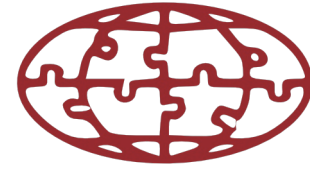




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Organized Violence in the World 2015

An assessment by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program

by Erik Melander, Director

Introduction

New data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) show that well over 100.000 people were killed in organized violence in the year 2014, which is the highest fatality count in twenty years. The best estimate is 126 059 fatalities. The death count in organized violence has not exceeded 100.000 since 1994 when the Rwandan genocide took place. For the first time this data release provides data on all three categories of organized violence coded by UCDP – state-based conflict, conflict between non-state actors, and one-sided killings of civilians – for the quarter century 1989-2014. The data on state-based conflict were released in June 2015 and introduced in an article in *Journal of Peace Research* (Pettersson and Wallensteen 2015), which is freely available at:

http://www.pcr.uu.se/digitalAssets/61/61533_1journal-of-peace-research-2015-pettersson-536-50.pdf

Now the data on non-state conflict and one-sided violence are available as well, which allows for an analysis of the total amount of organized violence. The last five years have seen a dramatic increase in organized violence, especially in the Middle East,

and if this trend continues an already very dire situation will rapidly become much worse. On the other hand the level of violence in 2014 is still much lower than the previous peak in 1994. Moreover, in the earlier post-World War II period there were many years with large wars and genocides which resulted in much higher death tolls. Even the exploding violence in the most recent years does not contradict the trend that overall levels of organized violence are declining, albeit unevenly.

There are important regional variations. The Middle East is currently the most violent region, with developments in Syria and Iraq mainly responsible for driving up the death toll. But over the last quarter century, i.e., 1989-2014, Africa has been the most violent region by far. Despite alarming levels of violence now in some areas, e.g., Northern Nigeria, Africa in recent years is actually less violent than it was in the 1990s. Indeed, most parts of the world have seen reductions in the amount of organized violence over the time period. Also in the Americas and East Asia the trends are unambiguously in the direction of fewer deaths in organized violence. For Europe and Central and South Asia the picture is mixed with progress in some parts and setbacks in others.

While it is necessary to take in the full extent of the atrocities rapidly developing now, for example in Syria, Iraq and Nigeria, it is also prudent to bear in mind that the world is nevertheless much less violent than during the Cold War and the World Wars. It is imperative to keep analyzing the factors that have caused this positive development in order to learn how best to promote peace in the future. There should be no contradiction in dealing with present catastrophes and preparing for looming threats on the one hand and appreciating the overall decline in violence on the other.

Global Deaths in Organized Violence 1989 - 2014

With the recent completion of the coding for the year 2014, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) now provides yearly fatality numbers for three categories of organized violence – state-based conflict, non-state conflict, and one-sided violence – for the 25-year period 1989-2014. This report for the first time presents the total picture of organized violence during the last quarter century that emerges from those data. Comparisons will also be made with the Cold War period (1946-1989). State based conflict is armed conflict between two governments (i.e., interstate conflict) such as the one between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1998-2000, or between a government and rebel organization (i.e., intrastate conflict) such as the conflict between the government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Non-state conflict refers to armed conflict between two organized actors, neither of which is a state. Examples of non-state conflicts include the conflict between the Islamic State (IS) and the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Syria, as well as that between Hindus and Muslims in India. One-sided violence is when an organized actor (a state or some organized non-state actor) kills unarmed civilians such as the violence committed by the Rwandan government and associated militias in Rwanda in 1994 as well as violence by Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad, commonly known as Boko Haram, in

Nigeria in more recent years. These definitions are developed and explained in more detail at:

<http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/>

Assessing the number of people killed in organized violence is a challenging undertaking, and no data collection effort with global ambitions can aspire to cover all violent deaths. The procedures used by UCDP are explained at:

<http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/faq/>

. The numbers provided by UCDP should be considered conservative, meaning that they are minimum numbers or on the low side. UCDP reports three estimates for fatalities, namely low, best, and high, to represent uncertainty when reliable precise numbers cannot be obtained. This report will use best estimates. Great uncertainty concerns the number of people killed in the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, and given that the total fatality figure at any rate is extremely high this uncertainty means that the total numbers for the whole world differ markedly depending on the numbers used for the Rwandan genocide. For this reason, this report will discuss some patterns in organized violence with and without the Rwandan genocide.

