Contemporary Violent Conflict World-Wide: Types, Index, Cases and Trends

by Dr. Christian P. Scherrer
Professor at Hiroshima Peace Institute

Global mass violence has undergone significant changes since World War 2. According to the world conflict index a majority of all conflicts that have occurred in the past twenty years have been intra-state conflicts. Over half of all violent conflicts were 'ethnic' in character or have been ethnicized.

Deep changes in contemporary violent conflicts call for rethinking and adaptation of the basic concepts of war, violence and peace in the 21st century.

Basic concepts and definitions

Wars and non-war types of mass violence, such as genocide or large-scale massacres, have to be clearly defined and distinguished. Actors and driving forces have to be named and explained.

Peace has in every society its own meaning and its own taste. Peace in its real meaning can best be approached in a Kantian way: According to Kant positive peace needs constant efforts. While *negative peace* would only mean the absence of violence or war, positive peace would be in its own right and represent new quality of social interaction. *Positive peace* only exists as an incessant effort to approach it: it has existed and does exist today. Almost nobody thought of the advantage of elaborating a typology of peace. An attempt to do so can identify 21 such types, cases or transitional stages of peace by their scope, key principle, their time frame or period, their characteristics and aims.[1]

Major wars and mass violence are distinguished from other armed conflicts or massacres by various degrees of medium or high intensity, claiming usually more than an estimated 1,000 victims per annum or as an average during the course of the conflict (see CoW, SIPRI, and others). In many cases the numbers of victims are contested or otherwise questionable. Governments tend to reduce the number of victims while rebels usually inflate numbers. Additionally, in most wars the adversaries exaggerate enemy casualties. Verification of numbers of battle-related deaths and (even more so) of massacre-related deaths is an awesome task.

War is defined as a violent mass conflict involving two or more armed forces as combatants/actors in warfare. Not in all cases are regular state armed forces (such as military, police forces, militias and other paramilitary troops) involved. Not-state actors are mainly so-called liberation movements having regular guerrilla or partisan armies, often recruiting along ethnic, national or social class lines. Tribal

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[1] See "Social-Historical Typology of Peace", in Scherrer, C.P.: *Structural Prevention of Ethnic Violence.* Palgrave 2002: 77-83.

militias, gangs, and other irregular forces have different agendas; they have less (or no) centralised control nor identifiable lines of command. In most types of contemporary warfare violent clashes and combat between the warring parties take place with some degree of continuity. Ethno-nationalist wars especially tend to become *protracted conflicts*.

Terrorism is sporadic, repeated or almost systematic violent action by clandestine gangs or by state elites who pursue illegitimate demands/aims and/or criminal interests by employing unjustifiable and criminal means, characterized by serious violations of human rights, committing war crimes (as defined by the Geneva conventions) or even crimes against humanity, whereby spreading fear and horror amongst defenceless populations by randomly or selectively targeting predominantly civilian victims.

Non-war types of mass violence are characterized by a separation of perpetrators of mass murder and their victims. In most cases the victimization and aggression is organised, supported, or tolerated by state actors. As compared to asymmetries in many types of wars (regarding quality of weaponry, availability of resources, and level of training), in non-war mass violence there is a clear difference to be made between armed perpetrators and victimised non-armed civilians, which are by definition defenceless. The worst type of mass violence is genocide.

Genocide is defined as state-organized mass murder and crimes against humanity characterised by the intention of the rulers to exterminate individuals because of belonging to a particular national, ethnic, 'racial' or religious group. Definitions different from the binding one made in the UN Anti-Genocide Convention of 1948 are not relevant and shall be rejected.

Mass murder committed against members of a particular political group (called *politicide* by Barbara Harff) or of a social group (called *democide* by Rudolph

Rummel) also constitutes a horrifying crime but does not legally fall under the UN Anti-Genocide Convention of 1948.

Most deadly regimes in the 20th century have all committed total genocide against domestic groups, mainly their barbarian attempt to exterminate domestic national, ethnic or religious minorities.

Dominant groups got into positions of command over the so-called monopoly of violence. Their assertive relationship toward ethnically distinct nationalities (*nations without their own state*) became the most important dangerous source of violent conflict since 1945, increasingly so with each cycle of decolonization.

