



# Intrastate-based Armed Conflicts:

## Overview of global and regional trends (1990-2013)

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Occasional paper 2

### Introduction:

On 31 October 2014, the United Nations Secretary-General appointed a High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations to undertake a 'comprehensive assessment of the state of UN peace operations today and the emerging needs of the future', especially with regard to the changing nature of conflict. In this context, the United Nations University - Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR), in November 2014, prepared a paper on major recent trends in violent conflict.<sup>i</sup> The paper, surveying global conflict data, noted, inter alia, a significant increase in major civil wars (i.e. those with over 1,000 battle deaths per year) and related battle deaths in recent years.

This observation triggered the appetite, among some members of the High-Level Panel, for a more granular understanding of how this global trend is reflected (or not) in different regions. Hence, CPR was asked to provide a disaggregation of the data by levels of conflict intensity, subregions, and countries, which is offered in the present paper. The limited aim of this paper is to simply present – and make easily accessible – the data and highlight key trends. It does not intend to provide an in-depth analysis of the causes or dynamics of conflict in different regions. For easy access, the graphs and data used in this paper are also available online.

### Note on the data sources used for this paper

The following analysis is based on Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) datasets, at the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University.<sup>ii</sup> These datasets are a key reference in conflict trend analysis and, as such, have been widely used by scholars in numerous publications.<sup>iii</sup> In this paper we provide an updated analysis of global and regional armed conflict trends, with a focus on the most conflict-prone regions (Asia, Middle East and North Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa).

Only conflicts reaching a threshold of 25 battle deaths in one given year are reported in UCDP datasets. Conflicts are coded as "minor" if they result in 25 to 999 battle deaths, while conflicts resulting in 1,000 or more battle deaths are coded as major civil wars.

As most contemporary conflicts are **intrastate conflicts**, this paper focuses mainly on these. Uppsala classifies violent conflict in three different categories: **1) state-based armed conflicts, 2) non-state conflicts** and **3) episodes of one-sided violence**. While "state-based armed conflicts" are the result of the fighting between two warring parties - where one has to be

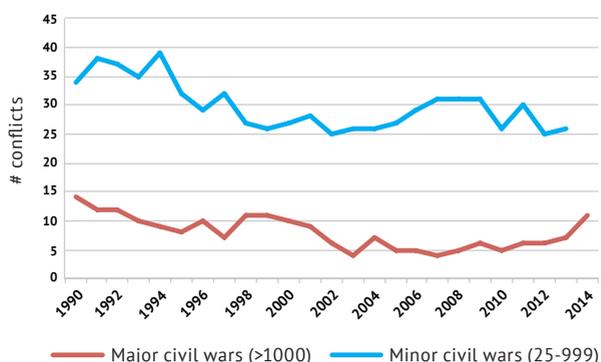
the government of a state and the other a formally organized armed group -, episodes of one-sided violence refer to the unilateral use of armed force (by either the government of a state or a formally organized group) against civilians. In non-state conflicts, none of the warring parties is the government of a state.

Most conflicts encompass all three different categories of violence. While it may be desirable to reflect all types of violence in single graphs, the different datasets are difficult to integrate, which is why graphs in this paper are largely based on the data covering “state-based armed conflicts,” and do thus not include battle deaths incurred as a result of episodes of one-sided violence or fighting between non-state armed groups. For example, the 1994 Rwandan genocide is classified as an episode of “one-sided violence” by UCDP and does not show in the battle death estimates related to “state-based armed conflict” (Figure 12). Similarly, the violent repression of civilian protests in Syria in 2011 is not reported in the estimates of battle deaths related to “state-based armed conflict” (Figure 7). Much of the violence associated with the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa is thus unreported in the graphs presented below.

