

Insecurity in an Unequal World

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Protracted conflicts continue to trap millions of civilians in a vicious circle of violence, displacement, loss of livelihoods, and poverty. Often, the key protagonists - who benefit economically from continued conflict - have little incentive for truce. This paper describes how current global conditions are undermining peace and security. It argues that activities related to the 'war on terror' have increased insecurity in many parts of the world - fuelling counter-insurgency, human rights abuses, arms trade expansion, and diminution of the humanitarian space. International commitment to end protracted conflicts is vastly inconsistent, while several global initiatives aimed at reducing conflict and poverty have been deprioritised since 9/11. Meanwhile, new threats such as environmental stress and disease are intensifying. The paper suggests a series of policy and practice changes in support of peace and security. However, these will only be achieved through genuine political commitment at all levels to effective multilateral action.

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1 The State of War

There are four major problems described below.

1. There is a 'rump' of 30 conflicts, most of them very protracted, that have evaded the successful attempts to resolve other wars since the end of the Cold War.¹ These are major conflicts involving states. Inter-communal violence – from Gujarat in India to Karamoja in Uganda – is above and beyond.² Most of both these types of conflict are in countries on the margins of the global economy, where poverty is as entrenched as violence.

In human terms, the world has around 25 million people displaced within their own countries³ (and another 20 million also directly affected each year by war⁴). A person displaced in 2004 had, on average, fled their home in 1990.⁵ The world's major *new* war, in Iraq,⁶ demonstrates a remarkable irony: it appears to have turned into a protracted conflict – the exact opposite of what US military strategy is designed to deliver: short, sharp victories won by overwhelming advantage and technical superiority.

2. Beyond these conflicts, there are new threats, outlined below, that may kill thousands more in future years.
 - *Environmental stress* feeds the tensions between communities as they compete for land to support their livelihoods.⁷ This can increase inter-communal violence (as in Karamoja) and that violence can be exploited in much wider conflicts. Darfur, which erupted into major violence in 2003, was labelled the 'first climate change conflict' for this reason.⁸ Such a situation can easily become a vicious circle as displaced people put new pressure on the environment and livelihoods are destroyed. Climate change causes environmental stress and is therefore also *one* cause of conflict along with local unsustainable behaviour.
 - HIV and AIDS threatens to undermine some African states' ability to function by killing whole swathes of public servants in health, education and security. It is one reason why states may be too 'fragile' to prevent conflict. Similarly, conflict spreads HIV and AIDS through sexual violence and the disruption of health services.⁹ Modern conflict is a story of one vicious circle upon another.
 - Technology – and terror: 'Terrorism' kills relatively few;¹⁰ weapons of mass destruction likewise. But WMD technology far outstrips governments' power to control it. It may well be only a matter of a time until 'terrorists' use radiological weapons to kill very large numbers of people in a key global centre, with devastating effects on the global economy and, therefore, on poor people in developing countries. Beyond its immediate death toll, 9/11 killed tens of thousands of under-five-year-olds in developing countries through this economic impact.¹¹

¹ Uppsala Conflict Data Programme. There is inadequate data, especially comparable year-on-year or very up-to-date data, on many security issues; a note of caution should be attached to most of the figures in this paper.

² 'One-sided violence', like the deliberate slaughter of civilians, was as common as armed conflicts involving states in 2002 and 2003, according to the Human Security Report 2005, p 6.

³ Norwegian Refugee Council 2005. The number of refugees, or 'conflict migrants', has slowly *declined* since the early 1990s

⁴ Hilary Benn, 2006

⁵ Report of the UN Secretary General on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2005.

⁶ Arguably Afghanistan as well. US troops are withdrawing in 2006 precisely because it is so protracted.

⁷ Richard Matthew, Mark Halle, Jason Switzer, 2002.

