

MANAGING THE NEW THREAT LANDSCAPE ADAPTING THE TOOLS OF INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY¹

In 2018, we face an international security environment measurably worse than that of a mere five years earlier. Increased war-related violence accompanies an international order under challenge and rent by tensions. Global conflict deaths peaked in 2014 at magnitudes second only to the Rwandan genocide during the post-Cold War period. Proxy wars in Ukraine and Syria are reminiscent of the great-power-fueled conflicts of the Cold War.

However, this does not signal a universally more unstable world. Rather, violent conflict is concentrated in specific regions and reflects specific challenges. Four key features of today's security environment, and one key emerging threat, deserve closer attention from the U.N. and other international actors.

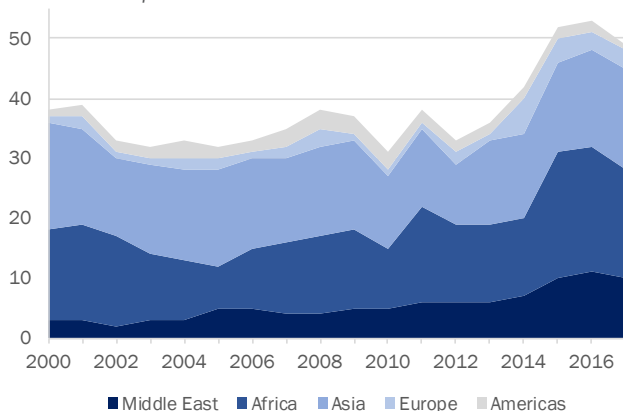
1. NEW CONFLICTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA ACCOUNT FOR THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF THE INCREASE IN GLOBAL BATTLE DEATHS AND CONFLICT INCIDENCE.

Conflict has not intensified in most of the world. This regional surge is due primarily to the civil war in Syria and the emergence and spread of the Islamic State and other extremist groups in and beyond Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Nigeria. The number of conflicts in both the Middle East and Africa doubled between 2010 and 2015, while the Middle East alone accounted for 68 percent of all battle deaths during the past five years (2013-17).

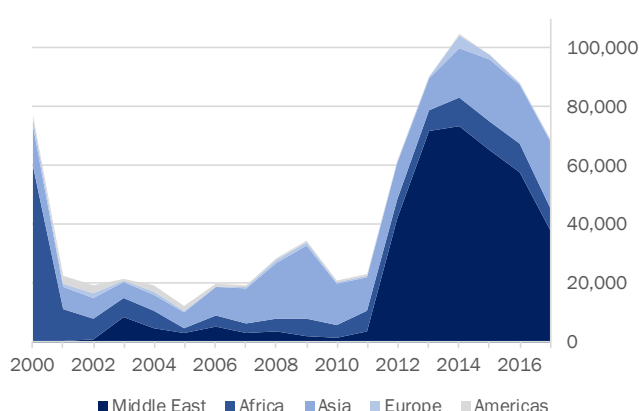
2. THE FUSION OF CIVIL WARS AND TERRORISM, INCLUDING ON THE AFRICAN CONTINENT, INTRODUCES A COMPLEX NEW CHALLENGE TO PEACE AND SECURITY OPERATIONS.

The spread of ISIS and other terror-linked Islamic extremist groups is a key factor in the rapid increase in conflict incidence. In 2015, the entire spike in global conflict incidence was due to the proliferation of ISIS to 11 new countries—not the outbreak of independent conflicts in these countries. The exigencies of simultaneously attempting stabilization efforts, humanitarian operations, and counterterrorism campaigns have proven vexing for national and international policymakers. The terrorist tactics and transnational aspirations of these organizations call into question the relevance of conventional state-building peace operations and diplomacy aimed at negotiated settlements.

New conflicts spread in the Middle East and Africa...



...while battle deaths are concentrated in the Middle East.



3. TO THE DETRIMENT OF GLOBAL PEACE, UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY REMOVED FROM TACKLING TODAY'S EVOLVING SECURITY CHALLENGES.

Current U.N. peacekeeping operations are not addressing the world's most pressing wars. Instead, they are deployed in countries that suffered only 7 percent of total global conflict deaths over the past five years. Of course, U.N. diplomatic efforts have taken place in many of these conflicts, terrorism is a complicating factor, and external sponsorship of warring parties has prolonged some of these conflicts. Nevertheless, the Security Council has proven unwilling or unable to authorize U.N. actions in these difficult wars, and U.N. troops remain underprepared to protect themselves and execute their mandates, much less take on emerging transnational terrorist threats—as highlighted by the Dos Santos Cruz report.

PRESENCE OF U.N. PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS IN CONFLICT COUNTRIES (2013-17)



Notes: Countries with U.N. peacekeeping operations denoted in blue. Data represents sum of battle-related, one-sided, and non-state violence deaths. ISIS deaths are consolidated for 2015-17, and attributed evenly to Iraq and Syria in 2013-14.

4. THE U.N. CONFRONTS RENEWED GREAT POWER TENSIONS AND THE CONCOMITANT RAISED RISKS OF MAJOR WARFARE, INCLUDING WITH NUCLEAR ARMED STATES, AND OF WIDENING PROXY WARFARE.

Great power tensions have especially affected areas of strategic interest to regional and global powers, such as Eastern Europe and East Asia. Strategic crises in the Middle East, Iran, and the Korean Peninsula have absorbed great power attention, adding to the tensions of the moment and undermining cooperation in the U.N. And although total global military spending has remained largely unchanged since 2010, rising Chinese and potentially American arms spending signal risks ahead. Long-standing norms surrounding humanitarian law and the use and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are being challenged.

5. FRONTIER THREATS IN EMERGING TECHNOLOGY, AND SPECIFICALLY CYBER TOOLS AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI), POSE AN IMMINENT AND GROWING CHALLENGE TO GLOBAL SECURITY.

Commerce, communications, individual privacy, intellectual property, and critical infrastructure all depend upon tools vulnerable to cyberattacks. With the diffusion of information technology, even non-state actors already possess offensive cyber capabilities. Cyberattacks can be difficult to trace and attribute, and even when they can be, legal and ethical questions persist on what constitutes proportional state response. Currently, the U.N. possesses few tools with which to monitor or regulate either state or non-state uses of cyber weapons. AI presents further challenges: first, AI technologies are likely to reshape the global economy, and the economic impact of the resulting employment shift could result in political instability. Second, advances in AI will likely be used in weapons development in the form of autonomous systems. Decreasing costs will drive the diffusion of these weapons into the hands of non-state groups. Finally, the concentration of AI research in China and the United States and the first-mover advantage inherent therein has substantial implications for the future development of the international economic and security order.

INTRODUCTION

The end of the Cold War brought two decades of relatively stable great power relations, and steadily decreasing civil conflict. These advances were interrupted by the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, and then again by a subsequent rise in transnational terrorism. Although the Iraq crisis had produced serious political strains in international relations, it is characteristic of the post-Cold War moment that despite this, the terrorism spike was met by a surge in multinational and bilateral cooperation, much of it animated by the U.N. Security Council (UNSC).

This semi-stability faltered in the wake of the global financial crisis; was buoyed by the Arab Spring, but rattled by its turn to violent counter-revolution; and then shaken by the Russian annexation of Crimea and the descent into proxy warfare in eastern Ukraine. The failure of the U.N.-led Geneva process to negotiate a political end to violence in Syria, followed by the start of CIA-backed efforts to arm the rebels in 2013, followed in turn by Russian direct military intervention in the conflict in 2015, turned Syria from a civil war and counter-revolution into a global proxy war, vaulting the international system back to the gory pattern of proxy fighting that so bloodied the “third world” during the Cold War.

Thus by 2018 we find ourselves in an international security environment measurably worse than that of a mere five years earlier, let alone a decade earlier. This new environment consists of increasing war-related violence amid an evolving international order of great power competition, even contestation. The significant expansion in the scale and sophistication of transnational terrorism, notably with the rise of ISIS, the fusion of this phenomenon with civil wars in the Middle East and North Africa—a region of economic and geopolitical significance to both the West and the non-Western powers—and rising levels of strategic competition between global and regional powers have created conditions that make it difficult for states and international organizations alike to respond to crises. Strategic crises in the Middle East and the Korean Peninsula have absorbed great power attention, adding to the tensions of the moment.

