

**The More Things Change...:
Recognizing and Responding to Trends in Armed Conflict**

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Abstract: It is becoming increasingly fashionable to argue that conflict patterns today are fundamentally different from patterns in past historical eras. If correct, this argument could call into question the future value of decades of scientific research on the sources and consequences of interstate conflict. This paper reviews several prominent differences that have been proposed, and examines major conflict-related data sets for evidence related to these explanations. It appears that intrastate conflict is currently more frequent and bloodier than interstate conflict, as many analysts have argued, but that this has been the case for most of the past two centuries. Similarly, while analysts claim that future conflict will revolve around ethnic or cultural issues rather than territorial or ideological questions, the available evidence is mixed. I conclude with several suggestions for future research on militarized conflict, focusing on three themes: non-state actors, subwar intrastate conflict, and (both interstate and intrastate) contentious issues and issue management.

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The More Things Change...: Recognizing and Responding to Trends in Armed Conflict

In a recent analysis of conflict patterns, Wallensteen and Sollenberg (1999, 2000, 2001) note that most conflict since the end of the Cold War appears to be internal in nature. They identify 108 armed conflicts, each of which resulted in at least 25 battle deaths during at least one calendar year between 1989-1998. Of these armed conflicts, only seven -- two of which were active in 1998 -- were primarily interstate in nature. Nine others were intrastate conflicts with foreign intervention, and the remaining 92 were intrastate in nature.

Wallensteen and Sollenberg's observation suggests a very disturbing implication. Despite more than three decades of systematic, data-based research on militarized conflict, relatively little work has examined intrastate conflict; the vast majority of data collection and data-based research has focused on conflict between sovereign nation-states. Yet according to Wallensteen and Sollenberg's research, primarily interstate conflict accounts for less than seven percent of all armed conflict in the decade since the Cold War, and interstate intervention into intrastate conflict accounts for only an additional eight percent. As a result, at least eighty-five percent of all armed conflict in the past decade lies beyond the scope of most data-based research on conflict -- meaning that the future study of war must undergo fundamental change, or else risk an inability to account for the vast majority of future war.

This paper examines the increasingly fashionable argument that militarized conflict is fundamentally different today than it was in earlier times, with the goal of improving the future study of conflict. The argument about fundamental changes in the nature of conflict has often been made without much systematic data-based analysis, and almost accepted by assumption. I evaluate the central themes of this argument using prominent data sets on both interstate and intrastate conflict over the past two centuries, and find only mixed support for the expectations of many analysts. I then discuss the implications of this analysis, offering several suggestions to improve both the study of future conflict and the future study of conflict.

Fundamental Changes in Conflict?

A variety of writers from academic, military, and policymaking backgrounds have suggested that patterns of armed conflict are currently undergoing (or have recently undergone) fundamental

changes. For example, following the end of the Cold War, U.S. President George Bush referred to a "New World Order" that was coming into place. In his vision for this order, Bush referred to a world of widespread respect for freedom, justice, and human rights. International disputes in this new world order could be resolved peacefully rather than forcibly, perhaps aided by international law and by organizations such as the United Nations -- but if force were used, the peace-loving states of the world would band together to defeat the aggressor, just as was done to reverse the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. In short, Bush proclaimed the coming of a more peaceful era in world politics, where force was rejected as a foreign policy tool. Other policymakers and scholars echoed this optimism, proclaiming the "End of History" or the beginnings of a new era of peace and prosperity.

Events in the subsequent decade appeared to dispel the initial optimism of the post-Cold War era. Both interstate and internal wars continued to occur in Africa, Asia, the Americas, and even in Europe. Even more troubling, these wars led to the emergence of new terminology like "ethnic cleansing," and the laws and organizations that Bush saw as being so effective struggled in such diverse locations as Somalia, Bosnia, and Rwanda. Less than a decade after Bush left office, the United States itself was targeted by terrorists, suffering approximately three thousand deaths in the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. By this time, many political and military analysts had begun forecasting a much darker future, full of intense conflict and with little respect for human rights or international law.

I now examine a variety of these analysts' projections about the future of armed conflict. Not all of these analysts are explicitly concerned with the theoretical and empirical study of conflict; for example, some are primarily concerned with military threats to the United States or its interests, future U.S. defense postures, or strategies for winning wars rather than for predicting them. Yet the writers generally share a number of common themes, which will be discussed briefly.¹

Non-State Actors in Armed Conflict

One common argument about fundamental changes in the nature of armed conflict involves

¹ Sources consulted include academic writings of the post-Cold War era as well as three recent government reports: the National Defense Panel's 1997 report "Transforming Defense: National Security in the 21st Century," which was meant to address long-term issues facing U.S. defense and national security; the 1999 report of the United States Commission on National Security / 21st Century (or Hart-Rudman Commission), "New World Coming: American Security in the 21st Century; Major Themes and Implications," which was meant to describe the world that would be emerging in the next quarter century with an eye toward designing an appropriate U.S. national security strategy; and the National Intelligence Council's 2000 report "Global Trends 2015," which was meant to analyze global trends that will shape the world of 2015.

the rise of non-state actors as participants in recent conflict, while states have presumably dominated past armed conflict. Holsti (1996: 19-20), for example, argues that recent wars have generally been fought by "loosely knit groups of regulars, irregulars, cells, and not infrequently by locally-based warlords under little or no central authority" rather than by "the organized armed forces of two or more states." The report of the Hart-Rudman Commission (Hart and Rudman 1999: 6) suggests that "Interstate wars will occur over the next 20 years, but most violence will erupt from conflicts internal to current territorial states." The National Intelligence Council (2000) analysis of global trends similarly concludes that internal conflicts will pose the most frequent threat to stability around the world, although interstate wars will continue to grow in lethality due to the availability of more destructive technologies.

Non-state actors are also seen as an increasingly important future threat to the United States specifically. Policy speeches and reports -- even before the attacks of September 11, 2001 -- warn of threats from international terrorist organizations, organized crime, or narcotraffickers. The NIC (2000: 19), for example, suggests that state-supported terrorism will decrease over the next fifteen years, but that there will be a trend toward "more diverse, free-wheeling, transnational networks" such as that of Osama bin Laden.

