is suggested in the language of state capacity. “You can strengthen the state (i.e. improve its ability to implement the decisions of its government), but then it may simply become a more efficient predator (i.e. better able to extract resources from individuals, and therefore become more of a fragile state under our definition, since it raises their risks).” The international “responsibility to protect” also fits into this risk reduction paradigm, in

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75 Francisco Gutierrez and Gerd Schönwälder, eds., *Economic Liberalization and Political Violence: Utopia or Dystopia?* (Pluto Press and the International Development Research Centre, 2010, p. 339).

that it expresses the obligations of the international community in terms of reducing the risk to individuals in extreme cases when national governments can't or are themselves the source of risk to individuals.

When states fail to function in reducing the risks to individual safety and well-being, then people “turn to non-state actors for their risk reduction.” Some of these are certainly legitimate (e.g. NGOs, religious communities), while others obviously may not be (e.g. ethnic militias and war lords).

### ***Early Warning***

Another common mechanism proposed to support conflict prevention is early warning. “Generically the aim of conflict early warning is to identify critical developments in a timely manner, so that coherent response strategies can be formulated to either prevent violent conflict or limit its destructive effects. Effective early warning involves the collection and analysis of data in a uniform and systematized way and according to a commonly shared methodology. It requires the formulation and communication of analysis and policy options to relevant end-users – information towards action.”<sup>76</sup>

CEWARN, the Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism in the Horn of Africa “is a collaborative effort of the seven IGAD Member States<sup>77</sup> and one of IGAD’s programmes targeted at mitigating and preventing violent conflicts in the sub-region. Since its establishment in 2002, CEWARN has been functioning with a particular focus on cross-border pastoralist and related conflicts.”<sup>78</sup> Preventive diplomacy, “including the use of mediation, arbitration, and confidence-building measures to de-escalate tensions and resolve conflicts,” needs to be

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76 Jakkie Cilliers, “Conflict Early Warning Systems and Support Of The Comprehensive Peace Agreement In Sudan,” Paper Presented at the Conference on Early Warning Systems ‘Conflicts are Preventable, Peace is Sustainable, Khartoum, 10-13 April 2006. Institute for Security Studies head office, Pretoria.  
<http://www.iss.co.za/pubs/Other/cewarnjkcapr06.pdf>.

77 Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda.

78 [http://www.cewarn.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=51&Itemid=53](http://www.cewarn.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=51&Itemid=53).

mainstreamed along with the development within conflict regions of stand-by facilities for conflict resolution.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *Peaceful Prevention of Deadly Conflict*, Friends Committee on National Legislation, Washington. N.d.  
<http://www.fcnl.org/index.htm>.

## Appendix I: Types of War

### *Inter-State Wars*

An inter-state war is a war between two or more states and for purposes of the Ploughshares reporting must also meet the 1,000 combat death criterion. Russia's intervention in Georgia in 2008, for example, was clearly an international conflict, but it was not included as an armed conflict or war because the threshold of 1,000 combat deaths was not crossed. International wars, though rare, are not yet banished from history: in addition to the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq there was the Eritrea-Ethiopia war in the 1998-2000, Armenia and Azerbaijan in the 1990s, Iran and Iraq in the 1980s, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the US/international invasion of Iraq and Kuwait in response in the 1990s, Israel in Lebanon in 2006.

Just as the distinction between political and criminal violence is often obscured in modern warfare, so too is the distinction between inter-state and intra-state violence. Inter-state wars, though international, are frequently fought on the territory of just one of the states in the conflict – that being the case in the 2001-2002 US-led attack on Afghanistan, and the 2003 US-led attack on Iraq. On the other hand, it is obviously also the case that virtually all civil or intra-state wars include extensive international involvement. Once again, the issue is the nature of the political conflict. For example, while the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq began as international conflicts (both countries were invaded by international coalitions led by the United States), the basic conflict in each country is now essentially internal. International involvement is obviously central to both, but they are not now inter-state wars. Both wars were identified initially as international wars, but are now shown as intra-state wars. International forces in each case are formally present to aid the national government or to aid one side in a civil or intrastate war. The war in the DRC is another civil war with heavy international involvement. No civil war is fought without international involvement or without there being extensive regional implications.

