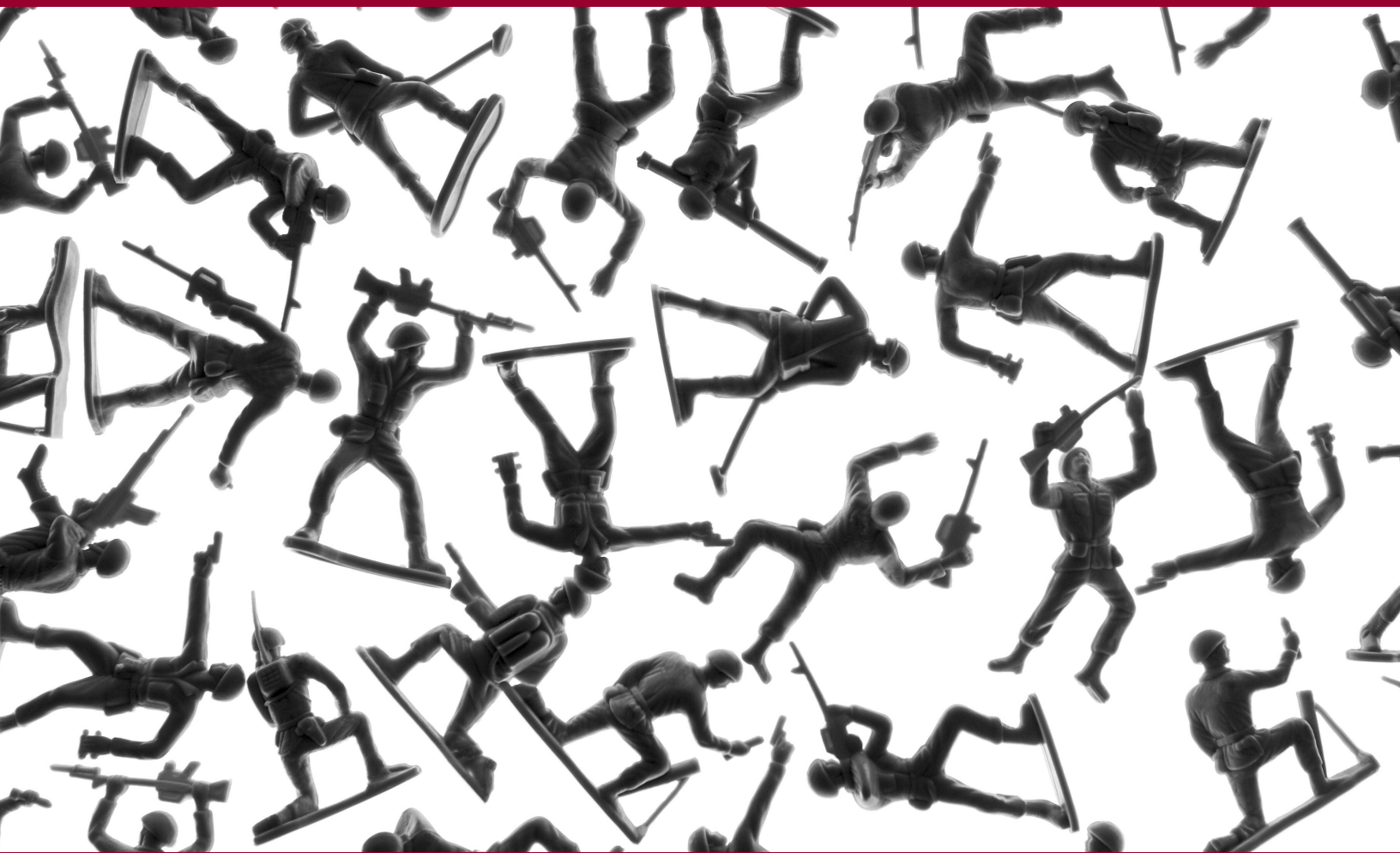# Global Political Violence: Explaining the Post-Cold War Decline

Coping with Crisis
Working Paper Series

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About the Author

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Acknowledgements

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The views expressed in this paper represent those of the author and not necessarily those of IPA. IPA welcomes consideration of a wide range of perspectives in the pursuit of a well-informed debate on critical policies and issues in international affairs.

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Foreword

Terje Rød-Larsen
President, International Peace Academy

The International Peace Academy (IPA) is pleased to introduce a new series of Working Papers within the program *Coping with Crisis, Conflict, and Change: The United Nations and Evolving Capacities for Managing Global Crises*, a four-year research and policy-facilitation program designed to generate fresh thinking about global crises and capacities for effective prevention and response.

In this series of Working Papers, IPA has asked leading experts to undertake a mapping exercise, presenting an assessment of critical challenges to human and international security. A first group of papers provides a horizontal perspective, examining the intersection of multiple challenges in specific regions of the world. A second group takes a vertical approach, providing in-depth analysis of global challenges relating to organized violence, poverty, population trends, public health, and climate change, among other topics. The Working Papers have three main objectives: to advance the understanding of these critical challenges and their interlinkages; to assess capacities to cope with these challenges and to draw scenarios for plausible future developments; and to offer a baseline for longer-term research and policy development.

Out of these initial Working Papers, a grave picture already emerges. The Papers make clear that common challenges take different forms in different regions of the world. At the same time, they show that complexity and interconnectedness will be a crucial attribute of crises in the foreseeable future.

First, new challenges are emerging, such as climate change and demographic trends. At least two billion additional inhabitants, and perhaps closer to three billion, will be added to the world over the next five decades, virtually all in the less developed regions, especially among the poorest countries in Africa and Asia. As a result of climate change, the magnitude and frequency of floods may increase in many regions; floods in coastal Bangladesh and India, for example, are expected to affect several million people. The demand for natural resources—notably water—will increase as a result of population growth and economic development; but some areas may have diminished access to clean water.

Second, some challenges are evolving in more dangerous global configurations such as transnational organized crime and terrorism. Illicit and violent organizations are gaining increasing control over territory, markets, and populations around the world. Non-state armed groups complicate peacemaking efforts due to their continued access to global commodity and arms markets. Many countries, even if they are not directly affected, can suffer from the economic impact of a major terrorist attack. States with ineffective and corrupted institutions may prove to be weak links in global arrangements to deal with threats ranging from the avian flu to transnational terrorism.

Finally, as these complex challenges emerge and evolve, 'old' problems still persist. While the number of violent conflicts waged around the world has recently declined, inequality—particularly between groups within the same country—is on the rise. When this intergroup inequality aligns with religious, ethnic, racial and language divides, the prospect of tension rises. Meanwhile, at the state level, the number of actual and aspirant nuclear-armed countries is growing, as is their ability to acquire weapons through illicit global trade.

As the international institutions created in the aftermath of World War II enter their seventh decade, their capacity to cope with this complex, rapidly evolving and interconnected security landscape is being sharply tested. The United Nations has made important progress in some of its core functions—'keeping the peace,' providing humanitarian relief, and helping advance human development and security. However, there are

reasons to question whether the broad UN crisis management system for prevention and response is up to the test.

Not only the UN, but also regional and state mechanisms are challenged by this complex landscape and the nature and scale of crises. In the Middle East, for example, interlinked conflicts are complicated by demographic and socioeconomic trends and regional institutions capable of coping with crisis are lacking. In both Latin America and Africa, 'old' problems of domestic insecurity arising from weak institutions and incomplete democratization intersect with 'new' transnational challenges such as organized crime. Overall, there is reason for concern about net global capacities to cope with these challenges, generating a growing sense of global crisis.

Reading these Working Papers, the first step in a four-year research program, one is left with a sense of urgency about the need for action and change: action where policies and mechanisms have already been identified; change where institutions are deemed inadequate and require innovation. The diversity of challenges suggests that solutions cannot rest in one actor or mechanism alone. For example, greater multilateral engagement can produce a regulatory framework to combat small arms proliferation and misuse, while private actors, including both industry and local communities, will need to play indispensable roles in forging global solutions to public health provision and food security. At the same time, the complexity and intertwined nature of the challenges require solutions at multiple levels. For example, governments will need to confront the realities that demographic change will impose on them in coming years, while international organizations such as the UN have a key role to play in technical assistance and norm-setting in areas as diverse as education, urban planning and environmental control.

That the world is changing is hardly news. What is new is a faster rate of change than ever before and an unprecedented interconnectedness between different domains of human activity—and the crises they can precipitate. This series of Working Papers aims to contribute to understanding these complexities and the responses that are needed from institutions and decision-makers to cope with these crises, challenges and change.

Terje Rød-Larsen

Introduction

This paper reviews global trends in political violence since the end of World War II, focusing in particular on the decline in conflict numbers that followed the end of the Cold War. It argues that the single most compelling explanation for this decline is found in the upsurge of peacemaking and peacebuilding activities that started in the early 1990s, was spearheaded by the UN, but also involved many other international agencies, donor governments, and NGOs. The paper also examines trends in war fatalities, which have been declining unevenly since the early 1950s and reviews possible explanations for the change. Trends in civilian deaths from organized political violence—including genocides and terrorism—are also reviewed.

What Happened After the Cold War

After the end of the Cold War, the number of violent conflicts being waged around the world began to decline rapidly, dropping by some 40 percent between 1992 and 2005. This startling change followed nearly four decades of inexorable increase.[1] The highest intensity conflicts—those that kill 1,000 or more people a year—declined by 80 percent over the same period.

The post-Cold War decline in armed conflicts was part of a broader pattern of reduced political violence that has gone largely unnoticed in the media, much of the policy community, and even parts of the research community. Other significant changes during the post-Cold War years include the following:

- The number of genocides and other mass slaughters declined by 90 percent between 1989 and 2005.
- Wars between countries, which have tended to kill far more people than intrastate conflicts and have always been relatively rare, now constitute fewer than 2 percent of all armed conflicts—closer to 0 percent in 2004 and 2005.
- The number of military coups and attempted coups has declined dramatically since 1963. In 1963, there were twenty-five coups or attempted coups; in 2005, there were three.

Even in sub-Saharan Africa there have been signs of real progress. Between 2002 and 2005, the number of armed conflicts in the region in which a government was one of the warring parties more than halved—from thirteen to five. Wars are not only less numerous today, they have also become dramatically less deadly over the past five decades, as is demonstrated later in this paper. Getting accurate data on war deaths can be extremely challenging, however, as current controversies over the death toll in Iraq indicate. But there can be no doubt about the direction of the fifty–year trend. Fatality statistics are discussed in more detail below.

This paper only includes data on political violence to the end of 2005. But events in 2006 remind us that there is no room for complacency on the global security front. Political violence flared—or intensified—during the year in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Palestine, Lebanon, Timor Leste, Nigeria, the Central African Republic, and Burundi. As the year moved to a close, the crisis in Darfur had spilled into Chad, fighting erupted between Ethiopia and the Union of Islamic Courts in Somalia, while sectarian violence in Iraq continued to escalate with no sign of resolution.

Global Trends in Armed Conflicts

As Figure 1 clearly indicates, the Cold War and post-Cold War trends in armed conflict numbers are radically different.

Figure 1 shows the trend in so-called "state-based" armed conflicts—i.e. those in which a government is one of the warring parties. The data are from Uppsala University's Conflict Data Program and the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo. For a conflict to be recorded there must be twenty-five or more battle-deaths in a calendar year and the warring parties must be identifiable. Twenty-five deaths is a lower threshold than other conflict datasets—meaning that the Uppsala/PRIO dataset captures more conflicts than those that have higher battle-death thresholds.