⁸ Oxfam GB staff

⁹ International Crisis Group, 2004

¹⁰ The figures are disputed. The more pessimistic ones appear to be less manipulated to show that the US is winning the 'war on terror'. 'Significant, high-casualty' terrorist attacks increased eightfold between 1982 and 2003, and by almost 50 per cent between 2001 and 2003, according to Alan Krueger of Princeton University, 'Faulty Terror Report Card', *Washington Post*, 17 May 2004. Since 2003, the thousands of deaths from suicide bombs in Iraq would increase these figures substantially.

¹¹ World Bank, 2001

3. Civilians are targets or 'collateral damage' in conflicts. Very large numbers¹² of children, women and men are already being killed – because civilians are the actual targets or increasingly accepted 'collateral damage' of conflict. This is not an accident; it happens because:
- Relatively weak rebels and insurgents know they will make a far greater impact from spreading fear among civilians than fighting better-armed government soldiers
 - In their struggle to defeat them, governments are apparently accepting increasing restrictions on human rights and hence, civilian casualties

Sexual Violence

In violent environments, the abuse of women and children flourishes, though young men suffer disproportionately in some ways too. Sexual violence, particularly against women and girls, is a method of warfare. In 2005, the UN reported that one region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo had 25,000 attacks a year.¹³ Women are far more vulnerable to violence when they have fled their homes, and so it is likely that the four-fold increase in the number of displaced people since the early 1970s has led to a dramatic increase in sexual violence.¹⁴

4. The wider 'collateral damage' including the destruction of livelihoods, breakdown of basic services and state capacity all feed the vicious circle of war and poverty that fuels most modern conflicts. Countries with the lowest GDP per capita are almost four times more likely to suffer conflict than those with per capita GDP of \$5000 or more.¹⁵ Poor countries are locked into a 'conflict trap'¹⁶ whereas most other conflicts that are not rooted in poverty are resolved. This is one of the important reasons why the rump of 30 wars still exists.

Conflicts can also sustain poverty by simply being very costly. The \$5.6 billion *monthly* bill for the US war in Iraq is one very expensive opportunity cost,¹⁷ while poor countries frequently spend on arms rather than on health and education. In 2003, India spent \$1 billion on a military radar system while it had a \$50 million shortfall in funds to fight polio.¹⁸ Less directly, the focus of donor governments' post-2001 on *their* security can squeeze the resources to reduce poverty.¹⁹ Altogether, to the extent that aid, debt and trade²⁰ are part of the solution to poverty, they are also part of the solution to conflict.

¹² Human Security Report 2005, *op.cit.* p 30. In 2002, different figures for the number of civilian deaths from armed attacks or battles ranged from 19,000 to 172,000. There are higher figures based on WHO research, and Oxfam has used them widely; but these seem to be increasingly questioned. They suggested that 300,000 were the average number of people killed in armed conflicts each year through the intentional use of firearms. Oxfam 'killer facts' of 500,000 a year, one a minute, were based on other WHO-based figures on deaths in 'peaceful' countries as well.

¹³ UN Secretary General, *op. cit.* p 4

¹⁴ Human Security Report 2005, *op. cit.*, p 8

¹⁵ Report of the UN High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, 2004, p 20.

¹⁶ World Bank, 2003.

¹⁷ Human Security Report 2005, *op. cit.* p 36

¹⁸ Oxfam, *Guns or Growth? Assessing the Impact of Arms Sales on Sustainable Development*, 2004, p 3

¹⁹ What was the outcome of US critiques of Paying the Price on this? The January 2006 change in USAID's Administrator and relationship with the State Department appears to make aid a tool of 'transformational diplomacy' to improve 'good government' and, hence, security: 'New Direction for US Foreign Assistance', Office of the Spokesman, US State Department, 19 January 2006

²⁰ There seems *some* evidence that trade improves security and that shocks can undermine it. But it seems clearer that conflicts undermine the ability to trade – part of the whole 'conflict trap' – and that the post-2001 US security requirements may do so too. There seem to be few specific policy ideas to make trade 'conflict-sensitive' beyond just making it fair. Hilary Benn, 'Trade and Security in an Interconnected World', in *Human and Environmental Security*, ed. Felix Dodds and Tim Pippard, 2005; 'Designing Conflict-Sensitive Trade Policy', International Institute for Sustainable Development and IUCN – the World Conservation Union, 2005

