



Tomas van Houtryve / Panos Pictures. NEPAL.

CHAPTER 1

Trends in Armed Conflict

The 2005 *Human Security Report* mapped trends in the number of armed conflicts being waged around the world from 1946 to 2003 and their associated battle-death tolls. This chapter updates the armed conflict and battle-death trend data to include new statistics for 2004 and 2005.

A key finding is that fewer armed conflicts were being waged in 2005 than in 2003. Indeed when the number of conflicts involving only non-state actors are added to the number of conflicts in which a government is one of the warring parties, it is clear that there were 11% fewer conflicts in 2005 than in 2003 (56 versus 63). There has also been a sharp decline in death tolls. However, as argued below, large uncertainties with respect to the reliability of battle-death tolls in individual countries—particularly Iraq—mean that this finding should be viewed with considerable caution.

In the discussion that follows we pay particular attention to the years 2002 to 2005. These are the years covered by a new dataset on non-state armed conflicts that is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

State-based Armed Conflict

The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) defines “state-based” armed conflicts as those between states, or between a state and one or more non-state armed groups.¹⁰

Figure 1.1 tracks the trends in four different categories of state-based armed conflict since 1946. This is a “stacked graph,”

meaning that the number of conflicts in each category is indicated by the depth of the band of colour. The top trend line tracks the total number of armed conflicts being fought each year.

The four categories of conflict shown in Figure 1.1 are:

- “Intrastate”—internal conflicts fought between a government and a non-state group.
- “Internationalized intrastate”—conflicts in which either the government, non-state armed group, or both, received external military support from a foreign government.
- “Interstate”—conflicts fought between two or more states.
- “Extra-state”—conflicts between a state and a non-state armed group outside that state’s territory. These are essentially the wars of liberation from colonial rule.

Figure 1.1 shows that the decline in state-based armed conflicts reported in the 2005 *Human Security Report* has levelled off since 2003. The number of conflicts changed little in the 2002 to 2005 period (from 32 to 31).

Only 23 countries experienced state-based armed conflict in 2005, and just six countries accounted for more than half of the global conflict total. India was involved in five conflicts, Myanmar in three, while Afghanistan, Ethiopia, the Philippines, and Turkey had two each. But while most conflicts are being fought in a comparatively small number of countries, these countries are home to more than 20% of the world’s population.

Of the 31 state-based conflicts in 2005, nine were new or restarted conflicts and 22 were ongoing from 2004.¹¹ Ten conflicts that were active in 2004 were no longer active in 2005.¹²

