

HUMAN SECURITY BRIEF 2006

In October 2005 the first *Human Security Report* was launched at the United Nations by the University of British Columbia's Human Security Centre. The *Report* tracked some of the extraordinary changes that had taken place in the global security landscape since the end of the 1980s.

Published subsequently by Oxford University Press, the *Report* described how armed conflicts, war death tolls, military coups, refugee numbers, international crises, and genocides had all declined in the wake of the Cold War. It argued that many of these changes could be attributed to an explosion of international activism, spearheaded by the UN, that sought to stop ongoing wars, help negotiate peace settlements, support post-conflict reconstruction, and prevent old wars from starting again.

The next *Human Security Report* will be published at the end of 2007. It will focus on two major themes—"The Hidden Costs of War" and "The Causes of Peace." Short descriptions of both are included at the end of this *Brief*.

The intent of the *Human Security Brief 2006* is twofold: to update the core trend data on political violence around the world that were published in the 2005 *Human Security Report*, and to analyse the key findings of a number of datasets that track these changes.

The *Brief* also describes and analyses the findings of three recently released datasets compiled by the Human

Security Centre's partner, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) at Uppsala University, Sweden. The datasets under review track trends in (a) wars fought by non-state actors, where none of the warring parties is a government; (b) campaigns of organized violence against civilians; and (c) war terminations.

Structure and Contents

The *Brief* is divided into three short chapters. This overview describes their main themes and findings.

Chapter 1: Trends in Armed Conflict reviews the latest findings of two datasets that measure global and regional trends in the number of armed conflicts and their associated battle deaths.

Chapter 2: Deadly Assaults on Civilians compares the findings of three datasets that seek to measure—albeit very differently—the number of civilians intentionally killed in campaigns of political violence.

Chapter 3: How Wars End analyses the findings of a new dataset that provides a comprehensive account of how wars end in the post-World War II era.

Key Findings

- Notwithstanding the escalating violence in Iraq and the widening war in Darfur, the new data indicate that from the beginning of 2002 to the end of 2005, the number of armed conflicts being waged around the world shrank 15% from 66 to 56. By far the greatest decline was in sub-Saharan Africa.¹

- Battle-death tolls declined worldwide by almost 40% between 2002 and 2005.² Battle-death statistics are prone to considerable error, however, so these findings should be treated with appropriate caution.
- The steep post-Cold War decline in genocides and other mass slaughters of civilians has continued. In 2005 there was just one ongoing genocide—in Darfur. In 1989 there were 10.³
- Growing numbers of wars are ending in negotiated settlements instead of being fought to the bitter end—a trend that reflects the increased commitment of the international community to peacemaking. In the Cold War era more wars were decided on the battlefield than ended in negotiation.
- The estimated number of displaced people around the world—refugees and internally displaced persons—fell from 34.2 million to 32.1 million between 2003 and 2005, a net decline of 6%.⁴
- The number of military coups and attempted coups fell from 10 in 2004 to just 3 in 2005, continuing an uneven decline from the 1963 high point of 25.⁵

But other trends are far from positive:

- Sub-Saharan Africa was the only region in the world to see a decline in armed conflicts. In four other regions of the world the number of armed conflicts increased between 2002 and 2005.
- International terrorist incidents increased threefold worldwide between 2002 and 2005, and the number of fatalities increased fivefold. Most of the increases were associated with the war in Iraq.
- Campaigns of organized violence against civilians have increased by 56% since 1989. Although most of these have killed relatively few people, this figure supports the popularly held belief that civilians are increasingly being victimized in the post-Cold War era by the perpetrators of political violence.
- The fact that more wars now end in negotiated settlements rather than victories is encouraging news for peacemakers. But it turns out that wars that end in negotiated settlements last three times longer than those that end in victories and are nearly twice as likely to restart within five years.

Trends in Armed Conflict

Most armed conflict datasets only track trends in armed conflicts in which a government is one of the warring parties. Wars fought between militias, rival guerrilla groups, clans, warlords,

or organized communal groups, but without the involvement of a government, have been systematically ignored.

Concerned that this omission gave an incomplete picture of the level of political violence around the world, in 2002 the Human Security Centre commissioned the UCDP to compile a dataset on these “non-state” conflicts and their attendant death tolls.

The initial findings of this dataset, which were published in the 2005 *Human Security Report*, revealed that non-state conflicts were actually slightly more numerous than “state-based” conflicts. In 2002, for example, there were 34 non-state conflicts being fought around the world, compared with 32 state-based conflicts.