Note that in addition to intrastate conflicts (those fought between a government and one or more non–state actors within the same country) and interstate (those fought between two or more governments), Figure 1 also includes two additional types of conflict. First, are "extra–state" conflicts—those fought between a state and a non–state group outside that state's territory. These are essentially the wars of liberation from colonial rule that, in the mid-1950s, made

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[1] Unless otherwise noted, all data in this paper are drawn from the Human Security Report 2005, Oxford University Press, New York, 2005, available at www.humansecurityreport.info, or from the Human Security Brief 2006, Human Security Centre, University of British Columbia, 2006, available at www.humansecuritybrief.info.
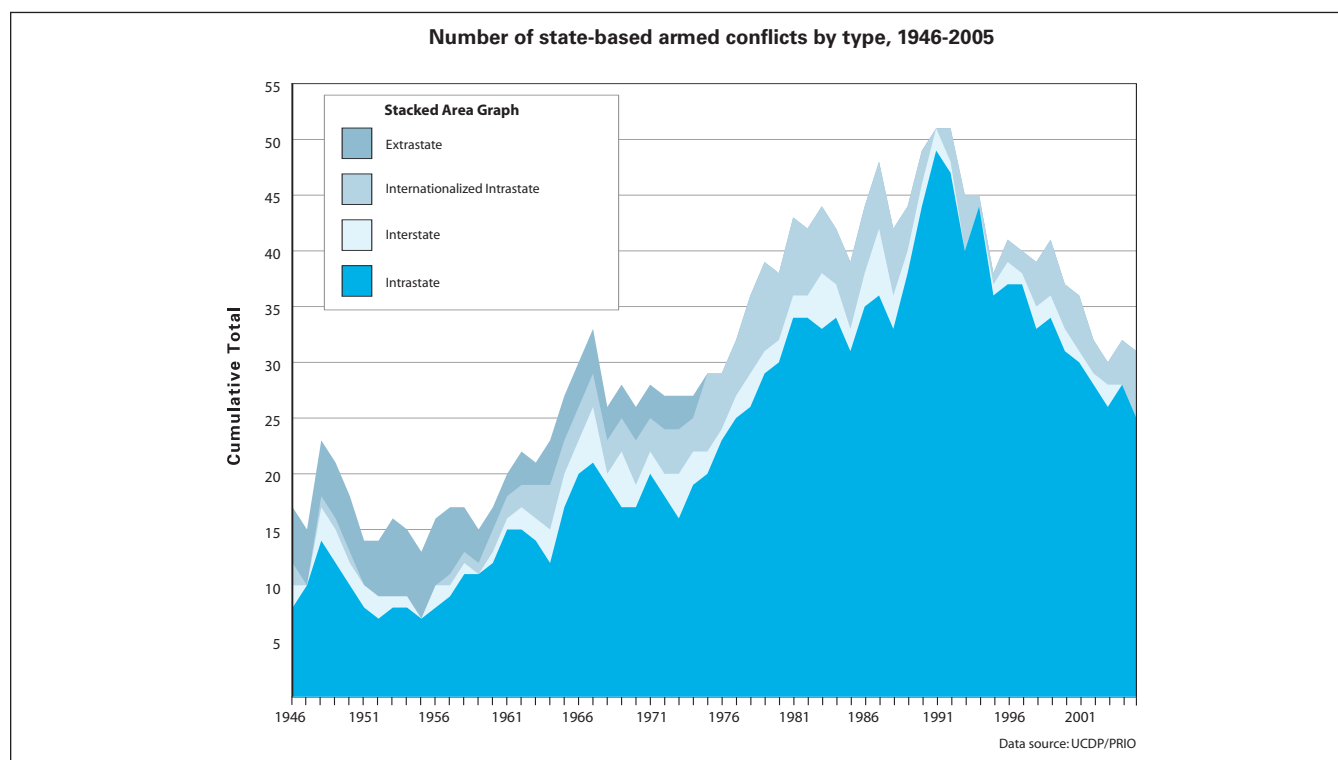
Number of state-based armed conflicts by type, 1946-2005

Figure 1

up nearly half of all armed conflicts. Today there are none and there haven't been any since the 1970s. Second, are so–called "internationalized intrastate conflicts"—those in which either the government or a non–state armed group—or both—receive external military assistance from a foreign government. Though relatively small in number, many of these conflicts have had very high death rates.

(It is important to note that Figure 1 refers to the number of armed conflicts, *not* the number of countries experiencing conflict—a single country can experience a number of different conflicts inside its borders within a single year—India and Burma are two cases in point. The trend line for countries in conflict is, however, very similar to the trend line for conflicts.)

The Cold War era, described by some scholars as the "Long Peace," was the longest period without war between the major powers in hundreds of years. But it was anything but peaceful for the rest of the world, as the number of conflicts tripled from the end of World War II to the end of the Cold War.

It is very clear from Figure 1 that intrastate conflicts (often called "civil wars") have made up the overwhelming majority of armed conflicts since the end of the Cold War. These conflicts accounted for most of the increase in conflict numbers up to the end of the Cold War—and most of the subsequent decrease.

Although interstate conflicts have been the focus of most scholarly research over the past fifty years, they have, as the trend data show, always been a minority of all wars.

Conflicts without Governments

Most conflict datasets only count wars in which a government is one of the warring parties. But this approach excludes violent intercommunal conflicts, fighting between warlords and clans, indeed any form of collective armed violence where a government is not one of the parties.

Concerned to provide a more comprehensive picture of armed conflict around the world, the Human Security Centre at the University of British Columbia commissioned Uppsala University's Conflict Data Program to collect data on these previously unrecorded "non–state" conflicts.

The first four years of results are presented in Figure 2 below.

The conflict trend data in Figure 1 ignore this entire class of conflicts entirely. Yet in 2002, there were actually more of these non–state conflicts than those in which a government was one of the warring parties—thirty-four versus thirty-two. Since 2002, the new data show a four-year decline of some 26 percent. The biggest decline by far was in sub-Saharan Africa where the number of "non–state conflicts" decreased from twenty-four to fourteen. When non-state and state–
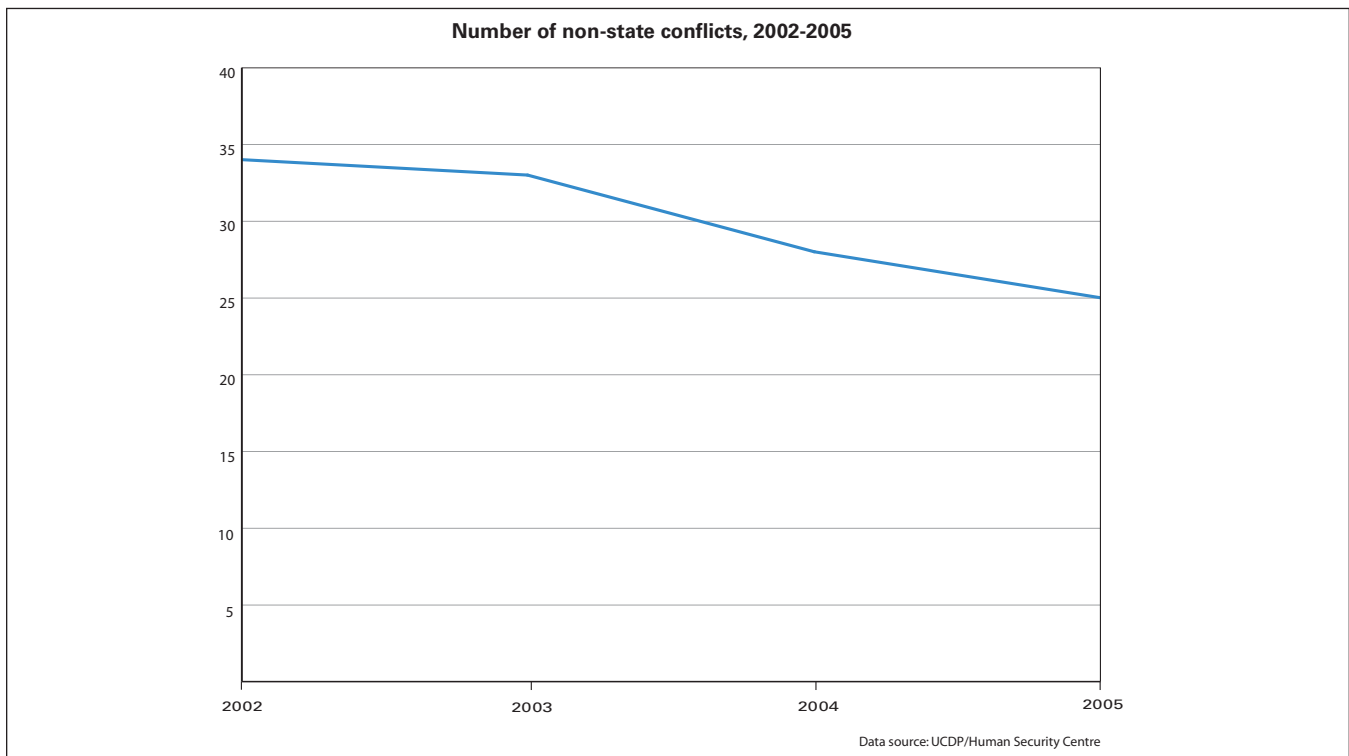
Figure 2

based conflicts are combined for this period the change is from a total of sixty-six conflicts in 2002 to fifty-six in 2005—a decline of 15 percent.

In other words, despite Iraq, Afghanistan, Darfur, and the other deadly conflicts that grab media headlines, the overall decline in armed conflict reported in the 2005 *Human Security Report* appears to be continuing. And, as we will see below, the death toll from armed conflicts also continues to decline.

Why are there Fewer Conflicts Today?

There are a number of reasons for the decline in armed conflict that has taken place since the end of the Cold War.

First, the end of colonialism removed a major source of political violence from the international system. The violent anti-colonial struggles were replaced in some cases by struggles for control of the new post-colonial states, but many of these had been resolved by the end of the 1980s.

Second, the end of the Cold War, which had driven approximately one-third of all conflicts in the post-World War II period, removed another source of conflict from the international system.[2] A pervasive driver of ideological rivalry simply disappeared. Washington and Moscow stopped fueling "proxy

wars" in the developing world, and any residual threat of war between the major powers vanished.

But most important was the unprecedented upsurge of international activism designed to stop ongoing wars and prevent old ones restarting that followed the end of the Cold War. Spearheaded by a UN liberated from the political shackles of superpower rivalries, these activities included:

- A six-fold increase in UN preventive diplomacy missions (i.e, those intended to stop wars before they start)—from one to six—between 1990 and 2002.

- A five-fold increase in UN peacemaking missions (those intended to end ongoing conflicts)—from three to fifteen—between 1989 and 2002.

- A near four-fold increase in UN peace operations (those intended, among other things, to reduce the risk of wars restarting)—from five to nineteen—between 1987 and 1999.

- An eleven-fold increase in the number of "Friends of the Secretary General" and other mechanisms designed to support local actors in ending wars and preventing them from restarting—from three to thirty-four—between 1989 and 2004.

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[2] Estimate by Eric Nicholls of the Human Security Centre.

The UN did not act alone, of course. The World Bank, donor states, regional organizations and thousands of NGOs worked closely with UN agencies—and often played independent roles of their own. But the UN, the only international organization with a global security mandate, was usually the leading player.

Determining whether or not the increased efforts to stop wars *caused* the decline in armed conflicts, or were simply *associated* with them is not easy, but a growing body of quantitative and case study evidence demonstrates that such initiatives can indeed improve the odds of attaining and sustaining peace agreements.[3]

The success rate of many of these activities was not particularly impressive—many UN peace operations, for example, had inappropriate mandates, were inadequately resourced and some were ineptly led. But even low success rates were a huge improvement over the Cold War years when such activities were notable mostly by their absence. Furthermore, the annual cost of these initiatives to the international community has been modest. The UN's peace operations currently cost less than 1 percent of annual global military spending around the world—and less than the United States spends in Iraq in a single month.