Consistent with these arguments about the rise of non-state actors and of intrastate conflict, Holsti (1996) reports evidence that -- at least in recent decades -- the threat of armed conflict between states has been declining, while the threat of war between communities and within states is on the rise. Over three fourths of the wars between 1945-1995 were primarily internal in nature, featuring combat between communities within a state or between a community and the state itself rather than combat between states; traditional combat between states accounts for only eighteen percent of the total wars in this period. Holsti (1996: 25) thus argues that "The main problem of war since 1945 has been within and about states, not between states."

Issues in Armed Conflict

Beyond the identity of the participants, many observers also see conflict arising for different reasons than in the past. Future conflict -- whether interstate or intrastate -- is seen as increasingly likely to involve ethnic, religious, nationalist, or other cultural issues. For example, the NIC report (2000: 21) suggests that much of the expected increase in global terrorism will be directed against

the U.S. and its allies or overseas interests, primarily because of perceived ethnic, religious, or cultural grievances. The National Defense Panel (1997: 5) suggests that ethnic and national pressures for independence and sovereignty are likely to continue throughout Europe, Asia, and Africa over the next few decades, and that "Conflict based upon race, religion, political ideology, or economic status will continue to exert internal and external pressures on many nations." Hart and Rudman (1999) suggest that states that are unable to meet their people's social, economic, or political expectations will be challenged from within, and that some states that are unable to meet these challenges will fragment or fail -- often through violence. Similarly, in a generally optimistic view on the prospects for future conflict in post-Cold War Europe, Van Evera (1990/91) argues that ethnic or nationalistic conflict in Eastern Europe is a very real possibility, even as the possibility of major war elsewhere in Europe fades.

Samuel Huntington has also proposed a well-known (and controversial) argument about the rise of civilizational identities in world politics. While recognizing that the nation-state will remain the principal actor in world politics for some time to come, Huntington (1996) argues that states are likely to be influenced heavily by civilizational concerns as well as by the pursuit of power and wealth. Furthermore, he suggests that the most dangerous conflicts will not be between social classes or within individual civilizations, but between peoples belonging to different cultural entities or (to use his famous phrase) "along the fault lines between civilizations."

Locations of Armed Conflict

A third general expectation concerns the location of armed conflict. Most scholarly attention, as well as most attention by policy makers, has traditionally focused on interstate wars in Europe. This is not surprising, given the American and European origins of most quantitative conflict researchers and the European setting for the two world wars. Since World War II, though, warfare -- whether interstate or internal in nature -- appears to be shifting away from Europe to the developing world. A variety of scholars have noted a decreasing propensity for armed conflict among political democracies, particularly when these democracies share high levels of economic interdependence and membership in the same international institutions (e.g., Russett and Oneal 2001). Holsti (1996: 21-25) notes the absence of interstate war in North America and Western Europe as well as South America (except for the extraregional Falklands/Malvinas War of 1982);

these regions also comprise three of Kacowicz' (1998) "zones of peace." While such conditions generally characterize the advanced industrial economies of today's world, though, they are far less typical of states in the developing world.

Even as the advanced industrialized states are able to manage armed conflict at low levels or to avoid it entirely, then, states elsewhere in the world are seen as likely arenas for future conflict. Rice (1988: 52 ff), for example, argues that the "wars of the third kind" that he sees as becoming increasingly prominent will generally occur in the Third World, and Holsti (1996) finds developing regions such as Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and the Middle East to be much more conflictual than the Americas or Western Europe. Similarly, the "shatterbelt" regions that Hensel and Diehl (1994) find to be much more conflictual than other regions include large parts of today's developing world. Perhaps not surprisingly, the NIC (2000) expects internal conflicts to be most frequent in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and parts of South and Southeast Asia, Central America, and the Andean region.

Patterns of Conflict

Many of the sources considered above were originally intended to help plan future U.S. defense policy or military force requirements, but there is also an important theoretical reason that their projections must be considered. Should these projected changes in conflict patterns come to pass, over three decades' systematic study of armed conflict run the risk of obsolescence. Conclusions drawn from research on interstate conflict in the Cold War, interwar, or earlier eras would appear unlikely to be a good guide to theory or policy in a world of armed conflict that primarily involves non-state actors and cultural or civilizational issues. Indeed, Rice (1988) describes "wars of the third kind" as substantially different from the traditional interstate armed conflicts that characterized past eras, and Holsti (1996) calls for replacing the traditional emphasis on interstate relations with a new emphasis on the problems of "weak states" as sources of armed conflict in coming years.

The next section of this paper attempts to evaluate these supposed changes in the nature of armed conflict, drawing from prominent quantitative data sets on militarized interstate and intrastate conflict. Three general groups of patterns are examined. Regarding conflict participants, the frequency and severity of interstate, extrastate, and intrastate conflict are compared, referring where

possible to both full-scale wars and sub-war conflicts . Regarding conflict issues, the issues at stake in various types of conflict are examined. Finally, the regional distribution of armed conflict is considered. The paper will then conclude by considering the implications for future research on conflict, based on empirically observable trends rather than on predictions about future events.

Conflict Participants

Conflict Frequency

One important set of predictions about future armed conflict involves the increasing predominance of intrastate conflict rather than interstate, and a corresponding increase in the importance of non-state actors in armed conflict. Table 1 and Figure 1 allow us to address this argument by examining trends in the frequency of different forms of armed conflict over the past two centuries. Table 1 presents the raw number of four types of conflict, all drawn from Correlates of War (COW) project data sets. Militarized interstate disputes, or MIDs (Jones, Bremer, and Singer 1996), are sets of interactions involving the threat, display, or use of militarized force between at least two nation-states. Interstate wars, extrastate wars (formerly known as extra-systemic wars), and intrastate wars (formerly known as civil wars) are described by Small and Singer (1982) and by Sarkees (2000). All three types of wars involve heavy casualties in sustained combat, with the primary difference lying in the nature of the combatants; interstate wars involve at least one state as the primary actor(s) on each side of the war, while intrastate wars involve a state against one or more non-state actors within a given state and extrastate wars involve a state against one or more non-state actors outside the state's borders (generally reflecting the acquisition of a colony or maintenance of an empire).

