

Mary Kaldor and Stathis Kalyvas: Contemporary violent conflict

# Who is the enemy?

**V**iolent conflicts in states such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Sudan and the Balkans are at the centre of global politics. Big battles have been fought, enormous sums of money have been spent and troops have been deployed to end these conflicts. But is trying to defeat the supposed enemies – be they ‘freedom fighters’, ‘terrorists’ or state armies – the right approach? Or do these conflicts demand other policy solutions?

Since the end of the Cold War the international community’s attention to intrastate civil war, political instability and state fragility has grown considerably. The past 20 years has seen a steep increase in the number of UN peace operations, with new players, such as the European Union and NATO, getting involved. This has given new impetus to academic discussions on the nature of contemporary violent conflict and warfare. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the ensuing military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq have added a new twist to these discussions. Increasingly security and stability are seen as ‘global issues’. This has all led to a lively debate about the causes and dynamics of intrastate violent conflicts as well as ways to deal with them.

*The Broker* invited two eminent researchers of contemporary civil war – Mary Kaldor of the London School of Economics and Stathis Kalyvas of Yale University – to share their views on these issues. Ten years ago, Kaldor wrote her ground-breaking book, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*. The book challenged and shifted the views of many policy makers, but it also sparked discussions about the newness of contemporary war. In her contribution to this special report, Kaldor argues that her ideas are still relevant and that the book continues to influence thinking about issues of human security.

Stathis Kalyvas has published widely on issues of civil war. In his most recent book, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, he analyzes the causes and dynamics of civil conflict, separating the concepts of war and violence. In his earlier work he questioned the idea that contemporary wars are new. In his contribution to this report, Kalyvas examines the main trends in civil war research since the Cold War and distinguishes different types of civil war.


Kaldor and Kalyvas will comment on each other’s articles on *The Broker* website. Rather than merely repeat an old discussion about the ‘newness’ of civil wars, with this special report *The Broker* wants to launch a debate about different understandings of and responses to civil war. We welcome your comments and opinions at [www.thebrokeronline.eu](http://www.thebrokeronline.eu).



Hollandse Hoogte / Jenny Matthews

Roadblock near Bo, Sierra Leone, October 1999.

Prepared by **Chris van der Borgh**, Centre of Conflict Studies at Utrecht University, the Netherlands and **Frans Bieckmann**

 A longer version of all articles in this report, with notes and references, can be found at [www.thebrokeronline.eu](http://www.thebrokeronline.eu).

## Counter-insurgency or human security

# New wars

Contemporary conflicts are very different from the conflicts of the twentieth century like the two world wars and the Cold War. Yet it has taken a long time for policy makers to realize that these ‘new wars’ require a different policy approach. Even in the case of US policies, a form of new thinking has emerged in response to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. But the Petraeus doctrine, which gives priority to ‘population security’, is not the same as the human security approach that is emerging in Canada, Japan and the EU. Old wars, or counter-insurgency concepts, still prevail in Afghanistan, and, more recently, in Pakistan.

The ‘new war’ literature can broadly be said to draw on three disparate sources. One group of researchers, including John Keegan and Martin Van Creveld, from within the tradition of strategic studies, have been preoccupied with the decline of what they call ‘Clausewitzian war’ – classic wars fought between states in which battle was the decisive encounter. 📖 A second group, including Mark Duffield, David Keen and Alex de Waal, who are closer to the fields of development studies and anthropology, were greatly influenced by the wars in Africa over the last two decades and, in particular, the importance of private militias or warlords and economic agendas. And a third is a group of political scientists, including Donald Snow and David Horowitz, who emphasized the rise of ethnic conflict.

