



# What Are the Trends in Armed Conflicts, and What Do They Mean for U.S. Defense Policy?

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This report assesses trends in armed conflict and their implications for defense planning. The incidence of such conflict has declined in recent decades and only sharply different alternative future scenarios are likely to change such trends. Several key political, economic, and strategic factors, including the deterrent effect of the U.S. military, appear to have contributed to this decline and are likely to continue to do so in the future.



## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the historical conflict trends?
- What are the key factors affecting conflict?
- What do the trends in future conflict look like?
- What do the trends mean for U.S. defense policy?



## KEY FINDINGS

### Armed Conflict Has Declined and Is Likely to Continue to Do So

- Examining armed conflict empirically over a decades-long perspective, we find that it has decreased—interstate war has become a rare event, and intrastate conflict has lessened in frequency and magnitude, despite a recent uptick in violence.
- Only a handful of the alternative future scenarios that we examined produced large spikes in expected levels of conflict down the road.
- As armed conflict declined, frequency of deployment of U.S. land forces for military interventions increased.
- Our analyses find that a number of key political, economic, and strategic factors, including the U.S. military and its forward posture, appear to have contributed to global declines in armed conflict.
- Our research suggests that the U.S. military has a continuing important role in deterring conventional conflict, underpinning peacekeeping coalitions, and possibly in responding to proxy wars by other powers.



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