[Table 1 about here]

The results from Table 1 indicate that interstate wars -- while traditionally the biggest concern for both policymakers and academics -- have generally been rare events, with only 79 wars in nearly two centuries. Militarized disputes (MIDs) have been much more common, with over 2000 disputes in the same period; only about four percent of all MIDs have escalated to the point of full-scale interstate war. Comparable data on subwar extrastate or intrastate conflict do not exist for most of the historical period covered by the COW war and MID data, but Table 1 reveals that both extrastate and intrastate wars have been more frequent than interstate wars since 1816. In each two-

decade period being compared in this table, at least one of these two types of wars is more frequent than interstate wars, and until recently both types of non-state wars were generally more frequent. The difference has become even more pronounced since World War II, with 84 intrastate or extrastate wars and only eighteen interstate wars being fought since 1960. This is consistent with the expectations of many of the scholars discussed earlier, although it is somewhat surprising that this is not a new trend; interstate wars have been a minority of all wars fought in each two-decade period since 1816.

[Figure 1 about here]

Figure 1 presents the trends in each type of conflict over time, dividing the frequency of each type of conflict in a given historical period by the number of states in the COW interstate system during that period (as presented in Table 1). This controls for the size of the system, because *ceteris paribus*, we would expect more conflict when there are more states that are eligible to engage in conflict. The frequency of interstate wars has remained roughly constant over the past two centuries, with relatively minor fluctuations over time after controlling for the size of the interstate system. The frequency of extrastate wars was consistently greater than that of interstate wars through the nineteenth century, although it declined through much of the twentieth century and has since reached zero (primarily because today's interstate system includes so few empires and colonies, the traditional objects of extrastate wars). The frequency of intrastate wars has always been above that of interstate wars and has increased dramatically since World War II, even after controlling for system size; this is again consistent with the arguments about the predominance of intrastate conflict in coming decades.

With regard to subwar conflict, Figure 1 indicates that militarized interstate disputes have been much more frequent than full-scale wars since 1816 -- indeed, the frequency in each period had to be divided by ten to allow it to fit on the same table as the far less frequent wars. The frequency of MIDs has also generally risen over time after controlling for system size, indicating that while there has been little systematic change in states' willingness to reach full-scale war, states appear to have become increasingly likely to threaten, display, or show force short of war (at least up to World War II).

[Table 2 about here]

It is unfortunate that we have no comparable data on subwar extrastate or intrastate conflict

over the past two centuries, particularly because of the clear trend of increasing civil wars after controlling for system size. Yet while no systematic data set currently covers subwar intrastate conflict as far back as 1816, the Center for Systemic Peace has produced a list of "major episodes of political violence" from 1945-1999, which appears to involve a minimum threshold of violence somewhere between MIDs and full-scale wars.² This list of conflicts distinguishes three different types of conflict: international-interstate (which generally involves at least one state on each side), civil-intrastate (which generally involves opposing political groups within a state), and ethnic-intrastate (which generally involves a state against a distinct ethnic group). As Table 2 indicates, for most of the period covered by this data set, the international-interstate type accounts for less than one third of all conflicts. Such conflicts experience a brief rise to 39 percent in the 1980s, and then decline to sixteen percent in the 1990s. As with the COW war data sets, this data set reveals that interstate conflicts have been outnumbered by intrastate conflicts for some time now.

[Table 3 about here]

Conflict Fatalities

Table 3 moves beyond the frequency of militarized conflict to examine the severity of the three types of COW wars. It may be that one type of armed conflict is relatively rare, yet accounts for a disproportionate share of battle deaths. This table presents the available information on battle deaths, which includes deaths suffered by nation-state actors' regular military forces for all three types of wars as well as deaths suffered by non-state forces for extrastate and intrastate forces. It should be noted, though, that non-state death figures are coded as missing for over half of all extrastate and intrastate wars, so those figures are likely to be underestimated severely.

Even considering the large number of missing fatality observations, intrastate wars appear to have been bloodier than interstate wars in almost every two-decade period since 1816. Intrastate wars have produced more battle deaths for nation-state participants than have interstate wars for all but two periods, the 1900-1919 and 1920-1939 periods that gave rise to the two world wars. While the world wars were severe enough that interstate wars have produced substantially more battle deaths than extrastate and intrastate wars, even if non-state deaths are considered, it is worth noting that intrastate wars have produced roughly three times as many deaths as interstate wars in the two

² This list and additional data and documentation are available through the Center for Systemic Peace web site at <<http://members.aol.com/CSPmgm/cspframe.htm>>.

most recent periods on this table. Combined with the earlier analyses of conflict frequency, these results suggest that interstate wars have been both less frequent and less bloody than intrastate wars for most of the last two centuries, with the (admittedly quite important) exception of the two world wars.

Conflict Issues

A second set of predictions about future conflict emphasizes the rise of ethnic, nationalist, or civilizational issues relative to the traditional ideological or territorial issues that are thought to have dominated past conflict. Unfortunately, contentious issues have received relatively little scholarly attention in the analysis of either interstate or intrastate conflicts. Several data sets include issue-related variables, though, allowing a systematic examination of trends over time.

[Table 4 about here]

Kalevi Holsti's 1991 book *Peace and War* attempts to list the issues involved for each participant in every war since 1648. A total of 105 of the wars in his list occurred since 1815, offering comparability with the COW data sets analyzed elsewhere in this paper, although Holsti also includes a number of earlier wars that will not be analyzed here. It should be noted that Holsti's list overlaps with all three of the COW war types; 54 of Holsti's wars also appear in the COW interstate war data set, 31 appear in either the extrastate or intrastate war data sets, and 20 appear to involve armed conflicts that did not reach the COW threshold for full-scale war. Table 4 reports the issues involved in all 105 of Holsti's wars since 1816. Two general categories of issues are considered, drawing from the nearly thirty issue types identified by Holsti: territorial/colonial (involving any of eight issue types reflecting contention over territory or colonial possessions) and nationalist/separatist (involving any of six issue types reflecting support for or opposition to ethnic/religious/secessionist groups).³

As Table 4 indicates, territorial/colonial issues are present in at least sixty percent of all wars in each historical period, while just over half of all wars before World War II and only 37 percent

³ "Territorial" issues indicate that at least one actor was coded by Holsti with at least one of the following issue types: Territory, Strategic Territory, Territory (Boundary), National Unification / State Creation, or Ethnic/Religious Unification / Irredenta. "Colonial/Imperial" issues include Holsti's Colonialism, Colonial Competition, and Empire Creation issue types. "Nationalist" issues include Holsti's Protect Ethnic Confreres, Protect Religious Confreres, and Ethnic/Religious Unification/Irredenta issue types. "Separatist" issues include Holsti's National Liberation / State Creation, Secession / State Creation, and Maintain Integrity of State / Empire issue types.

since then have involved nationalist/separatist issues. These results indicate that both territorial and nationalist issues have been relatively common sources of wars in the past two centuries, but there is little evidence to support the common expectation that warfare is becoming a matter of nationalist or cultural issues. Holsti's data set is unable to address post-Cold War trends because it ends in 1989, but in general there does not appear to have been a meaningful change in the issues leading to war.

