

Appendix 2B. Definitions, sources and methods for the conflict data

MIKAEL ERIKSSON, MARGARETA SOLLENBERG and
PETER WALLENSTEEN

The following sections will clarify the definitions and methods used when compiling data on major armed conflicts. The appendix will moreover provide some explanations concerning the treatment of sources. The armed conflict records presented in appendix 2A. are compiled by the Conflict Data Project, at the Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University.¹

I. Definitions

The Uppsala Conflict Data Project defines a major armed conflict as a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory over which the use of armed force between the military forces of two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, has resulted in at least 1000 battle-related deaths in any single year.²

The separate elements of this definition are defined as follows.³

1. *Incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory.* The incompatibility must concern government and/or territory, and it refers to the stated generally incompatible positions. An *incompatibility that concerns government* refers to the type of political system, the replacement of the central government or the change of the composition of the current government. An *incompatibility that concerns territory* refers to the status of a territory, for example, the change of the state in control of a certain territory (interstate conflict), secession or autonomy (intra-state conflict).

2. *Use of armed force.* This refers to the use of arms by the military forces of the parties in order to promote the parties' general position in the conflict, resulting in deaths. Arms are defined as any material means of combat, for example, manufactured weapons as well as sticks, stones, fire, water, and so on.

3. *Party.* This refers to the government of a state or an opposition organization or alliance of opposition organizations. The *government of a state* is that party which is generally regarded as being in central control, even by those organizations seeking to take over power. If this criterion is not applicable, the government is the party controlling the capital of the state. In most cases where there is a government, the two criteria coincide. An *opposition organization* is any non-governmental group, which

¹ For more information, see URL <<http://www.peace.uu.se>>.

² This definition of major armed conflict differs slightly from the definition applied to the data of the Uppsala Conflict Data Project published in *SIPRI Yearbooks 1988–1999* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1988–99). The requirement that a conflict must cause 1000 or more battle-related deaths in a single year, rather than over the entire course of the conflict, ensures that only conflicts that reach a high level of intensity, as measured by deaths, are included. The tables and figure in appendix 2A have been retroactively adjusted to reflect this new definition.

³ See also: Heldt, B. (ed.), *States in Armed Conflict 1990–91*, 2nd edn, Report no. 35 (Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University: Uppsala, 1992), pp. 31–34.

has announced a name for the group and its political goals and has used armed force to achieve them.

4. *State*. A state is an internationally recognized sovereign government controlling a specified territory or an internationally non-recognized government controlling a specified territory whose sovereignty is not disputed by an internationally recognized sovereign government, which previously controlled the same territory.

5. *Battle-related deaths*. This refers to those deaths the warring parties cause that can be directly related to combat over the contested incompatibility.

Once a conflict has reached the threshold of 1000 battle-related deaths, it continues to appear in the annual tables of conflicts until the contested incompatibility has been resolved and/or until there is no recorded use of armed force, resulting in deaths, between the parties and concerning the same incompatibility during the year. The same conflict may reappear in subsequent years if there is renewed use of armed force between the same parties, resulting in deaths and concerning the same incompatibility.

There is frequently international involvement of various types in intra-state conflicts. Only one type of international involvement is included in appendix 2A: another state or multinational coalition is considered as a party to a conflict if, and only if, it contributes regular troops to one of the warring parties and shares the goals of that party. A traditional peacekeeping operation is not considered to be a party to the conflict but rather an impartial part of a consensual peace process. It should also be noted that rebel groups operating from a base in a neighbouring state are listed as parties to the conflict in the location where the government is challenged, regardless of their nationality or where they are based.