Chapter 1 of this *Brief* examines trends from 2002 to 2005 in both the state-based and non-state datasets. It shows that while there was little change in the number of conflicts involving a government from 2002 to 2005, the number of non-state conflicts dropped from 34 in 2002 to 25 in 2005.

Sub-Saharan Africa was the only region in the world to see a decline in armed conflicts.

The non-state conflict dataset also shows that these conflicts are much less deadly than those in which a government is one of the warring parties. Between 2002 and 2005 non-state conflicts caused only a quarter as many battle deaths as did state-based conflicts.

By far the most important change in this period was in sub-Saharan Africa. Between 2002 and 2005 the number of state-based conflicts in the region declined from 13 to five; the number of non-state conflicts from 24 to 14.

In addition to the decline in overall conflict numbers, the number of sub-Saharan African countries experiencing one or more conflicts on their soil shrank from 15 to eight.

This remarkable change has taken place despite the fact that “structural” factors that are associated with heightened risks of armed conflict—poverty, low growth, economic shocks, and lack of state capacity—have changed little or even worsened. The decline has, however, been associated with a major increase in international support for efforts to end wars and prevent them from restarting.

One consequence of these changes is that sub-Saharan Africa is no longer the world’s most conflict-affected region. In fact, the drop in the number of conflicts in this region has

been the single most important factor driving down the global armed conflict toll over the past four years.

Trends in the rest of the world were less encouraging. Central and South Asia is now the most conflict-affected region. The Middle East and north Africa, East and Southeast Asia and Oceania, and the Americas also experienced increased numbers of conflicts. There was no change in Europe.

The estimated global decline in battle deaths from both state-based and non-state conflicts has been much greater than the decline in the number of conflicts.

In 2002 there were an estimated 22,736 battle deaths worldwide from both types of conflict. In 2005 there were only 14,085.

Sub-Saharan Africa experienced the greatest decline.⁶ The estimated state-based battle-death toll in the region for 2005 (1,851) was just 2% of the highest post-Cold War battle-death toll of nearly 100,000 in 1999.⁷

These battle-death estimates should be viewed with considerable caution. UCDP's data collection and coding methodology undercounts death tolls—quite seriously in high-intensity conflicts. It is nevertheless possible to use the battle-death data to track trends even when estimates of battle-death numbers are known to be too low. Only trend data can tell policy-makers whether things are getting better or worse.

Moreover, battle-death counts in low-intensity conflicts are much less prone to error because there are fewer deaths to count. Today the overwhelming majority of armed conflicts fall into this category and here the battle-death data can provide a useful guide to the human costs of war.

Deadly Assaults on Civilians

When the Secretary-General of the United Nations presents his annual *Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict* report to the Security Council neither he nor his staff has any real idea whether deadly threats to civilians around the world are increasing or decreasing. There is no authoritative source of data on the numbers of civilians intentionally killed by organized political violence each year.

Chapter 2 examines three datasets that measure, in very different ways, the worldwide extent of intentional deadly violence against civilians.

Although not directly comparable and problematic in a number of ways, these three sources of data provide the most comprehensive picture we have of global trends in organized violence against defenceless civilians.

“One-sided Violence”

The UCDP's “one-sided violence” dataset, which covers the period from 1989 to 2005 and which was commissioned by the Human Security Centre, is the major focus of Chapter 2.

The term “one-sided violence” reflects the fact that the victims cannot fight back. The dataset counts first the number of deadly campaigns perpetrated by either governments or armed non-state groups against civilians each year, and second the fatalities associated with them.

The data indicate that the number of campaigns of one-sided violence increased by 55% between 1989 and 2005. The number of state-based armed conflicts decreased by some 40% from 1992 to 2005.

Estimates of the number of victims of one-sided violence provide a very different perspective, however. Even if we exclude the huge death toll of the Rwanda genocide in 1994, the data show that there has been a clear, albeit very uneven, decline in reported deaths from one-sided violence since the mid-1990s.

There are, however, even more uncertainties involved in reporting and recording civilian death tolls than in estimating battle deaths.⁸ The trend data are suggestive—they are certainly not definitive.

Genocides and Politicides

Barbara Harff of the United States Naval Academy defines genocides and politicides as campaigns of “political mass murder” directed primarily against civilians that are intended to exterminate “in whole or in part” a communal or political group.

A dataset compiled by Professor Harff shows the number of genocides rising steadily from 1956, peaking in the mid-to late-1970s, and then declining sharply from 1989 onward. Between 1989 and 2005 the number of these campaigns of political mass murder dropped by 90%.

This trend closely follows the rise and decline of high-intensity civil conflicts over the same period—which is not surprising since most genocides/politicides take place in the context of civil wars.