All of this is to say nothing of the new challenges of cyber-enabled political warfare, strategic competition in AI and other emerging technologies, and advances in the weaponization of cyber, drone, space, and biological technologies by both state and non-state actors—what the U.N. has sometimes called “frontier technologies.”

This is the backdrop against which U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres prioritized conflict prevention in January 2017 and unveiled a disarmament agenda in May 2018. It is against this wider terrain of threats to international peace and security that we must assess progress or reversals on a prevention and disarmament agenda.

COLD WAR PEACE DIVIDENDS

The generally peaceful dissolution of the Soviet Union and the resulting pause in overt great power rivalry between the Americans and Russians decreased global tensions and improved security in the 1990s. While interstate and internal wars certainly did not end—specifically the fitful resolution of legacy Cold War conflicts, the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia, the genocide in Rwanda, and the Ethiopia-Eritrea and Congo wars toward the turn of the century—they decreased substantially from Cold War levels. What’s more, in the main, the international security environment was conducive to multilateral action. The international community generally limited military aid to proxies and coordinated efforts to end conflicts and broker lasting peace, often deploying forces into some of the

hardest cases of the time.² The consequence was a steady and substantial decline in the numbers and levels of civil wars from the early 1990s until the early 2010s.

We can measure this in human terms: despite existing conflicts, the September 11 terrorist attacks, and the subsequent U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the first decade of the new century witnessed a dramatic decrease in conflict deaths and conflict incidence.³ Inclusive of the massive blood-letting of the Rwandan genocide, total conflict deaths in the 2000s fell by more than two-thirds from 1990s levels.⁴ Battle deaths in the 2000s were roughly half of those experienced in the 1990s.⁵ Importantly, this decade witnessed a precipitous drop in major wars (defined as 10,000 battle deaths in a calendar year). Remarkably, there were only two such wars in the 2000s: the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 2000 and the war between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers in 2009.

Several elements contributed to this decade of relative peace. The United States' "unipolar moment" disincentivized great power competition and proxy conflicts. International cooperation among great powers, especially in regions in which they had limited strategic interest, facilitated the deployment of large U.N. peacekeeping operations into fragile states, in particular to sub-Saharan Africa. Regional organizations began to consolidate and contribute to both diplomatic and peacekeeping initiatives. Dozens of low-income states moved into lower or upper middle-income status, improving both their economies and their state capacities.

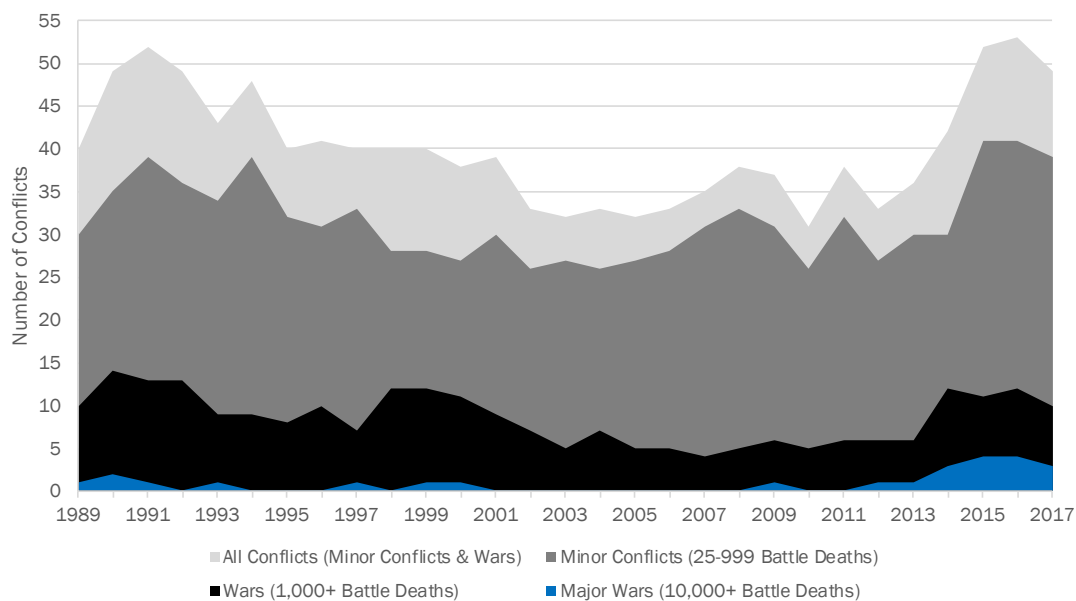
During the period from 1992-2011 when wars were declining steadily, the qualitative and quantitative scholarship on the issue demonstrated that the deployment of peace operations to support war termination was a critical part of why wars declined as consistently as they did.⁶ Some states are able to achieve stabilization without third party assistance or security mechanisms.⁷ But the parties to many conflicts desire, and require, external assistance. As Barbara Walter shows,⁸ security guarantees provided by third-party forces substantially increase the chances that a peace agreement will succeed. In some cases, autonomous recovery attempts have resulted in humanitarian disasters. International intervention mechanisms are difficult to organize, field, and fund, and such efforts are often criticized. Outright successes are difficult to identify. However, the many failures of non-intervention make clear the importance of the option of third-party intervention. Indeed, external military forces will likely need to be part of a solution in at least some of the deadly wars in Ukraine, Syria, Libya, or Yemen, an issue likely to come before the Council.

Despite the shocks of September 11 and the ensuing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, by 2010 the global security environment was relatively stable. The United States and Russia were attempting a "reset" under the guidance of two first-term presidents, al-Qaida and affiliated groups were on the defensive in the Middle East, and long-tenured rulers governed Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria. The United States had committed itself to an increasingly multilateral approach under President Barack Obama and many other leaders were more concerned with economic recovery than geopolitical rivalry. A contemporary observer could justifiably have expected an improvement in the global security environment over the coming decade. But this was not to be.

NEW PATTERNS OF CONFLICT AND WAR

Since 2012, the global security environment has undergone a serious deterioration. After a brief lull during the first decade of the 21st century, deadly conflict began a return to prominence. The aftermath of the Arab Spring and the destabilization of previously resilient regimes in the Middle East and North Africa coincided with a resurgence of tensions in Eastern Europe to spur death tolls from civil conflict to levels not seen since the 1990s. While the number of major wars remains limited, death tolls within them have spiked. Meanwhile, minor conflicts, defined as conflicts with between 25 and 999 annual battle-related deaths, reached record post-World War II levels. While this minor conflict metric invites hyperbolic statements about the state of global conflict, it does indicate an increasingly violent security environment.