Other Explanations for the Post-Cold War Decline in Armed Conflict

The downturn in political violence that has occurred since the early 1990s cannot be explained by the shifts in slow-changing "structural" factors like income per capita, rates of economic growth, demographics, or democratization that are the focus of so much contemporary research on the causes of war.[4] Structural change simply has not been significant or widespread enough to explain the steepness of the *global* decline in armed conflict since the Cold War ended.

In East and Southeast Asia, however, the decline in armed conflict numbers started in the late 1970s. Here the change is associated with the cessation of foreign interventions that were driven by Cold War rivalries, plus the extraordinary economic growth and increasingly inclusive processes of democratization that have

characterized the region for more than thirty years.

Coercion can also be an effective means of reducing the number of intrastate conflicts, at least in the short- and medium-term, though it is hardly a recipe for stability in the long-term. In the Middle East and North Africa, for example, the decline in armed conflict began in the late 1980s, half a decade earlier than the global decline. But this change had little to do with peacemaking, economic growth, or democratization. Instead, it was due primarily to the effective repression of violent domestic insurgencies in Egypt, Syria, Algeria, Tunisia, and elsewhere in the region. The civil war literature finds that relatively strong authoritarian states, like many in the Middle East, are less prone to armed conflict than so-called "anocracies"—countries whose modes of governance are neither wholly authoritarian, nor democratic but an often volatile mixture of the two.[5]

Is the Decline in Warfare Due to More Conflicts Ending—or Fewer Starting?

The fact that war numbers have declined since the end of the Cold War is well known to conflict researchers, but it stands in sharp contrast to the popular view of the 1990s as a period during which there was an explosion of new conflicts around the world. In fact, the conventional wisdom was *partly* correct. There *was* a dramatic increase in conflict numbers in the political turmoil that followed the break-up of the Soviet Union and the ending of superpower rivalries in the developing world. In fact there were *twice as many* conflict onsets in the 1990s as in the 1980s—suggesting that whatever conflict prevention policies were being attempted in this period were a dismal failure. But the decade also saw an even greater number of wars ending than beginning—suggesting that what the UN calls "peacemaking" may have become increasingly successful.

In other words, the reason there is less warfare today is because more wars are stopping, not because fewer wars are starting. In fact, the rate of new conflict onsets between 2000 and 2005 has remained higher than it was in the 1970s and 1980s, but the rate at which wars have been ending is higher still. In the first

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[3] Barbara Walter, *Committing to Peace: the Successful Settlement of Civil Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Page Fortna, "Does Peacekeeping Keep Peace? International Intervention and the Duration of Peace After Civil War," *International Studies Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (2004): 269–292; Michael W. Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis, *Making War and Building Peace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Stephen John Stedman, Donald S. Rothchild and Elizabeth M. Cousens, eds. *Ending Civil Wars: The Implementation of Peace Agreements* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002).

[4] There are clear associations between levels of poverty, economic growth and decline, and the risk of armed conflict. The relationship between democratization and the risk of conflict is more complex. So-called "anocracies"—countries that have "mixed" polities, i.e., neither wholly democratic nor authoritarian—are at far greater risk of war than inclusive democracies. In the 1990s, the number of anocracies *and* inclusive democracies increased, thus making any determination of the impact of these political changes on the risk of conflict impossible to determine.

[5] The classic reference is Håvard Hegre, Tanja Ellingsen, Scott Gates and Nils Petter Gleditsch, "Toward a Democratic Civil Peace? Opportunity, Grievance, and Civil War 1816–1992," *American Political Science Review* 95, no.1 (2001): 33-48.

six years of the new millennium there has been an average net decline (number of conflict terminations minus number of onsets) of 1.5 state-based conflicts a year. Were this rate to continue for a decade the number of state-based conflicts being waged around the world would be halved.

How Armed Conflicts End

The way in which conflicts end also changed dramatically in the 1990s. During the Cold War years twice as many wars ended in victory as in negotiated settlements. In the 1990s, the reverse was true—almost twice as many (forty-two) wars ended in negotiated settlements as in victory (twenty-three).[6] This trend accelerated in the new millennium. Between 2000 and 2005 there were *four times* as many negotiated settlements as victories.

This remarkable change suggests that the international community is taking peacemaking much more seriously—and to good effect. But wars that end in negotiated settlements have a downside. They last almost three times longer than those that end in victories and they are almost twice as likely to relapse into new fighting within five years.

Noting the instability of negotiated settlements, Edward Luttwak, in a much-cited *Foreign Affairs* article from 1999, argued against seeking mediated peace settlements on the grounds that doing so simply prolonged wars.[7] Ceasefires, he claimed, were typically used by the warring parties as an opportunity to re-arm and fight on, thus delaying the decisive victories that are the surest way to achieve stable peace. The international community should, he suggested, allow wars to "burn themselves out" rather than intervening in well-meaning, but ultimately counterproductive attempts to reach negotiated settlements.

Luttwak's advice to "give war a chance" would appear to be supported by the new conflict termination data from the University of Uppsala.[8] But the central assumption on which his thesis was based—namely that if no efforts are made to mediate armed conflicts they will swiftly "burn themselves out"—was incorrect. The reason that many conflicts last so long is because neither side can prevail on the battlefield.

Desirable or not, victory is simply not an option in many cases. And when military solutions are impossible, mediated settlements may be the only route to peace. Belligerents typically turn to mediators when they confront a "mutually hurting stalemate"—a situation in which neither side can prevail, but which imposes real costs on both.[9]

The turbulent 1990s saw negotiated settlements become more unstable—i.e., more likely to restart.[10] During the decade 43 percent of all conflicts that ended in negotiated settlements started again within five years, compared with just 9 percent that ended in victories. (Five years without a restart is the standard measure of success for a negotiated settlement or victory.) The average failure rate for the much smaller number of negotiated settlements in the Cold War years had been just 16 percent.

Many of the negotiated settlements signed in this Post–Cold War period appear to have been inappropriately designed, ineptly implemented and poorly supported—hence their high failure rate. But the sheer number of new settlements more than offset the effect of their increased failure rate. In the 1990s, twenty-four of the forty-two negotiated settlements succeeded—i.e., did not restart within five years. This meant that despite the large number of failures, the twenty-four successful settlements during this decade were still three times as numerous as the average for each decade in the Cold War years.

The category of conflict terminations that has the highest probability of failure is, unsurprisingly, the category containing those conflicts that end in neither a victory nor a peace agreement, but where the fighting simply peters out, or falls below the twenty-five battle–deaths per year threshold. This form of termination has the advantages of neither victories, nor negotiated settlements.

It is too early to make any definitive statements about the stability of the settlements signed since 2000, as five years have to elapse without a recurrence of fighting before a settlement can be labeled a success. But early indications suggest that negotiated settlements may be becoming more stable. In the six years from the beginning of 2000 to the end of 2005 only two out of seventeen negotiated settlements

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[6] Conflicts that simply peter out or fall beneath the annual battle-death threshold represent the largest single category of war termination, however.

[7] Edward Luttwak, "Give War a Chance", *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 4 (1999): 36-44.

[8] See the Uppsala Conflict Data Program's website, available at www.pcr.uu.se/research/UCDP/UCDP_toplevel.htm.

[9] For further discussion of when conflict may be ripe for mediation, see Chester Crocker, "Peacemaking and Mediation: Dynamics of a Changing Field," *Coping with Crisis* Working Paper Series, New York, International Peace Academy, March 2007.

[10] The Uppsala Conflict Data Program's category of "negotiated settlements" includes both peace agreements and ceasefires. In the 1990s, perhaps surprisingly, peace agreements—which are often preceded by ceasefires and which include de facto ceasefire provisions—had a slightly *higher* failure rate (45 percent) than ceasefires that were signed without a formal peace agreement (43 percent).

(11.8 percent) failed. The negotiated settlements for this period include ten peace agreements—not one of these has yet failed.

However, while the finding that the number of armed conflicts has declined since the end of the Cold War is slowly becoming accepted, there remains considerable skepticism that the positive trend of the past dozen years can continue.

Are Today's Wars more Intractable than Those of the Past?

Some researchers believe that easy–to–resolve conflicts have mostly ended and only the most intractable remain.[11] If this is indeed the case the implication is clear and sobering—the decline in political violence the world has experienced since the end of the Cold War may have come to an end.

It is certainly true that a number of very long-duration conflicts—those in Israel/Palestine, Colombia, Sri Lanka and Burma, for example—still appear far from resolution. But since the end of the Cold War other major conflicts that once seemed hopelessly intractable have ended. These include the wars in East Timor, Aceh (Indonesia), Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone, southern Sudan, Peru, and most recently, Nepal. Still other conflicts have seen a great reduction

in the level of violence (Algeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example), or (like Burundi, northern Uganda and possibly even Chechnya) appear to be moving towards some sort of termination.

Moreover, Uppsala's new termination dataset provides little statistical evidence to support claims that wars are becoming intractable. Of the thirty-one conflicts being waged in 2005, only 29 percent had been underway for ten or more years and really merited the label "intractable." A further 29 percent had been ongoing for less than a year, while 42 percent had lasted one to ten years. The fact that 71 percent of today's ongoing conflicts have lasted less than ten years suggests that "intractability" is not a major barrier to further progress.

Wars Have Become Less Deadly As Well As Less Numerous

While some believe that the wars of the post–Cold War era have become more deadly, there is no evidence to support such a belief. In fact, war death numbers have been declining for far longer than have armed conflicts. As Figure 3 shows, the number of people killed in state-based conflicts has declined

Number of reported, codable deaths from state-based armed conflict, 1946-2005*

Stacked Area Graph

- Central & South Asia (Total 855,802)
- Americas (Total 235,240)
- Sub-Saharan Africa (Total 1,329,842)
- Europe (Total 368,608)
- Middle East & North Africa (Total 1,596,188)
- East & Southeast Asia & Oceania (Total 5,722,716)

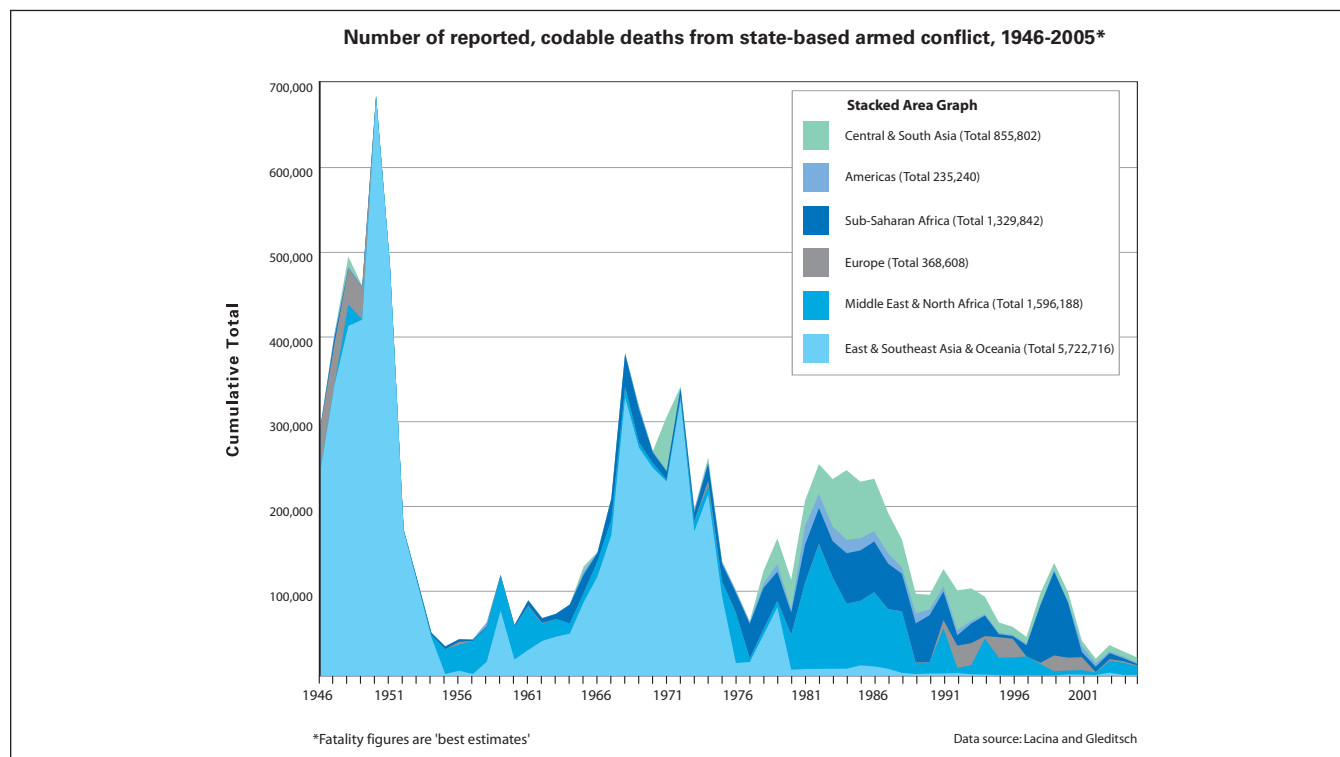*Fatality figures are 'best estimates'   Data source: Lacina and Gleditsch

[11] Fen Osler Hampson, Chester A. Crocker, Pamela Aall, "If the World's Getting More Peaceful, Why Are We Still in Danger?" *Globe and Mail*, October 20, 2005. The authors were responding to the findings of the 2005 *Human Security Report*.

dramatically, but unevenly, since the beginning of the 1950s. This decline would appear even more striking if the tripling of global population growth during this period were taken into account—i.e., if we focused on battle–deaths as a share of the world's population.