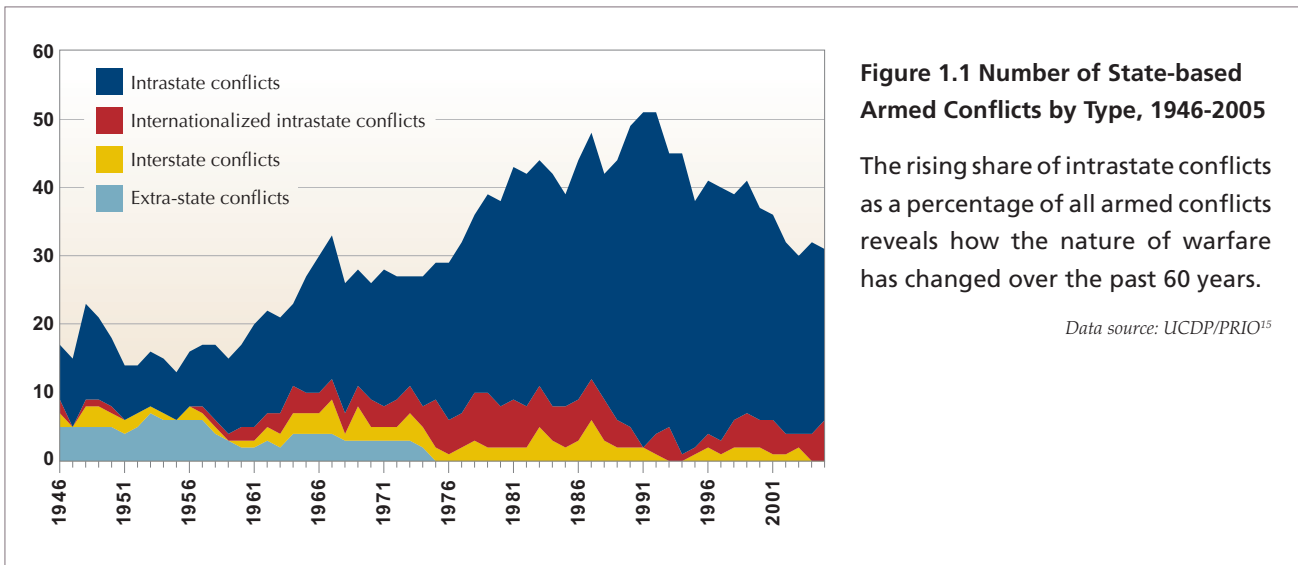


Figure 1.2 Number of State-based Armed Conflicts, 2002-2005

Region	2002	2003	2004	2005
Africa, sub-Saharan	13	7	8	5
Americas	2	1	3	2
Asia, Central and South	7	10	10	9
Asia, East and SE and Oceania	5	5	4	7
Europe	1	1	1	1
Middle East and north Africa	4	6	6	7
Total	32	30	32	31

Data source: UCDP/Human Security Centre Dataset¹⁶

The number of state-based armed conflicts has remained relatively constant over the last four years, though the global figure masks sharp differences in the regional trends.

Figure 1.2 shows that the greatest change has been in sub-Saharan Africa where the number of state-based conflicts has dropped by more than 60% between 2002 and 2005. There has also been a large decline in the number of countries in the region experiencing state-based conflicts over this period from 11 to four. (Note that some countries have more than one conflict.)

The year 2005 was also the first year since 1996 in which sub-Saharan Africa did not experience a war—that is a conflict that results in more than 1,000 battle deaths in a calendar year.¹³

Central and South Asia emerged as the region most affected by state-based conflicts in 2005. The countries in this region suffered both the greatest number of conflicts and the greatest number of battle deaths. Despite this, the death toll from state-based armed conflict in Central and South Asia was at its lowest point since 1984.¹⁴

Although the Middle East and north Africa is home to Iraq, the country that suffered the world’s single most deadly conflict in 2005, the region ranked second in terms of the number of state-based conflicts and, according to UCDP, second in terms of deaths from state-based conflicts.¹⁷

With seven state-based armed conflicts being waged in 2005, East and Southeast Asia outranked three other regions and ranked second in terms of numbers of armed conflicts with the Middle East and north Africa. However, according to UCDP, the total battle-death toll for East and Southeast Asia was below 1,000, making it the second-least deadly region.

There was only one state-based armed conflict in Europe in 2005—that in Chechnya—but by late 2006 the Chechen rebellion appeared to be coming to an end.

Battle-Death Trends in State-based Armed Conflict

UCDP's data indicate that there were fewer battle deaths in 2005 than in any year since 1946.¹⁸ Figure 1.3 shows that just two regions—Central and South Asia and the Middle East and north Africa—accounted for over 60% of the global toll in 2005. And one conflict, that in Iraq, accounted for almost 20% of battle-deaths worldwide.

In addition to experiencing a major drop in the number of conflicts being waged on its soil, sub-Saharan Africa has also witnessed a significant drop in battle deaths. In 2005 UCDP estimates that there were just 1,851 deaths from state-based conflict throughout the region—a decline of some 98% from the post-Cold War high in 1999 of nearly 100,000 when particularly deadly conflicts were being waged in the Great Lakes region and between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

In 2005 the five countries that experienced the most deaths from state-based conflict were Iraq, Nepal, India, Afghanistan, and Colombia.

Interstate conflicts have been the major drivers of war deaths during the Cold War years—1950 to 1989. But as Figure 1.4 clearly shows, in the post-Cold War period their share of the total death toll has shrunk from decade to decade.

