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CHAPTER 3

How Wars End

Drawing on the findings of a new conflict terminations dataset from 1946 to 2005 compiled by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) and funded by the Human Security Centre, the analysis that follows offers a comprehensive description of how wars end in the modern era.

The analysis reveals the dramatic impact that the ending of the Cold War had on the way wars terminate, and that far more wars are now ending in negotiated settlements than in military victories. It shows that the number of negotiated settlements doubled in the 1990s, but that their failure rate increased dramatically as well. It also shows that while most conflicts have been fought over control of territory, most peace settlements have been negotiated in conflicts fought over who should control the government.

The final section of the chapter examines some of the policy implications of these changes and considers the claim that today's conflicts are more intractable than those of the past and are thus less likely to be resolved.

War Termination Trends

The war trends revealed in the 2005 *Human Security Report* stood in stark contrast to the popular view of the 1990s as a period of escalating political violence around the world. The conventional wisdom was partly correct. There was a startling upturn in the number of new conflicts at the beginning of the decade, with much of the violence being associated with the

breakup of the former Soviet Union and other instabilities associated with the end of the Cold War.

But the 1990s also witnessed an even greater number of wars ending. The net effect of these changes was that by 2003 there were 40% fewer conflicts than in the peak year of 1992. The number of high-intensity conflicts—i.e., those with 1,000 or more battle-related deaths a year—declined by 80% over the same period.³⁷

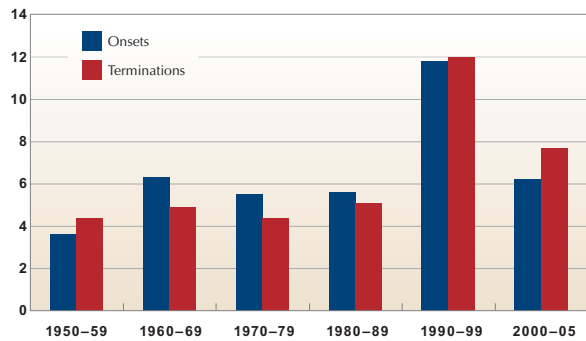
During the Cold War years more wars started than ended each decade—which drove the number of conflicts steadily upwards for some 40 years. But over the past decade and a half the global conflict tally has been driven down again because more wars ended than started.

Far more wars are now ending in negotiated settlements than in military victories.

Figure 3.1 shows the changes per decade in the average number of conflict onsets and terminations each year since the end of World War II. The huge increase in the number of conflicts both starting and ending during the 1990s, compared to previous decades, is very evident.

What the bar graph data for the 1990s do not reveal—because they simply show the averages for the decade—is that more wars started than ended at the beginning of

Figure 3.1 Average Number of Armed Conflict Onsets and Terminations, per Year, 1950-2005



Data source: UCDP/Human Security Centre Dataset

The end of the Cold War was associated with dramatic changes in the number of conflict episodes starting and ending.

the decade, but more ended than started during the rest of the decade.

Between 2000 and 2005 the average number of conflicts both starting and ending each year declined sharply from the extraordinarily high rates of the 1990s.³⁸ More conflicts are now ending than beginning, continuing the trend started in the 1990s.

In fact, in the first six years of the new millennium there has been an average net decline of 1.5 conflicts each year. If this rate were to continue for another 10 years, the number of conflicts currently being fought around the world would be halved. As noted previously, however, there are many reasons why such a trend may not continue.

Changes in war onset and termination rates have rather obvious policy implications. A major increase in the onset of new conflicts suggests that conflict prevention policies are having little or no effect. A major increase in negotiated settlements, on the other hand, suggests that efforts by the international community to mediate the end of wars may be succeeding.³⁹

Victories and Negotiated Settlements

Since the end of World War II, the manner in which wars end has changed radically. Between 1816 and 1945 there were extraordinarily few negotiated settlements and the overwhelming majority of wars were fought until one side or the other achieved a military victory.⁴⁰ But over the past 60 years mediated settlements have become far more common; the pursuit of victory much less so. By the 1990s, in a further

radical shift, more wars were ending in negotiated settlements than in victories.