The focus of study is not political violence per se but incompatibilities that are contested by the use of armed force. Thus, the project registers one major type of political violence, battle-related deaths, which serve as a measure of the magnitude of the conflict. Other types of political violence are excluded, such as: unilateral use of armed force, for example, massacres; unorganised or spontaneous violence, for example, communal violence; and violence which is not directed at the state, for example, non-governmental organizations fighting each other. These categories of political violence are expressions of phenomena other than armed conflict as defined here. For example, reciprocal violence is different from unilateral violence, that is, war is different from genocide. This is not to say that such other types of violence or violent conflict are not as important, but the distinction between them is important.⁴

II. Sources

The data presented in appendix 2A are based on information taken from a selection of publicly available sources, printed as well as electronic. The sources include news agencies, newspapers, journals, research reports, and documents of international, multinational and non-governmental organizations. The latter include documents of the warring parties (governments and opposition organizations) when such sources are available, since they serve as a crucial complement when identifying statements

⁴ The Department of Peace and Conflict Research in Uppsala is currently collecting data on unilateral violence and violence between non-governmental organizations. Thus, many violent situations that fall outside the scope of the current definition will be covered in these new definitions.

about the parties' incompatible positions. Global, regional and country-specific sources are used.

Independent news sources that have been selected over several years form the basis of the source collection. The Factiva news database (previously known as the Reuters Business Briefing) is indispensable for the collection of general news reports. The project also uses region- and country-specific sources extensively. However, they are not comparable between regions. This means that for some countries several sources are consulted, whereas for other countries and regions only a few high-quality region- or country-specific sources are used. Regional sources include, for example in the case of Africa, *Africa Confidential*, and *Africa Research Bulletin*. For Asia, country-specific news sources are consulted since few reliable regional sources are publicly available. For example, for the countries in South Asia, articles from a large number of national and local newspapers are used.

The project consistently scrutinizes and revises the selection and combination of sources in order to maintain a high level of reliability and comparable coverage of all regions and states. One of the priorities is to arrive at a balanced combination of sources of different origins in order to avoid a bias.

The reliability of the sources is judged by using the expertise within the project together with advice from a global network of experts. Of highest priority is the general reputation and expertise of the sources as judged by regional experts. If possible, the members of the project discuss the sources with academics in the respective countries in conflict. The independence of the sources is crucial as well as the transparency of the origins of the sources. Each source is judged according to the context in which it is published, that is, according to the potential interests of the source in misrepresenting political or violent events. In the case of biased sources, which are used to identify statements by the parties, they must be official sources issued by the parties. Since most sources are secondary sources, the project attempts to trace reports back to the primary source in order to decide whether they are reliable. In addition to deciding the level of reliability of available sources, the project strives to identify the existence of censorship. Thus, other sources than regular news sources must be used to establish what is occurring in a country. Documents and reports issued by international, multinational and non-governmental organizations are consulted for this purpose.

III. Methods

The data on major armed conflicts are compiled by calendar year. They include data on conflict location, type of incompatibility, year the incompatibility was formed, year the warring party began its use of armed force, warring parties, number of troops, total battle-related deaths, battle-related deaths during the year, and the change in battle-related deaths compared to the previous year.⁵

The data on battle-related deaths constitute the largest part of the data collection. Figures for battle-related deaths are produced through a comprehensive review of reports on individual violent incidents in each conflict, which are then aggregated. Ideally, these individual figures are corroborated by two or more independent sources. The aggregated figures are also compared to total figures that appear in official documents, special reports and the news media. Regional experts—for example,

⁵ See also the notes to table 2A.3 in appendix 2A.

researchers, diplomats and journalists—are often consulted during the process of the data collection. Their contribution is mainly clarification of the contexts in which events occur, thus facilitating proper interpretation of the reporting in published sources.

Little information on the exact number of deaths in armed conflicts is publicly available. The project therefore in many instances presents these figures as ranges or approximations, and they are best estimates. The numbers of battle-related deaths are based on conservative estimates. Experience shows that, as more information on an armed conflict becomes available, the conservative estimates based on information about each individual event are more often correct than the less conservative, higher estimates. If no figures are available or if published figures are too contradictory to establish even a minimum reliable figure, no figure is given. Figures are revised retroactively each year as new information becomes available.