The MID data set can also give at least some insight into the question of issues. This data set identifies the issues at stake for each participant in militarized disputes, using three general issue types: territory (involving ownership of or control over territory), regime (involving the political leadership or political system of a state), and policy (involving a specific governmental policy). Although no issue coding is available for nationalist or cultural issues, this data set allows us to examine the changing frequency of territorial issues, which have been argued to be decreasing in importance in recent years. As Hensel (2000) reports, territory has remained consistent as a source of militarized disputes, with territorial issues being present in 30.1 percent of all disputes between 1816-1945 and 27.7 from 1945-1992. If this figure is broken up by two-decade periods to be consistent with the rest of this paper's analyses, six of the nine periods feature territorial issues in 28-34 percent of all disputes, with one period (1920-1939) as high as 41.4 percent and two (1816-1839 and 1980-1992) at 13.3 and 15.8 percent respectively. While the most recent period has the lowest percentage of territorial issues since 1839, other recent periods had maintained roughly the same percentage as in the past 140 years. As a result, we must be careful to make too much out of a single change (using a time-shortened period, no less), although admittedly the decrease in territorial issues in the most recent period is consistent with the expected decline in territorial issues relative to nationalist or cultural issues.

Unfortunately, we have far less data on the issues involved in intrastate armed conflict, particularly over such a long period as that covered by the COW data sets. One preliminary answer to the question of changing issues comes from the CSP "major episodes of political violence" list. As reported in Table 2, the events in this list are categorized as international-interstate, civil-intrastate, or ethnic-intrastate. The first two categories can not tell us much about the issues at stake, because "interstate" or "civil-intrastate" could include any number of different issues, but the third category can be taken as an indication of the prominence of ethnic or cultural issues relative to other types of issues. For much of the post-1945 period, ethnic-intrastate conflicts account for less than

one fourth of all conflicts in this list. There was a brief spike in the 1970s, reaching thirty percent of all conflicts that decade, but the 1990s saw a dramatic increase to nearly half of all conflicts during the decade. This is certainly consistent with the predictions of increasing ethnic conflict, although as with the recent decrease of territorial issues in the MID data, one decade of dramatic change can not be considered convincing evidence of a larger trend.

[Table 5 about here]

Conflict Locations

The final set of expectations for future conflict involved the regional distribution of armed conflicts. Table 5 breaks down the three types of COW wars by regional setting, drawing from variables in the COW war data sets that indicate whether or not each war took place within each region; a given war may take place in multiple regions, as with World War II. In the nineteenth century, interstate war was concentrated in the Western Hemisphere and Europe, accounting for ten and fourteen wars respectively; only five nineteenth-century wars occurred in the Middle East and three in Asia. A similar disparity is found for intrastate wars, with 31 intrastate wars each in the Western Hemisphere and Europe. Yet these results are not surprising when we consider the makeup of the interstate system; the Western Hemisphere and Europe together contained 36 and 46 states in the two halves of the nineteenth century; Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Oceania combined only included three and ten states in those two periods.

The twentieth century has been a very different story, though. The Western Hemisphere has only seen action from five interstate wars in the entire century, a figure that is matched by Africa and that is one-third of the Middle East's total and one-fourth of Asia's. Even Europe saw fewer interstate wars than the Middle East or Asia in the twentieth century, and the European figures have declined to include only two interstate wars since 1950. Particularly in the last half of the century, both intrastate and interstate wars have been concentrated in the developing world. This trend is certainly consistent with the projections about where conflict will be most likely -- based on such diverse perspectives as the democratic or liberal peace in the developed world and the failure of weak states in the developing world -- and events since the end of these data sets have not suggested any reversal of the trend.

Wrapup

These simple empirical analyses suggest a fair amount of support for many of the projections discussed earlier. Interstate wars appear to be on the decline, particularly after controlling for the size of the interstate system, while intrastate wars have been increasing steadily. With the notable exception of the two world wars, interstate wars have consistently produced less battle-related fatalities than have extrastate and intrastate wars. Additionally, wars of all kinds have become increasingly concentrated in the developing world rather than in more industrialized areas, although the available evidence suggests that territorial issues are not being replaced rapidly by nationalist, separatist, or civilizational issues.

While recent periods appear to have been dominated by armed conflict involving non-state actors (whether intrastate or extrastate), though, it is worth noting that this has been the case for almost the entire two centuries analyzed here. This is not a new phenomenon, then, and is not by any means confined to the post-World War II or post-Cold War era. Intrastate and/or extrastate wars have been more frequent than interstate wars in every single two-decade period examined in this paper, as well as producing more battle deaths in every period except for those involving the two world wars.

Also, while plenty of anecdotal evidence exists to show the prominence of secessionist movements, terrorist groups, and other nontraditional actors in recent armed conflict, we must also remember that similar groups have played equally consequential roles in past times. The Ottoman and Hapsburg Empires were plagued for many decades by armed revolts ranging from Poland to Italy, Greece, and the Balkans; in many cases these revolts produced desired political changes ranging from increased autonomy to political independence. A Serbian terrorist organization, the Black Hand movement, helped bring about World War I by assassinating the Austrian archduke in Sarajevo. Both Jewish and Arab paramilitary groups were active in Palestine long before the state of Israel declared its independence, and religious or cultural conflicts between Christians, Jews, and Muslims (as well as between sects or denominations within these larger groupings) helped bring about the Thirty Years War and the Crusades as well as a host of lesser conflicts. In short, while scholars and policymakers may be recognizing non-state actors, intrastate conflict, or "civilizational" issues more readily than in the past, the entire nature of armed conflict does not seem to have undergone the fundamental changes proclaimed by some.