UCDP's new conflict termination dataset, which tracks these changes, covers the period from 1946 to 2005. It differs from other termination datasets in two important ways—it is updated annually, and it includes low-intensity conflicts in addition to the high-intensity conflicts, which are the subject of most other termination datasets.⁴¹

The dataset records conflict "episodes"⁴²—periods of violent conflict that can be ended by military victory, or by negotiated settlement—a category that includes peace agreements or ceasefires.⁴³ A third category, labelled "Other" in Figure 3.2, includes conflicts that end when death tolls fall below the 25 battle-death-per-calendar-year threshold.⁴⁴

UCDP's data show that between 1946 and 2005, 372 armed conflict episodes ended. Approximately one third of these terminations were military victories and just over a quarter were negotiated settlements (peace agreements and ceasefires). Most of the rest either ground to a halt or simmered along at a very low level.

Since the end of World War II, the manner in which wars end has changed radically.

But the pattern of terminations underwent major shifts during the period under review. The biggest changes came in the post-Cold War political turmoil of the 1990s. First, the decade's tally of 120 terminations (an average of 12 a year) was more than double the average of the previous four decades. Second, an unprecedented 35% of all conflicts ended in some form of negotiated settlement.

During the Cold War decades victories had outnumbered negotiated settlements by more than two to one. But in the 1990s the reverse was true—42 conflicts ended in negotiated settlements; just 23 in victories. Between 2000 and 2005 there was a further change: there were four times as many negotiated settlements (17) as there were victories (4).

This increase in negotiated settlements since the end of the Cold War has been associated with a major upsurge in international activism directed towards stopping armed conflicts.

As the 2005 *Human Security Report* pointed out, the UN's peacemaking efforts increased enormously between 1990 and 1999, with similar increases in activity by regional

Figure 3.2 Number of State-based Armed Conflict Terminations, 1946-2005

Years	Victories			Negotiated settlements*			Other			Total terminations		
	Total No.	Number restarted in under 5 years	% restarted in under 5 years	Total No.	Number restarted in under 5 years	% restarted in under 5 years	Total No.	Number restarted in under 5 years	% restarted in under 5 years	Total No.	Number restarted in under 5 years	% restarted in under 5 years
1946-49	13	1	7.7	3	0	0.0	7	0	0	23	1	4.3
1950-59	16	3	18.8	11	0	0.0	13	5	38.5	40	8	20.0
1960-69	22	2	9.1	11	3	27.3	17	3	17.6	50	8	16.0
1970-79	22	6	27.3	12	3	25.0	11	0	0	45	9	20.0
1980-89	20	4	20.0	8	1	12.5	26	15	57.7	54	20	37.0
1990-99	23	2	8.7	42	18	42.9	55	32	58.2	120	52	43.3
Total 1946-1999	116	18	15.5	87	25	28.7	129	55	42.6	332	98	29.5
2000-2005**	4	1	25.0	17	2	11.8	19	10	52.6	40	13	32.5
Total 1946-2005	120			104			148			372		

Data source: UCDP/Human Security Centre Dataset

Since the end of the Cold War more conflicts have ended in negotiated settlement than in victory, reversing a 40-year trend. Conflicts that end in negotiated settlements are, however, far more likely to restart than those that end in victory.

*Includes peace agreements, ceasefires with conflict-regulatory steps, and ceasefires without conflict-regulatory steps

** The number of failed terminations for 2000 to 2005 is at this point unknown. If a conflict restarts within five years, the settlement is recorded as a failure.

organizations, individual governments, and NGOs.⁴⁵ UN and regional organization peacekeeping missions (now usually referred to as “peace operations”) also increased dramatically throughout the decade.

Determining whether the increase in 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 from the research community demonstrates that such initiatives can indeed improve the odds of attaining and sustaining peace agreements.⁴⁶ The next *Human Security Report* will offer a detailed critical analysis of the effectiveness of policies that seek to end wars and prevent them from restarting.

Different Stakes, Different Settlement Provisions

Whether or not negotiated settlements succeed depends to a considerable degree on the stakes over which the conflict has been fought and the provisions of the settlement agreement. A new UCDP study shows that some types of conflict appear more difficult to resolve than others.⁴⁷

UCDP divides armed conflicts into two broad categories: those fought over control of territory—very often secessionist struggles—and those fought over which party should control a government.

A majority of conflicts during the post-Cold War era were fought over control of territory. However, most peace agreements during that time (70%) were associated with conflicts fought over who should control a government.

Successful negotiation depends in part on the political provisions of agreements. The provisions associated with the successful settlement of territorial conflicts turn out to be quite different from the provisions of settlements that successfully end conflicts fought over control of the state.

When negotiating agreements to end territorial conflicts after 1989, governments were often willing to agree to provisions for greater autonomy, regional government, cultural freedoms, and regional development. But while provisions for referenda on the future status of the disputed territory were not uncommon in these agreements, there has not been a single case in the post-Cold War period of a government permitting a separatist movement to secede.