It is no accident that interstate wars are so much deadlier than other types of war. Fighting a war with another country requires power projection capabilities and heavy weapons—in other words the capacity to create large numbers of casualties. The major interstate wars since 1950—the Korean War, the

Vietnam War, the Iran-Iraq war, the two US-led invasions of Iraq, and the Ethiopia-Eritrea war—were all fought with large armies and heavy weapons. And, unlike the mostly low-intensity wars of the past decade and a half, they involved major military engagements. The decline in interstate armed conflict since the Cold War ended has been a major factor driving down the global battle-death toll.

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Intrastate conflicts have been the most prevalent form of armed conflict in the period 1950 to 2005 but, as Figure 1.4 shows, they account for a relatively small share of total battle deaths in this period. Again this is not surprising. Absent external military support, and often fought with small arms and light weapons and relatively few troops, these conflicts—particularly in recent years—have had relatively low fatality rates.

Since the end of the Cold War internationalized intrastate conflicts have killed more people than any other type of conflict. The current conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq are both in this category, since the US is not fighting the incumbent governments but assisting them. If the latter were the case these would be interstate conflicts.) Foreign military assis-

Figure 1.3 Number of Reported, Codable Deaths from State-based Armed Conflicts, 2002-2005*

Region	2002	2003	2004	2005
Africa, sub-Saharan	4,741	3,427	2,914	1,851
Americas	1,200	518	1,478	1,106
Asia, Central and South	5,292	3,094	3,924	4,186
Asia, East and SE and Oceania	851	1,630	1,236	978
Europe	753	480	1,151	668
Middle East and north Africa	2,885	11,183	6,231	3,250
Total	15,722	20,332	16,934	12,039

Data source: UCDP/Human Security Centre Dataset

The number of reported, codable deaths from state-based armed conflicts declined slightly between 2002 and 2005. However, given the challenges in counting and coding battle deaths, particularly in Iraq, these figures should be treated with caution.

**Fatality figures are "best estimates."*

tance increases the killing capacity of the warring parties in internationalized intrastate wars.

Extra-state conflicts are essentially the wars of colonial liberation. They were fought for just three decades following the end of World War II. However, at times in the late 1940s and 1950s they accounted for 20% to almost 50% of all state-based conflicts. Furthermore, from 1954 to 1961 extra-state conflicts were, on average, the deadliest form of armed conflict. France’s colonial wars in Indochina and Algeria were the most deadly in the period 1950 to 2005.

Non-state Armed Conflict

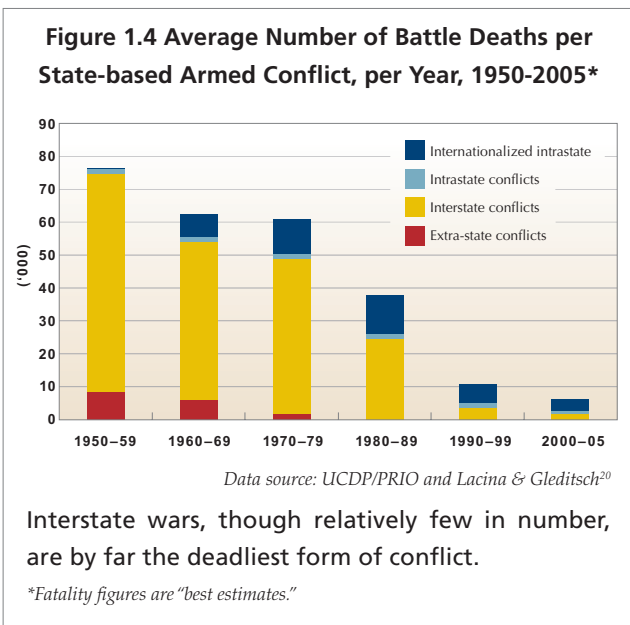
Non-state conflicts are those fought between militias, rival guerrilla groups, clans, warlords, or organized communal groups, without the involvement of a government.¹⁹ Although non-state conflicts are about as prevalent as state-based conflicts, they are not recorded in the annual war counts that are published in the *Journal of Peace Research* nor in the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute’s *SIPRI Yearbook*, both of which rely on UCDP data.

non-state conflict was just 82; for state-based conflicts it was 388.