Africa and War

Africa has *not* always seen more conflicts than any other continent: this is a new situation in the last twenty years arising from the 'conflict trap' of poverty and war. Before that, politics (anti-colonialism and then the Cold War), more than poverty, had been the root of modern war. Though many of Africa's conflicts had the same ideological elements, they are rooted in continuing poverty and that has prevented resolution. By 2000, 100,000 Africans a year were being killed in conflicts, more than in all the rest of the world conflicts combined.²¹ For *most* of the twentieth century, however, Europe, and later South-East and East Asia, dominated global warfare

2 The state we are in

The cycle of war and poverty, the 'conflict trap', not only keeps countries in conflict, it also makes it far more difficult to get out of conflict if the underlying poverty, poor governance and other grievances are not dealt with – even when 'peace' is signed. Forty per cent of countries collapse into war again within 5 years of peace deals,²² partly because of inadequate post-conflict development and peacekeeping. A state of 'peace' is all too often a fiction: the Democratic Republic of the Congo has supposedly been at peace since 2003.

In contrast with the deeply entrenched old wars, and despite the combined efforts of *Al-Qaeda* and US neo-conservatives, there are very few *new* wars. The fashion for 'conflict-prevention' since the 1990s has in a sense been misplaced: preventing new conflicts – in Iran or between Ethiopia and Eritrea, for example – is important, but far more human suffering is caused by the continuation of old wars.

The real challenge is therefore: *why is it so difficult to resolve conflicts?* And then, when it appears that the conflict has been resolved: *why is it so difficult to prevent peace processes collapsing into violence?* In other words, why does that rump of 30 conflicts remain?

There is no short answer or template to apply to every conflict in the world but the main reasons include the following:

- *Many conflicts are no longer contests in which both sides are trying to win; they are economically more lucrative to keep going forever.* This is often true for all sides: the leaders and, in more modest ways, some of the ordinary fighters.²³ In the process, they kill and impoverish most men, women and children. Conflicts make economic good sense for at least two reasons:
 - *Poverty:* the lack of peaceful ways to earn a livelihood makes a violent one attractive and;
 - *Globalisation:* the increased opportunities to profit from exporting natural resources, and drugs, from war-torn areas to international markets (linked to the growth in organised international crime).
- *The struggle against terrorism has become another vicious circle with terrorism, the 'global war on terror' and other brutal counter-insurgency fuelling each other.* 'Liberal' counter-insurgency, in which the poverty or grievances of all sides are tackled, has often been successful. But from Colombia to Uganda to Iraq, there are now counter-insurgency strategies that abuse civilians, fail to defeat their enemies, and show no good prospects of resolving the violence. This is not entirely new; viewed from the US or Europe, the impact of the 'war on terror' looks bigger than it is. For example, Colombia's conflict has evolved from wars, in turn, on 'communism', 'drugs' and now 'terror'. US military support has fuelled the abuses of the army and paramilitaries (fighting the equally abusive guerrillas) for decades.

²¹ Bethany Lacina and Nils Petter Gelditch, Monitoring Trends in Global Combat: a New Dataset of Battle Deaths 2005

²² Human Security Report, *op. cit.*, p 9

²³ There has been a long debate about the relative importance of leaders' 'greed' and popular 'grievance' in causing and sustaining conflicts. See Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffle, 'Greed and Grievance in Civil War', World Bank, 2001. The truth seems to be that it is both. See Mats Berdal, King's College, London

Post-2001, US policy has encouraged a tougher global approach to counter-insurgency, which seems to fail in protecting civilians and in defeating 'terrorists'. It has:

- *Fuelled a climate in which brutal military actions are acceptable* when confronting 'terrorists', a climate exploited by governments from Israel to Chechnya to justify stepping up military attacks. Uganda's 'Iron Fist' strategy begun in 2002, newly justified in terms of fighting the 'terrorists' of the Lords' Resistance Army. It has been continued since then, despite continuing failure, at least up to the end of 2006, to end a 20-year-old war.
- *Relaxed the controls on arming counter-insurgency actions*. In 2005, for example, the US waived its restrictions on arms to Indonesia's military – despite the fact that they remain unreformed since restrictions were imposed in 1999.²⁴
- *Increased the restrictions on 'conflict migrants'* by developed countries on those fleeing conflicts for the security and asylum of the industrialised world (as part of wider policies on migration).
- *Restricted 'humanitarian space'* of international aid agencies to operate independently in conflicts and the freedom of civil society in different ways²⁵
- *Undermined attempts to improve human rights and governance* because the US and others have lost the 'high moral ground' and therefore their influence on these matters. The year 2005 was the first in which it was clear that the use of torture was effectively US policy, rather than abuse by undisciplined US personnel.²⁶ At the same time, governments around the world are less and less challenged on human rights and governance, as long as they are making progress towards electoral 'democracy'

In these ways, the domestic tensions about counter-terror legislation in the US, UK and elsewhere are part of a global tension about how to balance the need for security and for rights. Sadly, many governments seem to prioritise their security over other people's rights.

- *Arms and ammunition keep fuelling conflicts*. In 2004, annual world military spending passed \$1 trillion after falling to a paltry \$ 693 billion in 1998 as military powers collected their post-Cold War 'peace dividend'. Similarly, the arms trade, shrinking in the 1990s, has been growing again since 2000. From 2002 to 2003, the world's top 100 arms companies increased their sales by 25% (in current \$) – though that is still half the amount at the (financial) height of the Cold War in 1987.²⁷ Importing arms and ammunition, and exporting natural resources, are frequently two sides of the only trade that flourishes in conflicts.
- *There has been a very mixed record of trying to resolve conflicts and protecting civilians*. This is partly because many are long running and, with few exceptions, receive little attention.²⁸ There is grossly unequal international commitment to resolving insecurity with some parts of the world favoured over others. The idea that investing in development can increase security drives support to reduce poverty in some parts of the world, not all. Iraq and Afghanistan have taken up a vastly disproportionate share of the aid increases in recent years.

This unequal effort is partly due to the post-2001 security concerns of Western governments. But there also seems to be little popular support amongst the public in the West for resolving conflicts and protecting people in them. There is, however, support for popular actions to stop wars fought by their *own* governments (from Vietnam to Iraq), and also sympathy for the victims of 'natural' disasters.²⁹ US public opinion against the Iraq war does not seem to be leading to any kind of wider concern for international crises. Throughout the world, public interest in 2005's South Asian disasters – the *tsunami* and then earthquake – far outstripped interest in conflicts in Darfur, Uganda or the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

²⁴ Human Rights Watch World Report 2006: <http://hrw.org/wr2k6/introduction/7.htm>

²⁵ The LSE began a two-year research project on this topic in January 2006, focussing on Kenya, India and Afghanistan. OGB may be involved in Kenya; Oxfam Australia may commission parallel research in Indonesia.

²⁶ Human Rights Watch World Report 2006: <http://hrw.org/wr2k6/introduction/2.htm>

²⁷ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI Yearbook 2004

²⁸ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI Yearbook 2005

²⁹ Stephen Devereux and Chris Eldridge, IDS

Humanitarian Aid

Provision of humanitarian aid to the victims of conflict is grossly unequal. It is blocked by the warring sides themselves or by the failings of the international humanitarian system³⁰. Humanitarian aid is at record levels, as part of the rise in total aid.³¹ In a few crises, it is generous but in most, it is inadequate and slow. In 2004, the average UN humanitarian appeal was only 64 per cent funded.