FIGURE 1: CONFLICT INCIDENCE AND INTENSITY



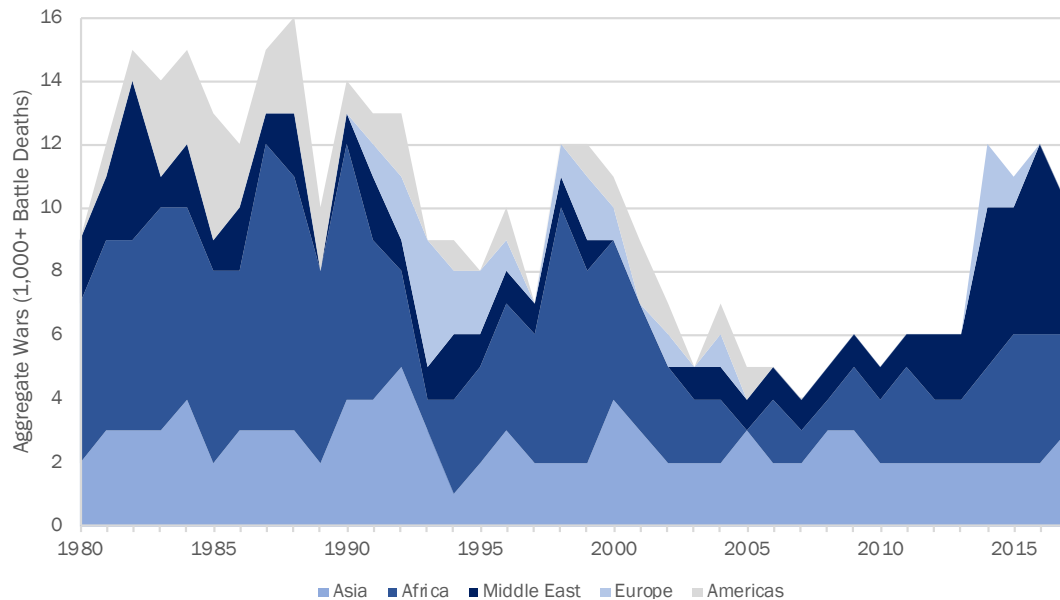
The geographical shift in violence

New conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa account for the overwhelming majority of this spike in global conflict incidence, at both the minor conflict and war thresholds, due primarily to the civil war in Syria and emergence and spread of the Islamic State and other extremist groups in and beyond Syria, Iraq, Nigeria, and Yemen. As demonstrated in the first chart of the executive summary, the number of conflicts in both the Middle East and Africa doubled between 2010 and 2015.⁹ In particular, the number of conflicts in North Africa and the Sahel more than quadrupled during the same period, increasing from three to 14.¹⁰ The vast majority of recent wars, defined as conflicts with 1,000 or more annual battle-related deaths, have also occurred in the Middle East. Figure 2 shows that while the number of wars in Asia has remained nearly constant since 2010, Africa, and especially the Middle East, have suffered from a rapid increase in the incidence of wars.

As a result of this geographical shift, the predominant share of recent battle deaths has occurred in the Middle East, as demonstrated in the second chart of the executive summary. In 2010, 8 percent of all battle deaths took place in conflicts in the region. By contrast, the Middle East accounted for 68 percent of all battle deaths during the

past five years (2013-17).¹¹ To put it in even starker terms: in 2010, majority-Muslim countries suffered nearly 18,000 battle deaths. By contrast, these countries suffered 420,000 battle deaths during the past five years, 93 percent of the global total.¹²

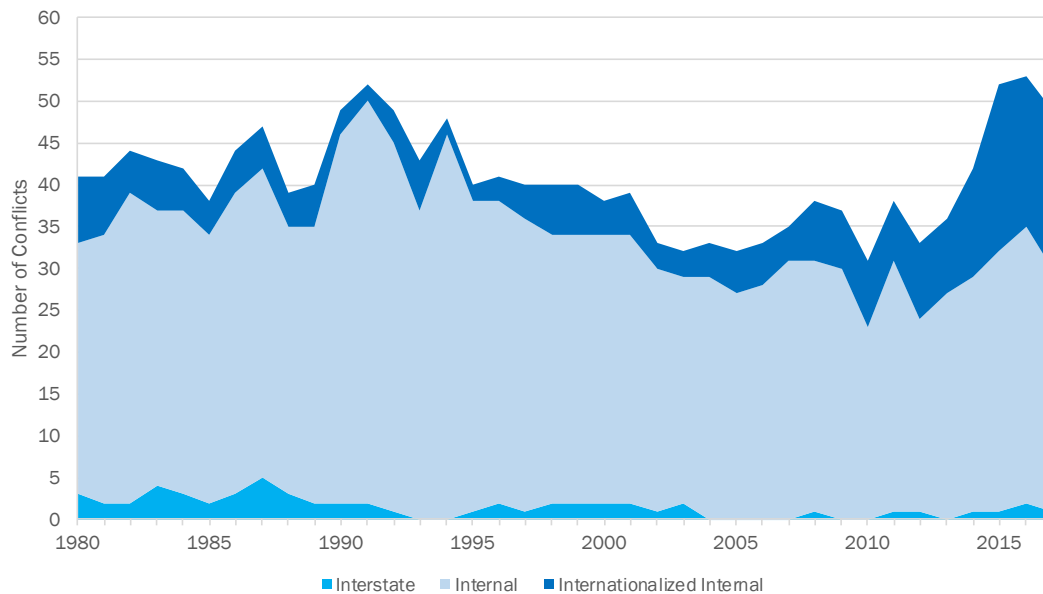
FIGURE 2: AGGREGATE WORLDWIDE WARS BY REGION



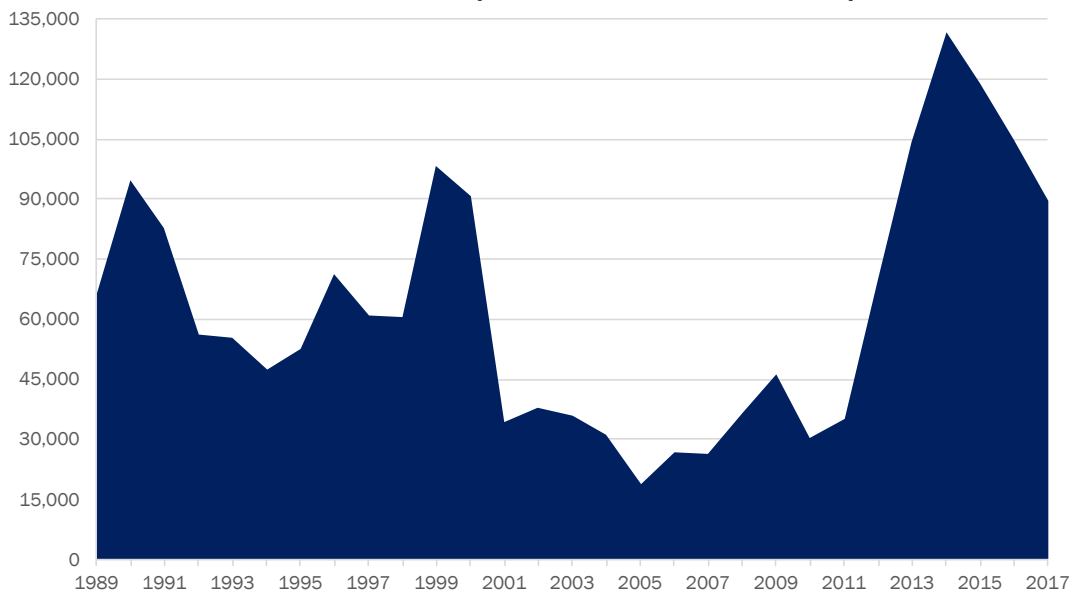
Of course, new wars have not been confined to the Middle East and Africa—the conflict in Ukraine reintroduced Europe to not just significant warfare, but also the manifestation of Russia’s return to great power politics. While war has not spread on the European continent, Russian actions in eastern Ukraine and Crimea have reignited Western concerns of Russian expansionism and caused Europe and the United States to attempt to isolate Russia through sanctions and expulsion from diplomatic bodies. The conflict in Ukraine has also once again laid bare the essential fault line in the U.N. Security Council when that body is confronted by crises that directly engage the interests of its five permanent members (P5).

The expansion of internationalized conflict

While conflict has spread, interstate conflict remains rare. By contrast, we have witnessed an explosion and intensification of a particularly challenging form of war, namely internationalized internal conflicts. The rise of transnational terrorist organizations, especially the Islamic State, is both a cause of this evolution and a broader contributor to higher conflict incidence. Indeed, new conflicts to which the Islamic State was party accounted for the entire increase in global conflict incidence in 2015. While the Islamic State may have been a contributing factor to the international spread of conflict, these conflicts will not die along with the Islamic State—their enduring effect is the spread of state fragility and the deepening of societal divisions.