### The ‘new wars’ thesis

My own work draws inspiration from all three bodies of thought. I used the term ‘new wars’ partly to draw attention to the need for new approaches in addressing contemporary conflicts, and partly because I was dissatisfied with other terms that have been proposed. One common proposition is that ‘new wars’ are civil wars or intrastate wars. It is widely asserted that, while interstate wars have declined, intrastate wars have increased. However, outside actors, including

states, are involved in the ‘new wars’, which are both global and local. Indeed, the difference between what is external and what is internal begins to break down in ‘new wars’. Another favourite term is privatized war. But although it is true that non-state actors are an important part of the landscape of new wars, as are economic motivations, ‘new wars’ also involve states or parts of states. As with civil wars, it is the distinction between what is public and what is private that is breaking down. Yet another term is post-modern war, which has a certain intellectual attraction because it can be argued that these are the wars that come after modernity, but I felt the term ‘post-modern’ would have less traction with practitioners and would require considerable explanation. Finally, a more recent and equally applicable term is ‘hybrid war’, which draws attention to the complex combination of the local and global, traditional and modern, state and non-state, terrorist and guerrilla, and the criminal and ideological.

My central point is that these are the types of wars that are characteristic of today’s global times. These wars have something to do with the impact of globalization on formerly authoritarian regimes. They are wars that are the consequence and cause of what today are variously called ‘weak’, ‘fragile’, ‘failed’, ‘failing’ or ‘collapsing’ states, where the binary distinctions characteristic of the modern state – between internal and external, civil and international, public and private, civilian and combatant, political and economic, and even war and peace – are breaking down. Even the term ‘war’ is perhaps problematic because, as I argue, these wars are a mixture of war (political conflict), human rights violations (political repression) and crime (economically motivated violence).

By **Mary Kaldor**, professor of global governance at the London School of Economics and convenor of the Human Security Study Group that reports to Javier Solana, the EU’s High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy.



A British soldier on a 'hearts and minds' mission in Southern Iraq, April 2003.

### No Clausewitzian wars

I argue that new wars differ from 'old wars' in the nature of the warring parties, the political goals, the methods of warfare and how the wars are financed. By 'old wars' I mean what Keegan and Van Creveld describe as Clausewitzian wars – wars between states where the warring parties are armies, the goals are geopolitical, the main method is the military capture of territory through battle, and the wars are financed through increased taxation and the mobilization of a centralized self-sufficient war economy.

By contrast, in 'new wars' the warring parties are networks of state and non-state actors organized in loose horizontal coalitions rather than hierarchical military organizations. These can include regular armies and police or parts of the state security services, party militias, warlords, bandits, mercenaries, private security companies, insurgents, self-defence groups and so on. The political goals are largely about identity politics – that is to say, the claim to access to power and to the state apparatus on the basis of a label, be it ethnic, tribal or religious (Serb versus Croat, Sunni versus Shi'ia, Hutu versus Tutsi) as opposed to geopolitical (control of the seas or access to oil) or ideological (to promote socialism or democracy).

In 'new wars' battles are rare, and most violence is directed against civilians. This can be deliberate, as in wars of ethnic cleansing (Bosnia and Kosovo, Nagorno-Karabakh and Baghdad) or in genocides (Rwanda and now Darfur), or because it is impossible to distinguish combatants from non-combatants (as in counter-insurgency wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Chechnya and Kashmir). For this reason, the techniques of 'new wars' directly violate international humanitarian and human rights law. And finally, in 'new

wars' taxation falls, and the wars have to be financed by a variety of methods that are dependent on violence. These include looting and pillaging, kidnapping and hostage-taking, skewing the terms of trade through checkpoints, the 'taxation' of humanitarian aid, outside support from the diaspora, smuggling of valuable commodities such as oil and diamonds, and other transnational criminal activities. Whereas 'old wars' were state-building, increasing the revenue base and the power of the state, 'new wars' are 'state-unbuilding'. They establish a 'new war' economy that is globalized, decentralized, criminalized and in which employment is very low.

These four characteristics, I argued, meant that, in contrast to 'old wars', which often had decisive endings, 'new wars' are very difficult to end. The warring parties share a mutual interest in the enterprise of war, either for political reasons or because violence helps to solidify the polarization of identity by spreading fear and hate; or for economic reasons, because their sources of finance depend on violence. Moreover, the various parties to the conflict emerge from it stronger than before. Some scholars suggest that the motivation for 'new wars' is economic. But my own view is that it is difficult to distinguish between those who engage in criminal activities to raise money for their political causes and those who use a political cause as a cover for their criminal activities.