Implications for the Future

Having analyzed recent trends in armed conflict, we are now in a position to consider meaningful directions for future research. As mentioned earlier, if patterns of armed conflict today are fundamentally different from those of past times -- or if patterns of armed conflict in the near future are going to be fundamentally different -- then more than thirty years of systematic research on conflict may be of little value in the future. In some ways, this argument resembles arguments made during the Cold War, when many scholars and policy makers believed that there were few lessons from previous times because world politics had undergone fundamental changes. For example, the spread of nuclear weapons was thought to increase the potential costs of war -- at least between the major powers -- to the point where no rational leader could initiate a war, and the bipolar system dominated by two superpowers was thought to be vastly different from the multipolar system that had characterized previous centuries (although there was great disagreement on whether bipolarity was more or less stable than multipolarity).

Both the Cold War and post-Cold War environments have certainly represented important changes in the makeup of world politics. Yet it is not clear that either environment has rendered past lessons or patterns meaningless. For example, after examining a variety of arguments about the unique nature of the nuclear era, Blainey (1988: 289) concludes that "the nuclear era shows considerable continuity with the preceding era." He notes "an understandable reluctance to accept what is true of the nuclear age as of the earlier ages: that international peace prevails when rival nations agree that they would lose rather than gain by trying to resolve their differences by war." Although the impact of specific causes of war may change over time, the basic nature of armed conflict does not seem to have changed substantially.⁴ Similarly, Hart and Rudman (1999) -- while spending a great portion of their report discussing changes in the international environment -- argue that "the essence of war will remain the same;" what will change is the kinds of actors involved in armed conflict and the weapons available to them, not the violence and carnage that have always characterized warfare in the modern era.

With that said, though, it is worth considering the implications of this study's brief analyses

⁴ Examples of such changes over time include Holsti's (1991) study of the issues that have led to war since 1648, Levy's (1983) analysis of the changing frequency and severity of great power war since 1495, and the impossibility of a democratic peace in a time with few or no democracies or a nuclear peace in a time before nuclear weapons.

of conflict patterns, with the goal of improving the future study of war (as well as of improving the study of future wars). I discuss implications in three areas: studying additional actors beyond states, studying additional forms of conflict short of full-scale war, and studying contentious issues rather than limiting ourselves to armed conflict. Where relevant, I address priorities for theoretical development, for data collection, and for empirical analysis in each of these areas.

Studying Non-State Actors

Interstate conflict accounts for the vast majority of all theoretical work and data-based scholarship on the sources and consequences of armed conflict. This dominance of interstate conflict has remained throughout the nearly forty years of the COW project and related endeavors, and does not appear likely to end any time soon. Ethnic conflict and civil wars are beginning to attract some serious scholarly attention, but still make up only a small minority of research papers presented at academic conferences such as the annual meetings of Peace Science Society (International) or published in relevant journals such as the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Journal of Peace Research*, *International Studies Quarterly*, or this present outlet.

Throughout this paper's discussion of possible future directions for the study of armed conflict, it is worth bearing in mind that the scientific study of conflict has undergone substantial improvement in the more than three decades of the COW project. To begin with, much of the early research was concerned primarily with armed conflict involving major powers, with little emphasis on the so-called "minor powers" of the interstate system. The field has now advanced by considering all armed conflict involving one or more system members on each side, giving minor powers a much more important role in both theoretical work and empirical analyses; very few recent studies have been limited to the major power subsystem. It may now be time to consider a similar extension to non-state actors.

One clear conclusion of this paper's empirical analyses is that interstate conflict does not account for the majority of all conflict behavior, either today or at any point in the past two centuries. As a result, a strong case could be made that future research should do more to consider the extrastate or intrastate conflicts that make up the majority of all wars since 1816 and the non-state actors who do or could fight in them. The first step in such an endeavor must be the identification of relevant actors. Much like the COW project had to begin by identifying all

members of the interstate system before any other data collection or analysis could proceed, a movement toward non-state actors would require identification of a list of potential actors that could then be the subject of systematic data collection.

Some work along these lines has already begun. For example, the Minorities at Risk project (Gurr 2000) has identified 275 ethnopolitical groups that are politically organized and that either suffer or benefit from differential treatment vis-a-vis other groups in the same society. The project is currently limited to the post-1945 period, but a similar strategy could certainly be followed to identify ethnopolitical actors in earlier times. Indeed, the COW project is in the process of collecting and refining a data set on cultural characteristics of states, which could be used to identify potential religious, linguistic, or ethnic communities within each state that could then be studied more closely to determine whether or not the communities are sufficiently organized to qualify for identification as a new actor in world politics.

Such a research strategy, of course, would be limited to groups that identify and organize themselves on the basis of religious, linguistic, or ethnic characteristics. Such groups would generally only be relevant to some portion of all intrastate wars; additional research strategies would be needed for the meaningful identification of groups who might become involved in conflicts out of political, economic, or other motivations. This strategy also excludes potential actors that exist outside the territory of recognized states, which would be relevant for the study of extrastate wars or other armed conflicts -- although a candidate list already exists that could be used to identify such cases. The COW project's widely used interstate system list is based on a little-known list called the "States, Nations, and Entities" file. This file includes all known entities that are or could become states, many of which are not members of the interstate system but are coded as autonomous actors in their own right. These actors could be studied more closely to construct a list of autonomous actors that could become involved in intrastate or extrastate conflict, either against states or against other such actors.

These suggestions, of course, are only relevant to identifying the actors who might become involved in armed conflict -- or essentially just extending the list of states to include other autonomous and politically organized entities that do not qualify as states. Should these suggestions be followed and such an extended list be constructed, an additional problem is the question of which additional variables should be collected to allow the new list to be used in

systematic empirical analyses of armed conflict. While data collection would not be easy, it would certainly be possible to identify some characteristics of each group that would be roughly comparable to the current measures of states' material capabilities. For example, the population of each group could be estimated, as could the number of group members under arms in a given year. Economic and industrial capabilities or additional details of the entity's relationship to its state government would be more difficult and may need to be handled categorically, as is done for many variables in the Minorities at Risk data set, but data collection could certainly be attempted.