FIGURE 3: THE GEOPOLITICAL NATURE OF CONFLICTS***The spike in conflict deaths***

This increase in internationalized internal wars has been marked by an increase in the lethality of these wars. Conflict deaths in 2014 eclipsed 130,000 people, the most killed in a year since the end of the Cold War, excluding the Rwandan genocide. This level of killing has been most affected by wars in three countries: Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, with each of these states experiencing over 10,000 battle-related deaths in every year between 2014 and 2017. Conflicts in these three countries accounted for 80 percent of global battle-related deaths during the past five years (2013-17).

FIGURE 4: ANNUAL CONFLICT DEATHS (EXCLUDING RWANDA IN 1994)

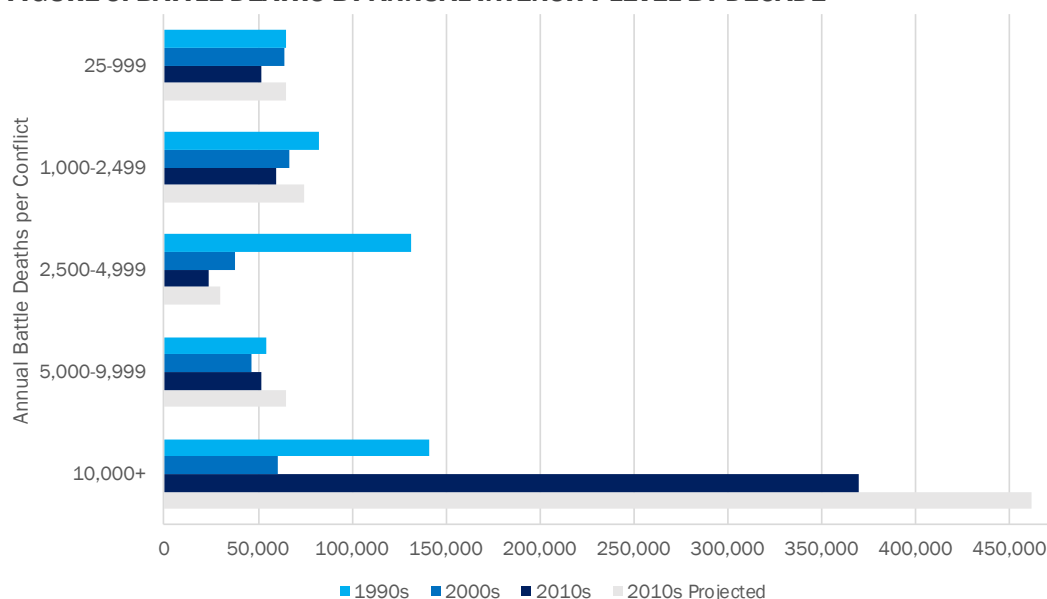
One of the factors contributing to the increased lethality of these internationalized civil wars is that many states have faced more than one simultaneous front in their conflicts, between different clusters of parties. These complex conflicts require solutions that

satisfy more than two sides, making bargains harder. And these complexities arise from a combination of the rise of violent non-state actors, as in Turkey and Nigeria, as well as proxies supported by competing great powers, such as in Syria and Ukraine.

More broadly, as shown in Figure 5, the increased lethality of intense wars represents the most consequential change in global conflict patterns, certainly in human terms, during the past decade. By and large, overall battle deaths in conflicts of moderate or intermediate intensity remain in line with or below levels seen in the 1990s and 2000s. Excluding conflicts with 10,000 or more annual battle deaths, the present decade (2010-17) actually has slightly fewer battle deaths than the 2000s and just over half those of the 1990s. If recent conflict levels continue for the next two years, the 2010s would see a 30 percent decrease in global battle deaths from the 1990s. The decreased incidence of intermediate conflicts is the main cause of this shift. Cumulative deaths from conflicts with between 2,500 and 4,999 annual battle deaths have dropped dramatically, from 130,000 in the 1990s to a projected figure of under 30,000 this decade.

Unfortunately, success in containing and mitigating moderate and intermediate conflicts has been overshadowed by glaring failures to prevent the escalation of the world's worst conflicts. Conflicts with over 10,000 annual battle deaths account for two out of every three battle casualties this decade and outweigh any gains the international community has made in conflict prevention and management since the end of the Cold War. Their presence and persistence should attract the attention and resources of the international community and all actors committed to peace.

FIGURE 5: BATTLE DEATHS BY ANNUAL INTENSITY LEVEL BY DECADE



The peacekeeping challenge

This increase in violence and conflict death has occurred despite a surge and near-record deployment of United Nations peacekeepers. Every year from 2006 to the present, the U.N. has deployed at least 80,000 uniformed peacekeeping personnel. U.N. peacekeeping forces peaked at nearly 108,000 personnel in 2015, and despite a subsequent decline included 91,699 personnel as of June 30, 2018.¹³

Prior to this dramatic surge in peacekeeping deployments, the number of U.N. peacekeeping personnel dropped to nearly Cold War levels. Criticism over U.N. peacekeeping operations in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and Somalia, among others, eroded support for U.N. peacekeeping as quickly as that support had emerged at the beginning of the 1990s. The euphoria of the post-Cold War peace and willingness to deploy forces to active conflict zones had given way to frustration over Mogadishu, Kigali, and Srebrenica.

Toward the end of the 1990s, the Security Council reevaluated peacekeeping goals, introduced reforms, and transformed U.N. peacekeeping operations. The current wave of operations began in 1999 and included deployments to Kosovo and East Timor. Since then, the vast majority of recent and ongoing peacekeeping missions have been concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa, in fragile countries with limited peace to keep and a challenging environment for economic and political development. For the better part of a decade, that peacekeeping surge worked. Despite many complications and reversals, and some failures, in the main, international peacekeeping helped to diminish the global levels of civil violence. By 2010, there were only two ongoing wars with over 2,500 annual battle deaths, and minor conflicts were being largely held in check.¹⁴

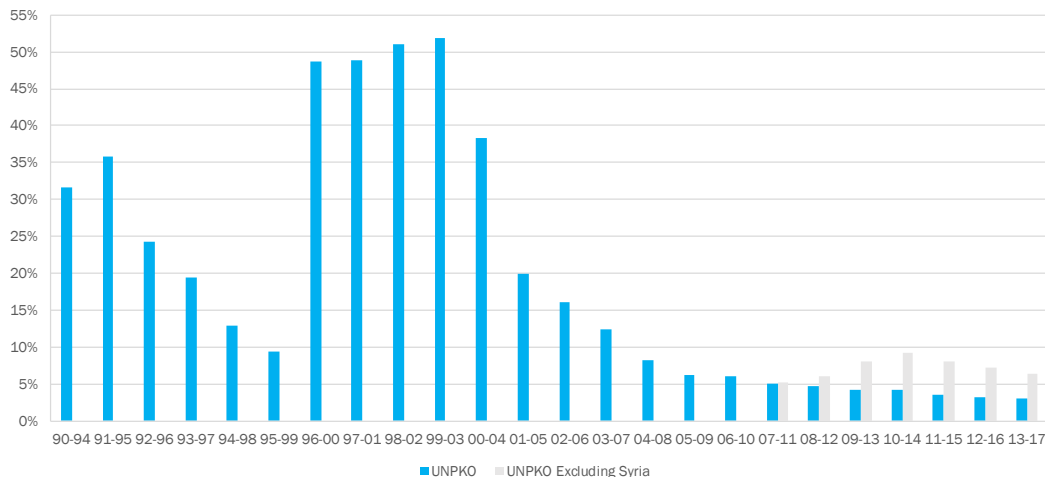
However, the data suggests that today, U.N. peacekeepers are not deploying to places where conflict-related violence is high. With the outbreak of violence in the Middle East and North Africa, as well as Eastern Europe, since 2011, we have not seen a similar success in the use of mediation and peacekeeping to quell civil violence. More than half a decade after the outbreak of violence following the Arab Spring, the U.N. is barely present in the world's most dangerous settings. There is a dearth of peacekeepers in the deadliest wars. Granted, peacekeepers are often deployed in response to a peace deal to avoid commitment problems from the combatants, and regional organizations now play a more important role than in the past. Nevertheless, adherence to this deployment pattern consigns the U.N. to remain absent where conflicts persist.