While Uppsala datasets are widely regarded as the most reliable available conflict-related data, and as such extremely valuable for the analysis of conflict trends, they tend to under-estimate the number of fatalities related to violent conflict. UCDP estimates are based on reports (news reports, NGO reports etc.) counting individual violent incidents and related fatalities as opposed to summary estimates and expert assessments.<sup>iv</sup> In war settings where direct reporting is impossible, this methodology tends to underestimate the actual number of battle deaths and fatalities. In addition, when reports provide different estimates, UCDP as a rule includes the lower figure.<sup>v</sup> This may partly explain, for instance, why UCDP datasets reported 15,000 battle deaths in Syria in 2012, when research commissioned by the OHCHR provided a much higher estimate.<sup>vi</sup>

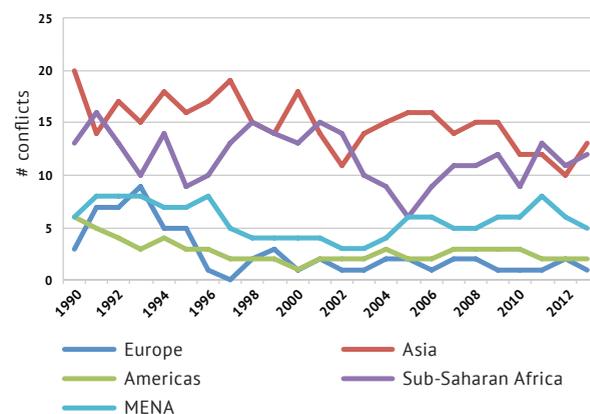
### 1. Global trends

**Figure 1: Global trends in intrastate armed conflicts, 1990-2013**



Source: UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset V.4-2014a.

**Figure 2: Global trends in intrastate armed conflicts by region, 1990-2013<sup>vii</sup>**



Source: UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset V.4-2014a.

In 2013, there were 33 active intrastate armed conflicts in the world. Overall, that number is still relatively low when compared to the peak year of 1991, when 50 intra-state conflicts were reported. However, after decreasing for much of the 1990s, major civil wars (i.e. those with more than 1,000 battle deaths), have been again on the rise, almost tripling from four in 2007 to eleven in 2014.<sup>viii</sup> The share of high-intensity conflicts as a total of intra-state conflicts has also been growing progressively since 2007.

These global trends, however, hide important regional disparities. Throughout the 1990s, Europe and the Americas have experienced an important reduction in the number of armed conflicts taking place within their borders, both stabilizing at very low levels in the 2000s. Since the 1990s, Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa have continuously been the two regions most affected by violent conflict. In 2013, Asia was the region with the highest concentration of armed conflicts, with a total of 13 intra-state conflicts. Most of these conflicts, however, were low-intensity conflicts, with only two major civil wars occurring in the region (Afghanistan and Pakistan). In sub-Saharan Africa, while there was a dramatic decrease in intra-state conflict during the first half of the 2000s, the trend has reversed as of 2005. Since then, intra-state armed conflicts in that sub-region have doubled, from 6 in 2005 to 12 in 2013. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the number of conflicts reached a peak in 2011, due to new conflicts breaking out in Libya and Syria, before returning to previous years' levels in 2012 and 2013. However, this slight downward trend in the number of conflicts hides a dramatic escalation in the intensity of conflicts (see figures 3 and 4 below).

## 2. Regional trends

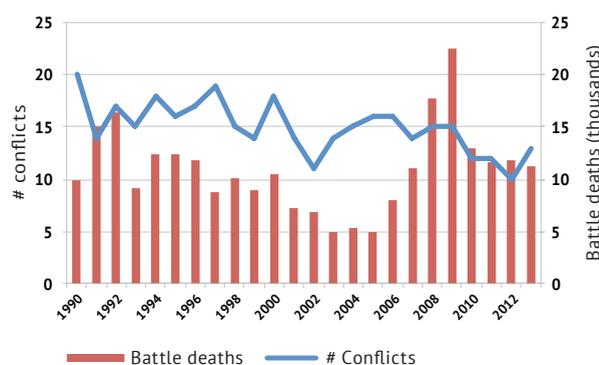
The frequency and intensity of conflict varies quite significantly, not only between regions, but also within regions and sub-regions. Three regions have been experiencing the highest number of conflicts and battle deaths over the past quarter century: Asia, the MENA region, and sub-Saharan Africa. The following sections of this paper provide a more detailed analysis of each of these three regions.