Using best estimates for all three categories of organized violence, and including the Rwandan genocide, almost two million people (1 941 658) were killed in the period 1989-2014. The majority (54%) perished in state-based armed conflict, i.e., in fighting in wars and lesser conflicts between states, or, between states and rebel challengers. This category of organized violence also includes fatalities when civilians are caught in the cross-fire during battles. The second largest category in terms of fatalities is one-sided violence, with 706 106 deaths (39% of the total). Out of these roughly 700 000 deaths in one-sided violence UCDP has recorded 500 000 deaths as the best estimate for the Rwandan genocide. However, using the high estimate (800 000) for one-sided violence in Rwanda in 1994 would be enough to make the number of deaths from one-sided violence larger than from state-based conflict. The third and decidedly smaller category, non-state conflict,

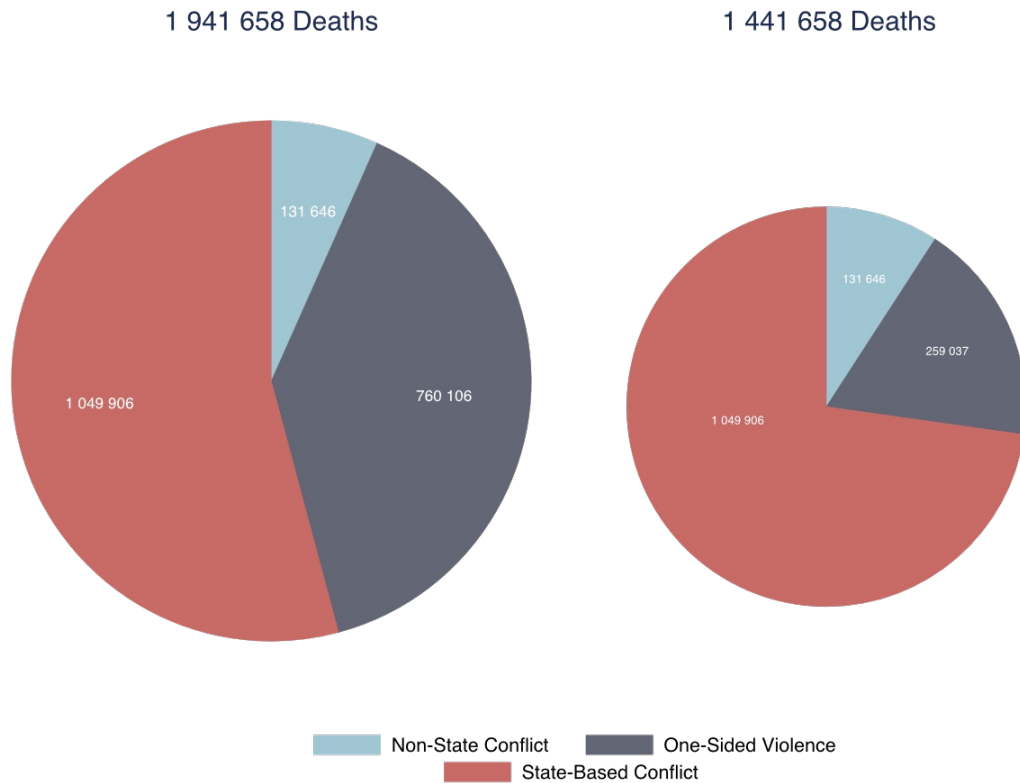


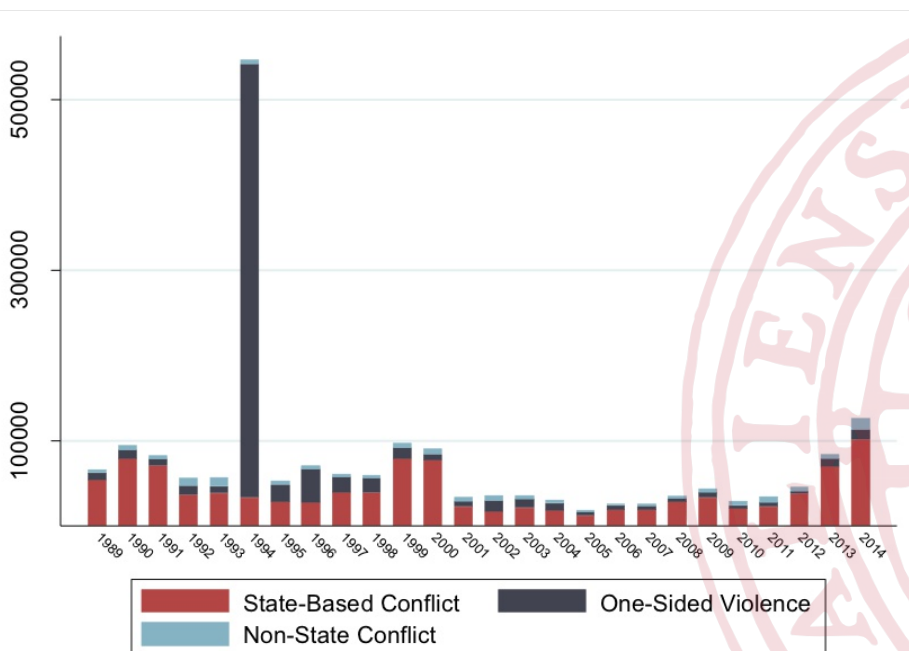
Figure 1. Fatalities in organized violence (1989-2014) with and without the Rwandan Genocide

claimed 131 646 lives (7% of the total), which needless to say still amounts to a horrendous number of violent deaths.