The average number of battle-deaths per conflict per year—which is the best measure of the deadliness of warfare—was 38,000 in 1950 and just 700 in 2005—a 98 percent decrease.

In the late 1940s and 1950s, as Figure 3 makes clear, most people getting killed in the world lived in East Asia—with the Chinese Civil War and the Korean War accounting for the overwhelming majority of war deaths. In the 1960s and 1970s, Southeast Asia was the world's deadliest killing zone—primarily because of the wars in Indochina. In the 1980s, combat-related deaths were distributed more equally around the world, though the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Central and South Asia experienced the highest number of fatalities. By the end of the 1990s, sub-Saharan Africa was suffering more battle–related deaths than the rest of the world put together. Since then there has been a sharp decline.

Today Iraq is by far the deadliest war in terms of battle-deaths, which include civilian "collateral damage." Battle-death counts do not, however, include either the intentional killing of civilians, nor so-called "indirect deaths"—i.e., deaths from war-exacerbated disease and malnutrition. Both intentional violence against civilians and "indirect deaths" are examined in more detail below.

Death Tolls in Non-State Conflicts

What about deaths in conflicts in so-called non-state wars? Although there are currently only data for four years (2002-2005), the estimates of battle-related death tolls in conflicts in which governments are not warring parties have declined sharply, as Figure 4 shows.

The decline in battle-deaths here has been a remarkable 71 percent. But the period under review is far too short for any confident claims about trends to be made. Eventually the non-state data will be extended back to 1989.

Explaining the Decline in Battle-Deaths

The explosion of international activism after the Cold War helps us understand the subsequent decline in the *number* of armed conflicts, but it does not tell us why they have become so much less *deadly* since the early 1950s. Here the explanation appears to be related to changes in the nature of warfare and (possibly) to the dramatic increase in the numbers of people displaced by armed conflict.

Many of the wars of the Cold War era involved huge armies and heavy conventional weapons, and civil wars were often associated with massive major
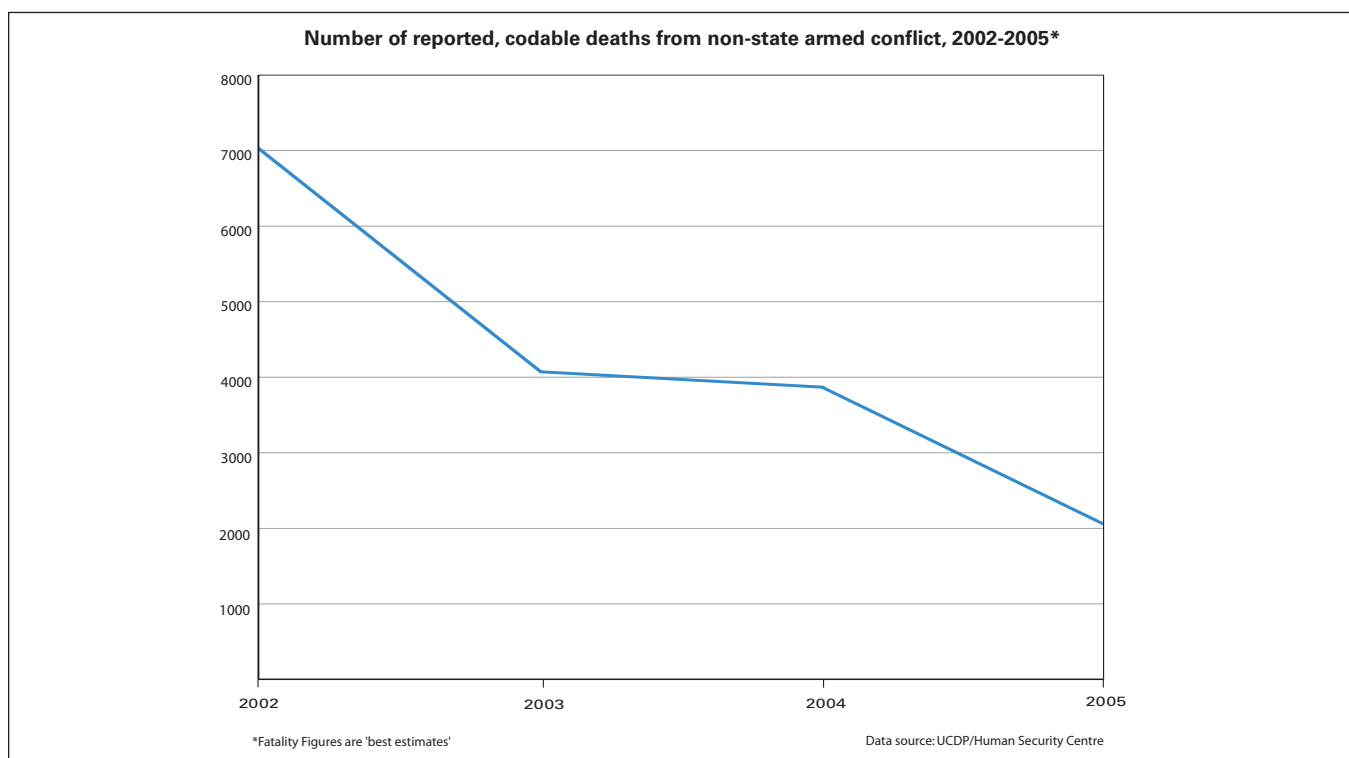
Number of reported, codable deaths from non-state armed conflict, 2002-2005*

*Fatality Figures are 'best estimates'   Data source: UCDP/Human Security Centre

Figure 4

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power intervention. These wars killed hundreds of thousands—sometimes millions. The overwhelming majority of today's wars are low-intensity conflicts fought mostly with small arms and light weapons. They typically pit weak government forces against ill-trained rebels and rarely involve major engagements. Many (up to 40 percent in the past two decades) are rural insurgencies in peripheral areas that drag on with relatively few casualties because even weak rebels can elude government forces. Although often brutal, these conflicts kill relatively few people compared with the major wars of the Cold War era—typically hundreds or thousands, rather than tens or hundreds of thousands.

The exception to this trend is found in the small number of wars prosecuted with high-tech weaponry by the US and its allies against relatively weak conventional adversaries. Gulf War I, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq fall into this category. Each of these wars was over quickly and with relatively few casualties. In Iraq, however, the conventional defeat of Saddam Hussein's regime was followed by an increasingly deadly urban insurgency against the occupying forces and the government—and more recently, a sectarian civil war. The huge advantages that high-tech US forces experience on the conventional battlefield are largely negated in urban insurgencies.

Deadly Assaults against Civilians

As noted above, none of the battle-death datasets deal with the intentional slaughter of defenseless civilians. Almost all conflict datasets treat such killings as *sui generis*, not least because some take place outside the context of an armed conflict, but also because "conflict" implies military engagement and *fighting*, as against simply killing those unable to defend themselves.

The conventional wisdom in the UN and other international agencies, and among many human rights and humanitarian workers, is that the deliberate targeting of civilians has increased since the end of the Cold War. Indeed one of the most widely-cited statistics in this field is that 90 percent of those killed in today's armed conflicts are civilians, compared with 50 percent in World War II and just 5 percent in World War I. Yet no evidence has ever been produced to substantiate the 90 percent fatality statistic—though the claim surfaces regularly in UN documents and academic articles. What evidence there is suggests that

the actual figure is much lower. According to Uppsala University's Conflict Data Program—which produces the most comprehensive and up-to-date statistics on armed conflicts—between 30 and 60 percent of violent deaths in today's armed conflicts are civilians.[12]

Part of the reason we know so little about civilian death tolls in today's wars is that no international agency collects official data on political violence—and even where governments do collect statistics on sensitive security issues they are rarely willing to share them. So when the UN Secretary-General makes his annual report on the Protection of Civilians to the Security Council he has no way of knowing whether more—or fewer—civilians have been killed around the world than was the case a year earlier. Without such information no one knows whether the UN's policies are making a difference or not.

Responding to the need for fatality trend data on intentional organized violence against civilians, the Human Security Centre commissioned Uppsala University's Conflict Data Program to collect the missing data. The resulting dataset records civilian deaths from organized violence from 1989 to 2005.[13] Uppsala refers to the intentional killing of civilians as "one-sided violence"—the term reflecting the fact that defenseless civilians cannot fight back.

As Figure 5 shows, the new dataset reveals there has been 56 percent increase in the number of campaigns of one-sided violence against civilians since 1989—from eighteen to twenty-eight. This finding supports the conventional wisdom that assaults on civilians are increasing. But the data also reveal that there had been a clear, albeit uneven, decline in the number of fatalities associated with these campaigns since the mid-1990s—a finding that runs contrary to the conventional wisdom. However, the new study only dates back to 1989, so it cannot tell us about longer-term trends. Additionally, the huge challenges involved in getting reliable civilian death counts in high-intensity conflicts like Darfur and Iraq mean that definitive judgments about fatality trends, even in the post-Cold War years, are not yet possible.

The Uppsala study is only one of several that have sought to measure organized violence against civilians. Each of these studies measures anti-civilian violence in different ways, and all confront challenging methodological problems, but taken together they provide the most comprehensive, albeit incomplete, picture of changing patterns of violence against civilians.

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[12] See "The Myth of Civilian War Deaths," in *Human Security Report* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 75.
[13] As with armed conflicts, there have to be twenty-five or more violent deaths a year for a "case" of one-sided violence to be recorded.

