



Conflict Trends and Conflict Drivers

An Empirical Assessment of Historical Conflict Patterns and Future Conflict Projections

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Future conflict projections suggest a continued decline in both interstate and intrastate conflict is likely through 2040. RAND researchers conclude the Army should help to support these trends by preparing for conventional wars against other states, although its most likely future missions will continue to involve irregular warfare against nonstate actors.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the post–Cold War trends in armed conflict?
- What are the global strategic trends that characterize and influence the environments in which conflict takes place?
- Are there any trends that might portend a change toward increased interstate conflict?



KEY FINDINGS

Trends in Conflict

- Overall levels of conflict have been declining in the past two decades.
- Interstate violence has decreased the most, both in the incidence and intensity of armed conflict.
- Intrastate conflict and low-intensity violence have declined more slowly, but have decreased in incidence and intensity.

Key Factors in Change in Conflict Patterns

- Capacity of state institutions
- Degree of ethnic and sectarian polarization

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- Prevalence of consolidated democracies
- Rate of economic growth
- Extent of economic interdependence
- Capabilities of international organizations
- Degree of U.S. preeminence
- Strength of international norms
- Diffusion of lethal technology
- Extent of resource stress because of population pressures

Future Projections of Conflict

- Both the interstate and intrastate baseline future conflict projections depict a continued decline through 2040.
- The three factors that most strongly increased interstate conflict expectations were declining U.S. preeminence, declining capabilities of international organizations, and declining prevalence of consolidated democracies.
- The two factors that most strongly increased intrastate conflict expectations were declining capacity of state institutions and declining rates of economic growth.