The diagram above illustrates the distribution between the three categories of organized violence. The pie chart to the right excludes the Rwandan genocide, since some readers may consider this

event to be of a different qualitative nature if full-scale genocide is considered distinct from less lethal one-sided killings. Figure 2 shows how the deaths in organized violence are distributed over time. Looking at the year 1994 the extreme lethality of the Rwandan genocide in the post-Cold War period stands out starkly.

Figure 2. Yearly fatalities in organized violence (1989-2014) including the Rwandan Genocide



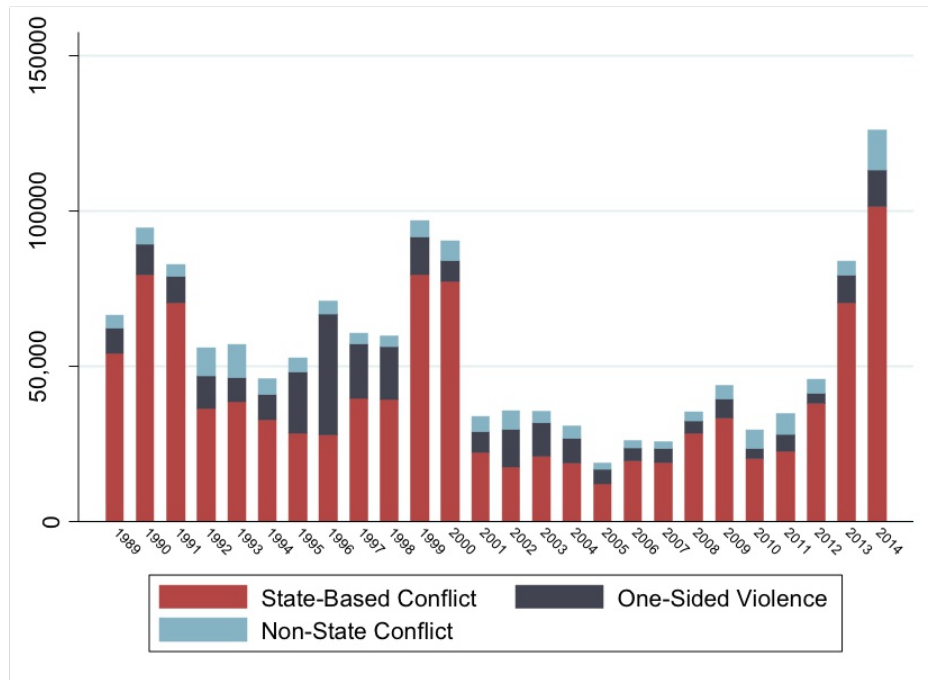


Figure 3. Yearly fatalities in organized violence, 1989-2014, excluding the Rwandan Genocide

Figure 2 also shows that 2014 was the second most lethal year with 126 059 fatalities. At the same time, because of the magnitude of the Rwandan genocide, 2014 is still much less bloody than 1994. As will be discussed in a later section, the Rwandan genocide is not unique in the longer period going back all the way to 1946; sadly, several genocides have occurred since the Second World War.

Figure 3 above is the same graph but with the Rwandan genocide excluded, which makes it easier to see how much more violent the year 2014 was compared to the other years in the post-Cold War era (except, of course, 1994 when the Rwandan genocide is taken into account). Yet, it is difficult to discern any clear trends in Figure 3. There are three peaks, 1990-1991, 1999-2000, and 2013-2014, with periods of less violence in between. Figure 2 showed that the organized violence in the world in 2014 was at a very worrying level at the same time as the carnage was far less than the extremes of a decade earlier. Indeed, if the Rwandan genocide is treated as a separate phenomenon and left out of the picture as in Figure 3, the violence in 2014 appears even more worrying. It would nevertheless be difficult to argue that the amount of violence is so high that a qualitative break is evident in the pattern. However, the aggregate patterns presented above

hide important regional variations, some of which will be presented below.

Regional Trends

The regional breakdown begins with state-based conflict, the category of violence inflicting the highest number of deaths (given that the best estimate of 500 000 deaths in the Rwandan genocide is used and not the high estimate of 800 000 – see above).