Peace agreements that follow wars over control of a government have very different settlement terms. The UCDDP study found that there was a provision for elections in 48% of the settlements under review, and in a substantial minority of cases there were also provisions for creating an interim government, for integrating rebels into the government and/or civil service, and for establishing the right to create political parties.⁴⁸ While some researchers have stressed the importance of power-sharing pacts for the successful implementation of peace agreements, UCDDP found that only 15% of agreements ending conflicts over government control had a provision for power-sharing.

Negotiated settlements are three times more likely to fail than victories.

The military provisions of peace settlements that seek to end intrastate conflicts were fairly consistent regardless of whether the fighting was about territory or the control of government. There were provisions for ceasefires in 60% of settlements, disarmament in 44%, integration of rebel forces into the national army in 38%, amnesties in 28%, and peace-keeping missions in 23%.

Further research in this area could help determine which sorts of political and military settlement provisions have been most effective in helping implement settlements of different types of conflict. Such findings would be of considerable utility to the policy community and could help reduce the high failure rate that has characterized peace settlements since the end of the Cold War.

The Downside of Negotiated Settlements

The big increase in negotiated settlements over the past decade and a half suggests that the international community's greatly increased efforts to bring wars to an end in this period have had a positive effect. But the data also suggest that negotiated settlements have two significant downsides compared to the victories they appear to be replacing.

First, wars that end in negotiated settlements last almost three times longer on average than those that are ended by military victory.

Second, negotiated settlements are three times more prone to failure than are victories.

The fact that victories are more stable than negotiated settlements is not surprising. When wars end with the mili-

tary defeat of one of the parties, the loser has no capacity to start fighting again, while the victor has no interest in doing so. But in negotiated settlements, where neither side has been defeated, the warring parties often retain substantial military capabilities well after peace agreements have been signed. Committing to peace in environments characterized by hostility and lack of trust is extraordinarily difficult. Seeking a more advantageous outcome by returning to war remains an option—and one that is often pursued.

The fact that negotiated settlements are associated with longer wars and a greater risk of reoccurrence than are victories might suggest that seeking decisive outcomes on the battlefield would be preferable to pursuing negotiated peace agreements. But as the short essay "Give War a Chance?" argues, this option is neither practical nor desirable (see next page).

In the 1990s negotiated settlements became much more unstable.⁴⁹ During the decade, 43% of all conflicts that ended in negotiated settlements started again within five years, compared with just 9% of conflicts that ended in victories.⁵⁰ (Five years without a restart is the standard measure of success for a negotiated settlement.) The average failure rate for peace settlements in the Cold War years had been just 13%.

Many of the negotiated settlements signed in the decade following the end of the Cold War 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, 24 of the 42 negotiated settlements succeeded—i.e., fighting did not restart within five years. This meant that—despite the large number of failures—the 24 successful settlements during this decade were more than twice the average of each decade in the Cold War years.

The average failure rate for peace settlements in the Cold War years was just 13%.

The category of conflict terminations that has the highest probability of failure are, unsurprisingly, those that end in neither a victory nor a peace agreement, but where the fighting simply dies down completely or falls below the 25 battle-death-a-year threshold. This form of termination lacks both the military advantages of victory and the political guarantees that often accompany negotiated settlements.

GIVE WAR A CHANCE?

In July 1999 *Foreign Affairs* published a provocative article by Edward Luttwak entitled, “Give War a Chance.” It made the case that more lives would be saved in the long term if the international community stopped trying to mediate settlements of violent conflicts, but instead allowed them to “burn themselves out.”⁵¹

Well-meaning efforts by the UN and NGOs to negotiate premature ceasefires and peace settlements, Luttwak argued, simply prolong the violence. They provide respites that allow the belligerents to reconstitute their forces, rearm, and fight on, thus delaying the decisive victory that is the one sure way to end the slaughter.

The findings of UCDP’s new conflict terminations dataset would appear to provide strong support for Luttwak’s thesis. Armed conflict episodes that end in negotiated settlements last almost three times longer on average than those that end in victories. And they are nearly twice as likely to relapse into violence within five years.⁵²

So if wars that end in victories are far shorter and less likely to restart than those that end in negotiated settlements, should not the international community heed Professor Luttwak’s advice and “give war a chance”?

The short answer is no.