Number of campaigns of one-sided violence, 1989-2005
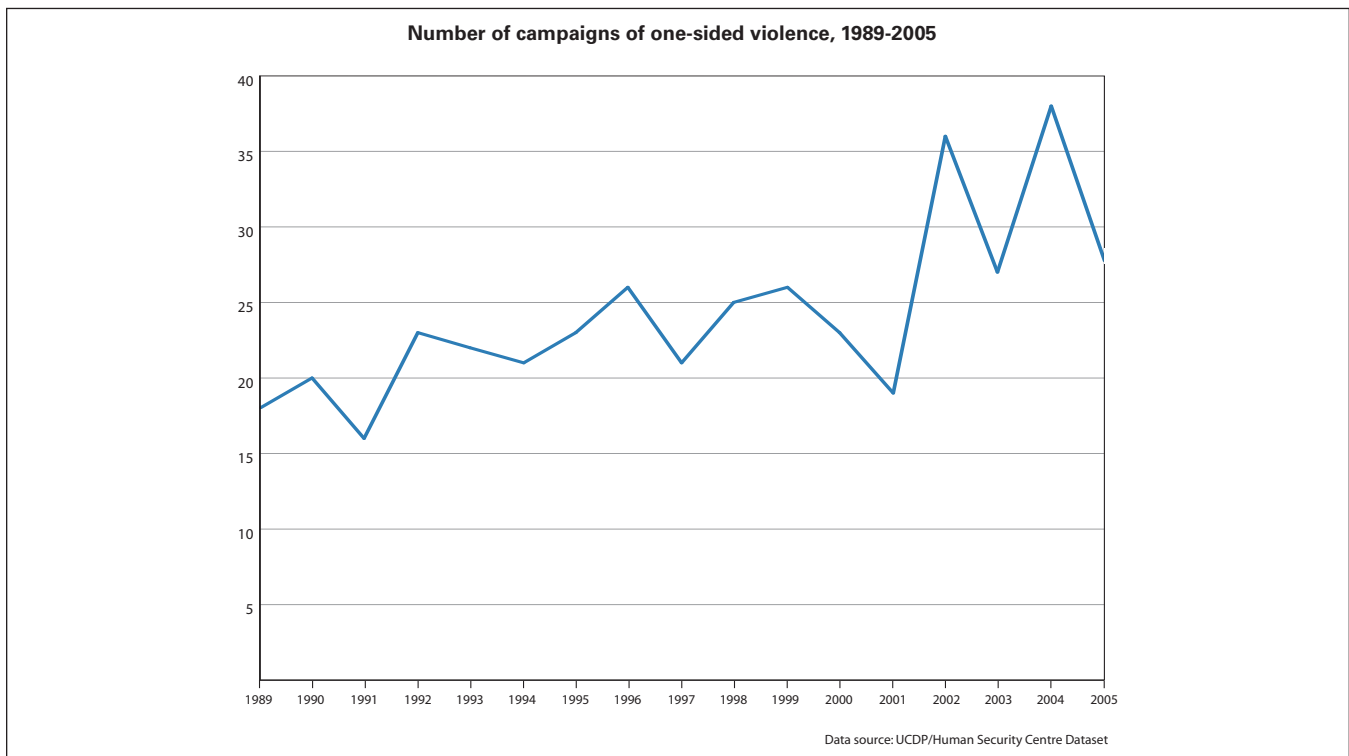

Data source: UCDP/Human Security Centre Dataset

Figure 5

Humanitarian Workers

One form of violence against civilians that is of particular concern to the UN and other humanitarian actors is attacks on humanitarian workers in the field. The belief that violent threats to humanitarian aid workers in conflict zones are increasing is widespread.[14] Every humanitarian agency and NGO has stories of aid workers threatened, attacked and sometimes killed. Such assaults are widely believed to be part of a broader worldwide trend towards increased political violence against civilians. Some humanitarian workers believe that the increased threat to aid workers is not accidental, that it has been caused by a blurring of the dividing line between humanitarian assistance and military counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Others worry that the United Nations' embrace of "integrated missions"—which bring aid workers and peacekeepers into a closer relationship—is a further erosion of the tradition of humanitarian impartiality, and a development that also puts aid workers at risk.

Clearly humanitarian assistance in zones of conflict can be a dangerous endeavor, but most claims about growing threats to aid workers have been based on anecdotal information. Only with the publication of a joint study by the Center for International Cooperation at New York University and the UK's Humanitarian Policy Group in October 2006 has the evidence needed to make objective assessments become available.[15] In what is by far the most comprehensive analysis of the problem to date, the study's authors compiled data on major acts of violence against humanitarian workers between 1997 and 2005. They found that between 1997 and 2005, the number of humanitarian workers killed each year had jumped from thirty-nine to sixty-one. The number of violent incidents (leading to death, injury or kidnapping) more than doubled from thirty-four to seventy-two over the same period.

These findings appeared to confirm the widespread perception that humanitarian work was indeed becoming more dangerous and could be seen as further evidence that deadly assaults on civilians were increasing. However, during this same period, the number of humanitarian workers in the field also increased (by an estimated 77 percent). This meant, as Figure 6 shows, that the rate of violent assaults per 10,000 aid workers had only increased marginally—

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[14] See for example, United Nations Security Council, Press Release SC/7856, "Security Council Expresses Strong Condemnation of Violence Against Humanitarian Workers, Calls for Action to Ensure Their Safety". Security Council Resolution 1502 (2003), August 26, 2003.

[15] Abby Stoddard, Adele Harmer and Katherine Haver, "Providing Aid in Insecure Environments: Trends in Policies and Operations," Briefing Paper 24, Humanitarian Policy Group, London, October, 2006, available at www.odi.org.uk/hpg/papers/hpgbrief24.pdf.
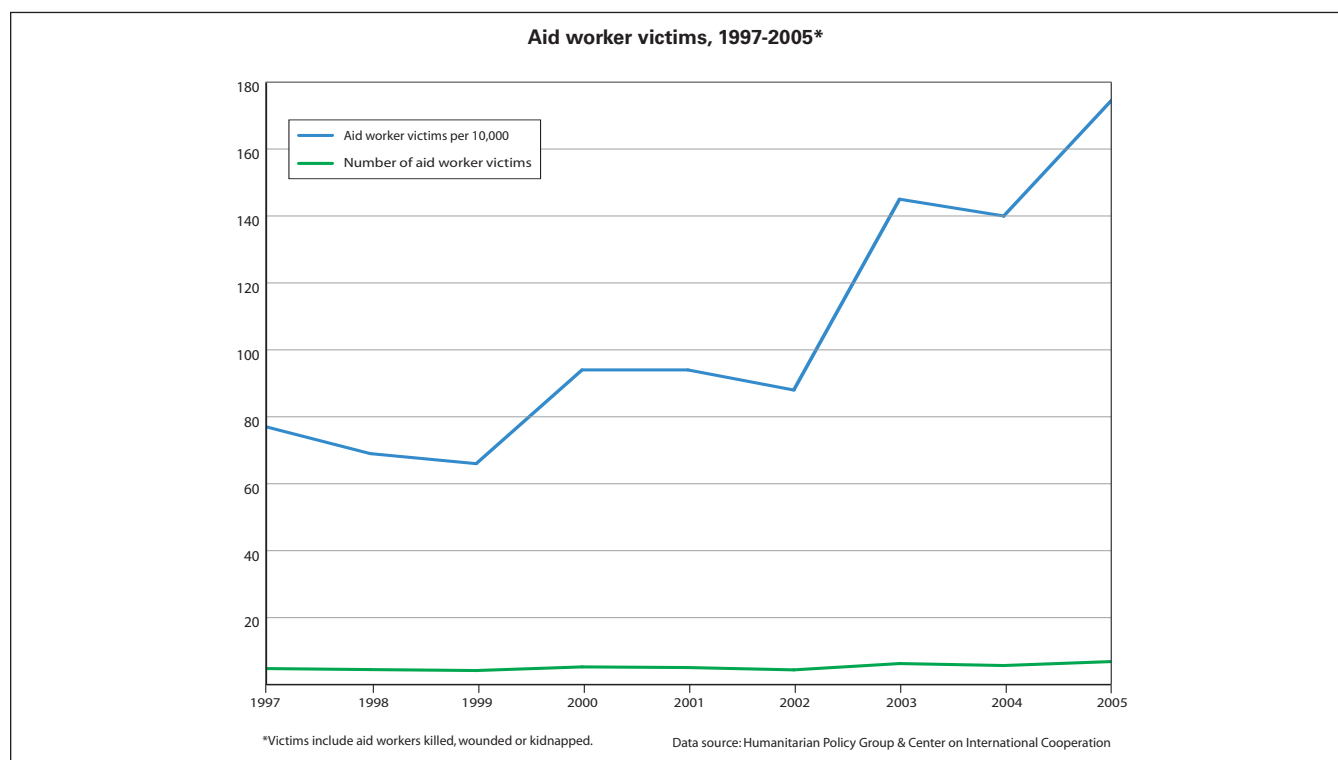
Aid worker victims, 1997-2005*

*Victims include aid workers killed, wounded or kidnapped.   Data source: Humanitarian Policy Group & Center on International Cooperation

Figure 6

from an average of 4.8 assaults per 10,000 workers between 1997 and 2001, to 5.8 between 2002 and 2005.[16]

International Terrorism

Statistics on international terrorism are another source of insight into trends in intentional violence against civilians—though none of the terrorism datasets includes violence against civilians perpetrated by governments.

The US-based Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism (MIPT), which codes and collates terrorism incident data provided by the RAND Corporation, is now the only institution that publishes updated international terrorism statistics on a timely annual basis. MIPT has international terrorism data going back to 1968, and domestic terrorism data from 1998.[17] As Figure 7 below indicates, MIPT's trend data reveal a fourfold *increase* in international terrorist incidents from 1968 to1991, followed by an almost four-fold *decline* by the end of the 1990s. Until the

beginning of the new millennium the international terrorism data followed a trend line remarkably similar to those of armed conflicts and genocides/politicides—i.e., a steady increase through the Cold War years followed by a sharp decrease in the 1990s. But over the past five years there has been a dramatic change. Starting in 2000, the downward trend in international terrorist incidents was reversed and by 2004 there were almost four times as many incidents as in 2000. The global incidence of domestic terrorism also increases dramatically over the same period. (MIPT only has data on domestic terrorism from 1998.)

But when the international terrorist incident data are disaggregated on a regional basis, it becomes clear that just two regions are driving almost all of the post-2000 increase. Figure 8 below shows the huge reported increase in international terrorism incidents in the Middle East and Persian Gulf, combined with those in South Asia. Most of the increased terrorist activity has taken place in the former region where, since 2003, it has been driven primarily by the violence in Iraq.

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[16] The aggregated data conceal some interesting trends. There have, for example, been major changes in the groups that were being victimized. Comparing two periods (1997–2001 and 2002–2005), the research team found that the rate of attacks on the major institutional players—particularly the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross declined by 30 percent and 71 percent respectively. This finding likely reflects the fact that more effective security management strategies were adopted by both institutions following the bombing of their headquarters in Baghdad in 2003. Attacks on NGOs, on the other hand, increased by 48 percent from the first to the second period. Over the same two periods the rate of attacks on international staff declined by 25 percent while those on national staff, who make up four out of five aid workers, *increased* by 48 percent. This may be due in part to the fact that some aid organizations have become more cautious about putting international staff into high-risk situations.

[17] Terrorism Knowledge Base, Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism, available at www.tkb.org/ChartModule.jsp. All subsequent references to MIPT terrorism data are drawn from the Terrorism Knowledge Base.