Africa is the region that has had the highest number of deaths in state-based conflict: 419 078. As Figure 4 (below) shows, Africa in this sense has in recent years nevertheless seen much less state-based conflict than in the first half of the time series. Africa has become much more peaceful. The second most lethal region in this category of organized violence is Central and South Asia with 271 503 deaths. The Middle East, which currently is the center of media attention because of the very violent civil wars in Syria and Iraq, and a number of smaller conflicts, is only the third most violent region when the whole time period is considered with 221 976 deaths. Even a quick glance at the graph shows that the other three regions have experienced much less state-based

Figure 4. Regional Breakdown of Battle Related Deaths (1989 - 2014, in thousands)

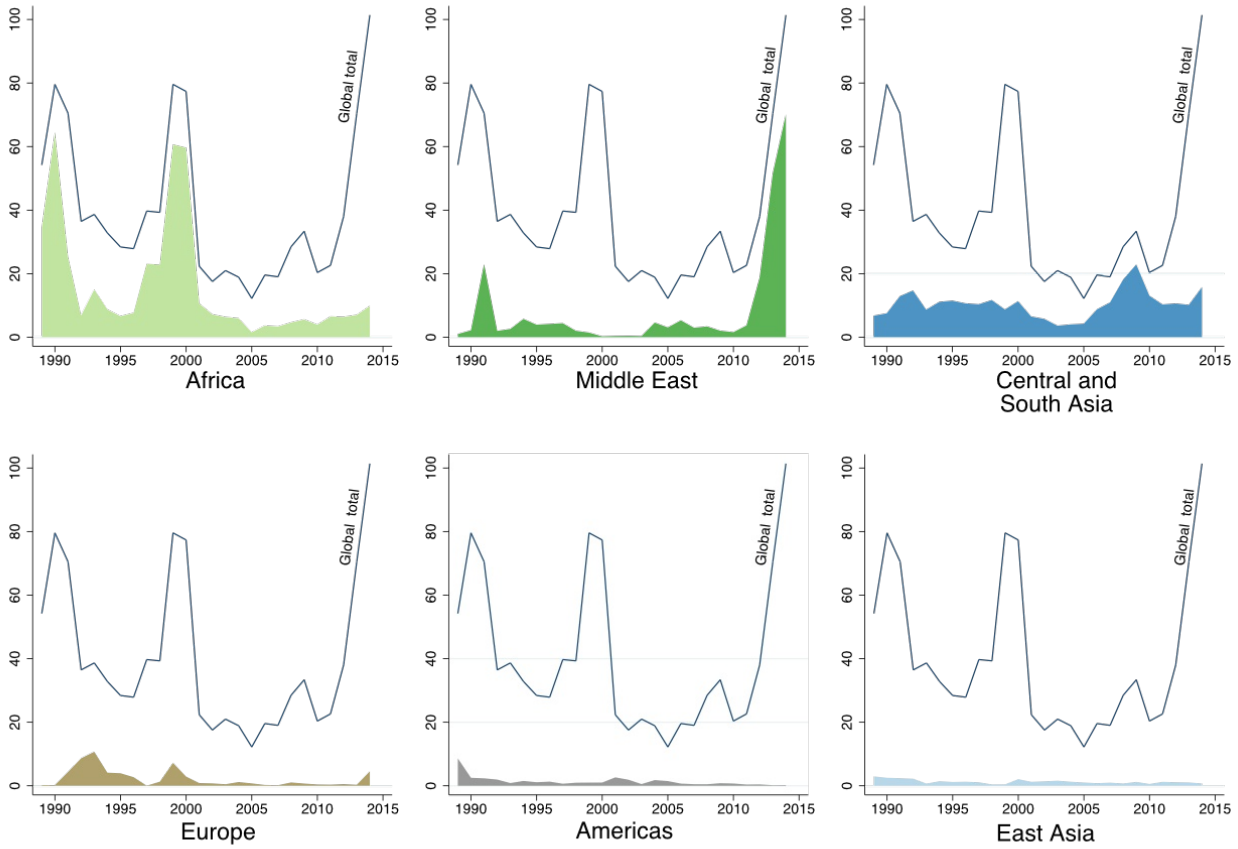
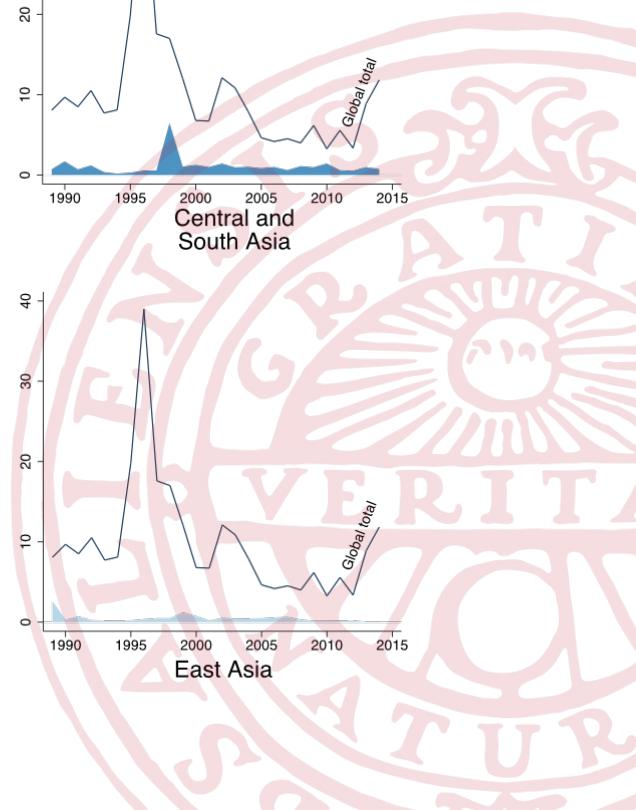
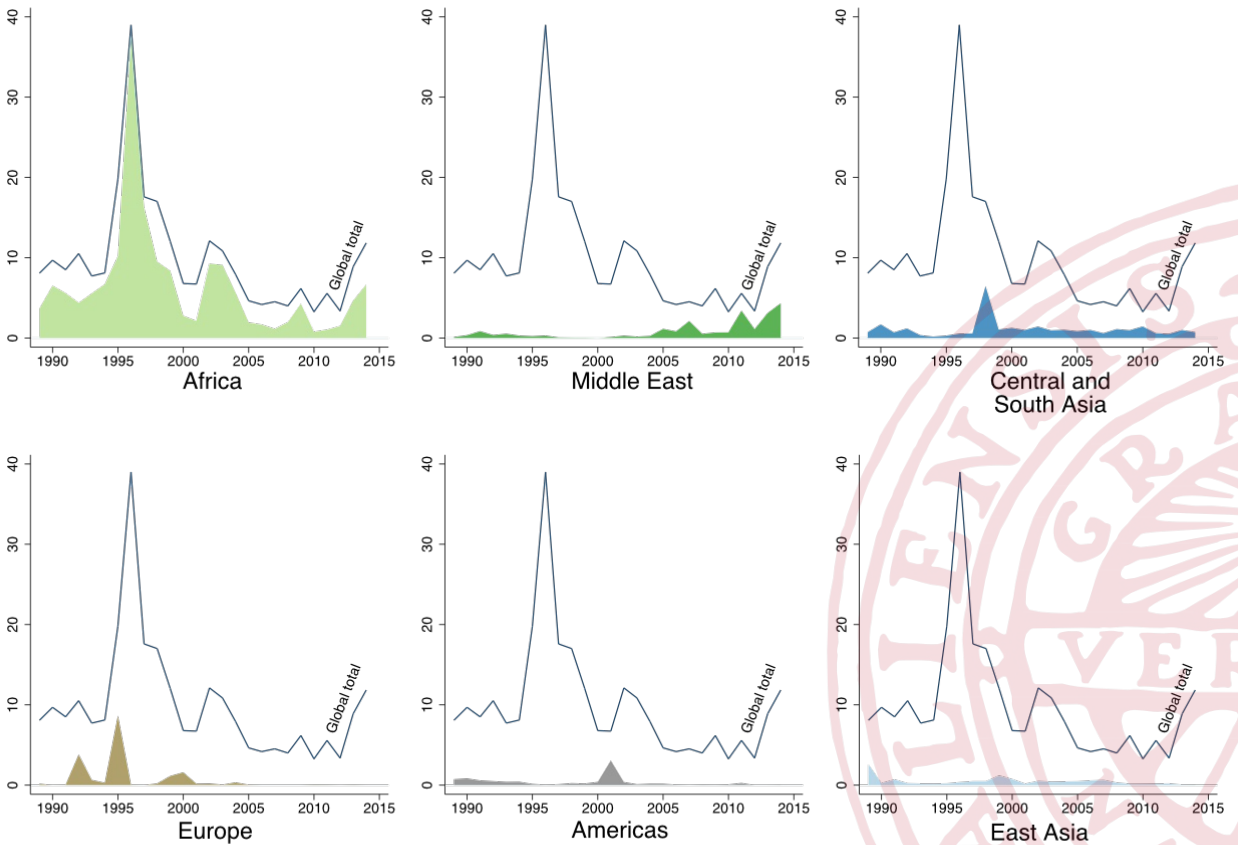