The 'new wars' are also very difficult to contain. They spread through refugees and displaced persons, through the virus of identity politics and through the transnational criminal links established during the conflict. This is why we observe regional clusters of war, such as in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Horn of Africa, the Balkans or the Caucasus, Central Asia, Central and East Africa. ➤

## Critiques

The ‘new wars’ thesis attracted a number of critiques. Perhaps the most persistent criticism was that new wars are not new and that the ‘new wars’ literature lacks a historical perspective. Most of the characteristics of new wars (banditry, population displacement, rape and other human rights violations) were present in earlier wars. The dominance of the Cold War, it was argued, masked the continuing prevalence of ‘small wars’ or ‘low-intensity wars’, which were much the same as ‘new wars’.

Of course, it is true that many of the characteristics of ‘new wars’ can be found in earlier wars. But what the historical criticism misses is that my aim was to change the way policy makers and policy shapers perceive these conflicts. The dominant understandings of these conflicts among Western policy makers were of two kinds. On the one hand, there was and still is a tendency to impose a stereotypical version of war, based on an ‘old war’ conception of war. In such wars, the resolution is either through negotiation or victory by one side, and outside intervention takes the form of either traditional peacekeeping – in which the peacekeepers are supposed to guarantee a negotiated agreement and the ruling principles are consent, neutrality and impartiality – or traditional war-fighting as in Korea or the Gulf War. On the other hand, there was a tendency to treat the wars as anarchy, barbarism or ancient rivalries, where the best policy response was containment – protecting the borders of the West from the malady. I wanted to demonstrate that these were wars with their own logic, but a logic that was different from ‘old wars’ and which, therefore, dictated a very different policy response.

Nevertheless, I do think that the ‘new wars’ argument does reflect a new reality – one that was emerging before the end of the Cold War. This reality has to do with the huge destructiveness of all types of military technology and the difficulty of fighting what the US calls ‘symmetric war’; the dramatic transformation in communications, which has affected all aspects of war (identity politics, network forms of organization, methods of warfare and the use of conspicuous atrocity, as well as criminal techniques); and the way all these phenomena come together in what we call globalization and its impact on the nature of the state.

## Long wars

A second set of criticisms focused on the claim that ‘new wars’ are post-Clausewitzian. The defenders of Clausewitz argue that Clausewitzian wars do not necessarily have to be fought by states, and that ‘new wars’ are rational in the sense of instrumental rationality. Thus ethnic cleansing is a rational way to win elections on the basis of ethnicity. But it is not reasonable because reason implies a certain element of morality.

I agree with this criticism, but I think that new wars are post-Clausewitzian for another reason. The essence of Clausewitz’s thinking was his theory that war tends to go to the extreme and this he derives logically from his definition of war as ‘an act of violence intended to compel an opponent

to fulfil our will’. This is what I believe has changed. The huge destructiveness of all military technology makes what economist Thomas Schelling called ‘compellence’ very difficult nowadays. For Clausewitz, battle was the centrepiece, the decisive moment in war, and he compared battle to the act of exchange in economics. In ‘new wars’, battles are very rare; new wars, as I argue, are better understood as a mutual enterprise in which both warring parties gain. The logical outcome of this definition of war is not extreme war but long war.

I have come to the view that this is the essential difference between ‘new’ and ‘old’ wars.

Finally, an important set of criticisms largely from the policy-making community is that ‘old wars’ are still important and may be even more so in the future. For many observers, the events of 9/11 seemed to suggest a return to sovereignty. The War on Terror represented an ‘old war’ response to what was perceived as an attack on the US. Moreover, the military power of China and Russia and new concerns about energy security suggest that geopolitics is still important. The US military often singles out China as a potential peer competitor, and it is often said that we may see the return of interstate war in the future.

To this set of criticisms, I have two answers. There is indeed no guarantee that ‘old wars’ will not be repeated. However, preparing for such wars could make them more likely; this is why multilateral agreements of all kinds, including disarmament and arms control, are so important.

In addition, ‘old war’ thinking in ‘new war’ situations simply makes them worse. This is what happened with the War on Terror. The attacks of 9/11 can be viewed as an extreme variant of ‘new war’ types of violence. George W. Bush responded in Afghanistan and Iraq as though the US had been attacked by a foreign state. The effect on what were very weak states was to stimulate new wars. In the second edition of my book, *New and Old Wars*, I have added a chapter on Iraq showing how the effort to impose an ‘old war’ model led to a new war, both by contributing to ethnic and religious polarization and by speeding up the dismantling of the state and the legitimate economy. A similar argument could be applied to the Russian intervention in South Ossetia and Georgia in the summer of 2008.