Figure 6 shows conflict deaths in countries experiencing the highest levels of violence over the past five years, with those countries hosting a U.N. peacekeeping presence shown in blue. Ongoing U.N. peacekeeping operations are deployed to countries that suffered only 7 percent of total global conflict deaths over the past five years.¹⁵

FIGURE 6: PRESENCE OF U.N. PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS IN CONFLICT COUNTRIES (2013-17)

Notes: Countries with U.N. peacekeeping operations denoted in blue. Data represents the sum of battle-related, one-sided, and non-state violence deaths. ISIS deaths are consolidated for 2015-17, and attributed evenly to Iraq and Syria in 2013-14.

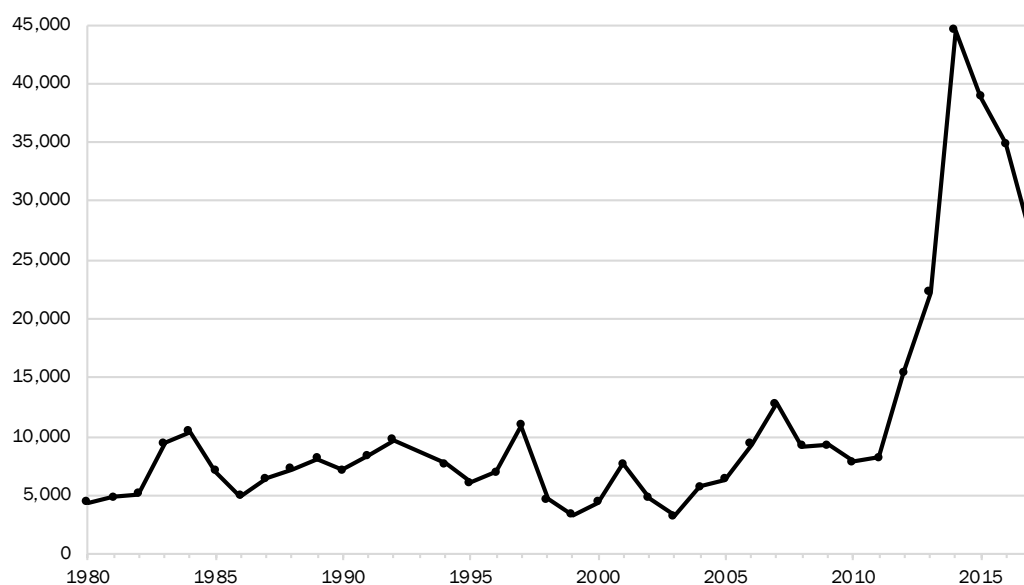
The limited engagement of current peacekeeping operations represents a relatively new phenomenon. Compared to initial engagement patterns after the end of the Cold War, U.N. peacekeeping operations today are deployed to countries with a historically low share of global battle deaths. As demonstrated in Figure 7, the share of global battle deaths over the preceding five-year period occurring in countries with a relevant U.N. peacekeeping operation during any year of that period has stagnated at or below 5 percent since 2011.¹⁶ The inability to address deadly conflict in Syria weighs heavily on this metric, but does not change the overall deployment pattern. Excluding the Syrian conflict altogether, U.N. peacekeeping operations would still be deployed to countries with fewer than 10 percent of global battle deaths, below the previous Cold War low during the 1995-99 period.

FIGURE 7: SHARE OF GLOBAL BATTLE DEATHS IN COUNTRIES WITH U.N. PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

The terrorism plague

Violence and international security are not only challenged by internal armed conflict. The rise of the Islamic State, the resurgence of al-Qaida, and the spread of state fragility have led to a surge in terrorist violence globally. There were more deaths from terrorism in every year from 2014 to 2016 than battle-related deaths in civil wars in any year between 2001 and 2011.¹⁷

FIGURE 8: GLOBAL DEATHS FROM TERRORISM



Terrorism and conflict battle deaths are increasingly interconnected. In the last five years with available data, 2013-17, 93 percent of all battle-related deaths occurred in countries in which UNSC-designated terrorist organizations operated.¹⁸ Even if we exclude Syria as an outlier, 85 percent of remaining battle-related deaths occurred in countries with UNSC-designated terrorist groups. At present these organizations are mostly Islamist and are concentrated in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Sahel, where they thrive in conflict areas where local resentment toward the state facilitates recruitment. Once established, the presence of organized terror networks destabilizes fragile states and supports a vicious cycle of violence and oppression.

The reluctance of the U.N. to operate peacekeeping missions in countries suffering from conflicts with a terrorist component compounds the problem. With the exceptions of Mali and Lebanon—where U.N. forces have had qualified success in containing terrorist violence and stabilizing fragile states—the U.N. has not deployed peacekeepers to countries with UNSC-designated terrorist threats. While the Central African Republic, Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and South Sudan suffer from terrorist attacks, they have thus far avoided any significant contagion from ideologically driven transnational terrorism. Figure 9 shows conflict deaths in countries experiencing the highest levels of violence over the past five years, with those suffering from UNSC-designated terrorism in black, those hosting a U.N. peacekeeping presence in blue, those meeting both criteria in dark blue, and those meeting neither criteria in gray. Countries with ongoing U.N. peacekeeping operations and UNSC-designated terrorist groups accounted for under 1 percent of conflict deaths in countries with designated terrorist groups, whether you exclude Syria or not.¹⁹

FIGURE 9: PRESENCE OF TERROR GROUPS AND U.N. PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS IN CONFLICT COUNTRIES (2013-17)

Notes: Countries with a UNSC-designated terror component but no U.N. peacekeeping presence denoted in black; countries with terror-related conflicts and a U.N. peacekeeping presence denoted in dark blue; countries with non-terror-related conflicts and a U.N. peacekeeping presence denoted in light blue; and countries with neither a terror-related conflict nor a U.N. peacekeeping presence are denoted in gray. Data represents the sum of battle-related, one-sided, and non-state violence deaths. ISIS deaths are consolidated for 2015-17, and attributed evenly to Iraq and Syria in 2013-14.

The U.N. has two potential options to confront the challenge of transnational terrorism. One is to fundamentally adapt U.N. peacekeeping operations to be able to respond in counterterrorism contexts. The successful adaptation of U.N. peacekeeping operations to the security challenges of the late 1990s demonstrates the potential for future transformation, despite institutional and inertial challenges. Another is to use multinational mechanisms like the Counter-ISIS Coalition in conjunction with flexible civilian elements of the U.N. to leverage the existing strengths of international partners.

Various multinational task forces have deployed directly to areas affected by the twin ills of civil war and transnational terrorism. One such example is the Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram (MNJTF), a multistate security force assembled to conduct military operations against the Boko Haram terrorist organization. It is particularly salient as a model due to its ability to operate across international borders, rally political rivals around a common security goal, and focus on counterterrorism. The MNJTF built on a cross-border task force originally established to combat cross-border criminal activity. In 2015, the African Union Peace and Security Council mandated the task force. The mission includes recapturing territory, re-establishing security and delivery of humanitarian aid, stemming cross-border small arms transfers, and reintegrating combatants. There is also an intelligence-sharing component that includes cooperation with the United States, United Kingdom, and European Union.

Similarly, the G5 Sahel Joint Force constitutes a sub-regional, transboundary response to the morphing challenge of ISIS affiliates in the Sahel region. The presidents of Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Chad launched this initiative in July 2017 with the authorization of the African Union and recognition by the U.N. The G5 Sahel Joint Force supplements the U.N. peacekeeping operation in Mali and coordinates with French military forces stationed in Chad under Operation Barkhane. In a fragile neighborhood with a history of poor governance and limited resources, this joint force targets cross-border operations of criminal networks and terrorist groups to

deter violence, radicalization, and corruption. In support of this security initiative, international donors, including the European Union, World Bank, U.N. Development Programme, and African Development Bank, have contributed to the Sahel Alliance, an effort to bring sustainable development to the Sahel states. While it is too early to judge the G5 Sahel Joint Force, it serves as another example of a flexible multinational counterterrorism coalition.