Figure 5. Regional Breakdown of One-sided Violence Deaths (1989 - 2014, in thousands)



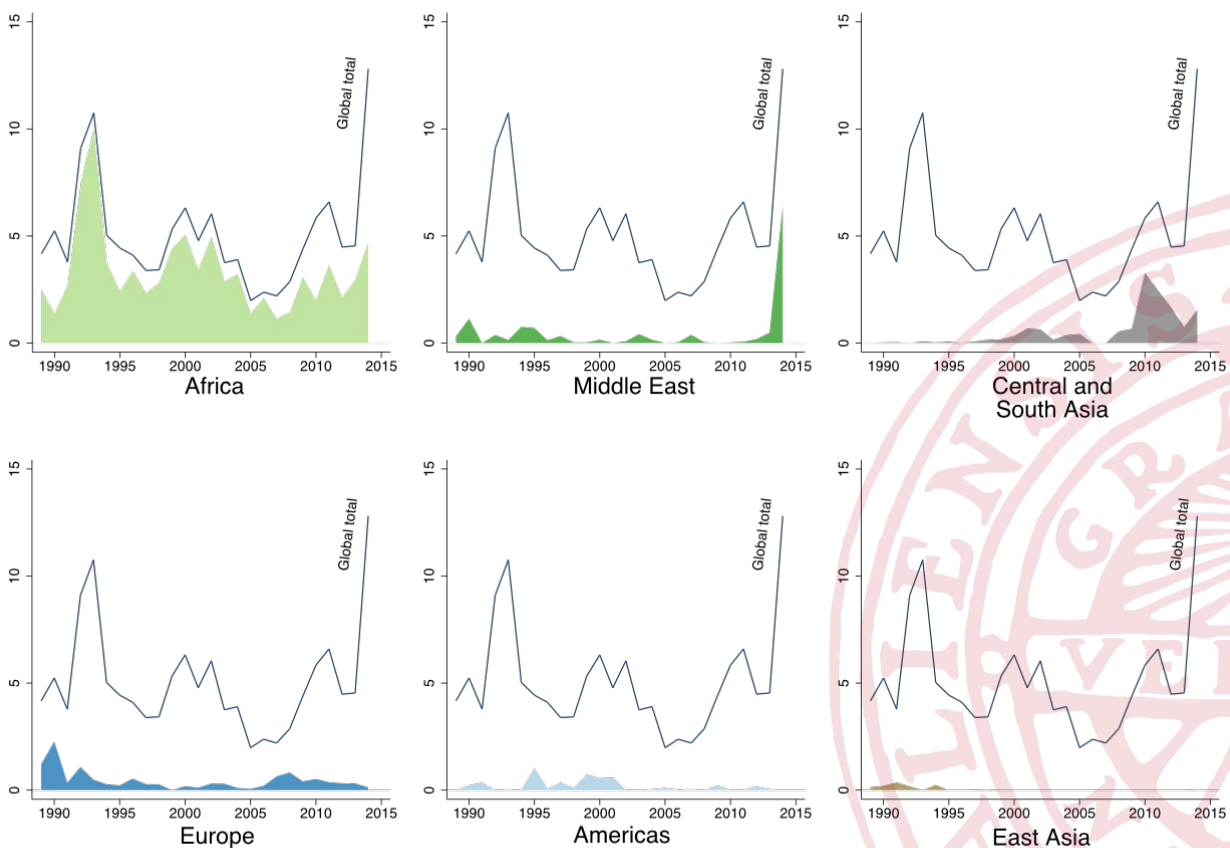
conflict: Europe with 58 937 deaths, Americas with 36 714, and East Asia with 33 771 deaths in state-based conflict. Whereas the trends are unclear in Central and South Asia and Europe, both Americas and East Asia have become much less violent over time.

Figure 5 (above) shows the regional breakdown of one-sided violence. Note that the range of the y-axis differs from Figure 4. Note also that the 500 000 deaths of the Rwandan genocide are excluded from this graph. Despite this, Africa completely dominates the pattern of killings in one-sided violence with 169 331 deaths. Although more than 6 000 people were massacred in Africa in 2014 the region is nevertheless much less violent in this regard now than in the peak years following the Rwandan genocide. The second most murderous region in terms of one-sided violence is Central and South Asia with 28 476 deaths, less than a sixth of the number of deaths in Africa. The Middle East is again the third most violent region with 22 200 deaths in one-sided violence, followed by Europe with 17 637 deaths, East Asia with 12 368 deaths, and Americas with 9 025 deaths. It is clear from Figure 5 that despite the dramatic

increases in one-sided violence in parts of the Middle East and Africa in recent years the world has become much less violent considering how violent especially Africa used to be in the 1990s.

Figure 6 (below) shows the regional breakdown of fatalities in non-state conflict, the least lethal form of organized violence. Note that the range of the y-axis again differs from previous graphs. As was the case with both state-based conflict and one-sided violence, Africa has seen the large majority of all fatalities in non-state conflict with 87 224 deaths. This type of violence peaked in Africa in the early 1990s. The second most violent region in terms of non-state conflict is Americas with 14 181 deaths, less than a sixth of the number in Africa. Middle East has the third highest number of fatalities with 12 370 deaths and a very sharp rise in 2014 because of heavy fighting between rival rebel groups opposing the Assad regime. Central and South Asia has an almost as high fatality count with 11 792 deaths in non-state conflict. East Asia and Europe have seen relatively few deaths in non-state conflict with 4 850 and 1 229 deaths, respectively.