Ethnic communities can be defined as historically generated or (in some cases) rediscovered communities of people that largely reproduce themselves. An ethnic or communal group has a distinct name, which often simply signifies 'person' or 'people' in the ethnic community's language, a specific heterogeneous culture, particularly, a distinct language, and a collective memory or historical remembrance, including community myths (myths of foundation or emergence relating to shared ancestry). This is producing a degree of solidarity between members, generating a feeling of belonging.

Ethnicity as a term is used to describe a variety of forms of mobilization, which ultimately relate to the autonomous existence of specifically ethnic forms of socialization. However, no clear-cut distinction can be made between struggles by social classes and struggles by ethnic groups. To talk about the politicization of ethnicity seems tautological. Different types of actors such as states, transnational corporations, liberation movements, migrants' organizations, political parties, pressure groups, strategic groups, military leaders, and populists all seek to make political capital out of 'ethnic identity'. Some actors deliberately try to influence and manipulate the identity set-up.

The changing character of global mass violence

Today, the most frequently dominant conflict type continues to be the ethno-nationalist (31,8%), followed by inter-ethnic wars (23,4%), with a strong increase, followed by anti-regime wars (19,6%) and gang wars (14%). The latter doubled compared to the mid-1990s: it includes warlordism and international terrorism. Decolonization wars and interstate conflicts stood at 4,7% each. Genocide (1.9%) remains the rarest type of violent conflict but the one with a high mortality (see Tables 1 and 2).

Conflicts that acquired a dominant ethnic character (types B, D, E and G) account for 61.7 % (down from two third or 66.2 % in the decade 1985-94) of all contemporary violent conflicts since 1995.

On the one hand, *ethno-nationalism from below* is carried by a multitude of political movements at the grass roots and armed parties and groups, with the support of large sections of the civilian society of the respective entity, aiming at the liberation or emancipation—often acting in self-defence—of a particular ethnic entity threatened by hostile governments or state-organized onslaught, and, on the other hand, *ethnicization from above* that is usually carried out by the leaders of an alleged nation states in order to single out members of a particular national group, in order to exclude them from the mainstream society or even threaten their existence. In the worst case, ethnicization is a preparatory stage for genocide.

7-Type Classification of Wars and Mass Violence

The ECOR conflict index is based on a 7-type classification of wars and mass violence (overview):

A. Anti-regime-wars, political conflicts; state versus insurgents
B. Ethno-nationalist conflicts, mostly as intra-state conflicts (state versus nation), often cross-border or spill-over effects
C. Interstate conflicts, state versus state, seen as 'classic wars'
D. Decolonisation wars or Foreign State Occupations
E. Inter-ethnic conflicts, predominantly non-state actors (exclusively so in communal conflicts)
F. Gang wars, non-state actors (warlords, religious extremists and terrorists, mixed with organised criminal elements), esp. in situations of state failure or state collapse
G. Genocide, state-organised, mass murder and major crimes.

The heterogeneous dynamic character of contemporary violent conflicts has to be expressed adequately. ECOR index addressed this as such: besides pointing at a dominant type secondary and tertiary components were also codified.

High Frequency and Dominance of Ethno-nationalism

The results show some clear trends: in the 16-year period from 1985 to 2000 ethno-nationalist wars and interethnic conflicts were more dominant than anti-regime wars, gang wars or interstate wars. Dominance and frequency are roughly balanced regarding interstate wars, decolonization wars, and interethnic wars. The tables 1 and 2 show dominance and frequency of conflict types in the recent six years period from 1995 to 2000.

Table 1: World Conflict Index: Frequency of Types and Dominance 1995–2000

Type	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	total
dominant	21	34	5	5	25	15	2	107
secondary	34	10	15	1	18	14	4	96
tertiary	4	1	8	4	6	8	4	35
Frequency	59	45	28	10	49	37	10	238

Table 2: Correlates of Frequency and Dominance

Correlates	Dominance & Frequency		
Period	1985-1994	1995-2000	1985-94 95-00

Anti-regime	19.2 : 30.7	19.6 : 24.8	0.63	0.79
e-nationalism		44.1 : 29.3	31.8 : 18.9	
	1.51	1.68		
inter-ethnic	13.7 : 17.3	23.3 : 20.6	0.79	1.13

Source: Scherrer / ECOR © 2001

Reduction of the *Classic* Type of Interstate Wars

Shocking for mainstream security studies and conflict research is the fact that the Clausewitzean type of inter-state conflict has practically disappeared. The most significant trend in recent years shows a decline of the absolute number (and proportion) of inter-state conflicts; according to dominance there are less than 1 in 20 conflicts.