## Implications

The implication of ‘new war’ thinking is that a new way of addressing contemporary conflicts is needed. In my book, I argue for a cosmopolitan approach to ‘new wars’, which would make individual rights and the rule of law the centrepiece of any outside intervention. I argue for the establishment of legitimate political authority in place of weak states, based on an inclusive ideology open to global engagement, building on what I call ‘islands of civility’. I also argue for a new kind of peacekeeping that is more like human rights enforcement than either war-fighting or traditional peacekeeping; and for a new approach to reconstruction that directly addresses the illicit ‘new war’ economy and focuses on legitimate ways of making a living.



This is a very ambitious agenda. A focus on individual rights would mean serious efforts to protect civilians who face large-scale human rights violations and to arrest those who violate these rights. It would be more like policing, but more robust because it would have to protect people directly and to arrest those who threaten stability. It would involve not just soldiers, but a mixture of military, police and civilians, and it would mean a much greater global commitment to this kind of operation.

Moreover, this kind of human rights enforcement needs to be backed by legal institutions, both domestically and internationally. At present, the International Criminal Court is at risk of being discredited, both because it lacks the capacity to arrest those it indicts or to undertake sufficient investigations, and because it can easily be seen as biased. In the end, it is local institutions that have to enforce human rights, and that is why the construction of legitimate political authority is so important. It involves much more than simply trying to establish a functioning state apparatus. It is about the relationship between the rulers and the ruled, and must involve an intensive process of dialogue and reconciliation. In places such as Sudan, Serbia or Iraq it may mean regime change, but through a bottom-up process rather than through military action. The most that military action can do is to create stability, to create space in which a political process can be established.

This kind of approach also implies a different economic approach. Current high levels of humanitarian assistance contribute to the problem by providing a source of funding for the warring parties. Young men, in most war zones, have little choice but to join a criminal gang or paramilitary group as a way to survive. In Iraq, official studies of insurgents show that most low-level insurgents depend on the income they earn through fighting. That is why a focus on jobs through public works or the reconstruction of infrastructure is so important.

In recent years I have used the term ‘human security’ in a series of reports written by the Human Security Study Group, which I convene and which reports to Javier Solana, the EU’s High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy. Our version of human security, which is a little different from the way it is used by the United Nations or in Canadian and Japanese discourse, has, to some extent, found its way into official EU documents. 📖 I do not want to suggest that the European Security and Defence Policy was directly influenced by the ‘new war’ literature. Rather, practitioners were influenced by their practical experience, especially in the Balkans, the South Caucasus and Africa.

‘New thinking’ in the US was similarly influenced by the direct experience of Iraq and Afghanistan. US General David Petraeus had always been part of the ‘small wars’ thinkers – a minority in the US Army and Marines. The ‘new thinking’ bubbled up from a number of officers who had been active on the ground in these wars but it was Petraeus who made it mainstream in the surge in Iraq and subsequently in Afghanistan. As in Europe, the new thinkers turned to the ‘new wars’ literature in order to frame their new

approaches. However, ‘new thinking’ in the US is not quite the same as human security thinking in the EU. The US insists that their new approach is counter-insurgency. While counter-terrorism means ‘killing enemies’, counter-insurgency, they say, means ‘population security.’ The implication is that the goal is still to defeat the enemies of the US, and that ‘population security’ is a means to that end rather than an end in itself. In this sense, there is still a significant streak of ‘old war’ thinking – something that Petraeus himself readily admits.

A cosmopolitan or human security approach that follows from a ‘new war’ analysis would put population security first, because it would treat Afghans or Iraqis as human beings and not as enemy civilians. It might be necessary to defeat attackers (or better still to arrest them). But the priority is stopping violence rather than winning. Counter-insurgency implies the possibility of ending a war through victory, although in a new war context, this will merely lead to a longer war.