Assuming that adequate data collection is possible, a further problem is the question of how relevant our current theories and hypotheses would be under a broader conception of armed conflict. More specifically, can we assume that interstate, extrastate, and intrastate conflicts arise under similar circumstances or can be explained by similar factors? I suspect that there will be some similarities across the different types of conflict, although there will also be many differences. This may not be as great a problem as it first appears, though. Even within the category of interstate conflict there are some arguments that are meant to apply much more to major powers than to minor powers throughout the international system, so it should not be too problematic if different sets of factors influence the conflict behavior of different types of actors. Simply focusing more on conflict involving non-state actors need not imply that the same theories should be equally relevant to all actors; the most important thing is that intrastate conflict receive more theoretical and empirical attention.

Studying Subwar Intrastate Conflict

Another problem that stands out from this study's analysis of conflict patterns is the lack of comparable longitudinal data on different types of armed conflict. With regard to full-scale war, the COW project has collected useful data sets on interstate, extrastate, and intrastate wars since 1816; this has allowed the meaningful comparison of trends in the frequency of wars over time. Below this level, the COW project's MID data allows systematic comparison of trends in interstate conflict over the past two centuries, but there is no equivalent to the MID data that covers the past two centuries for non-interstate conflict. The CSP data on major episodes of political violence only extends back to 1945, and many other similar lists do not even go that far. As a result, it is impossible to compare long-term trends in the occurrence of subwar intrastate conflict or in the

escalation of such conflict to full-scale war.

This lack of data on subwar intrastate conflict is a major impediment to both theoretical and empirical work. With regard to interstate conflict, early work in the COW tradition focused on the occurrence of interstate war as a single event, using dependent variables such as whether or not an interstate war began in a given year. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, though, the COW project collected the MID data set (initially termed the "serious interstate dispute" or SID data set). The availability of this data set allowed scholars to study subwar armed conflicts, some of which would eventually escalate to the level of full-scale war and some of which would not. Interstate war could thus be studied not as a single policy decision -- whether or not to initiate a full-scale war in a given year -- but rather as the outcome of a process, where low-level militarized conflict is first initiated and escalatory dynamics could lead to war or could end the dispute short of that level. Indeed, most research on militarized interstate conflict in the past decade has used the MID data, whether for purposes of identifying potential wars or for entirely different purposes involving low-level conflict.

If the study of extrastate or intrastate armed conflict is to be taken seriously and to advance like the study of interstate conflict has, then subwar conflict must be studied. This includes both the collection of data on extrastate and intrastate equivalents to MIDs, and the development of theoretical work that incorporates lower-level armed conflict in addition to (or instead of) full-scale war. This will not be an easy task, and may take a long period of time before it reaches a reasonable state of completion -- we must bear in mind that the number of cases in the MID data set expanded from under one thousand for the 1816-1976 version to over two thousand in the 1816-1992 version (version 2.10, available publicly on the Peace Science Society web site), and the MID3 extension of the data set through the end of 2001 will require at least two full years to add less than a decade of new data. This task would appear to be quite important, though, and would potentially offer a valuable theoretical and empirical payoff.

Studying Contentious Issues and Issue Management

A third area where the study of conflict -- whether interstate, extrastate, or intrastate -- can be improved is in the collection of systematic data on contentious issues between actors in world politics. As mentioned in the previous section, when the COW project collected the MID data set to supplement the already existing data on full-scale wars, the study of militarized interstate conflict

was improved dramatically. Collection of data on contentious issues and on issue management would appear likely to produce a comparable improvement.

The first important innovation from an emphasis on contentious issues is that such a focus allows the identification of potential militarized conflict before it breaks out. Just as studying militarized disputes allowed scholars to begin analysis before the outbreak of full-scale war, studying issues allows scholars to begin analysis with the onset of an initial disagreement between states that may or may not eventually lead to the threat, display, or use of military force. In essence, contentious issues can serve as an early warning indicator of potential military conflict, whether of the interstate, extrastate, or intrastate variety.

A second important innovation from studying issues is the possibility of studying issue management by both militarized and non-militarized means. If issues are the focus of research rather than militarized conflict, then military means can be seen as one option for pursuing a state's issue-related goals. Other means also exist, such as bilateral negotiations or the (binding or non-binding) involvement of third parties, and a focus on issues allows the scholar to consider the conditions under which each option is likely to be chosen.

One source of preliminary research on contentious issues between states is the Issue Correlates of War (ICOW) project (Hensel 2001). The first phase of the ICOW project, conducted over the past three years and still ongoing, involves the collection of data on territorial claims between states since 1816. The project has recently begun expanding to include two additional issue types, involving cross-border river claims and offshore maritime claims. In each case, the focus is on explicit contention between official government representatives of two or more states over the issue in question, whether this is the ownership of a specific piece of territory, the usage (or abuse) of a cross-border river, or the usage of a distinct portion of the ocean off one or more states' coast. Preliminary estimates suggest that there have been between three and four hundred distinct territorial claims across the entire world since 1816, one-fifth of which are currently ongoing. Additionally, there have been nearly one hundred explicit river claims in just three regions -- the Americas, Europe, and the Middle East -- in the twentieth century, and at least as many maritime claims.

Another source that addresses intrastate contentious issues is the Minorities at Risk project (Gurr 2000). This project identifies politically organized ethno-political groups that are either

advantaged or disadvantaged relative to other groups in the same state. Because of the relative advantage or disadvantage, each such group can be seen as involved in an intrastate issue, as either these groups or other groups in the same states by definition have explicit disagreements over their relative status. Of the 276 groups identified by Gurr (2000: 284-285), 32 are currently involved in what the Minorities at Risk project terms "ethnic wars" as of 1998, and 94 groups are classified as having a medium or high risk of ethnic war in the future. Over one third of the groups are either currently at war or at medium or high risk for future war, indicating the close connection between intrastate issues of this type and armed violence, while the remainder serve to remind us that not all issues need lead to armed conflict or war. Similarly, while Hensel (2001: 98) notes that the average territorial claim has generated two militarized disputes over the claimed territory, roughly half of all claims have never led to a single militarized threat or action -- and the average claim has also generated some seven peaceful settlement attempts.

