



Mikkel Ostergaard / Panos Pictures. DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO.

## The Next Human Security Report

In addition to updating the major conflict datasets, the next *Human Security Report* will focus on two thematic issues: “The Hidden Costs of War” and “The Causes of Peace.”

### The Hidden Costs of War

While the number of armed conflicts and mass slaughters of civilians around the world has declined quite remarkably over the past 15 years, warfare still exacts a terrible—and largely unrecognized—toll.

In many of the world’s conflict zones, 10 or more people succumb to war-exacerbated disease and malnutrition for every combat death. In extreme cases the ratio can be even higher. The International Rescue Committee, for example, estimates that for every violent death in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, there are currently some 50 “indirect” or “excess” deaths.<sup>60</sup>

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. As a consequence, indirect deaths remain mostly unseen, uncounted, and unnoticed.

The reality is that despite some improvements in data collection 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. We know that the indirect death toll is driven by a number of factors—the intensity and scope of the conflict, the numbers of people displaced, the health of the population, and access to basic health services. We also know that humanitarian assistance can achieve dramatic and timely reductions in indirect deaths at a remarkably low cost.

The provision of humanitarian services—food, sanitation, shelter, and health services—can reduce mortality rates from war-exacerbated disease and malnutrition to pre-war levels or better within four to six months.

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The critical intervening variable that impacts indirect death rates is the extent and effectiveness of humanitarian interventions. Drawing on the wealth of extant research, plus new data, the *Report* will analyse the multitude of (mostly political) factors that determine the effectiveness of humanitarian action today.

The aim is to produce the most comprehensive overview, thus far published, of the hidden human costs of war. We will review what is known about the extent of indirect deaths worldwide and the major diseases that cause them; we will analyse the drivers of those diseases and examine some of

the key dilemmas and constraints that confront humanitarian and local actors as they seek to help reduce conflict-induced suffering.

## The Causes of Peace

The “Causes of Peace” section will offer a more in-depth analysis of the arguments made briefly in Part V of the 2005 *Human Security Report*. It will provide an accessible account of what is known about the drivers of peace in today’s most numerous and deadly conflicts—civil wars in poor countries.

This section will critically review key findings about the causes of peace from the conflict research literature, commissioning new research where necessary. It will compare explanations that stress structural factors (“root causes”) and events data with those that focus on policies that seek to reduce the risk and incidence of war. The latter include what the UN calls “peacemaking” and “peacebuilding,” but also policies that seek to stop existing wars and deter new ones by coercive means.

It will also include detailed analyses of the many innovative security initiatives that have become standard security practice since the early 1990s—from the proliferation of “Friends” groups to the entrenchment of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs in peace operations.

Explanations for declining political violence that stress the importance of security policies stand in sharp contrast to the academic research that sees the drivers of peace as the inverse of the causes of war. In the latter case researchers use multiple regression analysis to determine whether, and to what extent, “structural” factors—such as income per capita, “youth bulges,” trade openness, “horizontal inequality,” and dependence on primary commodities—affect the risk and incidence of armed conflict.

The assumption that flows naturally from this work is that the drivers of peace are the antithesis of the drivers of war. There is in fact considerable evidence to support this assumption. For example, as incomes (and thus state capacity) rise and as economies diversify, state capacity increases, political instability decreases, group inequalities are attenuated, and

the risk of civil war declines. Where the reverse is true, the risk of war increases. These sorts of structural changes helped drive the decline in armed conflicts in East and Southeast Asia that began in the 1970s as local economies boomed and democratization spread across the region. This decline has continued to the present day.

However, as the 2005 *Human Security Report* argued, the dramatic worldwide downturn in political violence that has occurred since the early 1990s cannot be explained by changes in structural factors like income per capita or rates of economic growth. Structural change simply has not been significant or widespread enough to explain the steepness of the decline in armed conflicts.

The case of sub-Saharan Africa is instructive here. Between 2003 and 2005 the number of low-income countries under stress had increased from 11 to 14.<sup>61</sup> Over the same period the number of armed conflicts (including intercommunal conflicts) had declined by an extraordinary 37%—from 30 to 19. Here the most compelling explanation for the decline appears to lie with the greatly expanded conflict prevention, peacemaking, and peacebuilding policies pursued by the international community during this period.

Drawing on a range of recent empirical research, we will also analyse the effectiveness of a range of coercive policies that have been employed by the international community in pursuit of security goals. These include sanctions, economic conditionality instruments, and military interventions. An initial review of the literature suggests that, with some exceptions, the success rate of coercive approaches is very low.

The section will contain an accessible guide to the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to explaining the causes of peace—from macroquantitative econometric analysis to case studies.

Unpacking the reasons why wars come to an end—or in some countries never start—is a complex and often contested task. In addressing it, the next *Report* is responding to the increasing insistence by donor governments, agencies, and major NGOs that humanitarian, peacebuilding, and conflict prevention policies be evidence-based.