The war in Afghanistan offers a good example of how a human security approach might work. Human security is different from counter-insurgency, both rhetorically and in practice. US President Barack Obama is urging the European allies to make a greater commitment to Afghanistan on the grounds that Al Qaeda is a greater threat to Europe than to the US. The problem is that European fear that the war against Al Qaeda is making the threat more likely. Every successful strike against Al Qaeda results in new recruits. If Obama called on European allies to make a greater commitment to Afghanistan because we have a responsibility to the Afghan people to help stabilize Afghanistan and protect ordinary people, his pleas might be more convincing. This is not just about narrative.

There is a fundamental difference between counter-insurgency where population security and reconstruction are a means to an end (defeating Al Qaeda) and a human security strategy where the military is used together with other instruments to keep people safe. A human security approach would put the emphasis on Afghan security and thus would rule out strikes against insurgents that cause so-called collateral damage. It would mean focusing on local security, local governance and the rule of law. It would mean rebuilding legitimate political authority in Afghanistan from the bottom up.

There is a real risk at present that the predator strikes against Al Qaeda in Pakistan, touted as hugely successful by the Americans, could result in the destabilization of Pakistan. That would mean a long war and an increase in terrorism. Europeans should agree to a greater commitment only if there is a genuine change of strategy towards a human security approach. ■

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- Kaldor, M. (1999) *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*. Stanford University Press (second edition, with a new foreword, published 2001).

## Contemporary wars: trends and research

# War's evolution

**The decline of interstate conflict following the Second World War and the 'long peace' of the Cold War implied a movement towards global peace. However, an eruption of ethnic conflicts in the early 1990s brought to light a different kind of conflict that researchers had thus far largely overlooked: civil war. A research boom has now produced differing findings on the causes of and possible approaches to prevent civil war.**

**A**t the end of the Second World War, a combination of factors led to the obsolescence of interstate wars. In a world where 'war' was defined as interstate war, this trend was understood as a movement toward global peace – the paradoxical 'long peace' of the Cold War. For many years, academic research on war and conflict was centred on international relations. States were seen as the only actors capable of waging war, and research was focused on understanding the decline of interstate conflict.

Lurking below the surface, however, were non-state actors who engaged in a type of warfare that had many names, including civil war, intrastate war, low-intensity conflict, guerrilla war and wars of national liberation. It took some time for the academic community to realize that civil war was the one type of armed conflict that persisted in the post-Second World War period. This understanding was brought on by the spectacular eruption of ethnic conflicts that followed the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s. Indeed, the Cold War had sustained a flourishing industry of think-tanks and projects that allowed academic researchers to cling to the idea of war as interstate war, conveniently overlooking civil wars. Civil wars were always considered a messy form of conflict, deprived of armies with shiny uniforms, mass armour, pitched battles and clear frontlines – the elements that most people intuitively associate with the very essence of 'war'. The only point of contact between the systematic study of civil wars and the policy world was the area of counter-insurgency studies.

Yet civil war is difficult to ignore, both for the damage it causes in the developing world and for its potential to produce negative effects for the developed world, primarily in the form of transnational terrorists who use failed states as their base, and population displacement that leads to mass migrations.

The number of deaths in the civil wars that have taken place between 1945 and 1999 has been put at 143,883. In addition to direct fatalities, civil war causes many more indirect ones through mass displacement, epidemics, famines and the degradation of public infrastructure. Economic development is stalled or even reversed. This 'conflict trap' is now considered to be one of the main obstacles to economic development.

The realization that civil wars were real, relevant and worthy of systematic study led to a research boom that began in the mid-1990s.

There are three 'sources' of interest in civil war that correspond to three distinct styles of research and resulting 'findings'. While recognizing the complexity of the issue and acknowledging that the causes of civil wars are multiple, economists have stressed the impact of natural resources; international relations scholars have pointed to ethnic antagonism; and comparativists and sociologists have focused on the role of the state.

Overall, this research boom has been very valuable. The most significant and robust statistical finding across almost every study is the positive correlation between GDP per capita and the incidence of civil war. All other correlations tend to be weak. It is possible, therefore, to say with a great degree of certainty that poor countries are more at *risk* of civil wars compared with wealthy countries. However, we still cannot tell which particular causal pathway links poverty to civil war: lack of opportunities, greedy rebels, weakened states? Furthermore, we can only say that poor countries face a higher risk of civil war. We cannot really tell why only some poor countries experience civil war when most do not – or which ones among the poor countries are most at risk.