### *Intra-state wars*

There are three basic types of intra-state conflicts.

*State Control Wars:* These obviously centre on struggles for control of the governing apparatus of the state. State control struggles have typically been driven by ideologically defined revolutionary movements, decolonization campaigns, or simply as the means by which power is transferred from one set of elites to another. In some instances, communal and/or ethnic interests are central to the fight to transfer power, in other instances religion becomes a defining feature of the conflict, and in others the differences are more ideological.

*State Formation Wars:* These centre on the form or shape of the state itself and generally involve particular regions of a country fighting for a greater measure of autonomy or for outright secession – or, as in southern Sudan, for the right to decide in a fair and binding referendum whether or not to secede.

*Failed State Wars* typically involve spreading domestic chaos and armed violence, sometimes brought on by persistent and debilitating state control and/or state formation wars. Failed state wars are thus conflicts in which the armed conflict is neither about state control nor state formation, but about more local issues and disputes involving violence in the absence of effective government control. The primary failure is in the lack of capacity, or sometimes will, to provide minimal human security to groups of citizens. Pastoralist wars in Africa are often in this category. Pastoralist communities in East Africa, for example, usually live well beyond the reach of the state. There are virtually no state security services or institutions present and no political means of mediating disputes over access to grazing lands and water or to settle disputes related to cattle raiding. Communities come into conflict and, with access to small arms, there is an almost inevitable escalation of violence – it is political violence (and clearly distinct from criminal violence and organized crime), but it is violence over local issues and none of the parties has state control

or state formation objectives. In southern Sudan, the decades long, largely north-south, civil war led to failed state conflicts between and within major ethnic communities due in large part to the complete absence of the rule of law.

### ***Hybrid Wars***

The term “hybrid warfare” is sometimes used to refer the multidimensional nature of warfare – traditional national security issues combine with new threats from new, non-state actors (including ethnic and religious communities) engaging a wide range of technologies and tactics. In that sense it also seems appropriate to refer to “hybrid wars” to indicate the presence of more than one type of armed conflict within a country. As just noted, the north-south war in Sudan was essentially a state formation conflict, but the absence of the rule of law over most of the south also led to more localized failed state conflicts. The violence in the DRC, for example, is about control of the government, but there are also localized violent clashes that are based on local ethnic or territorial disputes – hence the war in DRC is part state control and part failed state conflict. In the Philippines the resistance of the New People’s Army is a state control conflict, but the secessionist campaign of rebels in Mindanao is a state formation conflict. [That totals more than 100 percent because 12 of the conflicts (15 per cent) involved a combination of types.]

## **Appendix II: Stanley Foundation report on “preconditions for mass atrocities”**

### ***Social Factors***

- politicization of religious or ethnic divisions.
- social, economic, or political discrimination.
- history of genocide and mass atrocity.

### ***Regime Factors***

- human rights violations.
- absence of rule of law.
- absence of democracy.

### ***Economic Factors***

- low GDP per capita.
- low economic interdependence.
- horizontal inequalities.

### ***Armed Conflict***

- presence of multiple armed groups/illicit arms flows.
- establishment of militia (government and nongovernment).
- group-based recruitment practices.
- presence of armed conflict.

### ***Three steps toward mass atrocities:***

#### ***Crisis***

Four principal forms of political crisis provide the catalyst for genocide and mass atrocities. Each form has its own subsets and the list is not exhaustive:

1. Armed contests: civil war, external intervention, reneging on peace agreements.
2. Unconstitutional regime changes: coups and attempted coups, disputed elections, contested succession, contested secession.
3. State incapacity: new states with low legitimacy, failed/failing state.

4. Radical revolutionary government: ideological commitment to radical transformation.

### ***Mobilization***

Mass atrocities require some degree of organization aimed at preparing and strengthening a particular group and weakening, excluding, or targeting victim groups.