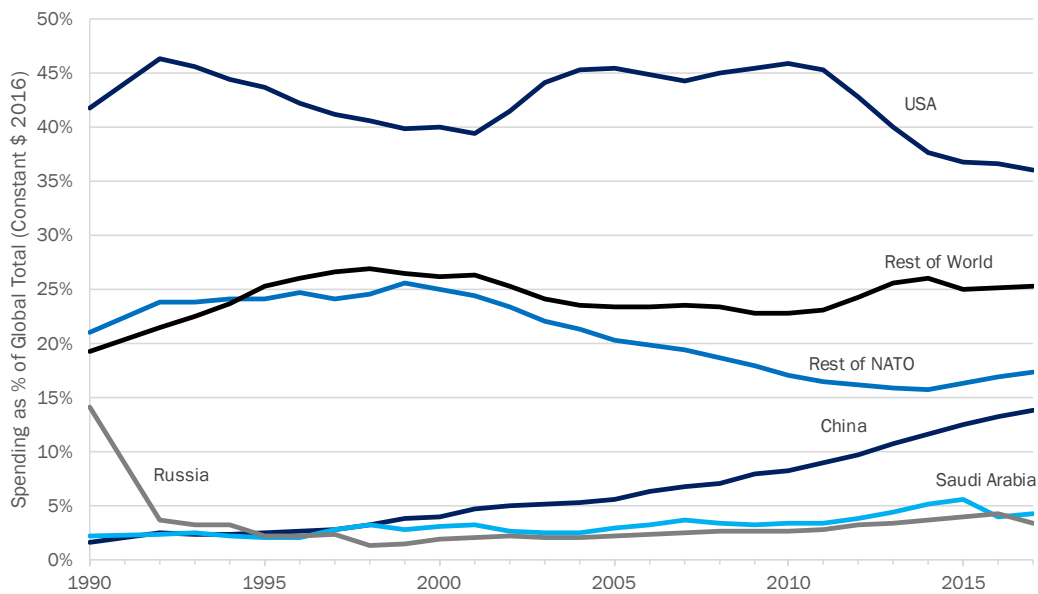
The most powerful of these multinational task forces is the Global Coalition against ISIS established by President Obama, comprising forces from more than 75 nations. Technically now known as the Global Coalition against Daesh, it includes military, political, technical, and reconstruction elements from countries across Europe, North America, the Middle East, and Africa. Militarily and politically led by the United States, the Global Coalition has largely worked through the Iraqi security services on the Iraqi side of the fight, and independently on the Syrian side of the fight. It has also worked on stemming the flow of foreign fighters to the Iraq-Syria theater, and combatted ISIS' sophisticated online presence. By 2016-17, it had achieved significant gains against ISIS on the ground and online.

This is not to suggest that multinational coalitions guarantee swift and complete success. The experience of the International Security Assistance Force, a robust force led by the United States, in Afghanistan demonstrates the challenge of defeating a capable, motivated, and ideologically driven opponent. Nevertheless, this is a policy vacuum that requires the attention of the U.N. Absent U.N. participation and attention, the world's premier expeditionary forces will step into the void, with potentially unsavory consequences.

Rising great power competition and strategic conflicts

One underlying contributor to the new global security environment is the recent intensification of great power competition, mostly dormant since the end of the Cold War. National and nationalist interests have exceeded economic competition and threaten the broader security environment. A resurgent Russia and economically expanding China have both begun to push back on American dominance, albeit in very different ways. The leaders of both states have expressed their intention to alter the international order. American leaders have expressed their intent to retain primacy, albeit through policy frameworks that do not seem designed to achieve that result. Competitive tensions are highest in areas that lie next to U.S. allies and within the near abroad of the two non-Western giants, who are expanding their military presence in these regions, exacerbating conflicts that involve Western military, economic, and political structures.

Military spending provides one measure of great power competition and the prevailing balance of power. As seen in Figure 10, as a percentage of global military expenditures, American spending has decreased substantially since 2010 and spending by the rest of NATO has fallen well below the levels of the late 1990s. Saudi Arabia has seen increases, as has Russia, although Russian spending remains well below Soviet levels. China, meanwhile, has drastically increased its spending.²⁰ All of this portends a shift in relative military power among the world's most powerful states. China and the United States are a long way off from parity but the directionality is clear, and when you add the advantage of proximity and strategic concentration of forces, China's military rise in Asia is a clear and present fact. Russia's military resurgence, even under conditions of economic stagnation and sanctions, is roiling both Eastern European and Middle Eastern politics.

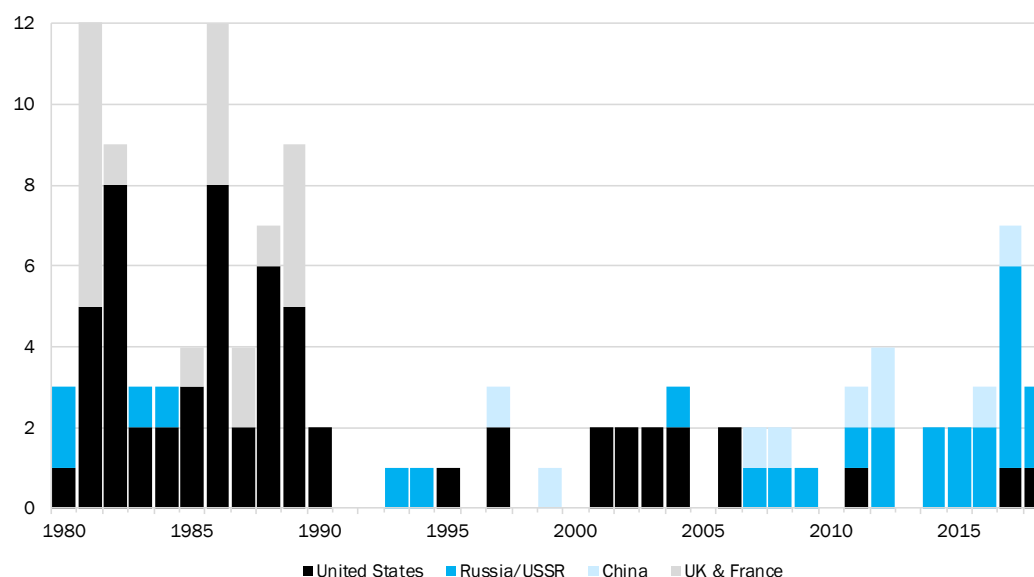
FIGURE 10: NATIONAL MILITARY SPENDING AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE GLOBAL TOTAL

Among the most challenging aspects of this great power competition are Russian attempts to interfere in the internal politics of Western states and their democratic systems through disinformation and propaganda, the funding of nationalist parties, and the exploitation of fissures in Atlantic and European alliances. Chinese territorial expansion in the South China Sea is increasingly militarized, exacerbating regional tensions, while the United States is also planning to expand its naval presence in the region.

Nevertheless, it is important to avoid over-dramatization of current military spending. Total global expenditures have remained largely unchanged since 2010, at around \$1.7 trillion, despite consistent global economic growth.²¹ Future increases in the U.S. and Chinese defense budgets would herald a shift, but we are a long way off from the burdensome arms races of the Cold War period. As discussed in the next section, it is growing competition in unconventional and cyber weapons that merits imminent attention and concern.

Meanwhile, East Asia is experiencing a security crisis on the Korea Peninsula, although efforts at negotiation may still yield fruit. If the crisis is resolved, it will be a major diplomatic achievement. If it is not, the crisis could, in a worst case scenario, result in an extraordinarily dangerous and damaging war. Close and sustained diplomacy involving Washington, Beijing, Seoul, and Tokyo will be necessary to avoid these outcomes. The episodic involvement of U.N. envoys in helping to lay the ground for negotiations is worth highlighting.