### 2.1. Asia<sup>ix</sup>

Despite a decrease in the number of conflicts in Asia since the mid-2000s, the region still had the highest number of conflicts in 2013. Four new conflicts erupted in the region that year, reversing the downward trend of the past five years: three in Myanmar (two in Kachin state and one in Shan state) and one in Malaysia. In terms of battle deaths, after a dramatic increase in the intensity of overall conflicts in the region since 2003

(mainly attributable to the war in Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Pakistan – see figure 4), the overall death toll in the region has decreased since the end of the war in Sri Lanka in 2009. Since then, however, battle deaths have stabilized at relatively high levels of around 10,000/year (figure 3). As such, the region remained until 2012 – when Middle East and North Africa recorded the highest battle death tolls - the deadliest in the world. Central and South Asia is where most of the battle deaths related to armed conflict in the continent are concentrated (figure 4).

**Figure 3: Intrastate armed conflicts and related battle deaths in Asia, 1990-2013**



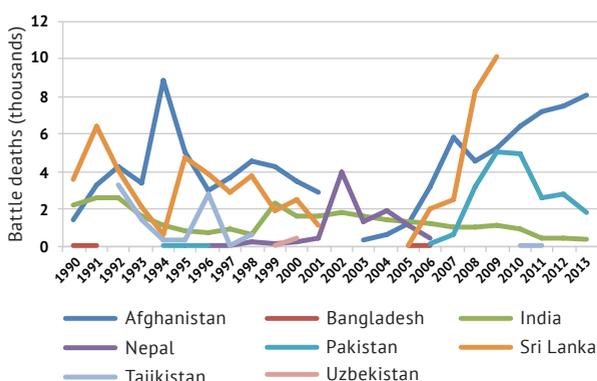
Source: UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset V.4-2014a; UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2014.

Afghanistan and, to a lesser extent, Pakistan, account for most battle deaths in the sub-region (figure 4). Over the past 10 years, Afghanistan has experienced a twenty-fold increase in battle deaths related to the armed conflict, 2013 being the deadliest year of the conflict with 8,048 reported battle deaths. Despite a drop in reported battle deaths in Pakistan since 2010, the conflict against the Taliban and other armed militant groups was still responsible for over 1,700 battle deaths in the country in 2013.

In Southeast Asia and Oceania (figure 5), the overall number of battle deaths has been relatively low since the mid-2000s, with no single major civil war reported in the sub-region since 2000, when the conflict in southern Philippines (Mindanao) reached the threshold

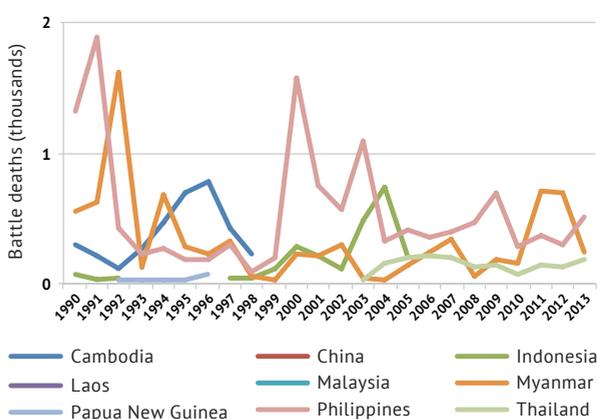
of 1000 battle deaths in one year. Since the de-escalation of the conflict in the Philippines, most battle deaths in the region have been the result of long-lasting low-intensity conflicts, periodically experiencing upsurges in violence (such as the Philippines in 2009 and 2013 or Myanmar in 2011-2012).

**Figure 4: Intrastate armed conflicts and related battle deaths in Central and South Asia, 1990-2013**



Source: UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2014.

**Figure 5: Intrastate armed conflicts and related battle deaths in East Asia, Southeast Asia and Oceania, 1990-2013**



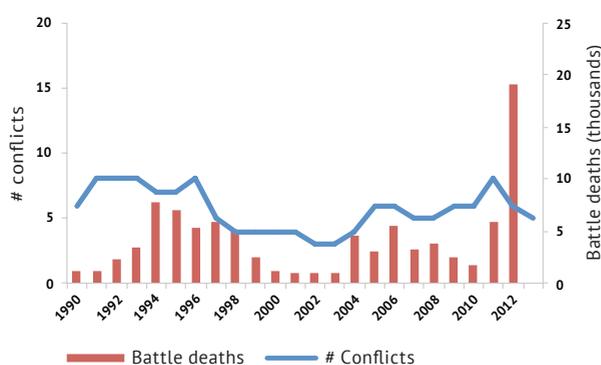
Source: UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2014.