3 What can be done?

Conflicts can be resolved despite all the above indications to the contrary. Even in the midst of them, lives can be saved. The number of conflicts has almost halved since the early 1990s (1992:50; 2004: 30).³² It is a matter of debate how much this is due to local peace-building, the increase in UN conflict resolution, and/or other international efforts. There have also been rare but effective actions to protect civilians in unresolved conflicts like the EU interventions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2003 and 2006.

What resolves conflicts?

- *Enlightened elites*: changing incentives that make peace an attractive option (South Africa, Sudan, Sierra Leone). Changing incentives influence poor people, particularly young males, as well. When peaceful livelihoods appear as genuine opportunities, a violent livelihood through banditry or following an armed group is less attractive.
- *People in the streets* (Vietnam, Palestine/Israel)
- *Threat of a good example* (DRC Artemis) or *bad example* (Bosnia, Kosovo)
- *Follow the leader* (South Africa, Palestine/Israel, development of 'responsibility to protect')
- *The power of belief* (landmines campaign, arms campaign, development of 'responsibility to protect')
- *External support* (south Sudan), *pressure* (South Africa) and *intervention* (Sierra Leone)

Over the next ten years, the number of armed conflicts might potentially be halved,³³ and civilians better protected within them, by a change in policies and practices in two broad areas:

- **Supporting the policy changes of all other chapters³⁴**, to reduce poverty and to create the comprehensive or human security upon which physical security rests. Specific elements of this would include a new level of sustained, pro-poor post-conflict development aid and debt relief, and conflict-sensitive trade, all designed to support the fragile 'peace' deals that so often collapse.
- **More effective action to protect civilians, when conflict prevention or peace processes fail.**
Actions will include:
 - Using the range of protection tools³⁵ available, including, as a last resort, force. Force should be authorised by the UN, according to new guidelines to be agreed by the General Assembly and Security Council. It should be complemented with a form of 'challenging support' by both the UN and the African Union: supporting but at the same time demanding performance. (The UN, AU and others will need to set out detail on non-military strategies, including sanctions and incentives to end violence).

³⁰ In 2004, 10 million people could not get access to aid and protection because of the conflict itself; UN Secretary General, *op cit*, p 3

³¹ \$ 7.8 billion in 2003

³² Uppsala, *op cit*

³³ Paul Collier, 'The Conflict Trap', World Bank, 2003

³⁴ See *From Poverty to Power: How Active Citizens and Effective States Can Change the World*. Security depends on getting everything else right, because unresolved inequalities and injustices create risks of violence

³⁵ Mephram, D and A. Ramsbotham, (2007), *Protecting Civilians* London: Institute of Public Policy Research.

- Revising the asylum policy of the EU and other regions to ensure that asylum seekers have their claims individually examined by means of full and fair procedures, irrespective of their country of origin and method of entry to their intended country of asylum. No country should be considered safe for all its citizens. No asylum-seeker should be turned away, or prevented from reaching their intended destination without an adequate assessment of their protection needs.
- Controlling the usual tools of violence: arms – through an international Arms Trade Treaty, linked to regional arms initiatives and a charter of good practise to support initiatives that improve the safety of communities already suffering from the proliferation of arms.
- Controlling the trade in natural resources,³⁶ and drugs, from conflict zones.
- Improving the quality and quantity of humanitarian aid, including the protection of women and children from the abuse of some humanitarian officials, and ensuring a consistent humanitarian response to both the neglected and the televised humanitarian crises. This is as much about a more accountable humanitarian system, as it is about more funding; the (almost) four-fold expansion in the UN's global humanitarian fund in 2005 should be regarded as only a start. It is also about empowering, and holding to account, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, and each crisis' Humanitarian Coordinator, to provide swift, sufficient aid against agreed benchmarks and measuring up to the Sphere and other international standards.