The perception of global politics as a zero-sum game has extended to the U.N. and has been a source of inaction. Historically, in times of great power competition, nations with a veto at the Security Council have used it to protect national security interests and prevent strategically disadvantageous U.N. interventions. During the post-Cold War period, there was something of a lull in the use of the veto outside the topic of the Middle East peace process, but the UNSC has witnessed a sharp increase in the use of veto power by permanent members since 2011. The seven vetoes exercised in 2017, including five by Russia, were the highest annual veto figure since 1989.²²

FIGURE 11: EXERCISE OF U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL VETO

Moreover, in the absence of any serious movement on U.N. reform, and in the wake of deep debates over Libya, Syria, and the “responsibility to protect” doctrine, there is a serious challenge of UNSC legitimacy within the wider membership. An initial effort by Brazil to bridge the divide, through a debate around what it termed the “responsibility while protecting” (RWP) was met with truculence by the P5 and was too quickly discarded. The issues raised by the RWP notion remain worthy of debate and discussion.

From the perspective of human security, this new period of power competition, whether global or regional, ushers in a new era of proxy wars similar to the Cold War. Russia supports the separatist groups of Eastern Ukraine and props up the Assad regime in Syria, prolonging the civil wars in these countries. The Middle East is replete with proxy wars, as Iran and Hezbollah also support the Assad regime, while Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates support rebel groups. The conflict in Yemen has persisted because of the military support of regional powers, the consequences of which have been felt by the Yemeni people.

While the U.N.’s 2015 High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations emphasizes the importance of structuring multilateral intervention around a set of political objectives,²³ such overarching frameworks remain elusive in these proxy conflicts. The wars in Syria, Yemen, and Ukraine continue to fester, and pose the risk of regional infection and terrorist incubation. Forging a political settlement that provides a basis for peace for the whole country may require waiting for the geopolitics to align.

Given the geopolitical salience of these wars and the involvement of great powers, the possibilities for negotiated settlements in these cases are far more constrained than in other post-Cold War civil wars. However, it is extraordinarily costly to wait and take no action on stabilization when opportunities arise. There are frequently pockets that can be stabilized, and peacekeeping or similar deconfliction mechanisms can be deployed in such sub-national spaces. A variety of models have been used to implement these kinds of strategies, and these show that sub-national stabilization can be effective, and can be put together in a number of ways.

The frontier threats

International security is challenged by not only physical violence, but also uncertainty created by frontier threats in emerging technologies. Cyber weapons and artificial intelligence are the most prominent frontier threats, but other advances in technology also pose risks to the global development agenda and the global balance of power. Technological revolutions empower first-movers, disrupt the existing economic and geopolitical equilibrium, and create externalities, both positive and negative.

The development and use of cyber weapons is the most pressing frontier threat to international security. Commerce, communications, individual privacy, intellectual property, and critical infrastructure all depend upon tools vulnerable to cyberattacks. Global and regional powers seek to protect their own networks, while developing tools to attack their adversaries. States are increasingly developing and deploying cyber, information, and other hybrid capabilities rather than physical mobilization of materiel and troops. Interstate warfare is much more likely to involve influence operations, proxy wars, cyberattacks, and partnerships with non-state actors than large militaries in open confrontation. Cyberattacks can be difficult to trace and attribute, and even when they can be, legal and moral questions persist on what constitutes proportional state response. Conflict prevention approaches must address these types of actions that draw on frontier technologies. The decreasing cost of computer power has also placed these destabilizing tools in the hands of non-state actors, including the Islamic State, Hezbollah, and Wikileaks. Currently, the U.N. possesses few tools with which to monitor and regulate state and non-state uses of cyber weapons.

Artificial intelligence presents a longer-term but likely more consequential challenge to the international security environment, with economic, military, social, and geopolitical implications. Such technologies are likely to reshape the global economy by making human workers obsolete in many sectors, and the economic impact of this employment shift is likely to result in political activity. Automation is already a cause of political discontent in many developed countries, and artificial intelligence will hasten further automation—and streamlined employment—in the manufacturing, transport, and administrative sectors. One radical yet possible future scenario portends a process of de-globalization as manufacturing concentrates in the largest consumer markets, an outcome with profound implications for the global development agenda, economic equity, and migrant flows. Based on the experience of previous industrial revolutions, the era of artificial intelligence will create disruption through innovation, and raise overall living standards while upending established social, economic, and political norms.

Advances in artificial intelligence will also likely be used in advanced weapons development, including in the form of autonomous systems. From aerial drone swarms to “intelligent” munitions, AI advances will power new classes of military hardware. While such technology can be used to observe and map human rights abuses and refugee flows around the world, they can also be used to remove humans from the decision chain of lethal weapons. Battlefields may soon be occupied by intelligent robots, or lethal autonomous weapons systems with or without a human controlling and monitoring their actions or participating in decisionmaking.²⁴ As with cybersecurity, risks are not limited to states. Decreasing costs will drive the diffusion of these weapons into the hands of non-state groups, which have already shown great ingenuity in deploying modified commercial drones to conduct attacks against state

forces in Iraq. The use of readily accessible digital technology for short-range targeting will increase the lethality of their operations. Autonomous weapons and weaponized drones may soon be available to non-state actors, extending the danger and violence of terrorist attacks and violent extremist insurgency. Moreover, terror groups such as ISIS have proven adept at recruiting online; with an AI bot scouring the web for potential recruits, their recruitment capacity will rise. The implications of automated weapons cannot be understated and will soon no longer be the purview of science fiction.

Meanwhile, the application of artificial intelligence to internet systems and government surveillance has serious social and political implications. Malicious actors already leverage tribalism and confirmation bias to manipulate public opinion through disinformation campaigns, and engage in more traditional hacking operations. Some governments already censor politically sensitive but legitimate information online. Artificial intelligence will empower malicious actors to target receptive audiences with misinformation and better disguise hacking attacks, and enable restrictive governments to further squelch dissent. There is the distinct possibility that the surveillance state, replete with facial recognition cameras, social credit scores, and intrusive internet controls will emerge as an alternative governance model. The international community should be attentive to the social and political opportunities and risks of this new technology.

Finally, the military and economic applications of artificial intelligence create serious geopolitical implications. Having identified the importance of artificial intelligence to future economic and military standing, the great powers are headed toward a potential all-out AI competition. Russian President Vladimir Putin recently identified artificial intelligence as the key strategic issue of future great power security competition, while China's Xi Jinping recently announced an ambitious new program to match U.S. capabilities in AI within five years—and exceed them by 2030. The first-mover advantage inherent to artificial intelligence and the need for vast initial investments suggests that the current leaders, the United States and China, will build on their leads and leave other contestants behind. This risks not only geopolitical inequality, with a concentration of power in the hands of few states, but also a new bipolarity.

The international community should plan now for a future of ubiquitous and far-reaching AI applications, and what that future portends for both states and non-state actors.

CONCLUSION

After the post-Cold War era of relative global peace, the new global security environment has become more violent and more complex, and this progression will likely worsen in the coming years. Economic and political inequalities have created more civil conflict and terrorist violence, while cheap high-tech weapons proliferate. All the while, great power competition fuels not only violence through proxy wars and provocation, but also paralyzes the international community's ability to respond to these crises.

But this is not the first time that the United Nations has confronted great power tensions. During the Cold War, the U.N. was not as sidelined to the management of those tensions as common lore would suggest. It proved helpful in mitigating the Suez crisis, the Berlin blockade, and the Cuban missile crisis. The U.N. has dealt with proxy wars in the past, indeed in tougher circumstances. The presence of transnational terrorists in civil wars poses a legal, political, and operational challenge to U.N. peacekeeping,

but not necessarily one that is harder than the challenge posed to the U.N. at the end of the Cold War to move from inter-positional peacekeeping in interstate wars into the messy and challenging business of managing civil wars and protecting civilians inside borders. The U.N. has diplomatic, political, and operational roles to play in the Middle East and on the Korean Peninsula, and progress on either front will once again place major demands on the weapons of mass destruction machinery of the wider U.N. system, from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to the International Atomic Energy Agency. New uses of the U.N.'s various mandates and latent toolkits on biological weaponry can be resuscitated.