## 2.2. Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region\*

After having significantly decreased during the second half of the 1990s - in both numbers and intensity - intrastate armed conflicts in the MENA region increased again in the mid-2000s (see figure 6). From 2004 to 2010, the war in Iraq was responsible for most battle

deaths reported in the region (see figure 7). While battle deaths dropped significantly in the country since 2006, the on-going conflict between the Yemeni government and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in 2009, followed by the outbreak of two new conflicts in Libya and Syria in 2011, sparked another peak of violence in the region. In 2011, the number of intra-state wars (8) reached levels comparable to the early 1990s. The number of violent conflicts in the MENA region has decreased since then but the escalation of violence in Syria and, to a lesser extent, Yemen have resulted in the region experiencing in 2012 its highest death toll over the past 25 years (see figure 6).<sup>xi</sup> As shown in figure 8, while in 2011 most of the violence in Syria was linked to the forceful repression of civilian protests by Bashar al-Assad's armed forces (recorded in UCDP datasets as "one-sided violence"), by 2012 the conflict had turned into a major civil war responsible for over 15,000 battle deaths.<sup>xii</sup> Since 2012, the expansion of ISIS in Iraq and neighboring Syria has also led to an upsurge of violence in both countries.<sup>xiii</sup>

**Figure 6: Intrastate armed conflicts and related battle deaths in the MENA region, 1990-2013**

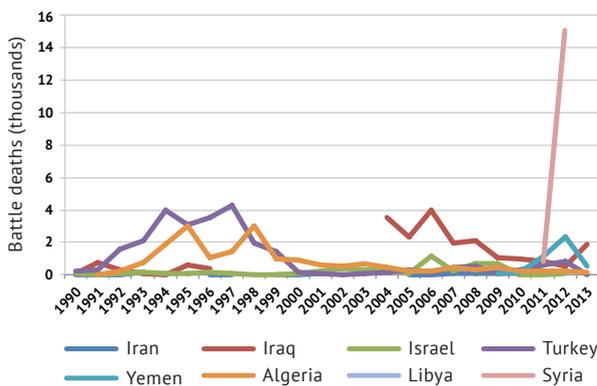


Sources: UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset V.4-2014a;

UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2014.

Battle death data for 2013 are not included due to the absence of reliable estimates for Syria.

**Figure 7: Battle deaths related to intrastate armed conflicts in selected MENA countries, 1990-2013**



Source: UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2014.

**Figure 8: Battle deaths related to intrastate armed conflicts and episodes of one-sided violence in Syria, 2011 and 2012**

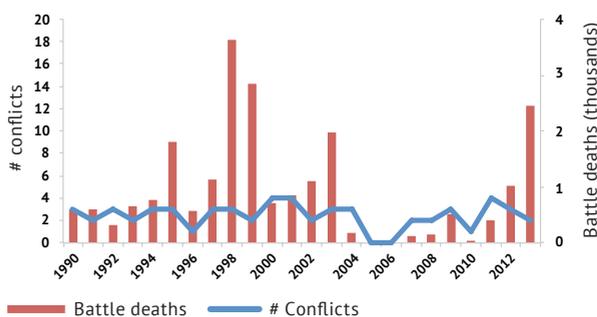


Source: UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2014;  
UCDP One-sided Violence Dataset v1.4-2014.