Contentious issues such as these can be helpful in studying conflict -- among other dimensions of world politics -- in a number of ways. To begin, such lists of issues allow scholars to select a set of comparable cases for analysis of non-issue-related hypotheses; states disagreeing on a territorial, river, or maritime issue can be studied to see what impact democracy, relative capabilities, power transitions, or some other factor(s) have on the likelihood of militarized conflict. The ICOW issues data sets also include variables allowing scholars to measure the salience of each issue; for example, territorial issues are considered more salient or more valuable when the territory at stake is known to include valuable resources, strategic positions, or the challenger state's ethnic kinsmen. These salience indicators allow scholars to differentiate between different territorial issues, rather than treating all territorial issues as identical (as is the case in Holsti's war issue codings or the MID issue codings). Indeed, Hensel (2001) finds important differences in issue management based on the salience of the claim; highly salient claims lead to much more activity than less salient claims, including ten times as much militarized conflict. Additionally, the ICOW issues data sets include data on each attempt to manage the issue peacefully through either bilateral negotiations or third party assistance, which allows scholars to analyze both militarized and peaceful settlement attempts as complementary or perhaps substitutable methods for achieving the same goal.

It thus appears desirable to study contentious issues much more in future research, going

beyond these preliminary efforts. Issues can be studied systematically for both interstate and intrastate interactions, as these initial examples help to illustrate. As long as care is taken to identify issues independently from knowledge of the occurrence of militarized conflict (or of any other potential dependent variable), in order to avoid selection on dependent or independent variables in analysis, these examples illustrate that issues can be identified systematically. With the collection of data on issue salience and on peaceful issue management attempts, scholars have numerous research options, allowing both the development and testing of a broad range of hypotheses that simply can not be tested with current data sets. There are many possible issues that could be addressed, as well; these examples represent only the tip of the iceberg.

To conclude, this paper has examined a number of prognostications about the future of armed conflict, and has considered a number of ways to improve the future study of conflict. While some of these prognostications appear to be supported by the available evidence, some of them have received only weak or mixed support. It appears, though, that scientific research on armed conflict has devoted far too little attention to several important topics. Suggestions for future improvements include greater emphases on non-state actors in world politics, on subwar intrastate conflict, and on contentious issues and issue management. While I am not necessarily calling for the COW project -- or any other specific scholars or groups -- to pursue these improvements, these are all improvements that would be beneficial to the entire scholarly community. All of them could be quite helpful in the study of future war -- if the prognosticators are correct -- as well as in the future study of war (and of other forms of disagreement and conflict between actors in world politics).

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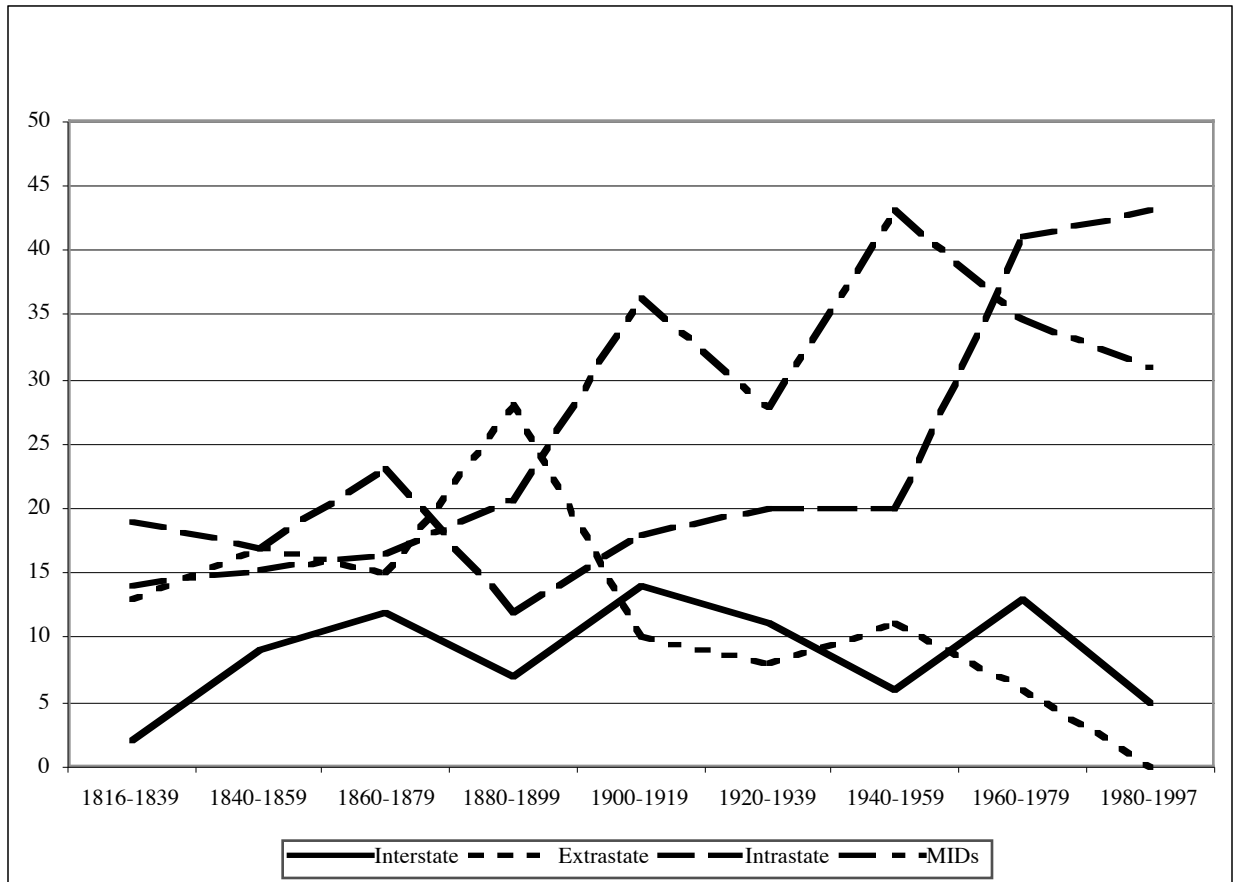
Table 1: Frequency of COW Wars and MIDs, 1816-1997

<u>Period</u>	<u>States</u>	<u>MIDs</u>	<u>Interstate Wars</u>	<u>Extrastate Wars</u>	<u>Intrastate Wars</u>
1816-1839	32	45	2	13	19
1840-1859	44	67	9	17	17
1860-1879	50	82	12	15	23
1880-1899	43	89	7	28	12
1900-1919	54	196	14	10	18
1920-1939	67	186	11	8	20
1940-1959	94	405	6	11	20
1960-1979	158	546	13	6	41
1980-1997	187	418*	5	0	43
Total	209	2034	79	108	213

Notes

* The MID data set currently ends in 1992, while the war data sets run through the end of 1997. As a result, the number of MIDs in this period is underestimated.