One of the most negative findings is that regime type has little impact on the risk of civil war. Poor democracies and poor autocracies are equally vulnerable. A less robust finding is that so-called anocracies – regimes that are neither democracies nor autocracies – tend to be at a higher risk of civil war, either because they lack both the legitimating

By **Stathis N. Kalyvas**, professor of political science at Yale University, USA.



An attack on a Southern Sri Lankan mosque kills 15 people and wounds 60, 10 March 2009.

capacity of democracy and the repressive capacity of autocracy, or because transitions to democracy increase the risk of conflict. In fact, there is some historical evidence suggesting that emerging democracies with weak political institutions are also at risk of civil war, because their leaders are likely to manipulate nationalist feelings and invoke external threats to scare their populations into supporting wars. 🗳️ The main implication here is that building strong institutions should precede running elections.

Despite these valuable contributions, this body of research also has problems. Civil wars are particularly challenging phenomena to study: their actors are often obscure, the countries in which they erupt are poor and they often lack major defining events such as decisive battles. As a result, data tend to be of questionable quality.

Even if the data were more reliable, the same statistical findings are typically interpreted in different ways. For Paul Collier of the University of Oxford and his collaborators, GDP per capita relates to the opportunity costs of fighting (poor people have nothing to lose), whereas James Fearon and David Laitin of Stanford University interpret it as state capacity (poor countries are weak countries).

Moreover, this research suffers from its twin reliance on the assumption of 'unit homogeneity' (the notion that participants, or experimental units, are identical) and static analysis. Civil wars are treated as if they were all manifestations of the same fundamental and constant underlying phenomenon. Although this is an acceptable assumption when the goal is to observe broad patterns, it becomes more problematic when the objective is to unearth causal mechanisms or interpret recent trends. In fact, an unexpected development has recently taken place: after an initial spike, following the end of the Cold War, the rate of civil wars began to decline significantly.


### The end of the Cold War

The end of the Cold War was welcomed by optimists as a blessing that would bring global openness, democracy and peace. At the same time, pessimists warned of a coming global anarchy, an era of ethnic conflict and instability. As we near the 20th anniversary of the end of the Cold War, it is worth taking stock of the consequences of this momentous event for violent conflict.

Civil war spiked immediately after the end of the Cold War. Observers and analysts alike were initially swayed by this spike. Many thought that the end of the Cold War spelled a 'coming anarchy', through the eruption of 'new wars' which 'shattered the dreams of the post-Cold War'. Following this wave of doomsday predictions, and after the rate of civil war onsets had returned to its Cold War average, many researchers concluded, as Fearon and Laitin did, that 'the prevalence of civil war in the 1990s was not due to the end of the Cold War and associated changes in the international system'. More recently, however, the observation of a declining trend in civil wars has produced renewed sensitivity about the end of the Cold War – and rightly so. For example, researchers associated with the Human Security Centre at the University of British Columbia have characterized this decline as an 'extraordinary and counterintuitive improvement in global security'. They note that by 2003 there were 40% fewer conflicts than in 1992, and that the deadliest conflicts (those with 1000 or more battle deaths) had fallen by some 80%. They also added that the end of the Cold War was the single most critical factor in this decline, and identified international intervention as the key mechanism. Because the two superpowers ended their interest in 'proxy wars' in the developing world, the United Nations and other international agencies, donor governments and NGOs were free to play a ➤

new global security role that entailed active diplomacy, peacekeeping and peacemaking, thus preventing new conflicts from taking place and brokering peace agreements to end those that had already erupted. Obviously, the divergence between these interpretations is largely a result of observations taken at different points in time. The end of the Cold War era seemed a disaster in 1992, appeared unimportant in 2001, but struck observers as having led to a clear improvement by 2005. Evidently, descriptive inferences based on highly sensitive short-term trends are treacherous.