### 2.3. Sub-Saharan Africa

#### 2.3.1. West Africa<sup>xiv</sup>

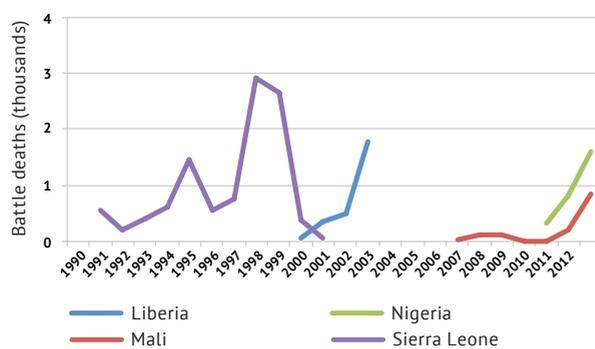
**Figure 9: Intrastate armed conflicts and related battle deaths in West Africa, 1990-2013**



Source: UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset V.4-2014a;  
UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2014

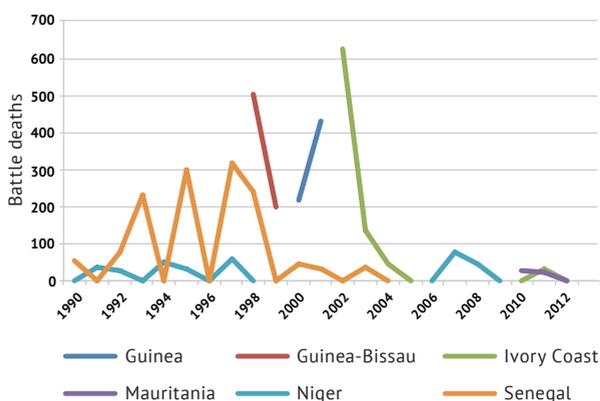
In West Africa, most of the conflicts that had fueled armed violence throughout the 1990s (especially the war in Sierra Leone from 1992 to 2002) had ended by 2005 (see figures 10 and 11). Following a remarkably peaceful period in the mid-2000s, with no conflict or battle death reported in 2005 and 2006, two new conflicts erupted more recently. The first was in Nigeria (2011) where the conflict between government forces and Boko Haram rapidly escalated to the level of a major civil war (more than 1,000 related battle deaths per year since 2012), and the second, more recently, in northern Mali (2012). The later didn't reach the 1,000 battle death threshold but led to French military intervention and the deployment of a UN peacekeeping mission (figure 10). While in absolute terms the number of conflicts in the region has decreased since 2011, recent conflicts have resulted in death tolls higher than any other point in time over the last 15 years. In addition to battle deaths related to state-based armed conflicts, conflicts opposing different non-state armed groups have contributed to 26% of all battle deaths in the region. Attacks on civilians by either governments or non-state armed groups represent an even higher share of the total death toll, with 44% of all battle deaths in the region resulting from episodes of "one-sided violence" (see figure 12).

**Figure 10: Battle deaths related to intrastate armed conflict in selected West African countries (I), 1990-2013**



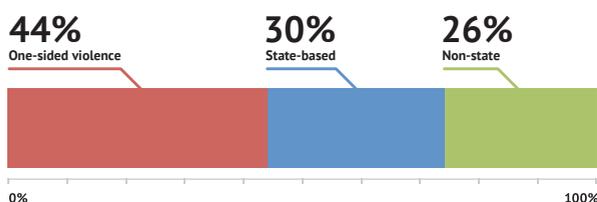
Source: UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2014.

**Figure 11: Battle deaths related to intrastate armed conflict in selected West African countries (II), 1990-2013**



Source: UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2014.

**Figure 12: Share of battle deaths related to different types of armed conflict in West Africa (1990-2013)**



Source: UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2014;

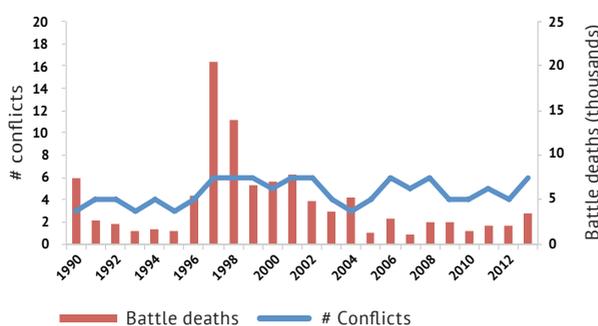
UCDP One-sided Violence Dataset v1.4-2014;

UCDP Non-State Conflict Dataset v.2.5-2014.

### 2.3.2. Central Africa<sup>xv</sup>

Since the beginning of the 1990s, most armed conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa have taken place in Central Africa. Over this period, between one third and two thirds of the region has continuously experienced armed conflict. In 2013, 6 countries out of 9 Central African countries have endured armed conflict, an increase of two from the previous year (DRC and Uganda).