Private War

In all sorts of ways, states are subcontracting their responsibility for security to private companies and to ordinary citizens. Between the 1991 and 2003 Iraq wars, the ratio of US private military contractors to US military personnel changed from 1 in 100 to 1 in 10. Private contractors do everything from logistics to providing bodyguards. In parts of Africa they do more, including, for example, front-line fighting in Sierra Leone and between Ethiopia and Eritrea.³⁷ Like groups of citizens, armed by governments, none of them are as accountable for their use of force as are regular soldiers. Private companies are also major players in providing humanitarian aid, particularly through transport, in response to conflicts.

4 What will change policies and practices?

Few of the actions set out above are likely to happen if we cannot change some of the ideas that keep the current policies in place. Following are *some* of the 'problem ideas':

- Individuals and communities involved see their identity shaped by fear or superiority of 'the other' including other ethnic or religious groups, the other 'side' in the 'war on terrorism'. Those in power, locally and globally, often choose to exploit these fears and exclusive identities, to create a 'clash of civilisations' where none need exist. 'The other' does not have rights and therefore it is very easy to accept that defeating them should be done without restraint, without respect for the rights that we expect for ourselves.
- In spite of all the rhetoric of global interdependence, governments fail to support the security of each other or to protect civilians around the world:
 - The UN Security Council fails in its responsibilities to uphold peace and security with what the Secretary General describes as 'tardy and hesitant' responses to most crises.
 - Donor governments fund poverty-reduction in some places, fearing the risk of conflict if they do not, but not everywhere.
 - The African Union has moved painfully slowly to protect African civilians in current conflicts.
 - The European Union has moved slowly to support them and establish itself as an effective international actor to reduce conflicts. Though it has nine active military missions,³⁸ it has only

³⁶ For example, what do we think of the UK-backed Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative?

³⁷ Human Security Report 2005, op cit, p 38.

³⁸ Under the European Security and Defence Policy

once suspended an EU partnership agreement (with Uzbekistan in October 2005) because its partner was killing its citizens.

- The dominant US has never accepted that international norms or multilateral decisions can restrain its actions. This is exaggerated, but not created by neo-conservatism. In traditional terms, its military supremacy remains unparalleled but, as Iraq and Vietnam show that does not guarantee success.
- In political terms, the uni-polar world that emerged after 1989 is changing into a multi-polar one. New global and regional powers, China supreme among them, but also India, South Africa, Brazil and others – are increasingly concerned with international security, whether or not they manage to get seats on a reformed UN Security Council. But it is very far from clear that some of them will act in a more benign way than traditional Western ‘realist’ foreign policy.

In the face of this, we must build on, rather than reinvent, ideas that have been emerging since 1990. None of these ideas effectively drive most governments’ policies. These ideas are that:

- Security is about people – and their rights – not just states.
- If states fail to provide security, the international community must do so.
- Physical security depends on an environment in which all other rights can be enjoyed.

5 Responsibility to protect

The current state of global warfare has, in part, been created by dramatic events. The end of the Cold War in 1989 reduced US and Soviet support for conflicts, and started a decade of more positive international involvements. The UN increased its conflict resolution. Aid donors considered the impact of their policies on conflicts, but did not align them to their security concerns. The arms trade declined and landmines were banned. There were terrible catastrophes, pre-eminently Rwanda’s genocide in 1994 but the number of conflicts fell sharply in the 1990s.

Then 9/11 heralded a new era of rising ‘terrorist’ attacks and sometimes counter-productive government responses that killed civilians as well. Arguably more significantly, the ‘war on terror’ and particularly the invasion of Iraq have undermined the international community’s willingness and capacity to intervene successfully (as in Sierra Leone) rather than catastrophically (as in Iraq).

It is not easy to see any equally dramatic event that could encourage more positive trends in the next ten years. Now, positive changes are more likely to come from gradual progress towards all those steps outlined in section 3 above; but they will only come if we build on a fragile, but growing idea that has emerged from the successes and failures to reduce conflict since the end of the Cold War.

We must accept that we all share a responsibility to protect every other child, woman and man from conflict. Security is not just for some – as many governments seem to have believed since 2001. It is for all.

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