This is a time of serious challenge, but it is not—yet—a new Cold War, nor is it yet as violent as many of the episodes of that long, dark period of human history. It will take both political risk and creativity by U.N. leaders and by leaders of countries that want to support an effective multilateral order for the U.N. to find constructive ways to contribute—if not to prevention, narrowly conceived, then at least to mitigation—of this rising challenge. That is the test ahead of us.

Note: In the next phase of work for this Brookings study, further development of the themes in this paper, and consultation with U.N. and government leaders, will help to refine a set of ideas and recommendations for consideration by member states and the U.N. Secretariat.

ENDNOTES

- 1 With additional inputs by Will Moreland, Katy Collin, Mara Karlin, and Chris Meserole.
- 2 Virginia Page Fortna, “Does Peacekeeping Keep Peace? International Intervention and the Duration of Peace after Civil War,” *International Studies Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (2004): 269-292.
- 3 Conflict incidence and conflict death data from Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP)/Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) disaggregated datasets. See Therése Pettersson and Kristine Eck, “Organized violence, 1989-2017,” *Journal of Peace Research* 55, no. 4 (July 2018): 535-547; Nils Petter Gleditsch et al., “Armed Conflict 1946-2001: A New Dataset,” *Journal of Peace Research* 39, no. 5 (September 2002): 615-637; Kristine Eck and Lisa Hultman, “One-Sided Violence Against Civilians in War: Insights from New Fatality Data,” *Journal of Peace Research* 44, no. 2 (March 2007): 233-246; and Ralph Sundberg, Kristine Eck, and Joakim Kreutz, “Introducing the UCDP Non-State Conflict Dataset,” *Journal of Peace Research* 49, no. 2 (March 2012): 351-362.
- 4 There were 385,445 conflict deaths during the 2000s compared to 1,180,346 conflict deaths during the 1990s, which amounts to a 67 percent decline. Here we are defining conflict deaths as the sum of battle-related deaths and fatalities from one-sided violence and non-state conflicts, e.g., the Rwandan genocide, often left out of accounts of death tolls in the 1990s for methodological reasons.
- 5 There were 274,008 battle-related deaths during the 2000s compared to 472,791 battle-related deaths during the 1990s, which amounts to a 42 percent decline.
- 6 See Michael W. Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis, *Making War and Building Peace: United Nations Peace Operations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Virginia Page Fortna, “Does Peacekeeping Keep Peace?”; Virginia Page Fortna, *Does Peacekeeping Work? Shaping Belligerents’ Choices after Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Joshua S. Goldstein, *Winning the War on War: The Decline of Armed Conflict Worldwide* (New York: Dutton, 2011); and Barbara F. Walter, *Committing to Peace: The Successful Settlement of Civil Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).
- 7 Jeremy Weinstein, “Autonomous Recovery and International Intervention in Comparative Perspective,” (Washington, DC: Center for Global Development, April 2005).
- 8 Barbara F. Walter, *Committing to Peace*.
- 9 There were five conflicts in the Middle East in 2010, compared to 10 in 2015 and 2017. There were 10 conflicts in Africa in 2010, compared to 21 in 2015 and 18 in 2017.
- 10 The Sahel is defined as: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal. North Africa is defined as Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia, per the North region of the African Union. Mauritania is in both groupings.
- 11 Middle Eastern countries include Cyprus, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.
- 12 Data for percentage of population that is Muslim from “Interactive Data Table: World Muslim Population by Country,” *Pew Research Center*, November 17, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/chart/interactive-data-table-world-muslim-population-by-country/>. The study includes 50 countries.

13 Data from “IPI Peacekeeping Database,” International Peace Institute, <http://www.providingforpeacekeeping.org/contributions/>. See also, “Summary of Military and Police Personnel by Mission and Post,” United Nations Peacekeeping, June 30, 2018, https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/6_mission_and_post_3.pdf. Data includes peacekeeping missions (90,454 personnel) and special political missions (1,245 personnel).

14 The civil wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan had 7,029 and 5,574 battle-related deaths, respectively, in 2010.

15 Data represents battle-related, one-sided, and non-state violence deaths from the UCDP/PRIO disaggregated datasets. Battle-related deaths apportioned evenly between two countries when the battle took place in two countries (282 deaths); this applied to the India-Pakistan conflict in Kashmir in 2014 and 2017; and the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict in 2016. One-sided deaths apportioned as follows in instances with multiple country locations listed in database (28,837 deaths): Boko Haram ascribed entirely to Nigeria in 2013, and ascribed 3/4 to Nigeria and 1/4 to Cameroon in 2014-17; Lord’s Resistance Army ascribed 2/3 to the Central African Republic and 1/3 to the DRC in 2013-15, 2017; ISIS split evenly between Syria and Iraq in 2013-14, and coded separately as IS in 2015-17 given global expansion (and shown in Figures 7 and 9 as a distinct entity though it is not a country); Al-Shabaab ascribed entirely to Somalia in 2013-17; Government of Sudan ascribed entirely to Sudan in 2013; Government of Ethiopia ascribed entirely to Ethiopia in 2015; Taliban ascribed entirely to Afghanistan in 2016; al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb ascribed entirely to Burkina Faso in 2016; Ansaroul Islam ascribed entirely to Burkina Faso in 2017; Government of Burundi ascribed entirely to Burundi in 2017. Non-state violence deaths apportioned as follows in instances with multiple country locations listed in database (758 deaths): Hezbollah vs. Jabhat Fateh al-Sham ascribed entirely to Lebanon in 2014; FSA vs. ISIS ascribed entirely to Syria in 2013, 2016; ISIS vs. Taliban ascribed entirely to Afghanistan in 2017; Toubou vs. Touareg ascribed entirely to Libya in 2015; SPLM/A-North vs. SPLM/A-North - MA faction ascribed entirely to South Sudan in 2017.

16 Peacekeeper data from “IPI Peacekeeping Database,” International Peace Institute. Includes all peacekeeping missions with at least one troop. UNPROFOR (former Yugoslavia) was also coded for Croatia and Serbia from 1992-95; ONUCA (Central America) was also coded for Nicaragua from 1990-92. The following missions were excluded for their status as primarily political missions: UNOA (Angola), UNOMIG (Georgia), MIPONUH (Haiti), UNAMI (Iraq), UNTSO (Israel), UNOMIL (Liberia), UNSMIL (Libya), UNMOGIP (Kashmir), and UNSOM (Somalia) and UNSOS (Somalia). UNDOF (Golan Heights) is excluded due to irrelevance to recent violence in Syria and Israel. Battle death data from Therése Pettersson and Kristine Eck, “Organized violence, 1989-2017.”

17 Data from “Global Terrorism Database,” University of Maryland, <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>. Deaths from civil war metric represents battle deaths from Therése Pettersson and Kristine Eck, “Organized violence, 1989-2017.” The highest figure for battle deaths between 2001 and 2011 was 34,530 in 2011.

18 Terrorist designations based on “Consolidated United Nations Security Council Sanctions List,” United Nations Security Council, <https://www.un.org/sc/suborg/en/sanctions/un-sc-consolidated-list>.

19 Mali and Lebanon had 2,038 and 911 conflict deaths from 2013-17, respectively. There were 482,263 conflict deaths in countries with U.N.-designated terror organizations during the same period. Data from UCDP/PRIO disaggregated datasets.

20 Data from “SIPRI Military Expenditure Database,” Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>. Data for 1991 excluded from analysis as no reputable data for Russia exists for that year.

21 Global military spending in constant 2016 U.S. dollars peaked in 2011 at \$1.675 trillion. Data from “SIPRI Military Expenditure Database.”

22 Data through August 6, 2018. Data from “Security Council – Veto List,” United Nations, <http://research.un.org/en/docs/sc/quick>.

23 The United Nations High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, *Uniting Our Strengths for Peace – Politics, Partnerships and People* (New York: The United Nations, 2015).

24 Matthew Symonds, “The New Battlegrounds,” *The Economist*, January 27, 2018, 3S-4S.

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