**Figure 13: Intrastate armed conflicts and related battle deaths in Central Africa, 1990-2013**

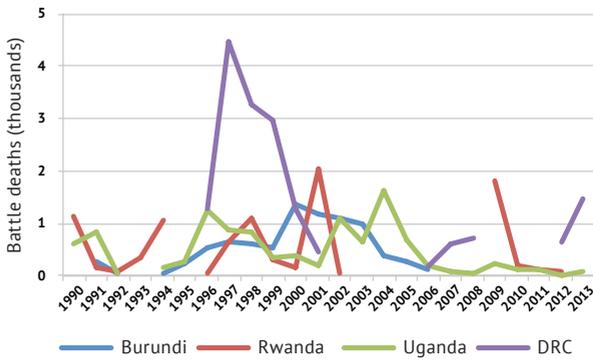


Source: UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset V.4-2014a;

UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2014

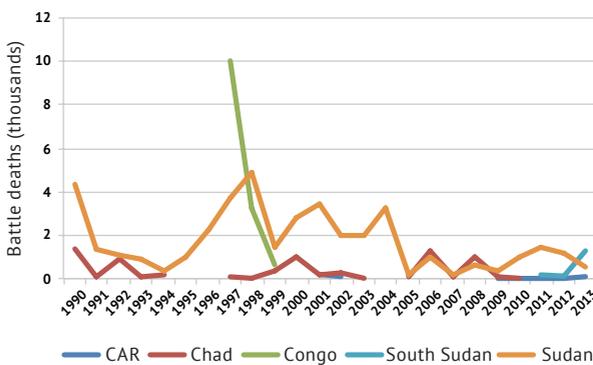
While battle deaths related to state-based armed conflicts are relatively low compared to the intensity of conflicts in the late 1990s, 2013 saw a significant escalation of violence in the DRC and South Sudan (both reaching the level of major civil war with over 1,000 battle deaths that year – see figures 14 and 15). In addition, this relatively low intensity of intra-state conflicts in the sub-region doesn't mean that conflicts are less violent than they used to be. As we have previously noted (see page 2), some of the violence linked to conflict, such as episodes of “one-sided violence” (i.e. unilateral attacks on civilians by either the government or non-state armed groups), is simply not recorded in the same category in UCDP datasets. In the Central African Republic for example, almost 2,000 civilians were killed as a result of such attacks in 2013. Similarly, violence between non-state armed groups in Sudan in 2013 was responsible for more than a thousand deaths.<sup>xvi</sup> Over the period 1990-2013, episodes of one-sided violence represented more than 80% of all battle deaths in the region (see figure 16).<sup>xvii</sup>

**Figure 14: Battle deaths related to intrastate armed conflicts in selected Central African countries (Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, DRC), 1990-2013**



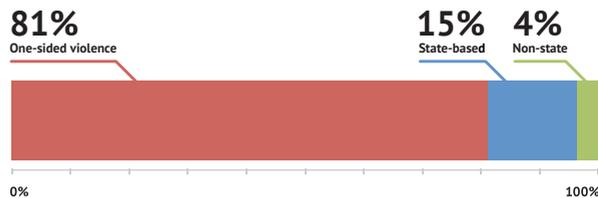
Source: UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2014.

**Figure 15: Battle deaths related to intrastate armed conflicts in selected Central African countries (CAR, Chad, Congo, Sudan, South-Sudan), 1990-2013**



Source: UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2014.

**Figure 16: Share of battle deaths related to different types of armed conflicts in Central Africa (1990-2013)**

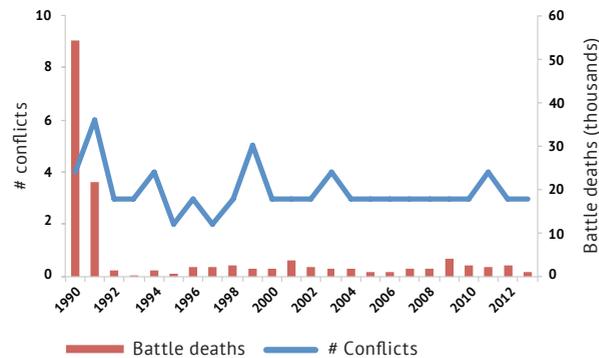


Source: UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2014;  
 UCDP One-sided Violence Dataset v1.4-2014;  
 UCDP Non-State Conflict Dataset v.2.5-2014.