While superficially plausible, Luttwak’s thesis is based on a number of false assumptions. The first is that if no outside efforts are made to mediate conflicts, they will swiftly burn themselves out. But, as Chester Crocker has pointed out, there are many examples of conflicts that have not been subject to external mediation that have nevertheless persisted for decades.⁵³

Luttwak concedes that this is true, but argues that this is because in civil wars it is often the case that neither side can defeat the other—a concession that fatally undermines his main argument.⁵⁴ Desirable or not, victory is simply not an option in many civil wars. When victory is impossible, negotiations may be the only way to end the killing.⁵⁵ Indeed, warring parties often turn to negotiations aided by external mediators precisely because they are unable to prevail on the battlefield.

Wars that cannot be stopped by victory, especially those where the parties are trapped in a “mutually hurting stalemate,” can be—and often are—stopped by negotiated peace settlements.⁵⁶

Second, consider Luttwak’s claim that external interventions in civil wars—typically UN efforts to mediate ceasefires and bring about peace settlements—simply pro-

long wars by giving the belligerents time to regroup, rearm, and thus continue fighting. His message is clear—mediation is dangerous.

In fact, external mediation plays a crucial role in stopping wars because it is so difficult for the warring parties on their own to commit to a negotiated settlement—particularly in those wars that neither side perceives it can win at acceptable cost. Such situations are typically characterized by a huge level of mutual distrust and fears that enemies will exploit negotiated ceasefires for all the reasons that Professor Luttwak suggests.

External intervention matters because third parties can provide security guarantees that the warring parties on their own obviously cannot. As Barbara Walter has pointed out in a major study of civil war settlements, external mediation dramatically increases the chances of bringing conflicts successfully to an end. In her study of 23 civil wars, she found that in the 12 cases where third-party security guarantees were offered, 11 of the signed agreements were implemented. In the 11 settlements where there were no third-party security assurances, nine failed to be implemented.⁵⁷

Third, Luttwak suggests that in stalemated wars, victory may still be possible if external actors intervene to help tip the military balance.

External military and economic assistance can indeed help a warring party win victory more swiftly on occasion. But such cases appear to be the exception, not the rule. As Patrick M. Regan and Aysegul Aydin point out in a recent study of the impact of external interventions on 153 armed conflicts, “the weight of the evidence suggests that outside military and economic interventions increase the duration and hostility levels and make the termination of civil conflicts less likely.”⁵⁸

It is true that the findings of the new UCDP dataset on conflict terminations appear to support Professor Luttwak’s provocative suggestion that pursuing victory on the battlefield is preferable to seeking peace settlements. But, as this short review of the evidence suggests, the prescriptions of “Give War a Chance” would in practice most likely lead to longer, not shorter, armed conflicts—and to greater death tolls.

It is too early to make any definitive statements about the stability of the settlements signed since 2000—five years have to elapse without a recurrence of fighting before a settlement can be labelled 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 17 negotiated settlements failed. The negotiated settlements for this period include 10 peace agreements—by the end of 2005 not one of these had failed.

Are Today's Conflicts More Intractable?

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

Some researchers believe that all the “low-hanging fruit” have now been gathered and the conflicts that remain will be far tougher to bring to an end. Fen Hampson, Chester Crocker, and Pamela Aall, for example, have argued that “The 21st century has been left with fewer but more intractable conflicts. Many are stalemated as antagonists display an undiminished appetite for continuing with their struggle in the hopes of eventual military victory.”⁵⁹

If today's remaining conflicts are indeed more intractable, the implication is clear and sobering—we can expect fewer conflicts to end, and 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-lasting conflicts—those in Israel/Palestine, Colombia, Sri Lanka, and

Burma, for example—still appear to be far from resolution. But in the last decade other major conflicts that once seemed hopelessly intractable have ended. These include the wars in East Timor, Aceh (Indonesia), Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and, most recently, Nepal. Still other conflicts, such as that in Algeria, have seen a great reduction in the level of violence or—like Burundi, northern Uganda, and possibly even Chechnya—appear to be moving towards some sort of termination.

Moreover, UCDP's new terminations dataset provides little statistical evidence to support claims that wars are becoming intractable. Of the 31 conflicts being waged in 2005, only 29% had been underway for 10 or more years and really merited the label “intractable.” A further 29% had been ongoing for less than a year, while 42% had lasted one to 10 years.

The fact that 71% of today's ongoing conflicts have lasted less than 10 years suggests that “intractability” is not a major barrier to further progress.

There is no reason to expect the number of conflicts to continue to trend downwards.

There is, of course, no reason to expect the number of conflicts to continue to trend downwards—the future holds too many unknowables for any prediction to be made with confidence. But there is nothing in the data that provides grounds for pessimism either.