Number of international terrorist incidents, 1968-2005

Data source: MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base

Figure 7

Number of international terrorist incidents in South Asia and the Middle East and Persian Gulf, 1968-2005

Data source: MIPT Terrorism Knowledge
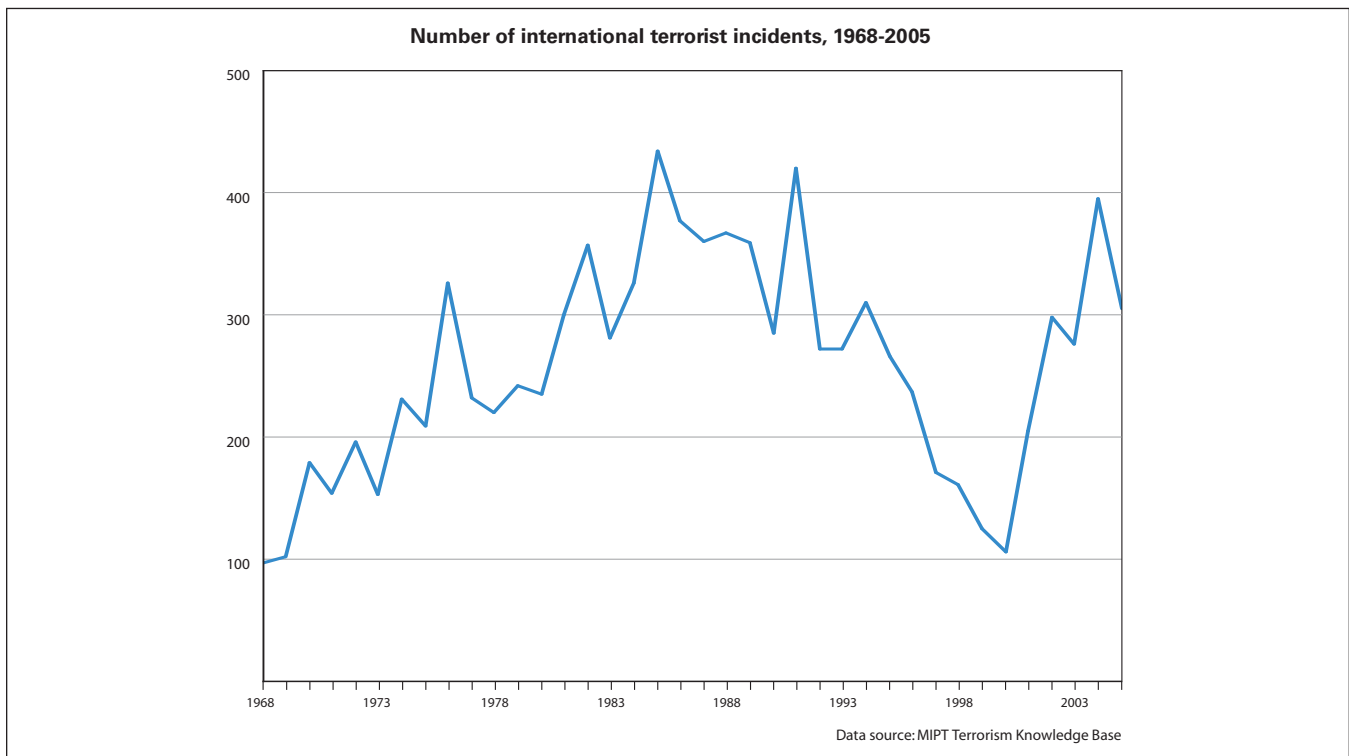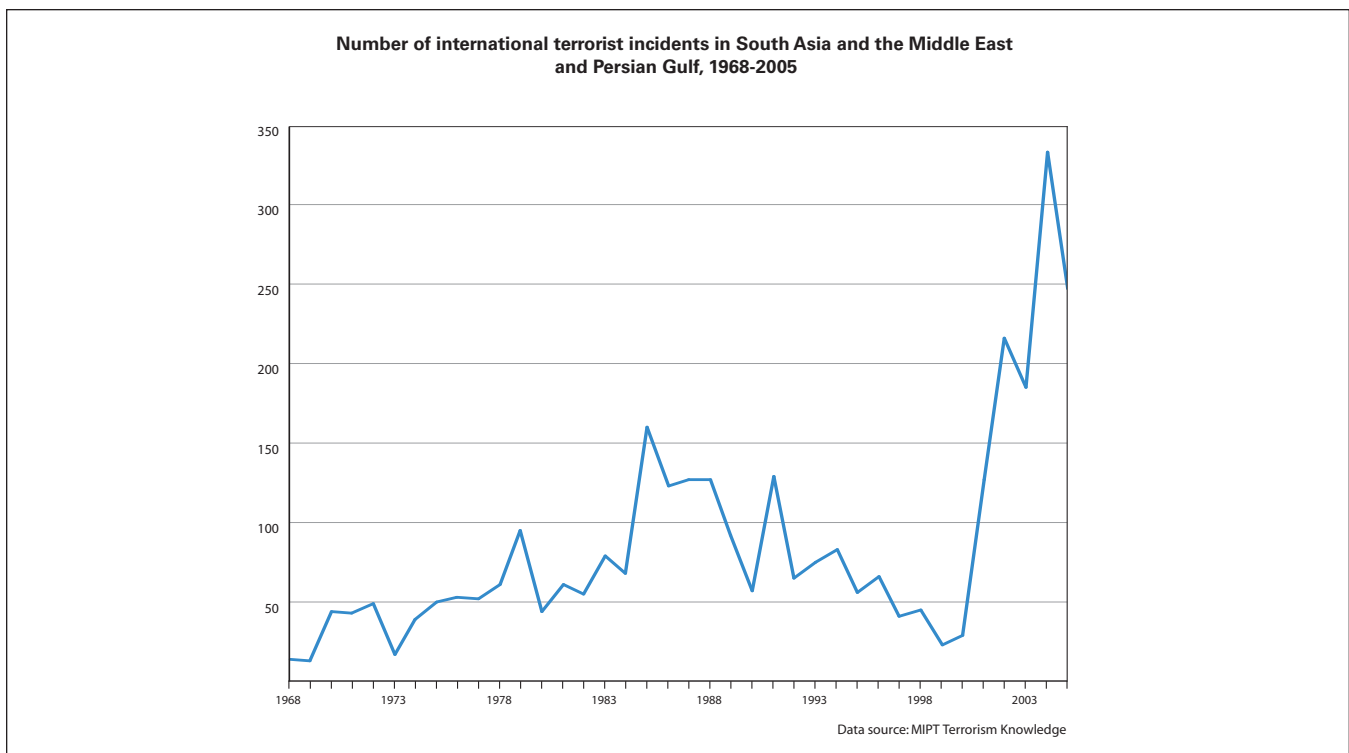
Figure 8

When terrorist incidents in the Middle East and Persian Gulf and South Asia are removed from the global trend data it becomes apparent that the decline in international terrorist incidents in the rest of the world that started 1991 has continued to the present day. This decline—from just under 300 incidents in 1991, to 58 in 2005—has passed almost completely unnoticed by the media and expert community alike.

Although the international terrorism trend data suggest that the civilian deaths have recently been

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Figure 9

rising sharply, the terrorism death toll, like that of humanitarian workers, is only a small fraction of that of other forms of political violence against civilians. On average, fewer than 400 people a year have been killed by international terrorists since 1968; the death toll of humanitarian workers is far smaller. These f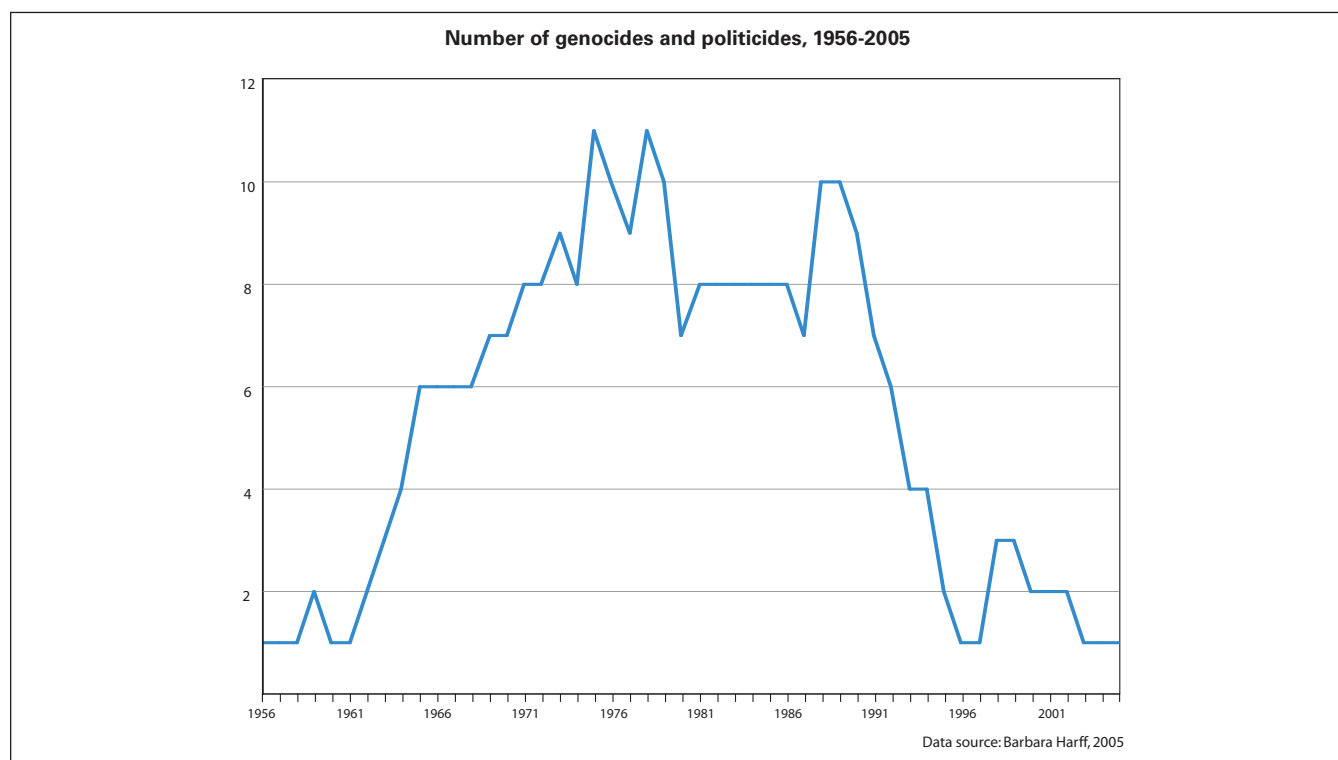igures compare with thousands of civilian deaths a year that Uppsala's one-sided violence dataset has recorded each year since 1989.

By far the largest numbers of civilians killed by organized violence since World War II have been victims of war crimes in high-intensity armed conflicts—and of the genocides that have so often been associated with them. Here the trend data are encouraging.

A study by Barbara Harff of the U.S. Naval Academy published at the end of 2005 indicated that genocides and other campaigns of mass violence against civilians dropped by 90 percent between 1989 and 2005, after rising steadily from 1956, peaking in the 1970s and staying at a high level throughout the 1980s.[18]

This pattern closely follows the trend in high-intensity armed conflicts that fell by 80 percent over the same period. In many of these latter conflicts large

numbers of civilians were intentionally killed by either governments or rebel groups—or both. The fact that the incidence of both major wars and genocides is down by 80 to 90 percent since the early 1990s provides powerful indirect evidence that the civilian death toll today is in fact far lower than it was in the Cold War years. None of this minimizes the appalling number of civilian deaths in Iraq, Darfur, and elsewhere. But a better understanding of what stopped the slaughter in the past can help save innocent lives in the future.

"Indirect Deaths"

Some critics of the current armed conflict databases have argued that counting only those killed *violently* in wars misses what is by far the biggest civilian death toll in poor countries where most of today's wars are fought—namely the "indirect" deaths caused by conflict-exacerbated disease and malnutrition. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, the International Rescue Committee estimates that some 3.9 million people have died—since 1998—mostly from disease and malnutrition—who would not have died had there been no war. In many poor country wars there may be five, ten, or more "indirect deaths"

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[18] Barbara Harff, "Assessing the Risks of Genocide and Politicide," in Monty G. Marshall and Ted Robert Gurr, *Peace and Conflict*, 2005 (Center for International Development and Management, University of Maryland, 2005), p. 57. See www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/P05print.pdf. Note that this dataset refers to the number of campaigns not the numbers killed.

for every direct death.

There are no global data for "indirect" deaths because they are rarely measured in such a way that national indirect death tolls can be estimated. There are, however, good reasons to believe that indirect deaths have declined along with battle-deaths. First, the major drivers of indirect deaths are the intensity and scope of armed conflict and the numbers of persons displaced. But conflicts have declined in number and intensity since 1992 and so too have the overall numbers of persons displaced by war. Second, humanitarian aid can radically reduce mortality rates from war-exacerbated disease and malnutrition. Humanitarian assistance has doubled in value over the same period that wars, direct war-deaths and numbers of persons displaced have declined.