Since the late 1990s there were only seven cases of 'classic' interstate conflicts: US bombing of Iraq since 1991: Eritrea vs. Ethiopia 1998–2000; Pakistan vs. India 1998; NATO vs. Yugoslavia 1999; US-led coalition vs. the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the al-Qaeda terrorist network, and the US-UK invasion of Iraq on March 20, 2003. The conflict in the Congo, with eight states intervening, can not be seem as a 'classic' interstate conflict since the intra-state conflict issues dominate.[2]

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[2] Latest 7cases of dominant inter-state conflicts in the past five years, amid the existence of 50 ongoing intra-state wars:
(1) continuous bombardments of Iraq since 1991 by US mainly; (2) war between Pakistan and India in Kargil/Kashmir 1998-9; (3) the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, March 1998 to mid 2000, with spillover effects on Southern Somalia during 1999, cease-fire and the deployment of UN peacekeepers late in 2000; (4) the 78-days air war of the NATO alliance against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999, resulting in ongoing violence in Kosovo 1999-2003; (5) the attack of the allegedly disarmed UÇK on Macedonia in 2000 (under the eyes of NATO-KFOR); (6) the September 11, 2002 terrorist attack (on Manhattan/New York and the Pentagon in Washington) lead to the US-led retaliation against al-Qaeda and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and, (7) the unprovoked and illegal invasion of Iraq by US-UK under the pretext of Iraq's alleged links with al-Qaeda and possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). The most costly of these wars and acts of violence was the war at the Horn of Africa with 100,000 victims. USA and UK were the most frequent involved states in 5 of 7 cases.

In contradiction to traditional polemological research, my assessment is that interstate conflict character may increasingly become a component of other types of conflicts. In the latest period of observation 1998–2003 we find only seven interstate conflicts. One example is already in the grey area of categorization: In the case of current conflict in Afghanistan the foreign intervention by a US-led coalition since October 2001 did not really change the rules of the internal conflict beyond succeeding, towards the end of 2001, to add to the demise of the Taliban regime, which was (on the ground) brought about by the Northern alliance. Currently the UN is trying to rebuild governance and helping to resolve the Afghan conflict. In 23 cases in from 1996 to 2000 the inter-state conflict character clearly became a secondary component of intra-state types of conflict, most prominently in Africa.

Increase of Foreign Interventions

1995–2000 foreign state participation increased to 26 cases (of 107 conflicts; there were 17 of 80 conflict cases 1995–1996). In the decade of 1985–1994 there had been 27 cases of foreign state intervention; in 15 of those 27 cases the intervention occurred in the last phase of the conflict. Since the 1990s foreign military intervention was ever increasing, lately mainly by Western powers.

In the mid 1990s Africa's share in the world's conflicts became the largest. Further increase to about half of all conflicts was avoided by increase in Asia. According to the number as well as the mortality of violent conflicts Africa has become the most war-thorn continent in recent years, ahead of Asia (with West Asia and Southeast Asia accounting for over half of Asia's share); see Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Regional Distribution of Mass Violence

Distribution	1985–94	(1995–6)	1995–2000
Asia	42.2 %	(33.7 %)	37.4 %

Africa	29.4 %	(45.0 %)	43.9 %
Europe	14.7 %	(7.5 %)	8.4 %
Americas	13.7 %	(13.7 %)	10.3 %

Table 4: Distribution and Change (detailed for Asia)

Regional Distribution and Change	1985-1994	%	1995-2000	%	Change
Latin America	**14**	**13.7**	**11**	**10.3**	**−**
Europe	**15**	**14.7**	**9**	**8.4**	**− −**
Africa	**30**	**29.4**	**47**	**43.9**	**+ +**
Asia	**43**	**42.2**	**40**	**37.4**	**−**
West Asia	11		11		none
Central Asia	3		4		+
S-Asia	7		7		none
SE-Asia	15		10		− −
E-Asia	1		0		−
Island Asia/Pacific	6		8		+
world's conflicts	**102**	**100%**	**107**	**100%**	**− / +**

Source: Scherrer / ECOR © 2001　　Remark: **+ +** or **− −** means a significant change

Trends

Contrary to common knowledge in the 20th century the number of battle-related victims was much less than the number of victims of genocide and mass murder. Genocide prevention is therefore among the most urgent tasks for the 21st century.