**2.3.3. Horn of Africa<sup>xviii</sup>**

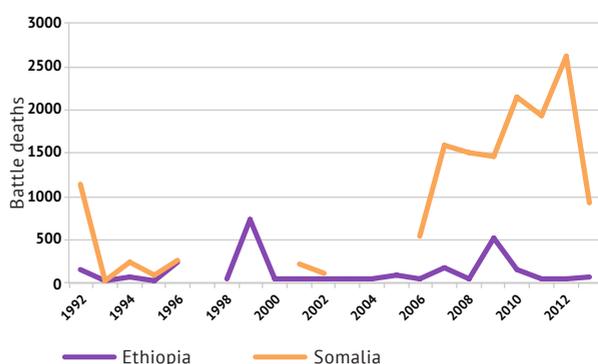
The number of intra-state armed conflicts in Eastern Africa has been relatively stable since the beginning of the 2000s, and concentrated in two countries – Ethiopia and Somalia (see figures 17 and 18). In addition, the sub-region has witnessed two of the four inter-state conflicts that broke out over the past 23 years in sub-Saharan Africa (Eritrea-Ethiopian war in 1998-2000, Djibouti-Eritrea border conflict in 2008).<sup>xix</sup> In 2013, two intra-state low-intensity conflicts were still on-going in Ethiopia, opposing government forces and small separatist factions remaining from the war. Armed violence related to Al-Shabaab’s insurgency in Somalia sparked a wave of violence in the country since 2006, rapidly escalating to a major civil war with a peak of over 2600 battle deaths in 2012. In 2013, for the first time since 2006, however, the intensity of the conflict has decreased below the 1000 battle deaths threshold.

**Figure 17: Intrastate armed conflicts and related battle deaths in the Horn of Africa, 1990-2013**



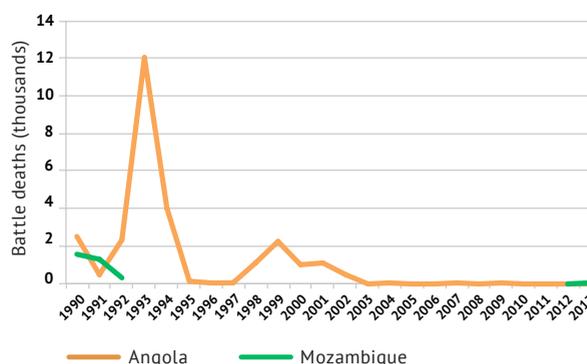
Source: UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset V.4-2014a;  
 UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2014

**Figure 18 : Battle deaths related to intrastate conflicts in the horn of Africa, 1992-2013<sup>xx</sup>**



Source: UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2014.

**Figure 20: Battle deaths related to intrastate armed conflicts in Southern Africa, 1992-2013**



Source: UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2014.

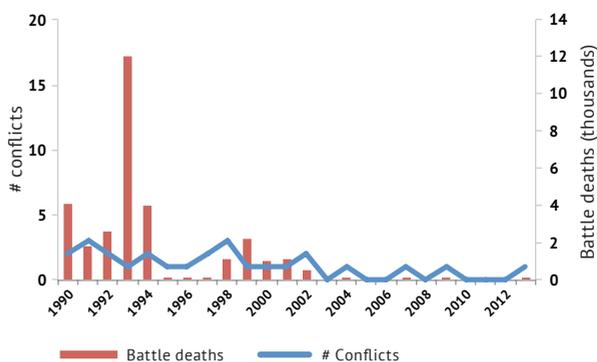
### 2.3.4. Southern Africa<sup>xxi</sup>

Over the last 23 years, southern Africa has been the region in sub-Saharan Africa least affected by armed conflict (with only 9% of all sub-Saharan conflicts taking place in this region). Almost no battle deaths have been reported in the region since the end of the Angolan civil war in 2002, with the exception of sporadic tensions in the northern part of Angola (Cabinda) in the second half of the 2000s and rising tensions between the government of Mozambique and the main opposition party – the Mozambique Resistance Movement- in 2013.