The interrelationships between war, displacement, and disease are the subject of increasing interest in the research and humanitarian communities. But indirect deaths are rarely the subject of much political attention and are often only evident in changes in mortality statistics for diseases that are already major killers in poor countries. Such shifts can only be determined by epidemiological surveys—which are too rarely undertaken. Not one of the existing conflict datasets measures indirect deaths. As a consequence, the most numerous victims of war remain mostly uncounted and, too often, unnoticed.

The reality is that, despite better conflict datasets and a huge expansion of humanitarian activity since the end of the Cold War, we still know extraordinarily little about the true extent of the human costs of war.

Future Challenges

During the Cold War the gravest threat to international peace and security was the risk of global nuclear war. In the twenty-first century that threat, together with fears of any war between the major powers, has largely faded. All forms of political violence except international terrorism in the Middle East and South Asia and campaigns of one-sided violence have declined in the past fifteen years, and the wars that are still being fought are far less deadly on average than those of the Cold War era.

But although there is absolutely no evidence to support claims that we are on the verge of World War IV as some alarmist commentators have claimed,[19] there remain real reasons for concern:

- Despite the trend towards fewer wars, there are still some fifty-six armed conflicts being waged around the globe.

- Sub-Saharan Africa was the only region to experience a decline in armed conflicts between 2002 and 2005—in four other regions, conflicts increased in number.

- A significant number of current peace agreements are certain to fail, not surprisingly, since wars worsen the very conditions that led to the outbreak of war in the first place.

- In much of the poor world, "root cause" drivers of armed conflict—weak state capacity, economic decline, political instability, and "horizontal inequality"—remain unchanged or are worsening.

- The January 2007 *Crisis Watch* report from the International Crisis Group found ten actual or potential conflict situations had worsened; and just one had improved.

- As other papers in this series make clear, the UN remains critically under-resourced when it comes to preventive diplomacy and peacemaking capacity, while the Organization is also confronting growing risks of overstretch in its peace operations.

Given these factors and a little imagination, it is not difficult to conjure up a future in which the current—on-balance encouraging—global security trends are reversed.

A Catastrophic Scenario

The sectarian violence in Iraq leads to the de facto breakup of the country in a war that draws in Iran on the side of the Shiites, with Saudi Arabia and Syria providing material support for the Sunnis. The fighting lasts for eighteen months leaving 220,000 estimated dead and much of the country "ethnically cleansed." The final US withdrawal from Iraq in 2008 was not quite as undignified as the final pullout from Saigon, but the impact on US security policy is comparable. The "Iraq Syndrome" turns out to be more enduring than the "Vietnam Syndrome" and the US retreats into military isolationism.

In Afghanistan, a resurgent Taliban's support base grows as civilian casualties from counterinsurgency operations increase. By 2012, foreign forces have withdrawn in response to domestic pressures at home. By then the national government has no writ outside

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[19] For names and the genesis of this term see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_IV

Kabul and different parts of the country wholly are in the hand of warlords or Islamic fundamentalists.

The perceived defeat of the US and its allies in neighboring Afghanistan fatally undermines the government in Islamabad which is overthrown by militant Islamicists, whose renewed support for the insurgency in Kashmir brings the country to the brink of war with India.

The Israel/Palestine conflict remains as far from resolution as ever with extremists on both the Israeli and Palestinian side reinforcing each other's position. Sporadic internecine fighting continues in Gaza, while Lebanon succumbs to low-level civil war.

In Africa, the crisis in Darfur becomes a region-wide civil war with widespread fighting not just in Chad, but spilling into the Central African Republic as well. Political violence flares in other parts of the region as a number of UN peacemaking and peacebuilding initiatives falter.

In the first term of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, key states in the G–77 deny the Organization resources needed to enhance its preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, and peacebuilding capacity. New peace operations are mandated, but too often lack the trained personnel and equipment needed to operate effectively on the ground.

The ill-equipped and undermanned UNMIS peace operation in southern Sudan proves powerless to stop a resumption of the north/south civil war that is ignited by increasingly bitter disputes of allocations of oil revenues.

China threatens to veto any attempt to give UNMIS the robust peace enforcement capacity that might save thousands of lives. Nearly 20,000 people die in the violence; 150,000 others die of war–exacer-bated disease and malnutrition. The failure of UNMIS, together with the collapse of the mission in Haiti, further undermines the UN's credibility and with it the willingness of member states to support peace operations either financially or with troops.

The level of violence in Nigeria's Delta region continues to escalate with brutal repressive measures pursued by government forces mobilizing increased resistance.

Central and Latin America remain free of new armed conflict, but deaths from gang warfare in some drug producing and refining countries far exceed civil war deaths in other parts of the world. Colombia is the only drug-producing country where the level of violence declines.

In East Asia, a waking nightmare of official Washington turns into reality with the revelation that the economically desperate North Korean regime has sold eight kilograms of weapons–grade plutonium to an Al Qaeda affiliate. The deal was uncovered when an Al Qaeda operative tried unsuccessfully to buy bomb-making expertise from a Russian nuclear scientist. Confronted with this evidence, Beijing finally agrees to sanctions being imposed on North Korea. A year later a bloody coup brings down the greatly weakened regime in Pyongyang and the country descends into violent chaos.

In Europe, an increasing number of *jihadi* suicide bombings by homegrown terrorists brings far-right nationalists to power in France, Denmark, and Holland by 2012, but despite draconian anti–terror legislation the attacks continue to escalate.

A Muddling-Through Scenario

Any element in the above scenario might happen—but the probability of most of them being realized is extraordinarily small. Much the same is true of any "best case" scenario that might be created. A "muddling through" future is by far the most likely—one that will turn out to contain a few elements of the worst case and best case scenarios, but will mostly involve little substantive change.

A Best Case Scenario

The sort of exercise attempted in the "catastrophic" scenario has very limited value. It is certainly possible to identify a series of "structural" factors that put a group of countries "at risk" of armed conflict, but making predictions about which particular countries will actually succumb to violence—and how—is an exercise in pure speculation. It cannot be otherwise since the key "trigger" factors that transform "structural" risk into actual violence, involve agency and contingency that are inherently unpredictable other than in the very short term.

This is in large part why the research community has such a poor track record in predicting major shifts in global security. Few scholars predicted the sudden end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, for example; none anticipated the decline in global warfare that followed.

So rather than speculating about individual countries, the "best case" scenario offers a brief review of a range of key conditions—and policies—that are conducive to peace. It concludes with an analysis of the prospects for Islamist terrorism over the medium- to long-term that is notably less pessimistic than most.

1. Rising Incomes are Conducive to Peace—and Poor Country Incomes Continue to Rise

The single most important long-term "structural" determinant of peace is a country's average income per capita.[20] One of the most robust findings in the conflict research literature is that the risk of war declines as per capita incomes rise. Countries with a $250 per capita income have a 15 percent risk on average of succumbing to armed conflict within five years; at $5000 per capita, the risk is less than 1 percent.

But while no one doubts the importance or robustness of the association, what it means is still subject to considerable debate.[21] Does the association exist because wars reduce per capita income, or because poverty is a driver of war—or both?

Few would contest the fact that the destruction and disruption that war brings in its wake is likely to cause incomes to decline. The low-income to war causal relationship is more controversial, however. Of course, no one is arguing that poor people are inherently more violent than those with higher incomes. But the opportunity costs for rebellion—especially for large cohorts of unemployed and disenfranchised youth—are much lower in the poor countries where most wars take place, than in countries with higher income levels. In low-income countries the poor have less to lose.

But for some researchers, income per capita is not interesting in itself—its significance is as a proxy measure for state capacity. The greater the capacity a state has, the better able it will be to crush rebels, or buy off popular grievances. Economic growth is also associated with a reduced risk of war, though the association is less strong than that between war and income. Income levels are also associated with the duration of wars—*ceteris paribus*, the higher the income the shorter the conflict.

The implications of these research findings are obvious. Insofar as incomes continue to rise in poor countries, the risks of armed conflict that they confront should fall. Recent history provides some grounds for optimism here. The proportion of the developing world's population living in extreme economic poverty has fallen from twenty-eight percent in 1990 to twenty-one percent in 2001, with the most dramatic improvements coming from East and Southeast Asia and South Asia.[22] There is no obvious reason why, if risks are well managed, this trend should not continue—with further reductions in the risk of armed conflict.[23]

2. Long–term Normative Changes

A second reason for medium- and long-term optimism is the ongoing, gradual but profound, global shift in global norms with respect to the use of violence in human relationships. Key indicators of this pervasive shift in attitudes, one that has been underway for several centuries, are the outlawing of human sacrifice, witch-burning, lynching, slavery, vigilantism, and genocide.

Nowhere has this normative shift been more obvious or important than in changing attitudes towards war. The resort to military force is no longer considered an unproblematic instrument of statecraft to be deployed in pursuit of perceived national interests. Today, war is proscribed except in self-defense, or with the authorization of the Security Council, while hypernationalist ideologies that portray warfare as a noble and virtuous endeavor are now notable mostly by their absence. Anti-war norms are often transgressed, of course, and they are far more entrenched in some regions and countries than others, but they nevertheless play an important role in constraining behavior. They also inform the creation of laws and institutions, which can in turn provide the monitoring and enforcement mechanisms that can help assure compliance.

A recent analysis by the Minorities at Risk Project suggests that another global normative shift is underway—one that is reducing the probability of violent ethnic conflicts. The study's authors found that the number of minority groups around the world experiencing state discrimination declined from

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[20] See Susan E. Rice, Corinne Graff and Janet Lewis, "Poverty and Civil War: What Policymakers Need to Know," *Global Development and Policy Working Paper*, Brookings Institution, Washington DC, December 2006, for a strong statement of this position.

[21] For further discussion of the relationship between poverty, inequality and conflict, see Ravi Kanbur, "Poverty and Conflict: The Inequality Link," *Coping with Crisis* Working Paper Series, International Peace Academy, New York, April 2007.

[22] See World Bank, Poverty Net, available at http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/EXTPA/0,,contentMDK:20153855~menuPK:435040~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:430367,00.html#trends.

[23] But note that this is a risk-reduction strategy over the long term. Even with an annual growth rate as high as 10 percent it would take more than 30 years to move from the high-conflict-risk income level of $250 per capita GDP to the very low-risk of $5,000 per capita. Note also that in the past, Sub-Saharan Africa, the world's most war-afflicted region for most of the past 20 years, has the glaring exception to this trend with per capita incomes having fallen by an estimated 14 percent between 1981 and 2002. See World Bank, *ibid*. However, the most recent data from the World Bank shows major improvements in growth rates in many African countries. See World Bank, "ADI 2006 Shows a Diverse Continent on the Move," World Bank, Washington DC, October 30, 2006.

seventy–five in 1991 to forty-one in 2003. "Societal discrimination" also declined, but not by as much. This change reflects increased recognition of—and adherence to—the political and cultural rights of minorities. It was driven in part by a longer–term normative shift that saw a steady increase in the number of governments pursuing "remedial discrimi-nation" (affirmative action) policies towards minori-ties, from ten in 1950 to nearly sixty in 2003.

Discrimination and repression directed against ethnopolitical minorities are closely associated with increased risks of armed conflicts. From 1950 to 1991 the number of minority groups experiencing political repression rose each decade, as did the number of armed conflicts. From 1991 to 2003, the number of conflicts and the number of minority groups experi-encing discrimination fell in parallel. Insofar as the norms that stress respect for minority rights are sustained, and even enhanced, there is every reason to assume that ethno–political conflicts may continue to decline.