Complex Crisis Situations and State Collapse

In the 1990s a dramatic increase of extreme crisis situations and complex emergency cases led to an alarming increase of conflict-induced mortality in cases of protracted conflicts. The most deadly case of mass violence—in a cumulative count since 1954—ravages Sudan. An estimated 2.5–3 million people became the victims of genocide, war, and famine, as consequences of successive Sudanese regimes' onslaught in southern Sudan. At present this large-scale conflict is going on unabated.

Another matter of concern is the proportion of gang wars (warlordism, (inter-) national terrorism, international *gansterism* and other organized crime) that grew exponentially, first almost doubling

from 3.9 percent to 6.25 percent in a period of less than ten years and then further rising to one out of seven conflicts or 14 percent of all recent conflicts. Until the mid 1990s 'chaos power' and warlordism characterized only a small number of all conflicts (every 16th), but gang wars increased even further, as I predicted some years ago, based on data covering the period up to 1996 (see Scherrer 1999: 398). This concern was based on the evidence that the higher proportion of mentioned cases compared to the proportion of dominance of this type of post-modern conflict indicates a trend toward further increases in dominance and frequency. Additionally, one of the components and manifold actors of gang wars are terrorist organizations and this sub-type was recently undergoing a qualitative change.

The Creation of Terrorism by States

Though in the 1970s terrorism was quite prominent in several world regions (mainly in the Middle East but including Europe with the German RAF and the Italian Red Brigades and Japan with the Japanese Red Army) and even developed into some sort of transcontinental networks it was not until the 1990s when a new type of terrorist network developed into a global threat.

In the end 1970s covert action against the Afghan communist-oriented regimes of Taraki and Amin by the Carter Administration created today's Islamist terror. US actions aimed at provoking a Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan (as disclosed by one of the chief instigators). Mid 1979 to early 1989 this was done by the build-up of a radical Mujaheddin front (later the Taliban) against the progressive government in Afghanistan which was supported by the USSR. Islamist terror was sponsored by the USA under Reagan and Bush Sr., Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. A highly organized extremist Islamist movement developed.[3]

The al-Qaeda ('the base') organization was trained by US-special forces. It became a multi-national terror organization build-up for the task to destabilize the Central Asia republics of the Soviet Union. Al-Qaeda was soon led by the charismatic Osama bin-Laden, who has been closely working with the CIA for more than a decade.

After the Soviet retreat from Afghanistan US-support dwindled. The former allies subsequently turned into enemies. This was provoked by the US military presence in Saudi Arabia since 1991 and the failed US policy in the Middle East. A series of terrorist attacks on the US presence in East Africa and the Middle East began. It culminated in an attack on symbols of America's power in the USA itself, on September 11, 2001.

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[3] Linked case studies: US covert actions, Cold War, Islamist terrorists and Afghanistan.
Covert action by the CIA to build-up a force of radical Islamist *agents provocateurs* was a long-guarded 'open secret' used by the Soviets to justify intervention. Indeed, the CIA began to aid the Mujaheddin in Afghanistan some six months before the Soviet intervention, as leaked by the former director of the CIA, Robert Gates, in his memoirs.

In 1998, the former US president Jimmy Carter's security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, boasted about it in an interview given to a French weekly ('Les Revelations d'un Ancien Conseiller de Carter: "Oui, la CIA est entrée en Afghanistan avant les Russes"', *Le Nouvel Observateur* (Paris), Jan 15-21, 1998: 76). On July 3, 1979, president Carter signed the first directive for secret aid to the opponents of the 'pro-Soviet regime in Kabul'. Brzezinski added that '... the same day, I wrote a note to the president in which I explained to him that in my opinion this aid was going to result in a Soviet military intervention.'.

Brzezinski cynically stated that there was no regret and that this covert action planned to provoke the USSR into intervening in Afghanistan was 'an excellent idea', for the very purpose to experience 'their own Vietnam'. He claimed that the resulting conflict would have caused the demise of the Soviet Union due to demoralization.

Power-politics unleashed tragedies and its consequences came "back home". 'If there had been no intervention here by the West (i.e. the U.S.A.), there would have been no war at all', wrote Phillip Bonosky in 'Washington's Secret War Against Afghanistan'. Until its backlash on September 11 the costs of whole action for the American tax payers were some US$ 3 billion, which caused the death of hundred thousands, the despair of millions of refugees, and, many years later, the death of 2.800 people in New York and another war in Afghanistan.