### Three types of civil war

Drawing from a new wave of research that systematically examines the dynamics of recruitment and violence  civil wars, I have suggested a distinction between three types of civil war. Widely considered to be the most common type is irregular (or ‘guerrilla’) war, in which the strategically weaker side refuses to match the stronger side’s expectations in terms of the conventionally accepted basic rules of warfare. These wars of ambush and surprise are typically wars of attrition, with the rebels seeking to win by not losing, while imposing unbearable costs on their opponent. A common manifestation of these wars is the absence of clear front lines. Examples are the conflicts in Chechnya or Kashmir.

Conventional civil wars, on the other hand, are thought to be much less common. This type of warfare requires a commonly shared perception of a balance of power between the two sides, in the sense that they are both willing to face each other conventionally, across clearly defined frontlines. The distinction between conventional and irregular wars is intuitive: whereas the former is a symmetric conflict, the latter is an asymmetric one. Examples of conventional wars include the Spanish civil war, the Biafran civil war in Nigeria, the Bosnian war and the war in Azerbaijan.

Although asymmetry is predominantly expressed in irregular war, the converse is not necessarily the case. Symmetry (or parity) is not synonymous with conventional war. Rather, it is possible to point to a third type of civil war, ‘symmetric non-conventional war’. This type of war is often described as ‘primitive’ or ‘criminal’ war, and entails irregular armies on both sides in a pattern resembling pre-modern war. Whereas in conventional civil wars the rebels are able to generate a military capacity that rises up to the state’s capacity, in symmetric non-conventional wars, the state’s capacity has fallen so much as to resemble that of the rebels; the state, in other words, is just another militia. Think of the conflicts in Lebanon, Somalia or Sierra Leone. A key difference between these types of conflict and large-scale criminal violence is that in the former the state has ceased to be a military superior actor and often has completely collapsed.

Recent research finds that, although irregular war is the dominant type of warfare in the post-Second World War period, it is much less common than is often thought. These wars constitute slightly more than half of all civil wars. Conventional civil wars are much more common than thought (about 35% of all civil wars), and symmetric non-conventional civil wars account for the balance. What is

very interesting, however, is that the dominance of irregular war is completely associated with the Cold War. Since the end of the Cold War, conventional and symmetric non-conventional wars have emerged as the dominant types of war, while irregular war has declined significantly. Indeed, the irregular wars being fought in Iraq and Afghanistan appear to be anomalies.

This analysis suggests that irregular war is not a method available at all times to all actors, but a historically contingent phenomenon. During the Cold War, three factors led to the preponderance of irregular wars: the financial and military support of the Soviet Union and its allies (and to a smaller degree of the US for ‘anti-Marxist’ insurgencies); the widespread belief that social change could be achieved through irregular war bolstered by the creation and operation of transnational networks of activists that gained experience by participating in several wars before launching their own; and the development and popularization of the doctrine of revolutionary people’s war.

These irregular wars of the Cold War had three characteristics: they required high levels of skill (and hence ‘high-quality’ rebels), they tended to be long-lasting and they were often won by the rebels.

The end of the Cold War led to a decisive degradation of rebel military capacity. The civil wars that continued in the post-Cold War period were either conventional, associated with the implosion of multi-ethnic empires and states, or symmetric non-conventional, associated with state failure. These types of war are neither new, nor are they more deadly compared with irregular wars; they became prevalent, however, by default.

What are the implications of this research for policy makers? Obviously, there is little we can do if the causes of civil wars are poverty or low state capacity. Both are slow, long-term processes that cannot easily be affected by outside intervention. In contrast, if the decline of civil wars proves lasting, and if it is indeed due to the secular decline of irregular wars, the news have a positive spin. Unlike irregular wars, rebels in both conventional and symmetric non-conventional wars are easier to defeat, or at least contain, by a well organized international force. These conflicts are no guerrilla quagmires and the rebels are no organized forces capable of putting up long-term resistance. The worst outcome is the persistence of lingering, low-intensity conflicts at the peripheries of states experiencing conflict, as opposed to higher-intensity wars of attrition that threaten power at the centre. This is not to minimize this type of instability, but it is one that is easier to manage than the irregular civil wars of the Cold War. State-building skills and long-term investment in institution building do require the cover of security operations, but the security challenge is more manageable than in the past. ■

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□ Kalyvas, S.N. (2006) *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Cambridge University Press.