Figure 1: Trends in COW War and MID Frequency, 1816-1997



Notes

- The number of wars in each period is divided by the number of states that were members of the COW interstate system during at least part of that period, in order to control for trends in system size. The resulting figure is multiplied by 100 to assist in data presentation.
- The number of MIDs per period is multiplied by 10 rather than 100 to allow all totals to be presented on the same table. Because the MID data set currently ends in 1992 while the war data sets run through 1997, MID totals in the final period are adjusted by extrapolating for the final five years based on the trend for 1980-1992. This adjustment makes little difference in the results, though, slightly slowing the rate of decrease relative to earlier periods.

Table 2: Frequency of "Major Episodes of Political Violence," 1945-1999

<u>Period</u>	Type of Conflict:			<u>Total</u>
	<u>International- Interstate</u>	<u>Civil- Intrastate</u>	<u>Ethnic- Intrastate</u>	
1945-1949	7 (29.2%)	12	5 (20.8%)	24
1950-1959	14 (30.4)	25	7 (15.2)	46
1960-1969	16 (30.2)	26	11 (20.8)	53
1970-1979	16 (28.6)	23	17 (30.4)	56
1980-1989	22 (39.3)	21	13 (23.2)	56
1990-1999	10 (16.4)	21	30 (49.2)	61
Total	85 (28.7)	128	83 (28.0)	296

Table 3: Fatalities in COW Wars, 1816-1997

<u>Period</u>	Interstate Wars		Extrastate Wars		Intrastate Wars	
	<u>Fatalities (1000s)</u> <u>State</u>	<u>Fatalities (1000s)</u> <u>State</u>	<u>Fatalities (1000s)</u> <u>Other*</u>	<u>Fatalities (1000s)</u> <u>State</u>	<u>Fatalities (1000s)</u> <u>Other*</u>	
1816-1839	131	96	341	190	223	
1840-1859	335	60	27	445	31	
1860-1879	890	149	198	2,872	417	
1880-1899	37	211	292	124	2	
1900-1919	9,112	16	229	354	850	
1920-1939	17,918	58	52	1,196	44	
1940-1959	928	385	390	1,576	60	
1960-1979	1,124	34	119	3,640	2,844	
1980-1997	1,282	0	0	3,186	172	
Total	31,759	1,008	1,648	13,583	4,642	
(Average)	(402.0)	(9.3)	(30.5)*	(63.8)	(86.0)*	

Notes

*The COW extrastate and intrastate war data sets include data on fatalities for nation-state actors in each war and (in some cases) for total fatalities, which allows calculation of fatalities for non-state actors. Non-state or total death figures are only available, though, for 54 of the 108 extrastate wars and 54 of the 213 intrastate wars. As a result, the total number of non-state fatalities is actually much higher than reported here, and these averages may be higher or lower than the actual average non-state fatalities across all wars.

Table 4: Issues at Stake in Holsti's War Data, 1815-1989

<u>Period</u>	Issue(s) at Stake in Conflict:	
	<u>Territorial or Colonial</u>	<u>Nationalist or Separatist</u>
1815-1839	2 / 7 (28.6%)	3 / 7 (42.9%)
1840-1859	4 / 6 (66.7)	4 / 6 (66.7)
1860-1879	6 / 7 (85.7)	4 / 7 (57.1)
1880-1899	3 / 6 (50.0)	3 / 6 (50.0)
1900-1919	7 / 12 (58.3)	8 / 12 (66.7)
1920-1939	15 / 20 (75.0)	9 / 20 (45.0)
1940-1959	8 / 17 (47.0)	7 / 17 (41.2)
1960-1979	20 / 27 (74.0)	11 / 27 (40.7)
1980-1989	1 / 3 (33.3)	0 / 3 (0.0)
Total	66 / 105 (62.9)	49 / 105 (46.7)

Notes

- Each war in this table may have numerous issues at stake; each of the 105 wars includes up to five participants, each of which has up to six issues at stake.

Table 5: Regional Variation in War Involvement

<u>Region</u>	<u>States</u> <u>Total (New)</u>	<u>COW War Involvement:</u>			<u>Total</u>
		<u>Interstate</u>	<u>Extrastate</u>	<u>Intrastate</u>	
Western Hemisphere					
1816-1849	10	1	2	6	9
1850-1899	17 (7)	9	4	25	38
1900-1949	22 (5)	3	1	15	19
1950-1997	35 (13)	2	0	13	15
Europe					
1816-1849	26	5	1	19	25
1850-1899	29 (3)	9	2	12	23
1900-1949	30 (14)	9	0	13	22
1950-1997	49 (25)	2	0	6	8
Africa					
1816-1849	0	0	3	0	3
1850-1899	1 (1)	0	23	0	23
1900-1949	3 (2)	3	5	0	8
1950-1997	48 (45)	2	6	31	39
Middle East					
1816-1849	3	1	4	3	8
1850-1899	5 (2)	4	4	1	9
1900-1949	11 (8)	9	8	5	22
1950-1997	22 (12)	7	4	18	29
Asia					
1816-1849	0	0	11	0	11
1850-1899	4 (4)	3	18	5	26
1900-1949	16 (12)	12	9	14	35
1950-1997	30 (16)	8	2	26	36
Oceania					
1816-1849	0	0	0	0	0
1850-1899	0 (0)	0	1	0	1
1900-1949	2 (2)	1	0	0	1
1950-1997	8 (8)	0	0	0	0

Notes

• "New" states are those that entered the COW interstate system during this period, or that reentered after leaving the system during a previous period; "total" states include all states that were system members for at least part of the period.