Figure 6. Regional Breakdown of Non-state Deaths (1989 - 2014, in thousands)

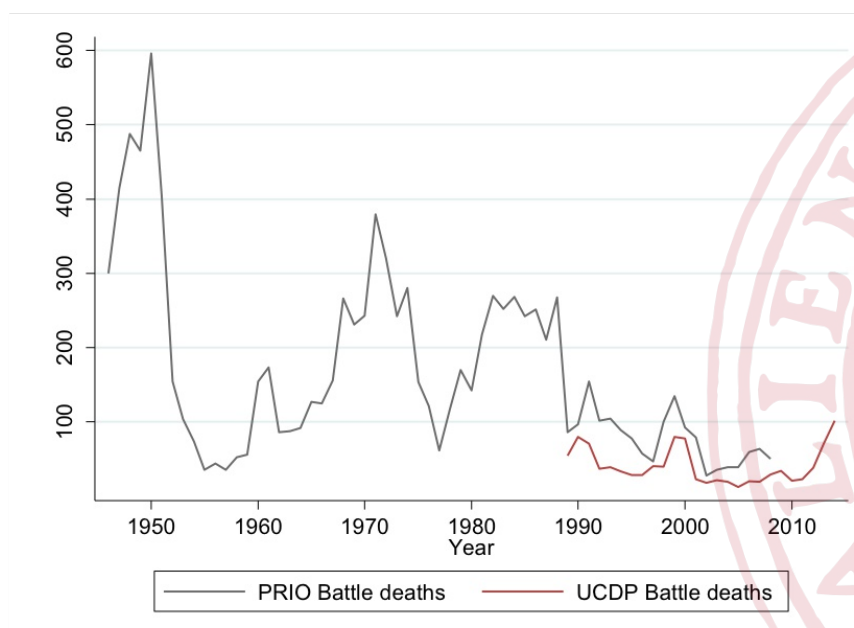


A few patterns stand out in the regional breakdowns in Figures 4-6. The Middle East is currently the region of the world with the highest levels of organized violence, but over the last quarter century Africa has been much more violent than the Middle East. Whereas the levels of violence in the Middle East have exploded in the most recent years Africa is now much less violent than it used to be, which of course is even more evident when the Rwandan genocide is brought back into the analysis. The third region with very high levels of organized violence is Central and South Asia. The trends for this region are contradicting. Already high levels of violence in Afghanistan are currently increasing, but the civil war in Sri Lanka ended in 2010, and organized violence in India has decreased substantially. Despite high levels of non-state conflict in Mexico, the Americas have become much more peaceful. Levels of organized violence are likewise falling in East Asia. In Europe the thousands of deaths from state-based conflict in Ukraine mean that organized violence is on the rise again, but the amounts of fatalities are still much lower than in the 1990s.

The data on fatalities in state-based conflict coded by UCDP cover the years 1989-2014. UCDP also maintains a time series of data on the number and location of all state-based conflicts for the period following World War II, 1946-2014 (UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset). This dataset, part of which was developed together with the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) (Gleditsch et al. 2002), records whether each identified state-based conflict claimed 1 000 battle-related deaths or more in a calendar year, which is considered full-scale war, or stayed below this threshold of 1000 deaths. The minimum number of battle-related deaths in a calendar year for inclusion in the dataset is 25. The patterns of state-based armed conflict are discussed in the article in Journal of Peace Research (Pettersson and Wallensteen 2015) mentioned above, which is freely available at: http://www.pcr.uu.se/digitalAssets/61/61533_1journal-of-peace-research-2015-pettersson-536-50.pdf.

In a separate undertaking, PRIO has coded the number of battle deaths in all the conflicts in the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset for the period 1946-2008 (the PRIO Battle Deaths Dataset). The UCDP Battle-related Deaths Dataset and the PRIO Battle Deaths Dataset thus overlap for the years 1989-2008. Figure 7 combines the two sources of information on battle-deaths in state-based

Figure 7. Prio and UCDP Battle-related Deaths (1945 - 2014)