Typically, mobilization involves at least one of the following:

- Marginalization of moderates within the elite.
- Organization of “hate groups” dedicated to the vilification of the target group.
- Purging the security forces of minority groups and those thought disloyal, and expanding recruitment among dominant and radicalized groups.
- Establishment, arming, and training of militias.
- Escalation of unpunished human rights abuses against targeted groups.
- Publication of hate propaganda

### ***Violence***

If one or more of the following factors are evident in these early violent exchanges, then the potential for mass atrocities ought to be considered a genuine and imminent risk:

1. Violence intentionally targeted against civilians.
2. Impunity for the perpetrators of these early crimes.
3. The existence of a significant threat to the survival of the governing regime and failure of initial attempts to counter that threat.

## **Appendix III: Structural and Direct Measures to Prevent Armed Conflict and Mass Atrocities<sup>80</sup>**

### **Structural Measures:**

#### ***Economic Measures***

Reducing deprivation and poverty  
Reducing inequalities, especially horizontal  
Promoting economic growth  
Supporting structural reform  
Providing technical assistance  
Improving the terms of trade and trade openness  
Supporting community development and local ownership

#### ***Governance Measures***

Building institutional capacity and ensuring delivery of social services  
Strengthening and supporting democracy  
Supporting the diffusion or sharing of power  
Strengthening the independence of judiciaries  
Eradicating corruption  
Strengthening local conflict resolution capacity

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### ***Security Measures***

Strengthening rule of law

Ending/preventing impunity

Reforming the security sector

Encouraging disarmament and effective arms control/management with particular reference to small arms

### ***Human Rights Measures***

Protecting fundamental human rights and building national capacity, with specific protection of minority, women, and children's rights

Supporting the work of the International Criminal Court

### ***Social Measures***

Intergroup confidence building, including interfaith dialogue

Strengthening and supporting civil society

Establishing freedom of the press

Preventing and punishing incitement and hate speech

Educating on diversity and tolerance

### **Direct Prevention:**

#### ***Early Warning***

Establishing a UN early warning and assessment capacity

#### ***Diplomatic Measures***

Fact-finding

Forming "groups of friends" among UN membership

Deploying eminent persons/envoys

Exercising the good offices of the secretary-general

Pursuing arbitration (including International Court of Justice)

Supporting indigenous conflict resolution processes

#### ***Sanctions***

Banning travel

Embargoing trade and arms

Freezing assets

Imposing diplomatic sanctions

#### ***Inducements***

Promoting economic or trade incentives

Offering political inducements

#### ***Military Measures***

Mobilizing preventive deployments

Developing and/or threatening rapid deployment capability

Jamming and other means of preventing incitement

#### ***Legal***

Referring matter to the International Criminal Court

**Appendix IV: John Tirman, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, n.d. Memo to Norwegian Department of Foreign Affairs.**

“Advocate within NATO for a global peacekeeping force, in cooperation with the U.N., to intervene where small policing actions could blunt civil wars.” Refer to proposals for a United Nations Emergency Force.

“Freshly analyze the complex tasks of post-conflict peace building to empower local actors, reduce dependency, address ideologies of violence, and coordinate political development with economic reforms in more flexible ways. This also requires high-level diplomatic attention.

“Initiate new fact-finding consultations and public diplomacy on issues of women and violence; fund women’s rights NGOs; build cross-cultural contact.

“Examine with other major aid donors how economic reform is being pursued through aid conditionality and other pressures that may be counterproductive.

“Launch (with oil revenues) a new research center on applied research in energy efficiency and link this to development diplomacy. (The very notion of “development diplomacy” deserves more attention.) Lead by example in domestic energy use.

“New commitments to food security, education, and health care are strongly indicated. Norway can again lead by example through its development policies, but advocacy by the foreign minister within government and IOs is urgent to bring on the players that can make a difference. Mitigating unwanted migration and political violence are strong incentives.

“Small states, even those as influential as Norway, are limited in dealing with large states, or large problems. Norway might reconsider its multilateralism—such as joining the EU—to enhance its power.