### Conclusions

This addendum showed that, despite an overall increase in the number of major civil wars and related battle deaths in recent years, the numbers and intensity of conflict still vary quite significantly between and within regions, with most of violent conflicts today located in Asia, the Middle East and different parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Beyond these trends, this paper also highlighted important differences in the nature of violent conflict, whether it relates to “state-based”, “non-state” armed-conflicts or “episodes of one-sided violence”.

**Figure 19: Intrastate armed conflicts and related battle deaths in Southern Africa, 1990-2013**



Source: UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset V.4-2014a; UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset v.5-2014.

**ENDNOTES**

- i Sebastian von Einsiedel et al., *Major Recent Trends in Violent Conflict*, Occasional Paper, United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, November 2014.
- ii See: <http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/datasets/>
- iii Among them the Human Security Report, which was last published in 2013. Available at: [http://www.hsrgroup.org/docs/Publications/HSR2013/HSRP\\_Report\\_2013\\_140226\\_Web.pdf](http://www.hsrgroup.org/docs/Publications/HSR2013/HSRP_Report_2013_140226_Web.pdf)
- iv For an in-depth review of UCDP methodology, see: Human Security Report Project, "Estimating Battle Deaths: A Challenging Exercise", 17 September 2012. Available at: [http://hsrgroup.org/docs/Publications/Additional-Publications/HSRP\\_Est.Battle\\_Deaths.pdf](http://hsrgroup.org/docs/Publications/Additional-Publications/HSRP_Est.Battle_Deaths.pdf)
- v See UCDP definition of "best estimate of deaths" at <http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/>
- vi Megan Price et al., "Preliminary Statistical Analysis of Documentation of Killings in the Syrian Arab Republic", The Benetech Human Rights Program, 2 January 2013. Available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/SY/PreliminaryStatAnalysisKillingsInSyria.pdf>
- vii See following sections for a detailed description of the regional groupings used in this paper.
- viii Data for 2014 is based on our own estimate of the number of civil wars who reached 1000 battle-deaths that year. While major civil wars are easily identifiable, lower-intensity conflicts are much more difficult to observe. For these, we only provide data until 2013, based on UCDP/PRIO dataset.
- ix This includes: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Sri Lanka Tajikistan, Thailand and Uzbekistan.
- x This includes data for: Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Syria, Turkey and Yemen.
- xi No battle death estimates are available in UCDP datasets for Syria in 2013.
- xii It should be noted that UCDP estimates for Syria are much lower than those provided by the Benetech's Human Rights Data Analysis Group for the OHCHR, which reported about 60,000 conflict-related violent deaths between March 2011 and November 2012. By April 2014, the death toll had reached over 191,000 according to the same source (see: <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/SY/HRDAGUpdatedReportAug2014.pdf>).
- xiii While no battle death estimates are available in UCDP datasets for Syria in 2013, however UCDP reported more than 2000 deaths linked to episodes of one-sided violence in the Iraq-Syria region in 2013 (source: UCDP One-sided Violence Dataset v1.4-2014).
- xiv We include countries for which an intra-state conflict (either minor or major) was reported in UCDP datasets. For this period, this includes: Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone.
- xv In this section, Central Africa refers to: Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, South Sudan, Rwanda and Uganda.
- xvi Source: UCDP Non-State Conflict Dataset v.2.5.-2014.
- xvii If we exclude the exceptional violence related to the Rwandan genocide, one-sided episodes of violence still account for 44% of all battle deaths, state-based armed conflicts for 43% and non-state armed conflict 13%.
- xviii This includes: Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia.
- xix Two other interstate conflicts erupted in sub-Saharan Africa during this period (1990-2013), including armed clashes between Cameroon and Nigeria over the Bakassi peninsula in 1996 and, more recently, tensions along the Sudan-South Sudan border.
- xx We excluded battle deaths related to the two last years of the Ethiopian civil war (1990 and 1991).
- xxi This includes: Angola, Comoros, Lesotho and Mozambique.