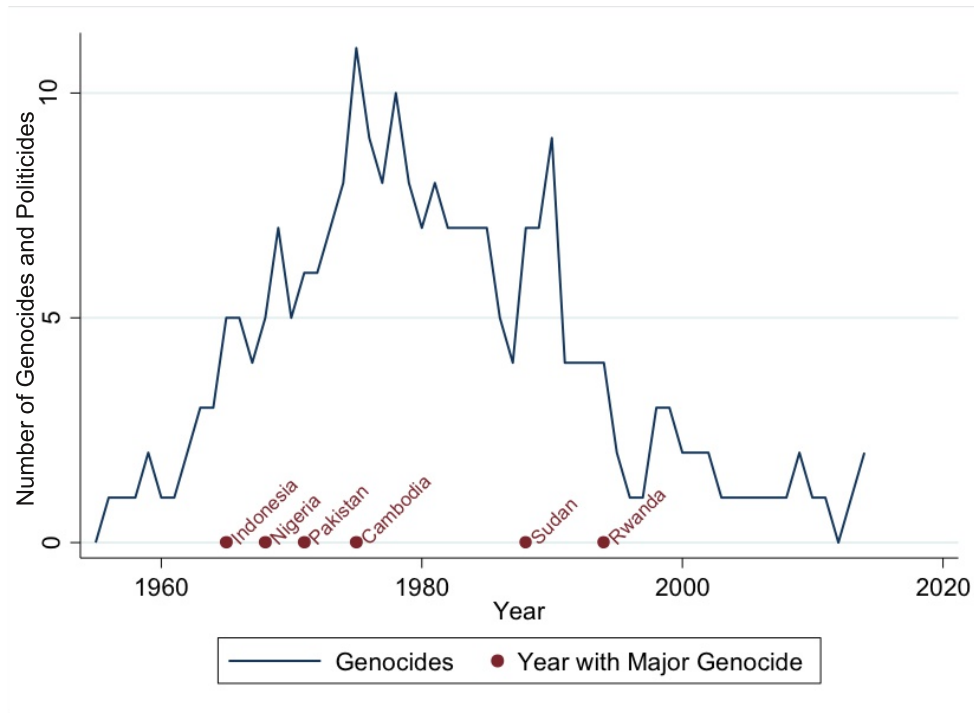


Figure 8. Genocide and Politicide during intrastate armed conflict (1955 - 2014)

conflict for the full period 1946-2014.

During the overlapping period the fatality numbers from the two datasets follow each other closely, although PRIO reports slightly higher numbers because of differences in coding procedures. Figure 7 immediately conveys that despite being the most deadly year for two decades, 2014 nevertheless represents a low level of violence compared to the repeated spikes of war fatalities during the Cold War. The most deadly wars in terms of battle-deaths were the Vietnam War 1955-1975, the Korean War 1950-1953, the Chinese Civil War 1946-1949, the Iran-Iraq War 1980-1988, and the civil war in Afghanistan which began in 1978 and still rages on today in a different configuration (Lacina and Gleditsch 2005). It should be stressed that the deaths graphed in Figure 7 only include battle deaths (i.e., deaths in state-based conflict), and not the many genocides and massacres that were not battle-related (which are coded as one-sided violence in the period 1989-2014). Just by looking at the number of people killed in war it is obvious that the Cold War (1946-1988) period was much more violent than the most recent years.

Genocide and Politicide during Intrastate Armed Conflict (1955-2014)

The conclusion that the most recent period is still much less violent than the Cold War is reinforced when data on massacres of civilians in the Cold War period are taken into account as well. The Center for Systemic Peace (Marshall et. al., 2015) provides data on such massacres, which are referred to as genocides or politicides, for the time period 1955-2014. Genocide and politicide usually occur during intrastate armed conflict, or in its immediate aftermath. Figure 8 shows the number of genocides and politicides with at least 1 000 victims as reported by the Center for Systemic Peace in countries involved in intrastate armed conflict according to the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset. Figure 8 also notes years in which the most lethal genocides began, each of which killed at least 256 000 people, by noting the country in question on the time axis.

The Center for Systemic Peace codes genocides ongoing in Iraq (the Islamic State) and the Central African Republic in 2014, but the numbers of people massacred are coded as relatively low compared to other genocides and politicides. Figure 8 shows that genocide in armed conflict

took place much more frequently during the worst days of the Cold War than in recent decades. Remember that the record of one-sided killings in the period since 1989 is totally dominated by the Rwandan genocide (Figure 2). As Figure 8 shows, during the Cold War there were at least five episodes of such truly massive genocides in states experiencing intrastate armed conflict, namely in Indonesia, Nigeria, Pakistan (Bangladesh), Cambodia, and Sudan. Indeed, the present carnage in the form of one-sided violence in parts of the Middle East and Africa – as destructive as it may be on the local level – pales in comparison to the enormous mass-slaughters carried out during the second half of the 20th Century. Again, the inescapable conclusion is that the Cold War era was much worse in terms of the number of people killed in organized violence compared to the period since the Rwandan genocide. Despite the rapidly worsening situation in Syria, Iraq, Nigeria, and elsewhere, the world remains much more peaceful than was the case during the Cold War and the turbulent years that followed in the immediate wake of the Cold War.

Conclusion

This report has presented the total picture of organized violence in the last quarter century, as depicted in the datasets that UCDP maintains on three types of organized violence: state-based conflict, non-state conflict, and one-sided violence. In addition, by combining UCDP data with other data from Peace Research Institute Oslo and the Center for Systemic Peace, the patterns identified for the period 1989-2014 were compared to the Cold War. Patterns of organized violence show important regional variations, but two major conclusions can be drawn. First, in the last few years the world has become more violent, with death tolls in all three forms of organized violence rapidly rising from a period of considerably lower levels. Second, despite the fact that the number of people who died in organized violence in 2014 is the highest since 1994, when the Rwandan genocide took place, the Cold War period was much more violent than the present. It is imperative to keep analyzing the factors that

have caused this positive development in order to learn how best to promote peace in the future. There should be no contradiction in dealing with present catastrophes and preparing for looming threats on the one hand and appreciating the overall decline in violence on the other.

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