The sharp decline in these campaigns of mass killing of civilians since 1989 stands in marked contrast to the media and public perception that the number of genocides is increasing.

Terrorism

Terrorism statistics provide a third measure of organized violence against civilians.

The Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism (MIPT) is the only institution that publishes regularly updated

international and national terrorism data. MIPT has data on international terrorist incidents and fatalities going back to 1968; national terrorism data date back to 1998.

The international terrorism data have followed a trend remarkably similar to those of state-based civil wars and genocides and politicides—namely a steep but uneven increase throughout the Cold War years followed by a steep decline throughout the 1990s.

But while neither civil wars nor genocides increased in number in the new millennium, the incidence of international terrorist attacks shot up almost threefold. According to MIPT's estimates, the majority of the terrorist killings were perpetrated in Iraq.

The death toll from international terrorism is, however, relatively small compared with the toll from the mass killings of civilians in genocides and politicides and other forms of one-sided violence.

Assessing the Evidence

Both UCDP's data on the increased incidence of violent campaigns against civilians and MIPT's findings on the soaring increase in national and international terrorist incidents lend credence to the widely held belief that deadly threats to civilians have been increasing.

But if the data are examined from a different perspective a somewhat less bleak picture emerges.

It was noted earlier that UCDP's one-sided violence dataset shows that civilian deaths from organized violence have been declining since the mid-1990s. But in terms of saving civilian lives, by far the most important trend over the past 60 years has been the 90% decline in genocides and politicides since the end of the Cold War, and the parallel decline in high-intensity armed conflicts. Large numbers of civilians were intentionally killed by governments or rebel groups in many of these latter conflicts during the Cold War years.

The number of civilian victims of organized violence is appreciably lower than in the Cold War years.

What this suggests is that, notwithstanding the recent increase in terrorist attacks, the number of civilian victims of intentional organized violence remains appreciably lower today than it was in the Cold War years.

How Wars End

The findings of a new dataset on conflict terminations from UCDP are the focus of discussion in Chapter 3 of this *Brief*. The new data, which cover the period from 1946 to 2005, reveal that there has been a radical shift in the number of wars starting and ending since the end of the Cold War. And there has been an equally important shift in the way in which conflicts come to an end.

The number of new conflict outbreaks in the 1990s was double that of the 1980s and previous decades—a dramatic increase that helped fuel public perceptions that the post-Cold War decade was uniquely dangerous.

There has been a radical shift in the number of wars starting and ending since the end of the Cold War.

But an even greater number of wars ended than began during the decade—though this change passed largely unnoticed in the media and among the general public. The net effect was that by 2003 there were 40% fewer state-based conflicts being waged around the world than in 1992—the conflict high point of the post-World War II era.

The 1990s witnessed a second striking change. For the first time more wars (42) ended by negotiated settlement than by military victory (23). This started a trend that accelerated in the new millennium. Between 2000 and 2005, 17 conflicts ended in negotiated settlements; just four ended in victory.

The big increase in negotiated settlements could be seen as a vindication of the UN's rapidly expanded peacemaking activities during this period. But it turns out that wars that end in negotiated settlements have a downside. They last three times longer on average than conflicts that end in victory, and are nearly twice as likely to start up again within five years.

This is a sobering finding, but the patterns of the past are not necessarily a reliable guide to the future, and the record of the past six years suggests—no more than this—that negotiated settlements may be becoming less prone to breakdown.

The increased emphasis in the UN and elsewhere on promoting negotiated settlements has been criticized on the grounds that too often mediation does little more than provide a breathing space for warring parties to prepare for the next round of fighting. Critics who hold this view argue that it is preferable to “give war a chance” and pursue a stable military solution.⁹

But the advocates of “give war a chance” assume that belligerents can choose between victory and a negotiated settlement. Often there is no such choice.

Conflicts usually become drawn-out affairs precisely because neither side can impose a military defeat on the other. And when victory is not an option, negotiation is the only way to stop the fighting.

The choice, in other words, is not between victory and a negotiated settlement, but between negotiation and no settlement at all.

Other skeptics have argued that today’s conflicts are more intractable than those of the recent past—those that were easy to resolve have already been negotiated and settled.

This is too pessimistic a view for two reasons. First, many conflicts that once appeared intractable have in fact been resolved in the past decade. These include the wars in East

Timor (Timor Leste), Aceh (Indonesia), Nepal, Angola, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.

Second, 71% of the conflicts that are currently underway around the world have lasted less than 10 years. These can hardly be written off as “intractable.”

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the fighting.

On average over the past six years, more conflicts have stopped than started each year. There is no reason to expect this trend to continue, but nor is there any reason to expect it to be reversed.