Finally, as noted earlier, there is a clear normative shift towards seeking to end wars by negotiation rather than pursuing victory. Currently this has meant that more wars are ending each year than starting. There is no reason in principle why this process should not continue.

3. Fewer Incentives to Resort to War

The most effective path to prosperity in modern economies is through increased productivity and international trade—not through the forcible seizure of land and raw materials. And an open trading system means that it is almost always cheaper to buy resources than to use force to acquire them. Economic interde-pendence has increased the costs of cross-border aggression while decreasing its benefits. It is perhaps no accident that the norm against aggression has strengthened as the utility of war as an instrument of statecraft and national interest has declined. Both the end of the Cold War and the end of colonialism removed major drivers of conflict from the interna-tional system.

4. The International Community is Getting Better at Stopping Wars

As noted earlier, quantitative analysis by Page Fortna,

Barbara Walter, Michael Doyle, and Nicholas Sambanis and others has demonstrated unequivocally that efforts by the international community to stop wars and prevent them from restarting can and do work. The track record of conflict prevention efforts is less encouraging, but mostly because conflict prevention is still more an aspiration rather than an established practice. During the past 15 years the UN and other agencies involved in peacemaking and peacebuilding have been on a steep and ongoing learning curve. Peace operations and post-conflict peacebuilding missions are more effective as a consequence. Current concerns about "overstretch" in peace operations are serious and need to be addressed, but they also demonstrate the continuing, indeed increased, importance of the UN as a global security actor.[24] There is no reason to assume that the importance of peacemaking and peacebuilding will decline in the foreseeable future. There is every reason to assume that—if adequately resourced and politically supported—it will become more effective.

What about International Terrorism?

For many in the West, particularly the US, the primary security concern is not the civil wars in remote poor countries, but international terrorism—or to be more precise, Islamist terrorism. What has come to be known in Washington since September 11, 2001 as the "Global War on Terror" is seen as a challenge comparable to the West's decades-long Cold War struggle against communism.[25]

The scope of this threat has been well–documented. Islamist terrorist groups are well–organized and well–funded, and their members are resolutely committed to their cause; they have a substantial base of passive and active support around the world; their networks have a global reach; they communicate and propagandize via hundreds of radical Islamic websites; and they have launched major terror attacks on six continents. Terrorist weapons systems are becoming more sophisticated and lethal and this, together with increased resort to suicide missions, has driven the death rate per terrorist incident sharply upwards over the past ten years. Suicide bombers are, of course, undeterrable. Some analysts believe it is simply a matter of time before terrorists obtain—and use—weapons of mass destruc-tion.

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[24] See Richard Gowan and Ian Johnstone, "New Challenges for Peacekeeping: Protection, Peacebuilding and the 'War on Terror,' *Coping with Crisis* Working Paper Series, International Peace Academy, New York, March 2007.
[25] See Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *National Military Strategy for the War on Terrorism*, Washington, DC, February 1, 2006.

Concern about these developments is wholly appropriate, but there are a number of reasons for believing that international terrorism poses less of a threat than is commonly believed. The most obvious reason—but actually the weakest—is that the US and its allies have achieved real tactical successes in the $400 million a year so-called Global War on Terror. Terrorist organizations have been denied sanctuaries; their finances have been disrupted; and many of their key operatives have been killed or captured. These tactical successes are not in doubt, but they have been accompanied by a dramatic increase in the very terrorist violence they were supposed to prevent, making any claims about "success" problematic to say the least. Moreover, the killing or capture of many key Al Qaeda operatives has caused the organization to metastasize into a broad informal global network—one that cannot be "decapitated" because the original hierarchical leadership structure has been disrupted.

The best reason for rejecting alarmism is found in the growing evidence that support for Islamist terror is declining, not increasing, in the Muslim world.

Such a statement might seem to be at odds with the leaked findings of the latest US National Intelligence Estimate which argued that the war in Iraq "has become a primary recruitment vehicle for violent Islamic extremists, motivating a new generation of potential terrorists around the world…"[26]

In fact there is no contradiction. It is quite possible for the recruitment of violent extremists—a minute percentage in all Muslim populations—to increase, while Muslim support for *jihadi* organizations and methods around the world declines. It is also possible for anti-Americanism in the Muslim world to increase at the same time. Indeed this is what appears to have happened.

The phenomenon of increasingly intense anti-Americanism coupled with declining support for Islamist terrorists is most obvious in Iraq. A poll conducted in September 2006 found that 61 percent of Iraqis approved of attacks against Americans, up from 47 percent in January 2006.[27] But another poll, also taken in September 2006, found that both Al Qaeda and its leader are "rejected by overwhelming majorities of Iraqi Shias and Kurds and large majorities of Sunnis." In fact 82 percent of all Iraqis have an unfavorable view of Al Qaeda, while 77 percent view Osama bin Laden unfavorably.[28]

It is true that the inevitable US withdrawal from Iraq will be presented by Al Qaeda as a major success for the jihadi cause, but with the Americans gone a potent recruitment issue will also disappear. And with only very limited support among the minority Sunnis and bitter hostility towards Al Qaeda among Shiites and Kurds, there is almost no chance that radical Sunni Islamicists and their foreign supporters in Iraq will succeed. Indeed one of the few predictions about Iraq that can be made with confidence is that the Sunni jihadi cause in Iraq is destined to fail.

Opposition to Islamist terrorism has also been growing in other Muslim countries according to a Pew survey undertaken in the spring of 2006. Support for both suicide bombing and Osama bin Laden has declined substantially. A continued decline in popular support for Islamic terrorism in the Muslim world is likely to have profound strategic consequences. As longtime terrorism expert, Audrey Kurth Cronin, has recently argued, erosion of public sympathy for terrorists' causes increases the likelihood that they will fail.[29] Loss of popular support was a major factor in the decline and demise of the Real Irish Republican Army, Spain's ETA, and Peru's Shining Path terror campaigns, for example.[30]

This is not all. Evidence from the research community indicates that terrorist campaigns that persistently fail to achieve their strategic objectives are likely to be abandoned. Some analysts have argued that terrorism "works" and that its recent successes explain the huge increase in terrorist activity over the past five years.[31] But, in a major new quantitative study, Max Abrahms argues persuasively that terrorists fail to achieve their strategic objectives in 90 percent of cases and that "the poor success rate is inherent in the tactic of terrorism itself."[32]

Terrorist violence is not a goal in itself; of course, it has to be a means to an end. In the case of Al Qaeda's terrorism, the goal is the creation of a pan-Islamic caliphate which requires the forcible

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[26] Karen DeYoung, "Spy Agencies Say Iraq War Hurting U.S. Terror Fight," *Washington Post*, September 24, 2006. The quote is Ms DeYoung's.

[27] Cited in Nicholas D. Kristof, "Take it from the Iraqis," *New York Times*, October 8, 2006.

[28] See World Public Opinion.org, "All Iraqi Groups Overwhelmingly Reject al Queda," October 8, 2006, available at www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/brmiddleeastnafricara/248.php?nid=&id=&pnt=248&lb=.

[29] See Audrey Kurth Cronin, "How al-Qaida Ends," *International Security* 31, No. 1 (Summer 2006): 7-48.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[31] See in particular to Robert A. Pape, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism," *American Political Science Review* 97, No. 3 (2003): 343-361.

[32] Max Abrahms, "Why Terrorism Does Not Work," *International Security* 31, No. 2 (2006): 42-68. Abrahms' paper contains a detailed critique of Robert Pape's thesis about the effectiveness of suicide terrorism.

overthrow of existing governments in Muslim countries and the creation of a pan-Islamic state. But the often brutal effectiveness of state repression of Islamic radicalism in most of the Muslim world, together with the persistent failures of pan-Arabist attempts to unite the Arab world, suggest that this goal is little more than a fantasy.

Finally, the history of past terror campaigns suggests that, in the long term, those that fail to achieve their strategic goals—as most do—are likely to be abandoned, even if the terrorists themselves remain undefeated.[33]

The evidence suggests that the threat from international terrorism, while undoubtedly serious, has been overhyped. If in the long-term the Islamist terrorists continue to fail to translate tactical success into real strategic gains, the current decline in support for their violent assaults on civilians will likely accelerate and spread to hardcore activists. If this happens, the current upsurge of Islamist terrorism will be reversed, just as international terrorism and urban guerrilla warfare in other parts of the world declined when it became obvious that support for the violence was declining and that it was serving no viable strategic or political purpose.

A Final Note

The message for policymakers from this assessment of trends in political violence should be clear. While current intelligence can and must guide day-to-day policy decisions, what is needed for the medium-term and beyond is a much deeper understanding of current trends. We need to know more, not only about the risks that are associated with these trends, but also the benefits. But without better analysis—which requires far better data than we have at the moment—scenario-building can be little more than an exercise in speculation.

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[33] See David C. Rapoport, "The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism," in Audrey Cronin and James Lukes, eds., *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004). The outcomes of terrorist campaigns suggest that those directed against foreign occupiers have been most successful. See Pape, "Strategic Logic."

Further Reading

Doyle, Michael W. and Nicholas Sambanis. *Making War and Building Peace: United Nations Peace Operations*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.

> *This book argues that the UN's strength lies more in promoting peace after the end of a conflict than in intervening in ongoing conflicts. It recommends that the UN therefore expand its post-conflict peacebuilding activities.*

Fortna, Virginia Page. *Peace Time: Cease-Fire Agreements and the Durability of Peace*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.

> *Fortna contends that specific attributes of cease-fire agreements have an impact on the likelihood of a durable peace, depending on what kind of incentives these attributes create for the belligerents.*

Human Security Centre. *Human Security Report 2005: War and Peace in the 21st Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. www.humansecurityreport.info.

> *The Report provides a comprehensive assessment of the incidence, severity, and consequences of political violence around the world. It documents a dramatic, but little-noticed, decline in the number of wars, genocides and human rights abuses over the past 15 years, arguing that the most compelling explanation for these changes is the recent upsurge of international activism, spearheaded by the UN.*

Human Security Centre. *Human Security Brief* 2006. Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2006. www.humansecuritybrief.info.

> *The Brief updates the 2005 Human Security Report's conflict trend data and analyzes two recently released datasets that track trends in war terminations and organized violence against civilians. The new data indicate that the post-Cold War decline in armed conflicts and related deaths has continued, with Sub-Saharan Africa seeing the greatest decrease in political violence.*

International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect: Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty*. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001.

> *This report suggests ways in which the international community can balance the need for state sovereignty with the "responsibility to protect" civilians from massive human rights abuses by their own governments. It argues that when a state is unable or unwilling to protect its citizens, the international community has a duty to do so.*

Kahl, Colin H. States, *Scarcity, and Civil Strife in the Developing World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.

> *This book examines the role of demographic and environmental stress in increasing the vulnerability of poor countries to armed conflict.*

Large, Judith and Timothy D. Sisk, eds. *Democracy, Conflict and Human Security: Pursuing Peace in the 21st Century*. 2 Vols. Stockholm: International IDEA, 2007. http://www.idea.int/publications/dchs/dchs_vol1.cfm.

The first volume looks at how democratic practice can help manage conflict and promote security and development objectives, while the second volume includes essays and case studies by leading specialists.

Marshall, Monty G. and Ted Robert Gurr. *Peace and Conflict 2005*. Center for International Development and Conflict Management. College Park, MD: University of Maryland, May 2005. www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/pc05print.pdf.

This report examines global trends in armed conflict, self-determination movements, and democracy from 1946 to 2004.

Stedman, Stephen John, Donald Rothchild, and Elizabeth M. Cousens, eds. *Ending Civil Wars: The Implementation of Peace Agreements*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002.

This book uses data on civil war settlements from 1980 to 1998 to conduct the most comprehensive study so far of what happens after peace agreements are signed.

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Nils Petter Gleditsch, Ragnhild Nordås, and Idean Salehyan

Poverty and Conflict: The Inequality Link
Ravi Kanbur

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