Non-state conflicts also tend to be relatively short in duration. Just over a quarter of the 25 non-state armed conflicts in 2005 were also active in 2004. Of these, only one—that between the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) and the United Self-Defence Forces (AUC) in Colombia—has been active each year since 2002. Given their low death tolls and short duration, it is not surprising that many non-state conflicts are so little known outside the countries in which they occur.²¹

Non-state armed conflicts tend to occur in countries with weak governments that have little capacity for maintaining internal security. In 2005, as has been the case in each of the four years that data have been collected, over half of the world’s non-state armed conflicts occurred in sub-Saharan Africa. The region has nevertheless seen a 42% decrease in these conflicts over the past four years.

Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for the majority of deaths from non-state conflict in 2005.



Concerned that this omission created a very incomplete picture of armed conflict around the world, the Human Security Centre commissioned UCDP to collect data on non-state conflicts for the *Human Security Report 2005*. This chapter presents new non-state conflict data for 2004 and 2005 that complement the material published in 2005.

Non-state conflicts are significantly less deadly than state-based conflicts. In 2005 the average death toll for each

Figure 1.5 shows the regional distribution of non-state conflicts. Both the concentration of these conflicts in Africa and their sharp decline since 2002—from 24 to 14 in 2005—are clearly evident in the table, which also reveals that Europe is the only region in this period to have experienced no non-state conflicts.

Non-state conflicts tend to be concentrated not only in the sub-Saharan African region, but also within particular African countries. In 2005 five African countries accounted for 15 of the 25 non-state conflicts: Somalia experienced six conflicts; Nigeria three; while Ethiopia, the Ivory Coast, and Sudan had two each.

Battle-death Trends in Non-state Conflicts

Figure 1.6 shows that sub-Saharan Africa accounted for the majority of deaths from non-state armed conflict in 2005—and indeed in all four years since data collection began. But there has been a dramatic 80% decline in the death toll in the region since 2002. Central and South Asia experienced an even greater decline in death toll—dropping some 88%. (Note that the Sudan/Darfur data are included in the Middle East and north Africa region, not sub-Saharan Africa.)

Figure 1.5 Number of Non-state Armed Conflicts, 2002-2005

Region	2002	2003	2004	2005
Africa, sub-Saharan	24	23	17	14
Americas	2	2	4	3
Asia, Central and South	3	5	3	4
Asia, East and SE and Oceania	2	0	1	1
Europe	0	0	0	0
Middle East and north Africa	3	3	3	3
Total	34	33	28	25

Data source: UCDP/Human Security Centre Dataset

There was a 26% decline in the number of non-state conflicts between 2002 and 2005. Most of the decline was in sub-Saharan Africa.

Figure 1.6 Number of Reported, Codable Deaths from Non-state Armed Conflict, 2002-2005*

Region	2002	2003	2004	2005
Africa, sub-Saharan	4,465	3,155	2,942	909
Americas	595	129	345	427
Asia, Central and South	1,687	298	289	206
Asia, East and SE and Oceania	91	0	52	29
Europe	0	0	0	0
Middle East and north Africa	176	490	240	475
Total	7,014	4,072	3,868	2,046

Data source: UCDP/Human Security Centre Dataset

There was a 71% decline in the number of reported and codable deaths from non-state conflict between 2002 and 2005. However, given the challenges in counting and coding battle deaths, particularly in Iraq, these figures should be treated with caution.

**Fatality figures are "best estimates."*

Trends versus Absolute Numbers

Counting armed conflicts is much more straightforward than estimating battle-death tolls. To determine whether or not there has been a conflict, researchers need only to know whether there have been 25 or more battle deaths in a calendar year. Determining the exact number of battle deaths is both far more difficult and far more contested—as the recent controversies about the death tolls in Iraq attest.²²

We can be very confident about trends in the numbers of armed conflicts worldwide, but we can have much less faith

in battle-death estimates. This is particularly true in the case of high-intensity conflicts that have very high numbers of fatalities. UCDP's stringent coding rules, together with the many challenges involved in reporting casualties, mean that many of the battle-death numbers published here are too low. But since the undercounting bias is relatively consistent, the data can still determine whether fatality rates are increasing or decreasing. This sort of information, which is critically important for policy-makers, can only be obtained from trend data.